

How to Report on Your Meditation Practice

By S. M. Tai

Learning how to report correctly on your meditation practice will help you practice meditation more skillfully. When you report on your practice, you must do so like an impersonal and impartial observer. You simply report on the observations you made during sitting meditation, walking meditation, and daily activities. You **do not need to explain** what is happening (“I had pain in my leg because I sat too long”), or evaluate whether it is good or bad. (“I think the pain is going to damage my leg.”) Like a scientist, you are simply collecting data, but you do not draw any conclusions about it. When you report, you just present the data to your teacher. Your teacher can then give instructions to help you in your practice and gain more wisdom.

When you report, you must try to be very honest and concise. If you cannot feel anything in the rising and falling of the abdomen when you breathe in and out, it is much better to report that, rather than trying to make something up. If your mind cannot focus, just report it, following the procedures given below. If you feel bored or frustrated, you can also report that honestly. You can report both good and bad experiences as long as you follow the right method!

The interview time is also short, so you cannot possibly include everything that you experienced during the day. You have to choose the most distinct experiences and briefly summarize them. You can jot down some notes after a day of practice and before your interview, but you should not stop in the middle of your sitting or walking session to write down notes.¹

Don't worry “What if I can't remember anything to report?” If you are really paying attention, you will remember. Take special care **not to** analyze what you are experiencing while sitting or walking. Similarly, **do not** mentally write a report in your head while you are practicing.

Your report should systematically break everything down into separate parts as follows: first report on sitting meditation, then walking meditation, then daily activities.

Sitting Meditation

Your sitting meditation report should describe what you observed about these four objects:

1. The primary object: the rising of the abdomen, and the falling of the abdomen

Secondary objects:

2. Thoughts or the wandering mind

3. Unpleasant and pleasant feelings

4. Dhamma objects (such as seeing, hearing, tasting, etc., and any prominent mental states

¹ During longer intensive retreats, it is also not advisable to write notes after each sitting since that can interrupt the continuity of your practice.

such as anger, happiness, boredom, sleepiness, etc., and anything not included in the first three categories.)

The Primary Object

Here is an example: I noted “rising,” I observed _____. I noted “falling,” I observed _____.

Report on the physical sensations you observe in the rising and falling, such as stiffness, tension, vibration, movement, hardness, softness, etc. If you cannot feel any sensations in the abdomen, report it following the procedure given above, exactly and precisely, **without adding anything extra** such as “My practice wasn’t good today.”

If you can focus on the rising and falling for some time, you can also mention how long you were able to stay on the abdomen before your mind slipped off into thoughts.

Thoughts and the Wandering Mind

For example: Thinking arose, I wasn’t able to note the thoughts, and got lost in thinking for a long time. Finally I remembered to note “thinking,” the thoughts kept going on and on. I noted “thinking, thinking” again and again, and finally the thoughts stopped, then I returned to noting the rising of the abdomen, etc.

When reporting thoughts, **do not** report on the content of your thoughts, just report whether you were able to note the thoughts, whether the thoughts continued or disappeared after you noted them, and how soon you were able to go back to the primary object. You can label thoughts in general as “thinking,” or “wandering,” or more in detail such as “imagining,” “planning,” “remembering,” etc. But don’t worry too much about choosing exactly the right label.

Pleasant and Unpleasant Feelings

For example: Pain arose in the leg, I noted it as “pain, pain,” I observed a dull ache. I noted “aching, aching,” the aching increased more and more and became unbearable, etc.

When reporting on unpleasant feelings, you can mention whether the pain increased, decreased or disappeared, whether it changed in location, what kind of pain it was (such as aching, tingling, numbing, itching, stabbing, burning, etc.) and whether it changed, and how long the pain lasted.

Dhamma Objects

For example: Anger and frustration arose, I noted it as “anger, anger,” the anger increased (or decreased), etc. Or: Sleepiness arose, I couldn’t note it and kept falling asleep for the whole sitting.

Walking Meditation

Report on each movement of the foot separately. Report on the physical sensations you experience in your foot and lower leg, such as lightness, heaviness, stiffness, tension,

movement, softness, hardness, heat, cold, etc. (Do not pay attention to the shape or form of your foot.)

If you do two-step noting (lifting, placing):

I noted "lifting," I observed _____. I noted "placing," I observed _____.

For three-step noting (lifting, moving, placing)

I noted "lifting," I observed _____. I noted "moving," I observed _____. I noted "placing," I observed _____.

Daily Activities

Choose a short segment from one daily activity, such as getting up from bed, or washing your face, or eating, or drinking juice, or changing postures from sitting to standing, standing to sitting, or opening or closing the door, etc. If you choose to report on eating, for example, you can report on what you observed when taking up and eating one mouthful of food. What sensations did you observe when lifting the hand, putting the spoon in the mouth, chewing and swallowing, etc.?

It takes time and patience to learn how to report correctly, just as it takes time and patience to learn how to be more skillful in meditation. Your teacher is there to help you, so don't be nervous. The interview is *not* an exam! It is a useful learning experience.

Summary of How to Report During Your Interview

Sitting Meditation

1. "I noted rising, I observed _____" (Describe how it feels physically, you can report more than one characteristic that you have observed)
2. "I noted falling, I observed _____" (Same procedure as above)
3. If rising changes, report it directly as: "I noted rising, I observed _____" (Describe the new characteristics you have observed.)
4. If falling changes, report it directly as: "I noted falling, I observed _____" (Same procedure as above)
5. Report on thoughts, for example: "Wandering mind arose, I noted it as 'thinking,'" or "I didn't note it." Then describe what happened to the thoughts, such as: "The thoughts stopped." Or "The thoughts kept going." **Do not report the content of your thoughts!**
6. Report on pleasant or unpleasant feelings in the body. For example: "Pain arose, I noted it as 'pain.'" Then describe the pain. Then report what happened to the pain.
7. Report on mental states, good or bad. For example: "Boredom arose, I noted it as 'bored.'" Then report what happened to the mental state.

Walking Meditation

1. I noted lifting, I observed _____ (Describe the sensations you observed in the foot and lower leg as it lifted up)
2. I noted moving, I observed _____ (Describe the sensations you observed in the foot and lower leg as it moved forward)
3. I noted placing, I observed _____ (Describe the sensations you observed in the foot and lower leg as you placed it downwards)

Daily Activities

Choose a short segment from one daily activity to report, if you have actually tried to note every single action involved, for example: eating, or drinking juice, or sitting down and standing up, or opening and closing the door, etc.