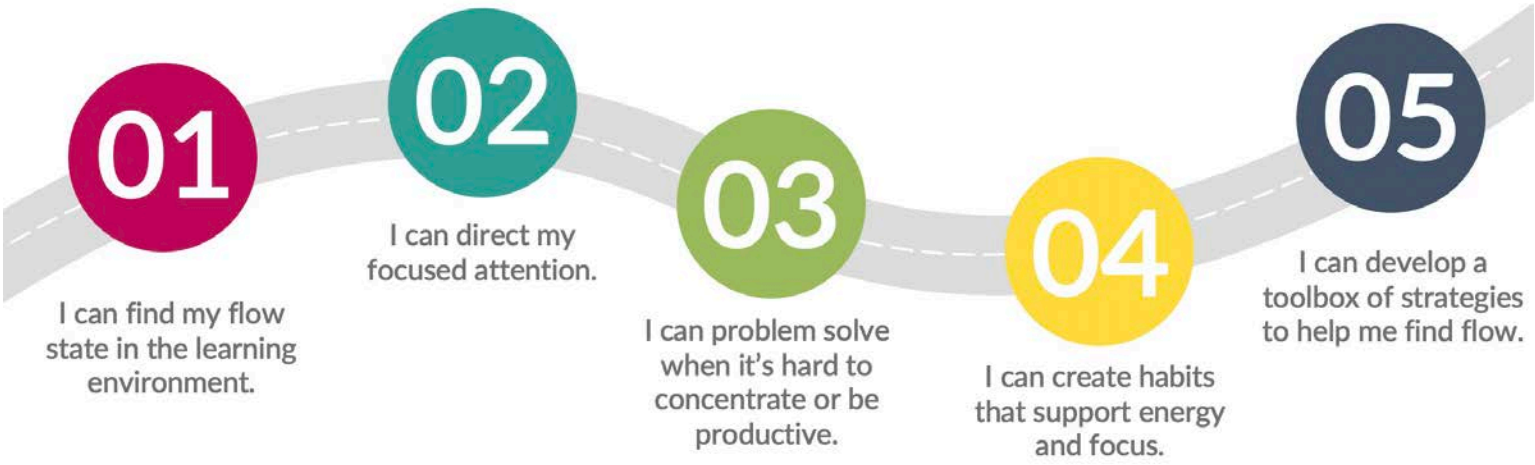
FINDING FLOW Solutions
Unit 1: Foundations of Flow

Teacher's Guide to the 5 Lesson Unit



How to Teach This Unit

Materials Needed

- Computer connected to an LCD projector to show the presentation in either Google Slides or PowerPoint
- Class set of copies for the 10 page student journal (provided digitally or printed; can be photocopied double-sided so only 5 pieces of paper are needed per student for the entire unit)

Preparation

1) Skim through the Teacher's Guide for yourself, either in the digital PDF version or printed out. You'll find the key ideas for each lesson are outlined. All printing is optional for this unit, but I recommend printing the mini posters for display.

2) Provide copies of the interactive journal to students. You can do this by printing out the 10 page student interactive journal, making a class set of photocopies, and stapling each student's copy to create a packet or booklet. The photocopies can be double-sided to save paper. Alternatively, you can share the typable PDF with students to complete on their devices.

Pacing and Timeframe

This 5 lesson unit is designed to be flexible. We recommend teaching one lesson per day during a five day school week. However, you can also teach one lesson per week, or follow any other format you'd like.

You can begin this unit at ANY time during the school year, and condense or expand the time frame to whatever meets your students' needs.

This resource is NOT designed as a set of independent practice activities for students to work through on their own. Rather, it's an instructional unit that walks you step-by-step through the process of teaching your students and guiding their practice through various activities.

You should set aside approximately 15-25 minutes of class time for each lesson.

Extend Learning

FINDING FLOW Solutions is a growing line of curricula that expands on the ideas shared in this unit. Once students complete this unit, you can choose from others based on student needs and interests. You can view all available units and special school/district pricing at FindingFlowSolutions.com.

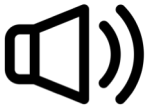
Questions?

Send an email to info@findingflowsolutions.com.

The "Why" Behind This Unit

This resource is designed to serve as both curriculum for students AND professional development for teachers. In that way, you're learning together, sharing your progress, and celebrating one another's growth.

You don't need to become an expert on these topics before implementing the unit. Instead, present it as something you're learning and experimenting with alongside your students. The Teacher's Guide for each lesson will give you the necessary background information about key concepts before you present them to students.



Want to listen instead of read?
Click here to launch the 10 minute audio version.

When it comes to student engagement, most teachers want to start with actionable strategies. You might be thinking, "I don't need all the background info. Just tell me what to *do*. What are the quick tips and tricks that will help get my kids on-task and turning work in on time?"

Our students often think the same way when we ask *them* to think deeply about a concept. They, too, will often plead, "Can't you just tell me what you want me to do?"

It's a natural human tendency to look for the shortcut. We want to skip to the end result as quickly as possible.

And yet, true learning and transformation doesn't happen without deep thinking. It requires time and practice to analyze, synthesize, and internalize new understandings.

This is why we want students to be self-directed in their learning and take initiative to figure things out for themselves. We want them to wrestle deeply with concepts and stick with complex ideas when they're confused. We want them to think critically and engage in the struggle of understanding so they come out on the other side truly owning their own learning, ideas, and beliefs.

Two of the most powerful ways to help students experience this kind of learning are:

1) Explicitly teaching students how to optimize concentration, time, and energy
2) Modeling these strategies for students with enthusiasm, curiosity, and intellectual humility

That's exactly what this unit is designed to help you do.

The first and most important step is to shift from viewing learning as something that you're trying to get students to do and they're resisting, and instead view learning as something that you experiment with together.

This mindset shift tends to be much more impactful than the practical strategies, because it becomes the lens through which you see every aspect of your work and your time with students. Envision it:

- What if we acknowledged that staying motivated, focused, and getting our work done is challenging, and even we as adults struggle with it?
- What if, instead of constantly telling kids to focus and do their assignments, we illuminated how our brains work and explored ways to funnel our focus, time, and energy?
- What if we presented productivity as one giant experiment that we can have fun doing alongside our students?

Why This Unit? (Continued)

This unit will help you and your students internalize this way of thinking, and establish the goal of finding flow in the classroom whenever possible.

Flow theory was first developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in the 1970s, and he continued studying flow until his death in 2021. He describes flow as "a state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will continue to do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it."

Experiencing flow means you are totally focused on the task at hand, and time passes without you even noticing because you're so absorbed in it.

It's not only the optimal state for learning and working, but it provides an optimal experience of being human. Csikszentmihalyi's research has shown that experiencing flow is fun, gives us a sense of satisfaction about our work, makes learning more enjoyable, makes concentration feel easier, helps us perform at our highest levels, and leaves us feeling energized after working instead of exhausted.

The best part about flow? The ideal conditions for experiencing it are activities that require learning, improving, and applying our skills–not passive leisure activities. Tasks that grow our skill sets and require concentration are the exact type of tasks that make flow easiest to experience.

Therefore, we can intentionally create experiences in the classroom that support students in experiencing flow.

When students understand how flow works and what factors they personally need in order to experience flow, they'll be able to concentrate, focus, and persevere through tasks much more easily in class. They'll also be able to use what they learn about flow to help them enjoy and improve in activities outside of school, including gaming, sports, music, dancing, drawing, acting, and creative writing.

Learning to find flow (specifically) and be productive (in general) are both highly personalized, lifelong processes. They can be a fun adventure if you approach these goals through a self-development lens. This means learning about your own needs and preferences which help you show up as the best version of yourself and make a positive impact on the world.

When you see productivity through this perspective, you naturally observe a difference in the way you think about and treat your students. You no longer expect them to just "buckle down and get it done" since you're aware of all the mental tricks and productivity hacks you yourself use to follow through on tasks. You no longer get as frustrated with kids who waste time because you understand some of the root causes, and you have tools to help.

I prefer the concept of "finding flow" to "managing time well," because flow implies joy and ease. These are wonderful states of being, and every student (and teacher) deserves to feel joy and ease in the classroom!

Here are a few markers of viewing productivity through the highly personal, lifelong process of finding flow:

- ✓ **Most people have not been formally taught strategies for managing their time, energy, and attention…and we need support.** We've been given tasks and expected to just "figure it out" in terms of managing our time and getting things done. And yet, it's not that simple, and no one should have to muddle through on their own when everyone is attempting to develop this skill set.

- ✓ **Our world is over-stimulating with massive amounts of information competing for our attention, so it's natural to struggle with processing and prioritizing it all.** We are bombarded with distractions constantly, and expected to just "exercise self-discipline" when technology was intentionally developed to be addictive. Kids are often expected to have self-regulation skills and levels of concentration that even adults don't have.

Why This Unit? (Continued)

- ✓ **School requires unpleasant, difficult, and uninteresting tasks at times, so it's only natural for kids to struggle to get their school work done.** Given the nature of humans, the developmental capabilities of young people, and the structure of school, it's unrealistic to expect kids to be intrinsically motivated to complete every task. We will be frustrated (and so will they!) if they're expected to always complete assignments in a timely manner and put forth 100% effort. Even adults are not capable of meeting that standard.

- ✓ **Productivity is a learned skill that everyone can improve in.** We can increase our capacity for deep thought and concentration. Certainly, staying focused and getting things done feels easier for some folks than others, but if someone is constantly late, unmotivated, or behind, that person is not doomed to those tendencies forever.

- ✓ **There are no "hopeless cases," including people who have ADHD or are otherwise neurodivergent.** Any adult or child struggling with productivity needs to know that there is nothing wrong with them; they just haven't yet found systems that work for their personality and needs.

- ✓ **The most effective approach to one's workflow changes all the time.** A routine or habit will often work well for a couple of days or weeks or even a few months, then just stop working. This does not mean something is wrong with the person or their approach. They just need to be flexible, and experiment with different ways to manage their time, energy, and focused attention.

- ✓ **Productivity is a lifelong experiment, and there's no such thing as a failed experiment.** All experiments give us feedback about what works and what doesn't. In an experiment with productivity, we're constantly tinkering with things, playing around, trying stuff out. We adjust our approach based on the information we learn from the experiment.

I'm inviting you to approach this unit as part of The Great Productivity Experiment alongside your students. This means you can build a toolbox of options to choose from when you're struggling to get stuff done, and support students in doing the same.

It also means you can release any unreasonable expectations you hold for yourself, your colleagues, or your students about knowing how to use time well intuitively, and instead expect that we're all experimenting with various levels of success.

Alongside your students, you can create space for low moods and high moods, low energy days and high energy days, and all different kinds of routines and approaches to learning.

Welcome to the next step of your journey — enjoy!

Angela Watson
Founder of FINDING FLOW Solutions

Lesson 1 Teacher's Guide:
I can find my flow state in the learning environment

Materials & Preparation

Prepare the journals for students, but don't pass them out (or share the link) until the end of the lesson when the slideshow introduces the journals. When you're ready to begin the lesson, project the slideshow for the class to see, starting with the "Unit Introduction" slide.

How to Teach This Lesson

Present the Lesson 1 slideshow in Google Slides or Powerpoint, following the prompts on the slides together with students. It's that simple!

Use "Presenter Mode" if possible so that you can view the slide Notes while teaching. These will give you more detailed directions about what to say and do. An overview of the lesson is provided below for your reference, but the Slides will guide you through the lesson completely.

1. Begin with the "Unit Introduction" slide. There are several slides that follow which prompt students to reflect on the flow state without introducing the term. See what your students come up with!
2. Continue on to the "Lesson 1" slide. In this section, students will be introduced to a "roadmap" which gives an overview of what they'll learn in each of the 5 lessons.
3. The lesson continues with slides introducing them to flow theory. A "turn and talk" prompt is included for students to reflect with a partner or group, followed by more guided instructions through the slides.
4. After sharing the "Closing Thoughts" slides, pass out the journals to students. They should complete the self-reflection prompts on page 2, and can use the front cover to either sketchnote or simply write/draw about any important learnings they have during the unit.

Key Ideas for Students

A Russian researcher named Mihaly Csikszentmihályi (ME-high Cheek-SENT-me-high) invented a word for this in the 1970s. He called it flow, and his research is referred to as "flow theory."

Why learn about flow in school?

- Flow is fun.
- Flow gives us a sense of satisfaction about our work.
- Flow makes learning and work more enjoyable.
- Flow makes concentration feel easier.
- Flow helps us perform at our highest levels and produces our best work.
- Flow leaves us feeling energized after working instead of exhausted.

4 factors that make flow possible:

- I'm totally present: completely involved in the task and not thinking about anything
- I understand what's needed: know what needs to be done and how well I'm doing
- I know I've got this: confident that my skills match the task
- I'm doing it for the flow: flow is its own reward and I get satisfaction from the process

You'll know you've experienced a flow state when:

- You lose track of time ("I can't believe the class period is over already!)"
- Your normal distractions don't tempt you (aren't thinking about snacks, games, checking your phone)
- You find yourself still thinking about the task even when it's time to stop and afterwards

Let's find flow as often as possible, instead of just trying to force ourselves to get work done.

Lesson 2 Teacher's Guide:
I can direct my focused attention.

Materials & Preparation

Prepare a curriculum-related task for which you want students to focus their attention. The goal is for students to practice entering a flow state, so you can assign any activity that lends itself to that (research, writing, reading, finishing a project, etc.) The task you select should take around 20-30 minutes and should be something students are familiar with how to complete, so they can focus on flow.

You can have students access page 3 of their journals before the task if you'd like (it has a list of the steps they'll follow to find flow) or wait until after the task to have students access the journals and self-reflect.

How to Teach This Lesson

Present the Lesson 2 slideshow in Google Slides, following the prompts on the slides together with students. Use "Presenter Mode" if possible so that you can view the slide Notes while teaching. An overview of the lesson is provided below for your reference, but the Slides will guide you through the lesson completely.

1. Begin with the "Lesson 2" slide. Students will revisit the "roadmap" which provides an overview of what they'll learn in each of the 5 lessons in this unit.
2. The lesson continues with slides that compare focused attention to a flashlight and teach students how to focus their attention where they want it.
3. Following the prompts on the slides, introduce the task you want students to complete while practicing how to focus their attention in a flow state. Students can reference page 3 of their journals to view the directions. Allow students 20-30 minutes to complete the task.
4. Afterward, the slides will guide your students through self-reflection and Closing Thoughts.
5. Provide a few minutes at the end of the lesson for students to respond to the three prompts at the bottom of page 3 in their journals.

Key Ideas for Students

Learning to focus your attention is like learning to control the direction of a flashlight. It's choosing which things to illuminate, light up, and bring attention to, and which to leave in relative darkness.

Directing your attention requires control, and that requires practice. The more that you practice shining the flashlight of your attention in one spot and holding the flashlight there, the easier it becomes to do it again.

5 steps to creating a flow state:

- Eliminate distractions: Get comfortable in a quiet place with devices silenced.
- Get clear on the task: Figure out what needs to be done and your next steps.
- Visualize the outcome: Picture the results and how you'll feel when the task is done.
- Set timer for 20-45 min: Give yourself a reasonable time period to get and stay in flow
- Focus your attention: Start with what feels easier and build on that until you get into the flow.

Flow gets easier with practice, and we'll keep practicing together throughout the school year.

Lesson 3 Teacher's Guide:

I can problem solve when it's hard to concentrate or be productive.

Materials & Preparation

When you're ready to begin, project the slideshow for the class to see, beginning with Lesson 3. Students will need their journals a few minutes into the lesson.

How to Teach This Lesson

Present the Lesson 3 slideshow in Google Slides, following the prompts on the slides together with students. Use "Presenter Mode" if possible so that you can view the slide Notes while teaching. An overview of the lesson is provided below for your reference, but the Slides will guide you through the lesson completely.

1. Begin with the "Lesson 3" slide. Students will revisit the "roadmap" which provides an overview of what they'll learn in each of the 5 lessons in this unit, and then review the 4 factors necessary for flow.
2. The slides continue with information to help students understand what productivity looks like (click to play the 90 second closed caption audio explanation), then review why students may have trouble concentrating and possible solutions.
3. Have students turn to page 4 in their journals. Review the directions, and as a class, complete the two examples which help students analyze the barriers to flow.
4. Have students continue the exercise on page 5, working independently, in pairs, or groups.
5. Afterward, bring your students back to the whole class lesson, using the slides to guide your students through self-reflection and Closing Thoughts.

Key Ideas for Students

4 reasons you may have trouble finding flow

Problem: Feeling unpresent
- I'm distracted by other problems in life
- I'm distracted by something that happened earlier
- I'm distracted by something that may happen later

Problem: Feeling unclear
- I don't understand what's needed to be successful
- I don't understand something I need to know first
- I don't know how to get started
- I don't know how to move past a specific part of a task

Problem: Feeling unconfident
- I don't think I have the skills needed to do this well
- I don't think I have enough time to do this well
- I don't think I'm focused enough today to do this well

Problem: Feeling unmotivated
- The task isn't interesting to me
- The task isn't meaningful or important to me
- I don't like the process for this task
- I'm tired of concentrating and need to take a break
- I have a bigger need I need to handle first

How to get into the flow when you feel…

Solutions for feeling unnpresent
- Choose a time to think or talk about your problems later
- Take 5 deep breaths and turn your attention to that
- Tell yourself, "I am okay here right now"

Solutions for feeling unclear
- Ask a friend/your teacher to explain it a different way
- Ask someone how to get started
- Get help with the part you can't do on your own

Solutions for feeling unconfident
- Ask if there is an accommodation/different approach
- Get started on the part you feel most confident about
- Skip to the part you understand best and go from there

Solutions for feeling unmotivated
- Find a part of the task that seems more interesting
- Consider how it will help with a more meaningful task later
- Ask if you can try a different process
- Take a short break and try again in a few minutes

Our goal with school work is to be productive: to use our time well to produce the results we want. The flow state is one of the easiest and most enjoyable ways to be productive.

Lesson 4 Teacher's Guide:

I can create habits that support energy and focus.

Materials & Preparation

Students will need their journals at the very end of the lesson. When you're ready to begin, project the slideshow for the class to see, beginning with Lesson 4.

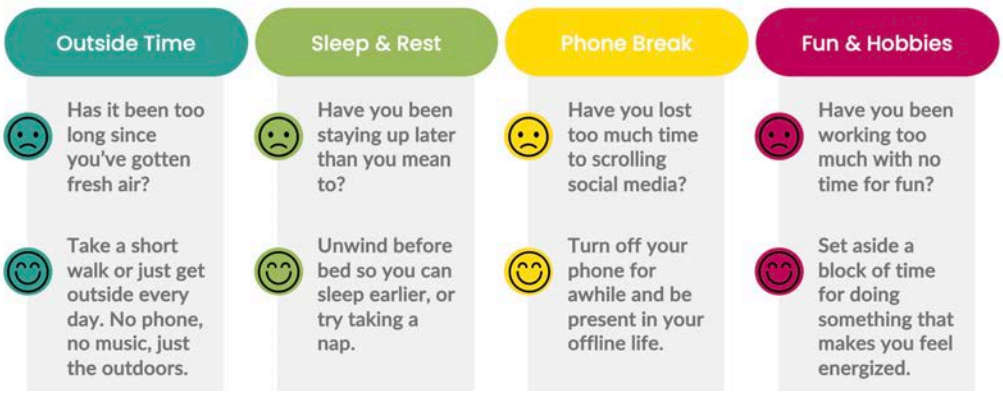
How to Teach This Lesson

Present the Lesson 4 slideshow in Google Slides, following the prompts on the slides together with students. Use "Presenter Mode" if possible so that you can view the slide Notes while teaching. An overview of the lesson is provided below for your reference, but the Slides will guide you through the lesson completely.

1. Begin with the "Lesson 4" slide. Students will revisit the "roadmap" which provides an overview of what they'll learn in each of the 5 lessons in this unit.
2. The lesson continues with slides that compare energy to a wind up toy, and teaches how energy is essential for getting things done and must be consciously replenished. It also prompts students to consider how their daily habits impact their energy levels.
3. The next three slides guide students to reflect on their preferred habits for completing school work. You can have students discuss each slide with a partner or group, or keep the activity whole-class by reading each option aloud and having students raise their hands to show which they prefer.
4. Afterward, share the Closing Thoughts and release students to complete page 6 of their journals, which prompts them to continue reflecting on their unique optimal conditions for finding flow.

Key Ideas for Students

- Energy, unlike time, does not automatically replenish itself. You don't wake up with more energy unless you've done something previously to replenish it — unless you've taken care of your body and mind, and allowed yourself time to recharge.
- How your daily habits affect your energy levels. You can set yourself up for success in school instead of doing things that make it even harder to get your work done. (see chart below.)
- Consider which work habits are best for your energy levels: how you manage your time to maximize your energy.



It's normal for your habits to change depending on the task and your mood. Productivity is a life-long experiment!

Lesson 5 Teacher's Guide:

I can develop a toolbox of strategies to help me find flow.

Materials & Preparation

This lesson may take slightly longer to complete than previous lessons due to a lengthy article students read and reflect on, so provide a full 25 minutes (or more) for the lesson.

How to Teach This Lesson

Present the Lesson 5 slideshow in Google Slides, following the prompts on the slides together with students. Use "Presenter Mode" if possible so that you can view the slide Notes while teaching. An overview of the lesson is provided below for your reference, but the Slides will guide you through the lesson completely.

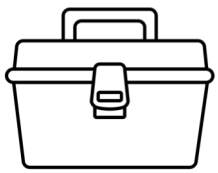
1. Begin with the "Lesson 5" slide. Students will revisit the "roadmap" which provides an overview of what they learned in each of the 5 lessons in this unit.
2. The lesson continues with slides that help students brainstorm things that help when they can't concentrate on school work. Continue on to introduce the toolbox analogy, in which students collect various tools/strategies that help them focus.
3. Students are prompted to read the article provided in their journal and use the provided illustration to design their toolbox of strategies. Provide about 10 minutes for this.
4. Afterward, have students share some strategies they've thought of, and share the Closing Thoughts.
5. You may choose to share the final slide which prompts students to reflect on other topics related to flow that they're interested in exploring. You can use student feedback to help you select which other resources in Finding Flow Solutions to implement, or look for other ways to extend student learning.

Key Ideas for Students

You can develop a toolbox of choices for when you can't get motivated to complete a task.

Strategies:

1) Clear your head by taking some deep breaths.
2) Take a purposeful break with an activity that gets you ready to focus afterward.
3) Think about how doing the task will benefit you.
4) Focus on how good it will feel when the task is done.
5) Use a timer.
6) Look for quick wins to ease yourself into the task.
7) Do the task that's creating the most anxiety.
8) Break the task down into easier, smaller steps, and cross them off as you complete them.
9) Ask yourself, "What would it look like if it were easy?"



Add to your toolbox as you think of more ideas. Experiment! Over time, you'll develop your own personal collection of tools to choose from when you feel overwhelmed.

What's Next?

This unit is one of 6 being developed for the "Finding Flow: Productivity Practices in the Classroom" curriculum by Angela Watson at FindingFlowSolutions.com.

All six units will be available by November 2023.

If your students were engaged in these lessons and are ready for more, consider obtaining funding for one or more of these units:

You can also follow your students' lead, and see what they're most interested in exploring next. Utilize the various units in ANY order you'd like, so consider which skills are most necessary or more interesting to your particular group(s) of students.

Questions? School or District Purchase Orders?

Email info@findingflowsolutions.com, and we'll help you out.

MORE RESOURCES FROM FINDING FLOW SOLUTIONS

SEE THE FULL CURRICULUM LINE

I'm Angela Watson, the founder of FindingFowSolutions.com and Lead Curriculum Creator. I'm also a National Board Certified Teacher, with a masters degree in Curriculum and Instruction, 11 years of classroom teaching experience, and over a decade of experience as an instructional coach.

I currently work as a Productivity and Mindset Specialist in the area of educational consulting. In practical terms, this means I author books, design curriculum, and provide professional development services. Everything I do is centered on sharing more effective, efficient, and *enjoyable* ways of teaching and learning!

I founded my website (**TruthforTeachers.com**) in 2003 to connect with other educators. You can now find thousands of ad-free articles and resources there from our K-12 teacher-writer's collective. Check out my other resources below:

PODCAST

COURSES

BOOKS

IN-PERSON PD

PRINTABLES

40 HOUR WORKWEEK

Stay in touch and get new resources sent to you automatically via email!
I send a personal, uplifting message every Sunday night to over 95,000 educators.

GET THE FREE WEEKLY EMAIL

How to Teach This Unit

Materials Needed

- Computer connected to an LCD projector to show the presentation in either Google Slides or PowerPoint
- Class set of copies for the 10 page student journal (provided digitally or printed)

Preparation

1) Skim through the Teacher's Guide for yourself, either in the digital PDF version or printed out. You'll find the key ideas for each lesson are outlined. All printing is optional for this unit, but I recommend printing the mini posters for display.

2) Provide copies of the interactive journal to students. You can do this by printing out the 10 page student interactive journal, making a class set of photocopies, and stapling each student's copy to create a packet or booklet. The photocopies can be double-sided to save paper. Alternatively, you can share the typable PDF with students to complete on their devices.

Pacing and Timeframe

This 5 lesson unit is designed to be flexible. We recommend teaching one lesson per day during a five day school week. However, you can also teach one lesson per week, or follow any other format you'd like.

You can begin this unit at ANY time during the school year, and condense or expand the time frame to whatever meets your students' needs.

This resource is NOT designed as a set of independent practice activities for students to work through on their own. Rather, it's an instructional unit that walks you step-by-step through the process of teaching your students and guiding their practice through various activities.

You should set aside approximately 15-25 minutes of class time for each lesson.

Extend Learning

FINDING FLOW Solutions is a growing line of curricula that expands on the ideas shared in this unit. Once students complete this unit, you can choose from others based on student needs and interests. You can view all available units and special school/district pricing at FindingFlowSolutions.com.

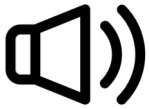
Questions?

Send an email to info@findingflowsolutions.com.

The "Why" Behind This Unit

This resource is designed to serve as both curriculum for students AND professional development for teachers. In that way, you're learning together, sharing your progress, and celebrating one another's growth.

You don't need to become an expert on these topics before implementing the unit. Instead, present it as something you're learning and experimenting with alongside your students. The Teacher's Guide for each lesson will give you the necessary background information about key concepts before you present them to students.



Want to listen instead of read?
Click here to launch the 10 minute audio version.

When it comes to student engagement, most teachers want to start with actionable strategies. You might be thinking, "I don't need all the background info. Just tell me what to *do*. What are the quick tips and tricks that will help get my kids on-task and turning work in on time?"

Our students often think the same way when we ask *them* to think deeply about a concept. They, too, will often plead, "Can't you just tell me what you want me to do?"

It's a natural human tendency to look for the shortcut. We want to skip to the end result as quickly as possible.

And yet, true learning and transformation doesn't happen without deep thinking. It requires time and practice to analyze, synthesize, and internalize new understandings.

This is why we want students to be self-directed in their learning and take initiative to figure things out for themselves. We want them to wrestle deeply with concepts and stick with complex ideas when they're confused. We want them to think critically and engage in the struggle of understanding so they come out on the other side truly owning their own learning, ideas, and beliefs.

Two of the most powerful ways to help students experience this kind of learning are:

1) Explicitly teaching students how to optimize concentration, time, and energy
2) Modeling these strategies for students with enthusiasm, curiosity, and intellectual humility

That's exactly what this unit is designed to help you do.

The first and most important step is to shift from viewing learning as something that you're trying to get students to do and they're resisting, and instead view learning as something that you experiment with together.

This mindset shift tends to be much more impactful than the practical strategies, because it becomes the lens through which you see every aspect of your work and your time with students. Envision it:

- What if we acknowledged that staying motivated, focused, and getting our work done is challenging, and even we as adults struggle with it?
- What if, instead of constantly telling kids to focus and do their assignments, we illuminated how our brains work and explored ways to funnel our focus, time, and energy?
- What if we presented productivity as one giant experiment that we can have fun doing alongside our students?

Why This Unit? (Continued)

This unit will help you and your students internalize this way of thinking, and establish the goal of finding flow in the classroom whenever possible.

Flow theory was first developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in the 1970s, and he continued studying flow until his death in 2021. He describes flow as "a state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so enjoyable that people will continue to do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it."

Experiencing flow means you are totally focused on the task at hand, and time passes without you even noticing because you're so absorbed in it.

It's not only the optimal state for learning and working, but it provides an optimal experience of being human. Csikszentmihalyi's research has shown that experiencing flow is fun, gives us a sense of satisfaction about our work, makes learning more enjoyable, makes concentration feel easier, helps us perform at our highest levels, and leaves us feeling energized after working instead of exhausted.

The best part about flow? The ideal conditions for experiencing it are activities that require learning, improving, and applying our skills–not passive leisure activities. Tasks that grow our skill sets and require concentration are the exact type of tasks that make flow easiest to experience.

Therefore, we can intentionally create experiences in the classroom that support students in experiencing flow.

When students understand how flow works and what factors they personally need in order to experience flow, they'll be able to concentrate, focus, and persevere through tasks much more easily in class. They'll also be able to use what they learn about flow to help them enjoy and improve in activities outside of school, including gaming, sports, music, dancing, drawing, acting, and creative writing.

Learning to find flow (specifically) and be productive (in general) are both highly personalized, lifelong processes. They can be a fun adventure if you approach these goals through a self-development lens. This means learning about your own needs and preferences which help you show up as the best version of yourself and make a positive impact on the world.

When you see productivity through this perspective, you naturally observe a difference in the way you think about and treat your students. You no longer expect them to just "buckle down and get it done" since you're aware of all the mental tricks and productivity hacks you yourself use to follow through on tasks. You no longer get as frustrated with kids who waste time because you understand some of the root causes, and you have tools to help.

I prefer the concept of "finding flow" to "managing time well," because flow implies joy and ease. These are wonderful states of being, and every student (and teacher) deserves to feel joy and ease in the classroom!

Here are a few markers of viewing productivity through the highly personal, lifelong process of finding flow:

- ✓ **Most people have not been formally taught strategies for managing their time, energy, and attention…and we need support.** We've been given tasks and expected to just "figure it out" in terms of managing our time and getting things done. And yet, it's not that simple, and no one should have to muddle through on their own when everyone is attempting to develop this skill set.

- ✓ **Our world is over-stimulating with massive amounts of information competing for our attention, so it's natural to struggle with processing and prioritizing it all.** We are bombarded with distractions constantly, and expected to just "exercise self-discipline" when technology was intentionally developed to be addictive. Kids are often expected to have self-regulation skills and levels of concentration that even adults don't have.

Why This Unit? (Continued)

- ✓ **School requires unpleasant, difficult, and uninteresting tasks at times, so it's only natural for kids to struggle to get their school work done.** Given the nature of humans, the developmental capabilities of young people, and the structure of school, it's unrealistic to expect kids to be intrinsically motivated to complete every task. We will be frustrated (and so will they!) if they're expected to always complete assignments in a timely manner and put forth 100% effort. Even adults are not capable of meeting that standard.

- ✓ **Productivity is a learned skill that everyone can improve in.** We can increase our capacity for deep thought and concentration. Certainly, staying focused and getting things done feels easier for some folks than others, but if someone is constantly late, unmotivated, or behind, that person is not doomed to those tendencies forever.

- ✓ **There are no "hopeless cases," including people who have ADHD or are otherwise neurodivergent.** Any adult or child struggling with productivity needs to know that there is nothing wrong with them; they just haven't yet found systems that work for their personality and needs.

- ✓ **The most effective approach to one's workflow changes all the time.** A routine or habit will often work well for a couple of days or weeks or even a few months, then just stop working. This does not mean something is wrong with the person or their approach. They just need to be flexible, and experiment with different ways to manage their time, energy, and focused attention.

- ✓ **Productivity is a lifelong experiment, and there's no such thing as a failed experiment.** All experiments give us feedback about what works and what doesn't. In an experiment with productivity, we're constantly tinkering with things, playing around, trying stuff out. We adjust our approach based on the information we learn from the experiment.

I'm inviting you to approach this unit as part of The Great Productivity Experiment alongside your students. This means you can build a toolbox of options to choose from when you're struggling to get stuff done, and support students in doing the same.

It also means you can release any unreasonable expectations you hold for yourself, your colleagues, or your students about knowing how to use time well intuitively, and instead expect that we're all experimenting with various levels of success.

Alongside your students, you can create space for low moods and high moods, low energy days and high energy days, and all different kinds of routines and approaches to learning.

Welcome to the next step of your journey — enjoy!

Angela Watson
Founder of FINDING FLOW Solutions

Lesson 1 Teachers' Guide:
I can find my flow state in the learning environment

Materials & Preparation

Prepare the journals for students, but don't pass them out (or share the link) until the end of the lesson when the slideshow introduces the journals. When you're ready to begin the lesson, project the slideshow for the class to see, starting with the "Unit Introduction" slide.

How to Teach This Lesson

Present the Lesson 1 slideshow in Google Slides or Powerpoint, following the prompts on the slides together with students. It's that simple!

Use "Presenter Mode" if possible so that you can view the slide Notes while teaching. These will give you more detailed directions about what to say and do. An overview of the lesson is provided below for your reference, but the Slides will guide you through the lesson completely.

1. Begin with the "Unit Introduction" slide. There are several slides that follow which prompt students to reflect on the flow state without introducing the term. See what your students come up with!
2. Continue on to the "Lesson 1" slide. In this section, students will be introduced to a "roadmap" which gives an overview of what they'll learn in each of the 5 lessons.
3. The lesson continues with slides introducing them to flow theory. A "turn and talk" prompt is included for students to reflect with a partner or group, followed by more guided instructions through the slides.
4. After sharing the "Closing Thoughts" slides, pass out the journals to students. They should complete the self-reflection prompts on page 2, and can use the front cover to either sketchnote or simply write/draw about any important learnings they have during the unit.

Key Ideas for Students

A Russian researcher named Mihaly Csikszentmihályi (ME-high Cheek-SENT-me-high) invented a word for this in the 1970s. He called it flow, and his research is referred to as "flow theory."

Why learn about flow in school?

- Flow is fun.
- Flow gives us a sense of satisfaction about our work.
- Flow makes learning and work more enjoyable.
- Flow makes concentration feel easier.
- Flow helps us perform at our highest levels and produces our best work.
- Flow leaves us feeling energized after working instead of exhausted.
-

4 factors that make flow possible:

- I'm totally present: completely involved in the task and not thinking about anything else
- I understand what's needed: know what needs to be done and how well I'm doing
- I know I've got this: confident that my skills match the task
- I'm doing it for the flow: flow is its own reward and I get satisfaction from the process

You'll know you've experienced a flow state when:

- You lose track of time ("I can't believe the class period is over already!)"
- Your normal distractions don't tempt you (aren't thinking about snacks, games, checking your phone)
- You find yourself still thinking about the task even when it's time to stop and afterwards

Let's find flow as often as possible, instead of just trying to force ourselves to get work done.

Lesson 2 Teachers' Guide:
I can direct my focused attention.

Materials & Preparation

Prepare a curriculum-related task for which you want students to focus their attention. The goal is for students to practice entering a flow state, so you can assign any activity that lends itself to that (research, writing, reading, finishing a project, etc.) The task you select should take around 20-30 minutes and should be something students are familiar with how to complete, so they can focus on flow.

You can have students access page 3 of their journals before the task if you'd like (it has a list of the steps they'll follow to find flow) or wait until after the task to have students access the journals and self-reflect.

How to Teach This Lesson

Present the Lesson 2 slideshow in Google Slides, following the prompts on the slides together with students. Use "Presenter Mode" if possible so that you can view the slide Notes while teaching. An overview of the lesson is provided below for your reference, but the Slides will guide you through the lesson completely.

1. Begin with the "Lesson 2" slide. Students will revisit the "roadmap" which provides an overview of what they'll learn in each of the 5 lessons in this unit.
2. The lesson continues with slides that compare focused attention to a flashlight and teach students how to focus their attention where they want it.
3. Following the prompts on the slides, introduce the task you want students to complete while practicing how to focus their attention in a flow state. Students can reference page 3 of their journals to view the directions. Allow students 20-30 minutes to complete the task.
4. Afterward, the slides will guide your students through self-reflection and Closing Thoughts.
5. Provide a few minutes at the end of the lesson for students to respond to the three prompts at the bottom of page 3 in their journals.

Key Ideas for Students

Learning to focus your attention is like learning to control the direction of a flashlight. It's choosing which things to illuminate, light up, and bring attention to, and which to leave in relative darkness.

Directing your attention requires control, and that requires practice. The more that you practice shining the flashlight of your attention in one spot and holding the flashlight there, the easier it becomes to do it again.

5 steps to creating a flow state:

- Eliminate distractions: Get comfortable in a quiet place with devices silenced.
- Get clear on the task: Figure out what needs to be done and your next steps.
- Visualize the outcome: Picture the results and how you'll feel when the task is done.
- Set timer for 20-45 min: Give yourself a reasonable time period to get and stay in flow
- Focus your attention: Start with what feels easier and build on that until you get into the flow.

Flow gets easier with practice, and we'll keep practicing together throughout the school year.

Lesson 3 Teachers' Guide:

I can problem solve when it's hard to concentrate or be productive.

Materials & Preparation

When you're ready to begin, project the slideshow for the class to see, beginning with Lesson 3. Students will need their journals a few minutes into the lesson.

How to Teach This Lesson

Present the Lesson 3 slideshow in Google Slides, following the prompts on the slides together with students. Use "Presenter Mode" if possible so that you can view the slide Notes while teaching. An overview of the lesson is provided below for your reference, but the Slides will guide you through the lesson completely.

1. Begin with the "Lesson 3" slide. Students will revisit the "roadmap" which provides an overview of what they'll learn in each of the 5 lessons in this unit, and then review the 4 factors necessary for flow.
2. The slides continue with information to help students understand what productivity looks like (click to play the 90 second closed caption audio explanation), then review why students may have trouble concentrating and possible solutions.
3. Have students turn to page 4 in their journals. Review the directions, and as a class, complete the two examples which help students analyze the barriers to flow.
4. Have students continue the exercise on page 5, working independently, in pairs, or groups.
5. Afterward, bring your students back to the whole class lesson, using the slides to guide your students through self-reflection and Closing Thoughts.

Key Ideas for Students

4 reasons you may have trouble finding flow

Problem: Feeling unpresent
- I'm distracted by other problems in life
- I'm distracted by something that happened earlier
- I'm distracted by something that may happen later

Problem: Feeling unclear
- I don't understand what's needed to be successful
- I don't understand something I need to know first
- I don't know how to get started
- I don't know how to move past a specific part of a task

Problem: Feeling unconfident
- I don't think I have the skills needed to do this well
- I don't think I have enough time to do this well
- I don't think I'm focused enough today to do this well

Problem: Feeling unmotivated
- The task isn't interesting to me
- The task isn't meaningful or important to me
- I don't like the process for this task
- I'm tired of concentrating and need to take a break
- I have a bigger need I need to handle first

How to get into the flow when you feel…

Solutions for feeling unnpresent
- Choose a time to think or talk about your problems later
- Take 5 deep breaths and turn your attention to that
- Tell yourself, "I am okay here right now"

Solutions for feeling unclear
- Ask a friend/your teacher to explain it a different way
- Ask someone how to get started
- Get help with the part you can't do on your own

Solutions for feeling unconfident
- Ask if there is an accommodation/different approach
- Get started on the part you feel most confident about
- Skip to the part you understand best and go from there

Solutions for feeling unmotivated
- Find a part of the task that seems more interesting
- Consider how it will help with a more meaningful task later
- Ask if you can try a different process
- Take a short break and try again in a few minutes

Our goal with school work is to be productive: to use our time well to produce the results we want. The flow state is one of the easiest and most enjoyable ways to be productive.

Lesson 4 Teachers' Guide:
I can create habits that support energy and focus.

Materials & Preparation

Students will need their journals at the very end of the lesson. When you're ready to begin, project the slideshow for the class to see, beginning with Lesson 4.

How to Teach This Lesson

Present the Lesson 4 slideshow in Google Slides, following the prompts on the slides together with students. Use "Presenter Mode" if possible so that you can view the slide Notes while teaching. An overview of the lesson is provided below for your reference, but the Slides will guide you through the lesson completely.

1. Begin with the "Lesson 4" slide. Students will revisit the "roadmap" which provides an overview of what they'll learn in each of the 5 lessons in this unit.
2. The lesson continues with slides that compare energy to a wind up toy, and teaches how energy is essential for getting things done and must be consciously replenished. It also prompts students to consider how their daily habits impact their energy levels.
3. The next three slides guide students to reflect on their preferred habits for completing school work. You can have students discuss each slide with a partner or group, or keep the activity whole-class by reading each option aloud and having students raise their hands to show which they prefer.
4. Afterward, share the Closing Thoughts and release students to complete page 6 of their journals, which prompts them to continue reflecting on their unique optimal conditions for finding flow.

Key Ideas for Students

- Energy, unlike time, does not automatically replenish itself. You don't wake up with more energy unless you've done something previously to replenish it — unless you've taken care of your body and mind, and allowed yourself time to recharge.
- How your daily habits affect your energy levels. You can set yourself up for success in school instead of doing things that make it even harder to get your work done. (see chart below.)
- Consider which work habits are best for your energy levels: how you manage your time to maximize your energy.

Outside Time	Sleep & Rest	Phone Break	Fun & Hobbies
Has it been too long since you've gotten fresh air?	Have you been staying up later than you mean to?	Have you lost too much time to scrolling social media?	Have you been working too much with no time for fun?
Take a short walk or just get outside every day. No phone, no music, just the outdoors.	Unwind before bed so you can sleep earlier, or try taking a nap.	Turn off your phone for awhile and be present in your offline life.	Set aside a block of time for doing something that makes you feel energized.

It's normal for your habits to change depending on the task and your mood.
Productivity is a life-long experiment!

Lesson 5 Teachers' Guide:

I can develop a toolbox of strategies to help me find flow.

Materials & Preparation

This lesson may take slightly longer to complete than previous lessons due to a lengthy article students read and reflect on, so provide a full 25 minutes (or more) for the lesson.

How to Teach This Lesson

Present the Lesson 5 slideshow in Google Slides, following the prompts on the slides together with students. Use "Presenter Mode" if possible so that you can view the slide Notes while teaching. An overview of the lesson is provided below for your reference, but the Slides will guide you through the lesson completely.

1. Begin with the "Lesson 5" slide. Students will revisit the "roadmap" which provides an overview of what they learned in each of the 5 lessons in this unit.
2. The lesson continues with slides that help students brainstorm things that help when they can't concentrate on school work. Continue on to introduce the toolbox analogy, in which students collect various tools/strategies that help them focus.
3. Students are prompted to read the article provided in their journal and use the provided illustration to design their toolbox of strategies. Provide about 10 minutes for this.
4. Afterward, have students share some strategies they've thought of, and share the Closing Thoughts.
5. You may choose to share the final slide which prompts students to reflect on other topics related to flow that they're interested in exploring. You can use student feedback to help you select which other resources in Finding Flow Solutions to implement, or look for other ways to extend student learning.

Key Ideas for Students

You can develop a toolbox of choices for when you can't get motivated to complete a task.

Strategies:

1) Clear your head by taking some deep breaths.
2) Take a purposeful break with an activity that gets you ready to focus afterward.
3) Think about how doing the task will benefit you.
4) Focus on how good it will feel when the task is done.
5) Use a timer.
6) Look for quick wins to ease yourself into the task.
7) Do the task that's creating the most anxiety.
8) Break the task down into easier, smaller steps, and cross them off as you complete them.
9) Ask yourself, "What would it look like if it were easy?"

Add to your toolbox as you think of more ideas. Experiment! Over time, you'll develop your own personal collection of tools to choose from when you feel overwhelmed.

What's Next?

This unit is one of 6 being developed for the "Finding Flow: Productivity Practices in the Classroom" curriculum by Angela Watson at FindingFlowSolutions.com.

All six units will be available by November 2023.

If your students were engaged in these lessons and are ready for more, consider obtaining funding for one or more of these units:

You can also follow your students' lead, and see what they're most interested in exploring next. Utilize the various units in ANY order you'd like, so consider which skills are most necessary or more interesting to your particular group(s) of students.

Questions? School or District Purchase Orders?

Email info@findingflowsolutions.com, and we'll help you out.