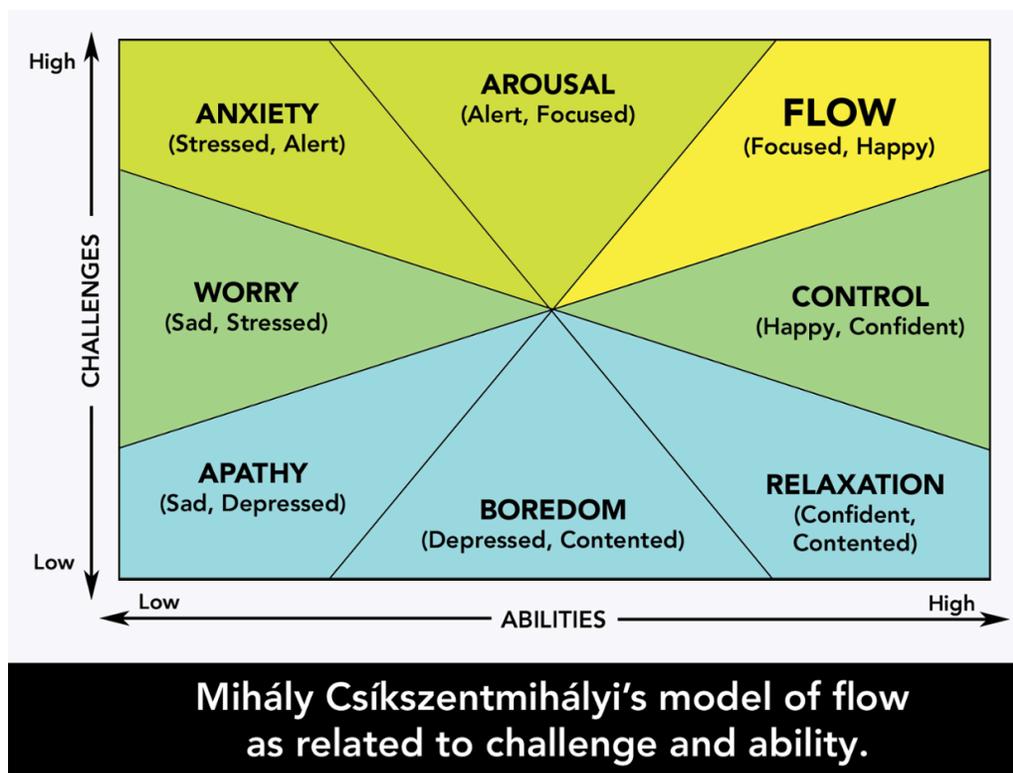


## Flow: 'A State of Mind You Achieve When You're Fully Immersed in a Task, Forgetting about the Outside World'

When you're in the state of Flow, you:

- are completely focused on the task at hand;
- forget about yourself, about others, about the world around you;
- lose track of time;
- feel happy and in control; and
- become creative and productive.



So how do you achieve this mystical state of being? Do you need to meditate or chant anything? No, you don't (although meditation can improve your ability to concentrate). And Flow is anything but mystical — it's very practical, and achieving it isn't mysterious.

These are 6 things you could do to use 'flow' as a strategy to become happier:

1. **Make sure it's challenging, but not too hard.** If a task is too easy, you will be able to complete it without much thought or effort. A task should be challenging enough to require your full concentration. However, if it is too hard, you will find it difficult to lose yourself in it, as you will spend most of your concentration just trying to figure out how to do it — either that, or you'll end up discouraged. It may take some trial and error to find tasks of the appropriate level of difficulty.
2. **Find your quiet, peak time.** This is actually two steps grouped into one. First, you'll want to find a time that's quiet, or you'll never be able to focus. That might be early morning, when you just wake, or early in the work day, when most people haven't arrived yet or are still getting their coffee and settling down. Or you might try the lunch hour, when people are usually out of the office. Evenings work well too for many people. Or, if you're lucky, you can do it at any time of the day if you can find a quiet spot to work in. Whatever time you choose, it should also be a peak energy time for you. Some people get tired after lunch — that's not a good time to go for Flow. Find a time when you have lots of energy and can concentrate.
3. **Clear away distractions.** Aside from finding a quiet time and place to work, you'll want to clear away all other distractions. That means turning off distracting music (unless you find music that helps you focus), turning off phones, email and notifications, You might also find it helpful to clear your desk, even if that means sweeping miscellaneous papers into a folder to be sorted through later.
4. **Learn to focus on that task for as long as possible.** This takes practice. You need to start on your chosen task and keep your focus on it for as long as you can. At first, many people will have difficulty, if they're used to constantly switching between tasks. But keep trying, and keep bringing your focus back to your task. You'll get better. And if you can keep your focus on that task, with no distractions, and if your task has been chosen well (something you love, something important, and something challenging), you should lose yourself in Flow.
5. **Enjoy yourself.** It feels great to be able to really pour yourself into something worthwhile, to make great progress on a project or important task, to do something you're passionate about. Take the time to appreciate this feeling (perhaps after the fact — it's hard to appreciate it while you're in Flow).
6. **Reap the rewards.** Aside from the pleasure of getting into Flow, you'll also be happier with your work overall. You'll get important stuff done. You'll complete stuff more often, rather than starting and stopping frequently. All of this is hugely satisfying and rewarding. Take the time to appreciate this, and to continue to practice it every day.

Positive Psychology: Happiness  
 Dr. Ellen Dreezens  
 University College Tilburg