

Teaching Personalized Practice

YOGA FOR ALL TRAINING



Making space for all bodies in yoga

- Establishing a culture of consent and agency to empower students
- Adjusting our language and cueing
- Giving folks the tools to work with *asana* in the bodies they have today

Creating a safe container for agency

- Students take ownership of their practice and their bodies (culture of consent)
- They understand and learn what is going on inside their own bodies (interoception, proprioception, nociception, DISCERNMENT)
- Our students identities are honored: no “parts of themselves” left outside the door in order to belong here
- They have permission to give themselves permission (to be where they are today, to have an experience in their body without striving or attaining, to take rest if needed, to push themselves if a challenge would benefit them)
- They can choose where they want to focus or work (rather than competing)
- They have the tools to personalize their practice for their own bodies

Let's talk about *modifications*

We can start to address implied hierarchy
in our teaching language.

Removing hierarchy from language

- Make it clear that variations on postures are neutral. No variation is “more advanced” than another.
- Build from a simple shape to a more complex shape rather than “if you can’t...”
- **Safety & foundations:** Where’s your feet > pelvis > ribs > head?
 - Grounding, inner body alignment, long spine
 - Energetic actions of the pose
 - Once foundations are established, you can introduce “fancy stuff” like taking the foot higher, lifting the arms, finding more sensation, etc.

Normalize and teach adaptive practice

- Normalize the concept of personalized practice and changing bodies. Say it out loud. Make it clear that the students know what feels best in their bodies. Give them space to practice self-sensing skills and trust their instincts.
- Find the language that works for you as a teacher and brings choice back to the student:
variations, enhancements, personalized practice, places to work
- Having variations on postures brings more power to the student, they are not a punishment for not being able to do a fancy posture. Choice gives your students the agency to take ownership of their practice.
- Props are power tools
 - Set everyone up with the same props
 - Teach what props are for and how to use them
 - Teach what props are not (a cheat / consolation prize)

What is the point of the posture or practice?

- What are the benefits? What are the challenges? Can you find the “spirit of the pose” in a different variation?
- Physical: backward bend? side bend? warm-up?
- Nervous system: downregulating or activating?
- Energetic: powerful? Calming? Or are we embodying a story/mythology, class theme, animal, etc.
- Example: Sun salutations

Other strategies for adapting asana

- Break the pose into parts
 - Make it dynamic: move in and out of the posture
 - Change orientation or relationship to gravity
 - Slow it down
 - Use a chair
 - How could I teach this in a lower stakes way?
-



Strategies for adapting to the chair

- As you build your sequence, consider the adaptive version of each *asana*. What would you do if I couldn't stand or get up and down off the floor? Always have a strategy!
- Build the asana from the foundation up. Foundation - how are they grounding in the classical asana? Feet? Sitting bones? Hands and knees?
- Pelvis & spine check. Hips in open/closed position? Internal/external rotation? Spine - Neutral? Back bend? Forward bend?
- Last, add “fancy stuff” like arms / gaze / breath / vinyasa. Can you add in anything that’s missing from being seated (abdominal pressure, balance)?
- What is the essence of this asana? Let that inform your cues while students experience the asana.



Tips for working with chairs

- Secure the chair - all 4 feet on the mat
- Use the corner of the chair for open hip postures to allow more room for the legs
- Use the seat of the chair instead of blocks
- Hip extension while seated is difficult. Try one side at a time. Support big joints.
- Use *drishti* to bring in the element of balance, even if both feet are on the ground
- Maybe not the chair. Be aware some folks in larger bodies may need a different prop (benches work well for everyone)



Teaching mixed-level classes

- Focus on unifying the group/experience (this is not 2 separate poses or someone “just rest in child’s pose”)
- Arrange students so they are oriented in the same direction
- Instruct students to come into preparatory position separately (based on who can most likely hold the prep position longest)
- Come into the pose together; find language that works at all different levels
- Breathe together, then come out together
- More important to create an equitable experience than to get through poses / peak physical experience