

“PIPER” is an acronym for five steps you can take to prepare yourself for meditation. Here's what the letters stand for:

Posture

Setting up a good posture and maintaining it during the meditation session is indispensable for your practice. It is important to take as much time as needed to set up a well-balanced, comfortable posture that you can easily maintain and restore during the practice session.

Introspection

Introspection means spending a little time before the meditation to take stock of your state of mind. Just sit quietly, and become more aware of your current of feelings and emotions. When you are engaged in other things, you may not notice how you are feeling as clearly as when you are sitting quietly.

Purpose

Purpose is both general and specific. In general, you need to keep up an overall awareness of yourself, and to guard against slipping into an ineffective application to the practice. More specifically, there may be some particular problem that is holding your attention. Or perhaps we tend to fidget or slip into sleepiness.

Enthusiasm

If you really know that you are going to make an effort in your practice, you will feel an emotional momentum behind that intention. You feel an enthusiasm for getting on with the meditation and doing whatever will be necessary. You might reflect for a while on the joys and benefits of meditation, or on what you enjoy in the practice. In this way you can bring more of yourself into it.

Resolve

With a clear purpose and enthusiasm fully behind it, a stronger resolve emerges. You make effort in your practice in a gentle, yet firm and persistent way.

Times and Places to Meditate

Friends of the Western Buddhist Order

Times

There's no one best time to meditate. Many people find it useful to get up a bit early and meditate before the pressures of the day mount up. They want to prepare for the day so that things go well. Other people like to meditate before going to bed in order to "unwind." Both can work.

I'm far from being a "morning person," but I prefer to meditate before breakfast. Maybe it's not a good idea for us to limit ourselves with these labels -- "morning person" and "evening person." Even those of us with allergies to mornings can benefit from getting up a little early. The beneficial effects of twenty minutes of meditation before hitting the streets usually far outweighs the benefits of another few minutes in bed.

You might even want to experiment with meditating during the day. You could try shutting the office door, taking the phone off the hook, and catching ten to fifteen minutes of relaxing and stimulating meditation.

And there's no reason why you can't meditate more than once!

Choosing a Time

Probably the worst thing you can do is to tell yourself that you'll just "fit it in" at some point. That point will probably never come. You need to decide when you're going to meditate and stick to that time. If you plan your week, then plan your meditation into your week to make sure it happens. It's too important to leave to chance.

The thing that seems to work best for most people is to incorporate it in their morning routine and always do a meditation even if it's only for five minutes just to keep the routine going. Also it's good to decide how long you are going to sit for before you sit and stick to that time whatever thoughts arise otherwise you can start to cut sits short because of something you remembered that suddenly seems so important.

Places

Although I've suggested that you can meditate anywhere, like the office, it can be good to have a particular place to meditate regularly, and to make that place a little special, meaningful, and beautiful. You can do this by having some pictures that remind you of why you want to meditate -- whether religious imagery or natural imagery. You can have candles and incense. I find that the ritual of "lighting up" is quite soothing and grounding, especially if I do it with mindfulness, and in a spirit of reverence.