

Hacking Your Brain For Practice and Performance

Shanna Pranaitis, certified Integrative Change Work Coach

www.shannapranaitis.com

Self-directed neuroplasticity is about consciously and intentionally rewiring your own brain – basically it's brain hacking. Anything you do, say, feel, or think with repetition becomes a habituated pattern in the brain. The pattern can be changed by interrupting the pattern. Then you can choose an alternative action, thought, or feeling.

Pattern Interrupts

Peripheral Expansion: (calms your nervous system and stops racing thoughts fast)

- Choose a point to look at and keep your eyes focused there as you slowly soften your gaze and expand into your peripheral vision
- Expand it even further, become aware of the space on either side of you, above you, behind you, as if you could see in 360 degrees
- notice what happens in your mind and body, how your thoughts stop, and your body relaxes

Heart Breath: (adapted from the HeartMath Institute)

- start by bringing awareness to your heart, imagine breathing deeply in and out through your heart
- you might want to bring your hands to your heart and imagine holding your heart as you breathe through it
- bringing more awareness to your whole body as blood pumps through your heart
- imagine you could relax the back of your tongue and jaw as you continue to breathe through your heart, resetting your whole body's coherence

Bilateral Stimulation: (stimulates both sides of the brain and stops anxiety fast)

- grab something you can toss, a ball, bottle of eye drops, pencil, water bottle
- Begin to pass it back and forth crossing the midline of the body
- one hand stays in front while the other swings out to the side, back and forth
- do this for about a 1 min
- stop take a deep breath and exhale twice as long
- notice how you feel, you might notice that anxiety is totally dissipated

Faster EFT: (uses accupressure points, releases emotional energy fast)

- Please watch this video for the explanation: [Click here](#)

For more tools check out the book: [The Anti-Anxiety Toolkit](#) by Melissa Tiers

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Meta-Pattern Steps

Pattern underneath how your brain learns and changes

1. Identify the specific passage and the *specific* problem

- a. Too often we practice in general and not specific enough. This is the key to the everything! *Get specific.*
- b. play it and *experience* it
- c. Notice how it feels and sounds. Be present to what you don't like
- d. Feel how your body and nervous system feel (anxious, tense, etc?)

2. Stop and distance yourself from the problem

- a. Shake it off (literally shake your body) & take a step back from the stand
- b. Interrupt any anxious thoughts, tension, fears, etc with a pattern interrupt:
 - i. Peripheral expansion
 - ii. Heart breath
 - iii. Bilateral
 - iv. Faster EFT

3. How do you want it to sound or feel instead?

- a. Feel how you want it to feel in your hands, face, body
- b. Hear how you want it to sound in your mind, in detail
- c. How will you feel when this passage feels easy to you? Feel that *now*
- d. Imagine trying it out, really feeling and hearing yourself doing it

4. Bring your internal experience into reality

- a. While you are hearing it and feeling it, try it on the flute
- b. Notice: what is different now?

Loop step 3 and 4 until it feels automatic and reliable.

- *Keep step 3 very creative, and use pattern interrupts as needed anytime your nervous system, feelings, or thoughts get unruly or unhelpful.*

Bonus tip: Slow It Down (For fast passages where your mind is racing)

1. Slow it down 10x in your mind, hearing it 10x slower while exhaling twice as long
2. Imagine your hands moving 10x slower (without actually moving your fingers!)
3. Try playing it again while hearing it 10x slower in your mind and allowing the fingers to move at tempo

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Relaxation and Visualization Technique:

There is an enormous body of work to support the effectiveness and power of using visualization for performance, and you may have used a similar technique before. Here we are going to deepen it with a specific guided process that will help you wire in deeper any changes you want to make in your playing, performance, or even life.

Note: Please only do this when you are in a state of feeling good and how you want to feel. Also: not everyone "sees" things in their mind. It's ok if you don't. However the ideas of the exercise below occur to you are totally fine. There is no right way to experience this exercise.

1. Begin by taking a comfortable seat or lying down in a distraction-free environment.
 2. Take a deep breath and exhale twice as long. Continue breathing in this way and when you feel at ease, close your eyes.
 3. Count backward slowly from 10-1, with each number feeling a wave of comfort and relaxation wash through your body as the number dissolves and floats away.
 4. With each number feeling more and more comfortable and relaxed, knowing that any sound you hear or movement you make takes you deeper.
 5. After 1 dissolves and floats away, imagine a large screen in front of you, however it occurs to you, and on that screen is a movie you want to star in. A movie where you are playing how you want to play, performing how you want to perform, feeling how you want to feel.
 6. Imagine you could float into the movie and merge with yourself there, feeling how it feels to play, perform and be how you want to play, perform and be.
 7. When you feel ready to come back, you'll know you're ready because you'll feel yourself floating out of the movie and coming back to your seat.
- Shake it off and enjoy the rest of your day.