

The Sonic Psyche

Attune Your Mind



TUNE IN: A SOUND-BASED PRACTICE FOR ENHANCED FOCUS AND CLARITY

COMPANION GUIDE

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Welcome!

Using music, breath, and gentle structure to invite a state of focus and presence, this practice is designed to support you in shifting from feeling stressed and overwhelmed to feeling more calm and centered. The result is enhanced productivity and a greater sense of wellbeing.

We now know that music can do far more than entertain: it can help regulate our nervous system, align our brain rhythms, and enhance sustained attention.

This practice is not about forcing productivity. It's about creating the conditions for it.

I invite you to turn to this practice anytime you feel mentally foggy, overstimulated, or unmotivated. Whether you're writing, working, creating, or simply trying to be present, this tool is here to help you feel more grounded.

ABOUT NATALIE...



I am a forensic psychologist, singer-songwriter, and lifelong explorer of the mind-body connection.

With an extensive background in psychology, music, and a passion for the healing power of sound, I create evidence-based tools that bridge psychology with soulful creativity to encourage positive outcomes related to productivity and wellbeing. This practice was born out of both personal need and professional insight.

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WHY MUSIC CAN HELP YOU FOCUS: RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

1. ENTRAINMENT

When we listen to music with a steady tempo, our brainwaves can begin to synchronize with that rhythm. This process, called **entrainment**, can support mental clarity and sustained attention by aligning internal rhythms with external patterns. It's one of the key ways that music helps guide the brain toward a focused state.

(Sources: Cabral-Calderin & Henry, 2022; Nozaradan et al., 2012; Trost & Vuilleumier, 2013; Zaatar et al., 2024)



2. DOPAMINE BOOST

Pleasurable music experiences activate the brain's dopamine system — a network responsible for motivation, reward, and learning. When you listen to music you enjoy, your brain releases more dopamine, which can help increase your motivation to engage with a task and sustain effort. In some cases, you may reach state of “flow”. **Flow** is a mental state of deep focus, where you're fully immersed in what you're doing. Perception of time can be distorted (i.e., feeling like time is “flying by”) , distractions fade, and productivity feels natural.

(Sources: Ferreri et al., 2019; Salimpoor et al., 2011; Zaatar et al., 2024)

WHY MUSIC HELPS YOU FOCUS:

RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

3. REDUCED ACTIVITY IN PREFRONTAL CORTEX

The listening of certain forms of music is conducive to decreased activity in the prefrontal cortex — specifically, the part of the brain responsible for self-monitoring, overthinking, and time awareness. This “quieting” of such intrusive thoughts allows for a greater sense of presence, creativity, and immersion in the moment.

(Sources: Dietrich, 2004; Ferreri et al., 2015; Ulrich et al., 2014)



4. EMOTION REGULATION

Calm, predictable music can help regulate your nervous system by reducing cortisol (the stress hormone) and activating the parasympathetic nervous system — your body’s natural rest-and-digest state. This emotional and physiological regulation is a powerful foundation for focus and flow.

(Sources: Hasanah & Haikal, 2021; Koelsch, 2020; Thoma et al., 2013)

***Your brain is wired to respond to
rhythm, pattern, and sound
in profound ways.***

Choosing The Right Music for Focus and Flow

Not all music is created equal when it comes to supporting focus. Studies suggest that music with the following characteristics can support sustained attention, emotion regulation, and creative flow (Angel et al., 2010; Smalley et al., 2023; Sun, 2025):

STEADY, PREDICTABLE RHYTHM

- Consistent tempo of about 60-80 beats per minute (bpm).

LOW COMPLEXITY WITHOUT BEING BORING

- Simple musical structures to minimize cognitive load.

INSTRUMENTAL/NON-LYRICAL

- Instrumental or non-lyrical tracks do not activate the language processing parts of the brain and therefore, they are less distracting than pieces of music that are lyrically dense.

EMOTIONALLY NEUTRAL TO GENTLY UPLIFTING

- The piece of music or soundscape chosen for the purpose of enhancing flow and productivity should not evoke strong emotions. Tracks should be calming and motivational; not sad, dramatic, or overly energizing.



*Sound can be more than
background noise — it can be a
useful tool to create conditions for a
state of deep, grounded presence.*

Your Step-by-Step Focus Practice

STEP 1: GROUND YOURSELF

- Find a quiet space where you feel relatively safe and there is low risk of interruption — even a small corner with a warm drink and headphones can work. Set up your materials in advance so you're not scrambling mid-session. These materials might consist of a journal, laptop, sketchpad, or simply a comfortable spot to think.
- Begin the guided audio session, while allowing yourself to pause as necessary. Use this time to settle your body and anchor your breath.
- A helpful breathing technique suggested in this audio practice is to inhale for 4 counts, hold for 4, exhale for 6, then repeat.
- **Diaphragmatic breathing** is recommended — a foundational breathwork approach used by singers and endorsed by a range of medical and mental health professionals. To practice it, place one hand on your belly and one on your chest. As you inhale through your nose, allow your belly to expand while keeping your chest still. Exhale slowly through the mouth. This type of breathing stimulates the vagus nerve (part of the parasympathetic nervous system), enhances oxygen flow, and signals the body that it is safe to settle into the moment.
- Let each breath be unhurried, drawing you deeper into presence.



Feel free to adapt the breath counts. You can try the more symmetrical approach of **box breathing** (inhale for 4, hold for 4, exhale for 4). Alternatively, you may wish to increase the length of the “hold” and “exhale” portions. The 4-7-8 method is preferred by some (inhale for 4, hold for 7, exhale for 8), but it tends to promote a state of deeper relaxation rather than mental acuity, and is potentially best for enhancing sleep quality. You can experiment to find the technique that works best for you.

Your Step-by-Step Focus Practice

STEP 2: SET AN INTENTION

- Choose one simple, meaningful task to focus on after the guided portion of the practice ends. It could be something creative (like writing or planning), logistical (organizing your inbox or calendar), or meditative (like reflective journaling or quiet problem-solving). The key is clarity and compassion — no multitasking, no pressure to finish.
- As you continue listening, allow the music to become a cue, gently helping you transition out of inertia or tension and into focused readiness. You don't have to force attention; you're simply preparing your mind and body to receive it.



Your Step-by-Step Focus Practice

STEP 3: BEGIN IN FLOW

- When the voice track ends, begin your task. Let the music track continue to play in the background to support your concentration.
- If your mind begins to wander (which is normal!), return to the breathing exercise, or focus on the rhythm of the music. Reground yourself with a short sigh out, or place a hand on your chest or belly as an anchor.



Try this practice daily for a week, even if it's just for 10–15 minutes per session. Consistency, not perfection, will strengthen your focus over time.

You may begin to notice small but meaningful shifts in how easily you transition into work, how long you stay present, and how much quieter your inner voice becomes along the way.



Journal Prompts:

- *What helped me focus today?*
- *What interrupted or distracted me?*
- *How did I feel before the practice? After?*

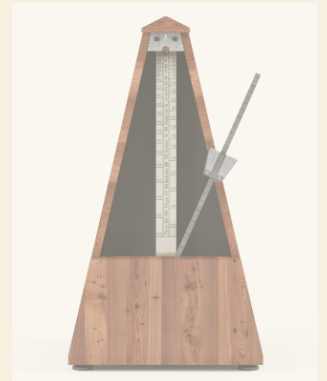
Tune In: Track Insight

Tune In was composed with care — not only as a musical experience, but as a therapeutic tool to support focus, clarity, and calm. Drawing from research in psychology, neuroscience, and music therapy, every element of the track was intentionally chosen to help guide the listener into a flow-ready state.

Below are some of the key sound design choices and the evidence-based principles behind them:

STEADY TEMPO (65 BPM)

- The track maintains a tempo of 65 beats per minute — roughly matching a calm resting heart rate.
- **Why it works:** Slow, consistent tempos are associated with parasympathetic nervous system activation — the body's "rest-and-digest" mode. They support heart rate variability, stabilize breath, and help reduce cortisol levels. This tempo is also ideal for entering a calm-alert state, a foundation for focus and creativity.
- Sources: Zaccaro et al., 2018; Kiss & Linnell, 2021; Thoma et al., 2013



SINGLE-CHORD DESIGN

- The entire composition remains rooted in one chord (A minor), with subtle modal shading and variation.
- **Why it works:** Harmonic simplicity reduces the listener's cognitive load. When the brain doesn't need to anticipate complex changes, it can redirect attention toward internal focus or external tasks. This aligns with research on flow states and reduced prefrontal activation during immersive experiences.
- Source: Goltz & Sadakata, 2021



Tune In: Track Insight

LOOPEL LAYERS AND GENTLE REPETITION

- The music gradually unfolds through soft loops and evolving layers — repeating without being static.
- **Why it works:** Repetition enhances temporal binding; that is, the brain's ability to integrate experience over time. It creates predictability and fosters a sense of emotional containment, which can help maintain steady focus and reduce mental fatigue.
- Sources: Margulis, 2013; Nozaradan et al., 2012



BREATH-BASED RHYTHM

- Subtle breath sounds, modeled after slow exhalation, are used rhythmically throughout the instrumental section.
- **Why it works:** These sounds act as external pacing cues. When they mirror the listener's natural breath rhythm (around 65 bpm), they can promote respiratory coherence and reduce sympathetic nervous system activity — the body's "fight-or-flight" response. This helps the mind settle and sustain attention.
- Sources: Kerrebroeck & Maes, 2021; Zaccaro et al., 2018



Tune In: Track Insight

LOW-FREQUENCY CAT PURR (FRED'S SIGNATURE SOUND)

- Fred's soulful purr was recorded and layered as a low, continuous texture throughout portions of the instrumental section.
- **Why it works:** Purring frequencies (~25–150 Hz) overlap with those used in vibroacoustic therapy. These frequencies have been linked to parasympathetic activation, reduction of stress hormones, and even physical healing in both animals and humans. The sound of a cat purring also adds warmth, grounding, and nonverbal comfort.
- Source: von Muggenthaler, 2001



BINAURAL PANNING (SUBTLE STEREO MOVEMENT)

- Certain elements — including breath layers and Fred's purr — gently move between the left and right channels of the stereo field.
- **Why it works:** This technique promotes hemispheric integration — a coordinated activation of both the left (logical) and right (creative) sides of the brain. Binaural panning can enhance working memory, attentional balance, and emotion regulation, all of which are associated with states of flow. Spatial motion also increases a sense of presence, without overstimulating the auditory field.
- Source: Al-Shargie et al., 2022



Tune In: Track Insight

LYRIC-FREE VOCAL SOUNDSCAPES

- Wordless vocal harmonies were layered to offer warmth, texture, and emotional support.
- **Why it works:** Vocals carry powerful emotional resonance; however, lyrics can activate language-processing centers in the brain, competing with tasks that require verbal reasoning. By using lyric-free vocal layers, the track preserves emotional connection while keeping cognitive space open.
- Source: Souza & Leal Barbosa, 2023



Reflection

Every sound in *Tune In* was chosen with care — not just to sound beautiful, but to feel safe, steady, and emotionally resonant. Whether you're entering a creative session, organizing your thoughts, or simply pausing to breathe, this track is here to offer you a rhythmic, science-informed return to presence.

Curated Playlist: Music to Support Flow

Music can help create the conditions for psychological flow, but you need not limit yourself to one particular genre, and there are some individual differences in flow-supportive music. Although ambient soundscapes are often recommended for focus, many people find flow through more emotionally resonant or rhythmically grounded tracks.

This curated playlist offers a range of sonic textures, from ambient and instrumental pieces to dreamy slow-pop, minimalist electronic, and cinematic folk. All tracks were selected for their ability to support focus, clarity, and emotional balance.

Each track was chosen with intention, based on research-informed qualities shown to help reduce mental noise while preserving intellectual and creative presence: steady rhythm, low lyrical content, gentle repetition, harmonic simplicity, and emotional grounding.

I encourage you to listen with curiosity. Which tracks help you feel more present and focused? Which textures make you feel most mentally open or creatively attuned? There is no single formula for focus — only gentle, ongoing discovery.

Track (Artist)	Key Features Supporting Flow
A Portrait of Time (Hollie Kenniff, Goldmund, Harbors)	- Steady tempo (~76 BPM) - Harmonic simplicity – ambient drones without jarring shifts - Looped layers & gentle repetition – slow-evolving ambient structure - Breath-based rhythm – soft phrasing with natural pacing - Emotionally spacious – evokes presence without overstimulation - Lyric free This ambient track sets a tone of calm attentional readiness. The absence of chord changes and melodic events reduces cognitive demands, while the looped textures foster temporal binding, gently anchoring awareness. “A Portrait of Time” features beautiful breath-like pacing that supports vagal tone and emotional regulation, making it an ideal opener for grounding and mental clearing.
Near Light (Ólafur Arnalds)	- Steady tempo (~60 BPM, free-flowing) - Harmonic simplicity – minimal chord variation - Looped/evolving layers – soft ambient textures and piano/string motifs - Emotionally grounded – contemplative and non-disruptive - Breath-based pacing – piano phrasing mimics natural inhale-exhale curves - Lyric free This piece balances subtle unpredictability with harmonic restraint, stimulating attention while maintaining emotional containment. The combination of ambient wash and introspective piano promotes gentle focus and internal exploration. “Near Light” is ideal for journaling, reflecting, or starting a creative session.

Curated Playlist: Music to Support Flow

Track (Artist)	Key Features Supporting Flow
Written on the Sky (Max Richter)	• Steady tempo (~60 BPM) • Repetitive structure – minimalist piano theme • Breath-based pacing – fermata (rests) and slow phrasing mirror natural breathing • Emotionally reflective – contemplative but emotionally safe • Lyric free This minimalist composition functions like a musical exhale. Its gentle tempo and sparse phrasing support nervous system downregulation while minimizing auditory stimulation. Ideal for introspective or emotionally regulated tasks such as journaling, quiet organizing, or soft-focus reading.
Promise of Sun (Sophie Hutchings)	• Steady tempo (~66 BPM) • Harmonic simplicity – modal shifts without complex modulations • Looped/evolving phrases – builds gently through repetition • Breath-based dynamics – phrasing swells and releases in wave-like cycles • Emotionally supportive – gently expressive without distraction • Lyric free “Promise of Sun” is ideal for mid-focus transitions — offering a sense of momentum while preserving clarity. Its breath-like dynamic shifts mirror autonomic rhythm, and its soft harmonic shading enhances immersion without emotional volatility. Great for visual tasks, light admin, or extended creative flow.
Awake (Tycho)	• Moderate, steady tempo (~88 BPM) • Harmonic simplicity – minimal chord changes, modal texture • Looped layers & gentle repetition – consistent rhythmic phrasing and evolving synth textures • Emotionally grounding – gently uplifting without lyrical narrative • Breath-like pacing – syncs easily with physical rhythm or breath • Lyric free • Binaural panning / stereo movement – ambient textures gently drift across the sound field “Awake” is a sonic blueprint for gentle forward motion. Its loop-based structure and steady tempo promote entrainment, while the subtle stereo panning enhances spatial presence, supporting hemispheric integration. Ideal for mid-focus tasks, organizing, or entering a creative zone that requires sustained attention.
Autumn (Message to Bears)	• Moderate, steady tempo (84 BPM) • Low harmonic complexity – tonal consistency across sections • Looped instrumental phrases – repeating guitar and string motifs • Emotionally grounded – warm and introspective without volatility • Breath-like pacing – soft rhythmic cycles and subtle swells • Lyric free With acoustic textures and a touch of field ambiance, “Autumn” creates a grounded listening experience. The repeating motifs enhance predictability and emotional containment — two key factors in maintaining attentional stability. Great for transitions, slow-paced admin tasks, or creative tasks.

Curated Playlist: Music to Support Flow

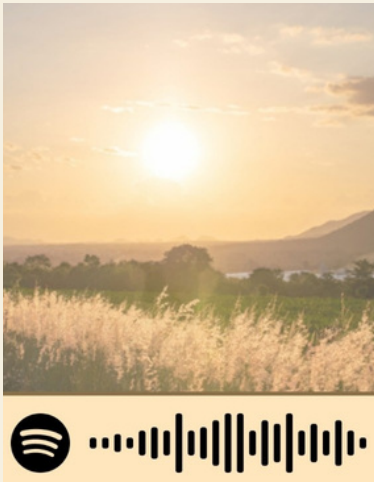
Track (Artist)	Key Features Supporting Flow
The Nightingale (Julee Cruise)	• Slow, steady tempo (~74 BPM) • Minimal harmonic change – dreamy chord repetition • Emotionally dreamlike – evocative without pulling attention away • Breath-based vocal phrasing – extended exhale-like lines • Lyrics present, but used like ambient instrumentation • Binaural panning / stereo reverb – vocals and pads shift softly across channels This track creates a suspended emotional space, where vocals function more as texture than as narrative. The slow tempo and stereo reverberation support spatial immersion and time distortion, both core aspects of flow. Best for intuitive or visual tasks, emotional processing, or meditative movement.
Drive (Cover) (Britta Phillips)	• Steady tempo (~74 BPM) • Looped structural form – repetitive synth phrasing and retro pad textures • Emotionally nostalgic but stable – controlled mood with no dramatic shifts • Breath-like vocals – soft delivery, evenly spaced phrasing • Lyrics present, but spaced out and softly delivered • Subtle electropop texture – synth-driven dream pop aesthetic The electropop structure of “Drive” adds gentle rhythmic motion to the playlist, while Britta’s vocal delivery preserves space for presence. Despite lyrical content, the track remains non-intrusive — best for ambient listening, light movement, or creative planning sessions that benefit from a nostalgic, steady vibe.
Twin Peaks Theme (Angelo Badalamenti)	• Slow tempo (~72 BPM) • Minimal harmonic change – anchored in long, repeating progressions • Looped ambient motifs – string pads and lead themes return predictably • Emotionally ambiguous but non-disruptive – creates a surreal container • Breath-like swells – instrumental phrasing mimics slow inhalation/exhalation • Lyric free This cinematic classic offers a sense of suspended time. The sustained ambient tones and subtly panned textures invite presence and introspection while avoiding overstimulation. Ideal for light mental transitions, ambient journaling, or re-grounding between cognitive tasks.
Sine Waves (Martin Roth & Tom Ashbrook)	• Moderate, steady tempo (~93 BPM) • Looped, repetitive structure – ambient piano motifs over soft rhythmic underlay • Harmonic simplicity – no dramatic chordal shifts • Emotionally warm but gentle – provides energy without overstimulation • Subtle binaural panning – ambient textures gently pan between channels • Lyric free “Sine Waves” bridges ambient and electronic textures to support calm forward movement. The binaural drift and pulse-based flow promote hemispheric coordination and subtle entrainment, making it great for mid-session resets, deep creative work, or moving through transitions with focus.

Curated Playlist: Music to Support Flow

Track (Artist)	Key Features Supporting Flow
Malibu Nights (Rhye)	• Steady tempo (~61 BPM) • Looped phrasing & soft beats – steady rhythmic structure with melodic smoothness • Harmonic simplicity • Lyric free • Emotionally balanced – calm, sensual, and steady This instrumental track creates a soft groove without tipping into overt rhythm. Its melodic phrasing and restrained energy support tasks requiring quiet forward motion — perfect for light movement, journaling, or post-focus integration.
Emancipation (Helios)	• Steady tempo (~ 75 BPM) • Harmonic simplicity – drone-like stability • Looped layering – ambient and melodic layers evolve gradually • Lyric free • Emotionally reflective – grounded and introspective • Breath-like dynamics – phrasing is soft and expansive • Binaural panning – ambient textures shift gently across channels “Emancipation” offers a deeply immersive sonic space through harmonic restraint, looping patterns, and stereo drift. The gentle motion between channels supports hemispheric integration, while the non-linear pacing encourages reflective focus. Excellent for immersive creative flow or quiet task transitions.

Not everyone finds flow in the same soundscape. This curated list offers diverse entry points — from ambient textures to dreamy slow-pop and lo-fi instrumentals — each chosen for its ability to support focus, creativity, or calm alertness based on research-informed principles.

Scan this code to listen on Spotify
(Or click [here](#) if reading digitally)



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