



How to Choose a Yoga Class, Studio, or Teacher

The following are essential questions to ask when helping your patient or student who struggles with an eating disorder, body image, or distorted eating pattern to choose a yoga class, studio, or yoga teacher:

Does the studio have mirrors? Will the student be prone to body-checking, comparison, or painful self-examination.

What style of clothing is prevalent? What kinds of clothing are the students who attend this studio or class generally wearing? How revealing is the clothing style at this studio? Will the student be prone to body-checking, comparison, or competition?

Does studio play music? If so, what kind? Music can serve as a distraction in an unhelpful manner if it tends to provoke memory, daydreaming, or if it provokes or suggests an over-emphasis on specific mind states. For example, for students struggling simply to accept themselves as they are, music that promotes bliss or elation may cause them to misinterpret that their mood should be higher, more uplifted, more "yogic."

Is cardio or working out emphasized? For students who are looking for calorie burning, being in a class where this is emphasized creates a challenging dilemma for discovering that there are other ways to be in their body.

Is the studio heated? Hot yoga isn't for everyone. Some body constitutions don't do as well in the heat. Students who may be prone to compulsively exercise or over-exercise ought not be referred to hot yoga classes. Students who are already hyper mobile, whose adrenals are taxed, or who use dehydration strategies as weight management also ought not be attending hot yoga classes.

What language styles does the teacher or studio emphasize?

- **Inviting vs. commanding?**
 - For example, inviting: "I invite you to feel the sensations as they are occurring just now." Or: "Consider a slightly deeper breath, below your navel."
 - Versus a command: "Feel what's happening in your body." Or "Breathe deeply."
- **Global vs. personal? Direct vs. indirect?**
 - An example of global, indirect language: "While we inhale, raising our arms over our heads." This style is impersonal, collective, and inaccurate for grammar. It doesn't ask a person to inhabit their body parts.
 - An example of personal, direct language: "As you inhale, raise your arms over your head."



- **Active vs. passive?** Active language supports students in reclaiming how they move their body. Passive doesn't lend itself to as much personal leadership and is often inaccurate.
 - Active: As you inhale, raise your arms over your head. I invite you to feel into your own end range for this and to ask "where is your body breathing just now?"
 - Passive: "As you inhale allow your arms to float up overhead," (which arms can't do on their own - gravity pulls them down). "Feel your breath lifting your arms," (the breath supports this action but this phrase is one step removed from ownership.)
- **Does the teacher value and make use of imagery as well as linear instructions?** Imagery asks the right brain mode to participate. Linear language asks the left mode to participate. "Press into your index finger knuckles and as you energize your arms, turn your triceps in toward your nose. This broadens the back of your heart and creates strong river banks through which your heart can flow downstream. I invite you to release any unnecessary tension in your heart and to send it downstream for now."
- **Pace of language.** Does the teacher talk at a pace that allows students to take in the information. Does she or he consider the brain processing speed of someone entering or navigating recovery?
- **Voice prosody.** Is their voice tone warm and empathetic?

Focus on inner experience or outer form? Does the teacher emphasize the inner experience of each pose or attaining the outer form?

Structural safety in yoga poses? Does the teacher understand how to create safe, stable, non-injurious yoga poses? Are they educated about osteoporosis? Hyper-mobile joints, trauma, anxiety, etc.?

Are mindfulness and breathing tools woven in? Does the teacher provide take away tools for the student to use when not in class?

Do teachers have knowledge of nervous system regulation? Vagus nerve? Diaphragm? Enteric nervous system?

Teacher's knowledge of value of proximity not just participation? Will they allow a student to simply be in the room, even if lying down? Do they understand that proximity with safety and empathy can evolve into participation?

Teacher's personal body image and language about self. How does the teacher talk about or refer to themselves and their personal body image?