

## Work Cycle (the zone)

In [positive psychology](#), **flow**, also known as **the zone**, is the mental state of operation in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity. In essence, flow is characterized by complete absorption in what one does. Named by [Mihály Csíkszentmihályi](#), the concept has been widely referenced across a variety of fields (and has an especially big recognition in [Occupational Therapy](#)), though has existed for thousands of years under other guises, notably in some [Eastern religions](#).<sup>[1]</sup> Achieving flow is often colloquially referred to as *being in the zone*.

According to Csíkszentmihályi, flow is completely focused [motivation](#). It is a [single-minded immersion](#) and represents perhaps the ultimate experience in harnessing the [emotions](#) in the service of performing and [learning](#). In flow, the emotions are not just contained and channeled, but positive, energized, and aligned with the task at hand. The hallmark of flow is a feeling of spontaneous [joy](#), even rapture, while performing a task,<sup>[2]</sup> although flow is also described (below) as a deep focus on nothing but the activity – not even oneself or one's emotions.

Jeanne Nakamura and Csíkszentmihályi identify the following six factors as encompassing an experience of flow.<sup>[3]</sup>

1. Intense and focused concentration on the present moment
2. Merging of action and awareness
3. A loss of reflective [self-consciousness](#)
4. A sense of personal control or agency over the situation or activity
5. A distortion of temporal experience, one's [subjective experience of time](#) is altered
6. Experience of the activity as intrinsically [rewarding](#), also referred to as [autotelic](#) experience

Those aspects can appear independently of each other, but only in combination do they constitute a so-called *flow experience*. Additionally, psychology expert, Kendra Cherry, has mentioned three other components that Csíkszentmihályi lists as being a part of the flow experience:<sup>[4]</sup>

1. "Immediate feedback" <sup>[4]</sup>
2. Feeling that you have the potential to succeed
3. Feeling so engrossed in the experience, that other needs become negligible

Just as with the conditions listed above, these conditions can be independent of one another.

Flow theory postulates three conditions that have to be met to achieve a flow state:

1. One must be involved in an activity with a clear set of goals and progress. This adds direction and structure to the task.<sup>[15]</sup>
2. The task at hand must have clear and immediate feedback. This helps the person negotiate any changing demands and allows them to adjust their performance to maintain the flow state.<sup>[15]</sup>

3. One must have a good balance between the *perceived* challenges of the task at hand and their own *perceived* skills. One must have confidence in one's ability to complete the task at hand. [\[15\]](#)