

Search for

## al gathering place

LEAVE A COMMENT

BY CHRISTYWENGER UNCATEGORIZED

# Meditating on The Move: Can Cardio Exercise become Part of Contemplative Writing Pedagogy?

Save

*Nota bene: At the end of this blog post, I'd appreciate readers "voting," or chiming in with commentary, on the potential of cardio to be contemplative in nature. Doing so would benefit my dissertation research greatly.*

When my Zyn22 spin instructor yells, "This is your time! Time to meditate on the move!" I can't help but feel a little frustrated.

Maybe I'm frustrated because the next command that often follows usually sounds like this: "Time to dig deep! Time to leave no gas in your tank!"

Or maybe I'm frustrated because the act of meditation is being seen as chasing a euphoric state of sweaty bliss or objectifying the practice in front of gentrified fitness junkies. Maybe the McM mindfulness thoughts I expect them to have aren't fair assumptions though.



[\\_ \(https://aeplblog.files.wordpress.com/2016/08/screen-shot-](https://aeplblog.files.wordpress.com/2016/08/screen-shot-)

[2016.png\)](#)

Thinking back to Jon Kabat-Zinn's widely-accepted definition of meditation, I understand meditation as an "awareness, cultivated by paying attention in a sustained and particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally." My fellow spin students could be meditating as they push up

and down on their bike pedals, but if they're like me then they're wiping away beads of sweat, taking sips of water every five minutes, or occasionally wondering if Lululemon advertisement on the left is noticing when they miss a beat.

On the other hand, part of me believes that cardio can be contemplative, even meditative, for some practitioners. For me, running is much more contemplative than spinning—less equipment to adjust and more nature around me makes running the easier activity for clearing my mind. I've good reason to believe other scholars think running could be contemplative.

Most recently, I interviewed Dr. Pat Okker for my dissertation research project, and I had the privilege of asking this University of Missouri English Professor turned Senior Associate Provost, Marathoner, and Competitive Women's Powerlifter all about her thoughts on the relationship between writing activity and physical activity. Dr. Okker teaches an honors course that explores running in relation to writing. The running activity supports the writing activity of her students in new and insightful ways.

In another exchange with Dr. Christy Wenger at Shepherd University, I learned that some of her students have suggested that cardio exercise could be contemplative. For these reasons, I can give more credence to what my spin instructor is yelling to me.

Wait, there's more in other research fields. We've seen a surge of research exploring the mental-intellectual benefits of cardio. In psychology, a meta-analysis of research overwhelmingly supports the conclusion that cardio exercise improves memory, creative processing, and decreases stress inevitably experienced by most individuals engaging in the creative process (Tompsonski).

Journalists are another group jumping on the contemplative-cardio cart. Twice now New York Magazine, Melissa Dahl made readers privvy to the stacks of new research on writing, running, and meditating as mind-clearing activities. Dahl cites examples of prolific writers who united these activities for the sake of their writing processes. As Atlantic writer Nick Ripatrozone hypothesizes, for Joyce Carol Oates, Louis May Alcott, Jonathan Swift and many other writers, running feels like a "natural extension of writing," in that the cardiovascular demands of running feel cathartic to "cloistered" writers doing "intensive work."

## Advertisements

REPORT THIS AD

It is at this point that my research trail tapers off. The aforementioned examples give composition researchers and pedagogues some ideas about where to take our research in the future if others in the field want to pursue this question. However, we're still left wondering how compositionists might answer the question: can cardio exercise become part of contemplative writing pedagogy?

I'm wondering what other scholars think. I'm wondering what other researchers know or what research they care to share with our AEPL community. All comments and insights are welcome.

-Jackie Hoermann

<https://about.me/jackiehoermann> (<https://about.me/jackiehoermann>)

E: [j.hoermann@tcu.edu](mailto:j.hoermann@tcu.edu)

[jacquelynehoermann@gmail.com](mailto:jacquelynehoermann@gmail.com)

## Works Cited

Dahl, Melissa. "How Running and Meditation Change the Brains of the Depressed." NY MAG Online (24 March 2016). Web. 24 May 2016.

Kabat-Zinn, Jon. *Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming The Present Moment—And Your Life*. Louisville, CO: Sounds True, Incorporated, 2011. Print.

Ripatrazone, Nick. "Why Writers Run." *The Atlantic* (11 Nov 2015). Web. 25 May 2016.

Tompsonski, Phillip D. "Effects of Acute Bouts of Exercise on Cognition." *Acta Psychologica* 112.3. (2003): 297-324. Print.

Advertisements

REPORT THIS AD

**Blog at WordPress.com. Do Not Sell or Share My Personal Information**