

Progressive Tense/Release

The following script is a method of introducing a Progressive Tense/Release exercise. Students may assume any position – sitting in chairs, or supported by pillows on the floor. Both partners should experience this. If students are lying on the floor, begin with the first paragraph marked “*”. If they are sitting in chairs, skip ahead to the second paragraph “**”.

Educator’s script

* Spend a few seconds making sure that you are as comfortable as you can get on the floor in this classroom. If you are pregnant, it is recommended that you lie on your side when relaxing. Place a pillow under your head, a pillow between your knees, and one under your upper arm so you can release into the pillows, feeling well supported. Partners, you may choose to lie on your side or on your back. If you are on your back, you should have a pillow under your head and another pillow under your knees. Your legs should be uncrossed allowing your knees to turn gently outwards. Your arms should be comfortably supported at your sides. Move and adjust until all your limbs are well supported, joints flexed, and you are as comfortable as you can be.

** The purpose of this exercise is to learn to recognize how a muscle group feels when it is tense and when it is released. By exaggerating the activity of a muscle from a shortened, contracted state to a lengthened, stretched state, we can more easily identify the neutral point of the relaxed muscle in between. Once we identify the differences through exaggerated movements, it is easier to simply release and let go of tension that accumulates through the day. Some people release a muscle more fully after contracting, or tightening it... others release easier after a stretch. This sequence encourages both, for you to feel which is better for you. Adjust your position any time you need to during this exercise.

And now, let go of any worries or concerns that may be in your mind. You can have them back later. This is the time to concentrate on how all of your muscles feel and to learn how you can best allow a deep, soothing relaxation to come over your body.

Take a deep breath in, ... and gently let it out. Take another deep breath in, ... and gently let it out... and as you take a third breath, let any remaining tension flow away with an outward sigh.

Think about your forehead. Is it released, or is it tense? First, raise your eyebrows in a look of surprise. Release them... Now frown and feel the deep furrows in your brow. Hold, then release your forehead. Just imagine someone smoothing your brow... perhaps with either a warm hand... or a cool cloth.

Move your eyes slowly, and hold briefly in each direction – look up... down... right... left. Feel the tension in your eyes as you move them, then close them softly, just peering into darkness. Press your lips together in a tight pucker... Release them. Part your lips slightly after moistening them with your tongue. Stretch an exaggerated smile across

your face, then release to a soft, relaxed smile. Press your tongue tightly against the back of your teeth and the top of your mouth. Feel what a strong muscle your tongue is – even it can carry tension. Release it to fall loosely in your mouth. Let it feel thick and soft.

Bite your teeth together gently. Feel the tension in your jaw as you hold even a gentle bite. Then allow your jaw to fall open slightly, so your teeth do not touch. Now stretch your jaw by dragging it down, wide open. Yawn if you wish. Then allow your jaw to close, but keep it loose and slack.

Pull your head into your shoulders like a turtle. Then release it. Next, stretch your neck by allowing your head to drop forward, chin to chest. Hold that stretch. Arc your chin to the right shoulder... back to your chest... arc to the left shoulder... then to center.

Clench your fists... hold tight... feel the tension... Release your fists... Be aware of the sensation. Stretch your fingers long... hold the stretch... Release and let your fingers relax in a gentle curl.

Round your shoulders forward... Feel the stretch across your back as you hold it... Release it... Pull your shoulders back and down... Feel the stretch... Release... concentrate on the feeling in your shoulders as the stretches are released...

Pull your arms in tightly against your body... hold... Now allow your arms to rest loosely by your side.

Breathe deeply, filling your lungs with air... then blow the air out your mouth in a deep sigh. Take another big breath and feel your belly rise... then pull your belly inward as you slowly exhale. Mom's body will hug the baby with the breath out... Release the hug as you inhale and allow your baby to float peacefully.

Pinch your buttocks together... Feel the tightness... Release it... Let your muscles spread as they let go.

Push your feet and legs together... Feel the tension... Release... Let them flop open. Press your hips and knees outward... Hold... Release... Let them go loose. Flex your right foot and stretch your leg... Feel the stretch... Drop your foot and leg... Release. Repeat with the opposite leg... stretch... release... Curl your toes gently without pointing your foot... Hold... Feel... Release the curl. Wiggle your toes.

Now scan your body, thinking of each muscle we just worked. Release them all... concentrate on this feeling of relaxation. Remember that as you practice, the time required to reach this relaxed state will shorten. You will be able to say to yourself: "Release upper body... scan... release lower body... scan." Or simply get yourself into a well-supported position and just say, "Let go," and your entire body will release.

Narrator's voice should increase in energy as class returns to alertness.

Now it is time to leave this relaxed state. Do not move quickly. Take your time to readjust. Think again about this room you are in and the people around you. Be ready for the lights to brighten. Begin by slowly moving your arms and legs. And only when you are ready, return to a state of alertness. You will feel quite refreshed.