

Addendum to the Mindfulness-Based Interventions: Teaching Assessment Criteria (MBI:TAC)

For assessing online delivery of Mindfulness-based Programs

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Background and Context

The MBI:TAC was developed to assess competence and adherence in Mindfulness-based Program (MBP) teaching (Crane et al., 2012) and has since been used in MBP teacher training (Griffith et al., in review), research (Crane et al., 2013), supervision and peer reflection (Evans, et al., in review). Online delivery of Mindfulness-Based Programs (MBPs) is increasingly common and supports the accessibility of mindfulness-based teaching. Some situations may support a hybrid delivery of both online and in person teaching. For example, where in person meetings are possible but at less frequent intervals.

This addendum gives guidance on how the key features within each domain are represented in online delivery and should be used alongside the latest version of the full MBI:TAC manual and summary. The guidance assumes that the delivery is via live, teacher-led sessions. Further guidance, on specific technical adjustments that can be made in order to adhere to these criteria, is given at the end of this document.

Assessors should themselves be proficient MBP teachers and should have experience and ideally training, in delivering MBPs online.

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Domain 1: Coverage, pacing and organisation of the session curriculum

Kf 1. Adherence to the form of the programme and coverage of themes and curriculum content

- The content and coverage of the curriculum delivered is not impacted by online delivery.

Kf2. Responsiveness and flexibility in adhering to the session curriculum

- The teacher demonstrates heightened awareness and increased responsiveness in relation to participants' personal circumstances and 'at home' interruptions that may occur during sessions. This is balanced skilfully with the needs and safety of the group.

Kf4. Level of organisation on the teacher, room and materials

- The teacher ensures a strong enough internet service and appropriate bandwidth to support a reliable digital connection.
- In cases where those within a device are inadequate, the teacher uses additional microphone, speakers and camera to ensure adequate audio and visual transmission.
- Consideration has been given to the online platform most suited to the teaching setting, ensuring an appropriate range of functionality (see further guidance I).
- The teacher ensures that it is possible for them to clearly view the whole group at one time (see further guidance II).
- The teachers' personal environment is well organised, with considered use of lighting and appropriate visible background content.
- Sufficient organisation has been undertaken to prepare participants to engage successfully with online delivery. Teachers have provided appropriate pre-course information, including details of personal equipment needed, technical instructions and situational requirements (see further guidance III).

Kf5. The degree to which a session flows and is appropriately paced

- Session pacing allows for the development of relational and group processes (detailed in domains 2 and 6) and takes account of differences in the time needed for transition between session elements.

Domain 2: Relational Skills

Kf1. Authenticity and Potency

- The teachers' honesty and openness about the nature of online delivery, including technical and situational teaching challenges, conveys authenticity and potency to participants. Such challenges are named to the group as they arise.

Kf2. Connection and Acceptance

- The teacher employs creative ways of building informal connection and discussion between themselves and individual participants. This can be achieved by opening the online 'room' before the session starts, and staying available online after the session has finished.
- A clear and well-lit view of the teacher is presented that facilitates connection.
- The teacher effectively connects with participants when engaged in dialogue. Challenges in maintaining individual eye contact, through the use of the camera, are limited where possible. The teacher names this challenge, assuring participants that when they are speaking they are being looked at directly. The teacher may also encourage participants to experiment with a broader range of focus.
- The teacher perhaps switches off their 'self-view', to support more engaged connection with participants.

Kf3. Compassion and warmth

- Warmth and compassion may be more difficult to convey online, due to not sharing a physical space. When compassion naturally arises, this is effectively and authentically communicated to the participant, either verbally or non-verbally.

Kf4. Curiosity and Respect

- Delays in internet connection can make it difficult to ensure a participant feels fully heard and understood. The teacher demonstrates awareness of this and waits until a participant has completely finished speaking, checking that they have been understood correctly.
- Participants accessing the course from their home environment may inadvertently convey more of their personal lives than if they were attending a group in person. The teacher takes care to respect boundaries and refrains from commenting on a participants' home environment, except in cases where this is necessary to manage connectivity or safety. Where participants make this reference, the teacher comments skilfully and respectfully as a means of developing intimacy.

Domain 3: Embodiment of Mindfulness

Kf1. Present moment focus

- The teachers own embodiment is effectively conveyed within the virtual environment, requiring an enhanced need to stay grounded and present in comparison to when teaching in person.
- The teacher ensures a sufficient amount of their body language is visible to participants for non-verbal embodiment to be conveyed.
- The teacher demonstrates adequate familiarity and ease of use with technology, to limit its impact on sustained present moment focus.

Kf2. Present moment responsiveness

- The teacher responds calmly and appropriately to difficulties and interruptions related to the online delivery of the MBP.
- The teaching is both alive and responsive, considering the virtual environment.

Domain 4: Guiding mindfulness practices

Kf1. Language is clear, precise, accurate and accessible while conveying spaciousness

- The teacher sets an appropriate volume level when guiding practice to ensure their voice is accessible to participants.
- The teacher leaves appropriate periods of silence to ensure spaciousness in their guidance, considering possible delays or disruptions in connection.

Kf2. The teacher guides the practice in a way that makes the key learning for each practice available to participants

- The teacher acknowledges the space that the participants inhabit and the space in which the group is connecting, referring explicitly to the 'virtual' nature of the environment.
- Generalised guidance about the sorts of sensory experience that may be present for participants is offered, in light of reduced shared experience during practice.

Kf3. The particular elements to consider when guiding each practice are appropriately present

Body Scan

- When guiding a Body Scan practice, the teacher is visible to the group. It may be more appropriate to lead a body scan from a seated posture.
- The teacher finds ways to retain a sense of connection with the participants, who may or may not be in view. More active monitoring is essential for online guidance. The teachers' availability should be made explicit and options for challenges that may arise should be offered prior to beginning. This may include shifting posture, discontinuing practice, or sending a private chat to the teacher who can check in after the class.
- The teacher offers additional guidance in relation to options and taking care.

Mindful Movement

- When guiding Mindful Movement, the teacher stands far enough away from the screen for the whole body to be visible to participants, ensuring their voice can be heard from a distance (see further guidance IV).
- The teacher offers additional guidance around safety and choices.

Domain 5: Conveying course themes through interactive inquiry and didactic teaching

Kf3. Conveying learning themes through skilful teaching using a range of teaching approaches, including; inquiry, didactic teaching; experiential and group exercises; stories, poems and action methods etc.

- Participants can experience a greater sense of distance and anonymity online, which can reduce participation in inquiry. In this case, the teacher demonstrates responsiveness by creatively engaging the group (see further guidance V).
- The teacher demonstrates skilful use of a physical flip chart, screen sharing or 'white board' functionality to support group activities (see further guidance VI).
- The teachers finds creative ways to direct and instruct the group, such as using group messaging functionality, during teaching activities, when it is otherwise not possible to communicate with participants verbally.

Domain 6: Holding the group learning environment

Kf1. Learning container – creating and sustaining a rich learning environment made safe through careful management of issues such as ground rules, boundaries and confidentiality, but which is simultaneously a place in which participants can explore and take risks

- Confidentiality and consent have been given appropriate consideration. The teacher has identified the likelihood that other people may be present in participants' home environment and has taken steps to facilitate a sense of safety within the group in light of this (see further guidance VII).
- Recording of sections of the course may be appropriate to reduce concerns over loss of connection, or for supervision or assessment purposes (see further guidance VIII). Consent is discussed within the group and participants are given opportunities to privately decline consent for the recording of visual, audio or both.
- The teacher ensures participants videos are left on throughout the entirety of sessions, including during guided practice, in order to monitor the safety of the group at all times.
- Opportunities are created for participants to 'check in' and give a sense of how they are throughout the session, in order to contribute to a sense of safety.
- The use of small groups, rather than pairs, is employed in early sessions, to ensure participants feel safe when working without the teacher present.
- The principles of safe and effective peer communication are set up and reinforced in advance of any pair or small group work. Where working in a space without the teacher present, participants are informed that they can exit this space at any time, or request the teacher join them for clarity or support.
- In online delivery, some participants' can more easily go unnoticed and others, with a tendency to dominate, may have less awareness and sensitivity to the needs of the group. The teacher takes time to ensure balanced attention is given to all, reinforcing ground rules and making space for quieter voices, where necessary.

Kf2. Group development – clear management of the group development processes over the eight weeks, particularly regarding the management of the group in terms of beginnings, endings and challenges.

- The number of participants is appropriate for online delivery. Development of group processes can be impaired with too large a group.

- Participants are given appropriate direction, to increase the likelihood that they are able to see the whole group at once (see further guidance IX).
- The teacher facilitates connections between participants within the group, creating opportunities for peer relationships to form before and/or after sessions, as well as creating space for participants to connect with a general sense of the others present (see further guidance X).
- Inter-personal difficulties within the group may be less obvious or less readily raised by participants during the sessions. The teacher affords a greater degree of awareness and responsiveness to potential group based challenges.

Kf3. Personal to universal learning – the teacher consistently opens the learning process towards connection with the universality and common humanity of the processes under exploration.

- Online delivery of MBPs may result in a reduction in the shared experience of the group, as each participant is situated in a context that separates them from other participants and creates individual elements of sensory experience. The teacher demonstrates awareness of this and emphasises the common humanity and universality of experiences shared by participants. This may be particularly true at times when shared global realities can be acknowledged and honoured. Likewise, online groups span geographical boundaries, offering another kind of intimacy as we meet people who may have never gathered together in an in-person classroom.

Further Guidance: Technical adjustments in support of adherence to domain specific assessment criteria for the online delivery of MBPs

This section gives further guidance in relation to technical adjustments that can be made in online delivery of MBPs. With time, technological development may result in a broader range of platforms and functionality available to teachers utilising online delivery, impacting the guidance given here.

I. The internet platform used must support essential functionality. This includes the capacity to stream and record video and audio, the ability to move between whole group work and small groups or pairs in what may be referred to as ‘breakout rooms’, a messaging or ‘chat’ feature and a way of sharing documents during a session, to support collaborative work. The platform must also meet the data protection procedures relevant to the teaching context. For example, the Zoom online platform offers HIPAA/PIPEDA enabled plans for use in healthcare settings. Certain organisations have a heightened need for security and may require the use of particular online platforms.

II. It is best practice, and a requirement when training to teach, for the teacher to be able to see the whole group at one time. The number of participants that can be viewed will depend on the processing power of the device, determined by the size of the video card, as well as the size of the screen. This technological capacity should be matched to the number of participants accepted on to a course. Another option is to use multiple screens at one time, enabling the whole group to be viewed simultaneously across more than one display.

III. Appropriate pre-course information for participants can be sub-divided by personal equipment, technical instructions and situational requirements.

Personal equipment

- A stable, upright seat that enables the feet to touch the floor
- A mat suitable for floor work
- A pen, colouring pens and paper
- External camera, headphones and speakers where needed
- Printed materials or course workbook

Technical instructions

- Criteria for what constitutes an acceptable device – i.e. laptop or desktop computer resting on a hard surface. Except in unplanned emergency, mobile phones and portable devices are not acceptable means for accessing the course.
- Instructions on how to access and engage with the online platform, including how to download the latest version and how to use necessary features and functions, such as ‘mute/unmute’, messaging or ‘chat’.
- Instructions on how to support a whole group view, by selecting gallery view.
- Phone contact information for the teacher, in case of loss of connectivity or other technical challenges, during the session.

Situational Requirements

- A quiet area to sit in without other people present (nb. where this is not possible, other people should not be visible in the background at any point and participants should wear headphones to assure confidentiality for the whole group)
- A stable seated position
- Adequate physical space to engage in lying down and standing practices
- A stable surface on which to rest a device
- Adequate audio and lighting. In some cases an external microphone is needed. Participants should direct lighting towards their face from in front of them, rather than from the rear.

IV. Guidance of floor-based practice, such as movement or body scan, requires the teacher to ensure they have appropriate physical space to stand or lie in, as well as adequate wireless (eg. Bluetooth) headphones with a microphone to ensure they can be heard. The teacher can also instruct participants to use a 'pin' or 'spotlight' feature, in order for the teacher to be more easily viewed.

V. The messaging or 'chat' functions can be used in horizontal inquiry. The teacher can ask participants to write one word about their experience and then read the list out for the whole group to hear, drawing out similar or different experiences.

Some online platforms have a function that enables participants to share an icon of a raised hand to signify agreement. This can also be done, by simply asking participants to visibly raise their own hands.

Guidelines can be set in advance to support vertical inquiry, for example teachers can instruct participants to 'unmute' their microphones when they speak, if they are prepared to explore their experience further.

VI. If a 'virtual' white board is to be used effectively, it is important that the teacher and participants are able to view this function, without losing the view of the rest of the group. Some platforms have functionality that allows this, for example, Zoom enables users to alter the proportion of screen that is allocated, between both the shared document and the images of other users.

It is possible for documents to be shared with all participants in a way that enables them to annotate simultaneously, which can support collaborative activity but may be limited for some depending on the functionality of their device. Alternatively, a physical flip chart can be placed immediately behind the teacher, where it is visible on the screen, ensuring all participants can view the activity. Here, too, "pin" or "spotlight" will ensure viewing ease.

VII. The teacher should instruct participants to use headphones when not alone in their physical space. Participants should also be instructed to refrain from taking photographs or 'screen shots,' or recording the images or voices of the teacher or other participants in any other ways.

VIII. When recording during sessions is required, for example for supervision or assessment purposes, it is possible to ensure that the teacher is kept in view so that participants are not included in the recording and anonymity is maintained.

IX. Where possible, participants should be able to see all other members of the group. Guidance relating to this should be included in pre-course information, as detailed above. Where participants' devices mean that this is not possible, they can be guided to periodically switch between views, so that they don't lose a sense of the other group members.

X. The use of messaging or 'chat' functionality, during sessions, is not recommended as a means of developing group process. In some platforms, such as zoom, it is possible to disable 'chat' during sessions and enable it before the start and at the end of the session to support informal peer connection. If this feature is enabled for participants, they should be informed that all messages are sent to the host at the end of the session.

Teachers may facilitate between session peer communication through a forum or messaging application. However, for this to be acceptable, close monitoring by the teacher is required ensuring communication is safe and appropriate. There is a risk that this may have the consequence of increasing feelings of separation from the group, for those who choose not to engage.

Guidance on recording for assessment

It is common for individual training organisations to offer guidelines on recording for assessment. These should be adhered to, in addition to guidance below, which is of specific relevance to the online delivery of MBPs.

The recording of teaching for assessment can be done in one of two ways. Both are outlined below, alongside specific considerations for each. The former is preferable.

i. Recording from an additional camera, not connected to the device being used to deliver the course.

The camera should be set up in the corner of the room, behind and/or to the side of the teachers' device, one to two or so meters away. The camera view should include the teacher in full, the area in which they are sitting to teach and the position of the device being used to deliver the course. The teacher should ensure they are at an appropriate distance from the device to be heard and seen by participants, while also ensuring participants can be heard but not seen within the camera view. An additional microphone and/or speakers may be necessary to make this possible.

Please note, this is only an acceptable way of recording for teachers in a solitary space, where confidentiality and safety can be assured without the need for the teacher to use

headphones. This suggestion for recording will not be possible if others are present within the teachers' environment, or, where the teacher does not have a large enough room to enable positioning of the camera at a distance that affords a their full view.

ii. Recording via an online platform function

If the recording option outlined above is not possible, it is permissible for the teacher to provide a recording using the online platform recording function. This will likely provide a limited view of the teachers' head and shoulders. If this is the case the teacher should provide further contextual information in writing, detailing the set up of their teaching space. For floor-based practice, such as movement or body scan, the teacher must ensure that their whole body is visible on the recording (see IV above); and if the teacher is using an additional flip chart/whiteboard, this too must be visible when it is in use.

Please note, in this case, it is important that the teacher records a view of himself or herself only. A view of the participants should be available to the teacher at all times, but not visible on the recording, assuring participant confidentiality, throughout the assessment process.