

DBT Mindfulness “What” Skills Worksheet

Observe • Describe • Participate

What this skill is

In DBT, the mindfulness “What” skills describe what you do when practicing mindfulness: notice experience, put words to what you notice, and enter fully into the current activity. The goal is not to force calm; it is to strengthen present-moment awareness and flexible responding.

OBSERVE	Notice sensations, thoughts, emotions, urges, and events as they arise. Try to notice without immediately reacting or pushing the experience away.
DESCRIBE	Put simple, factual words to what you notice. Separate observable facts from interpretations, assumptions, or labels.
PARTICIPATE	Enter into the activity of the moment as fully as you can, without standing outside the experience and judging your performance.

Practice with one real situation

Situation or activity I am practicing with:	
OBSERVE — What did I notice in my body, thoughts, emotions, urges, or surroundings?	
DESCRIBE — What are the observable facts? What interpretations did my mind add?	
PARTICIPATE — What would it look like to engage fully in the next few minutes?	
What changed, if anything, after practicing these skills?	

Practice Page — “What” Skills

Use this page to repeat the skill in an ordinary activity such as eating, showering, walking, listening, working, or having a conversation.

Practice option	Try / note
Observe 5 sensory details without changing them.	■ Tried ■ Helpful ■ Not helpful Notes: _____
Describe an emotion as “I notice...” rather than “I am...”.	■ Tried ■ Helpful ■ Not helpful Notes: _____
Describe only what a camera or microphone could record.	■ Tried ■ Helpful ■ Not helpful Notes: _____
Participate in one activity for 2–5 minutes without multitasking.	■ Tried ■ Helpful ■ Not helpful Notes: _____
Notice when attention wanders and gently return to the activity.	■ Tried ■ Helpful ■ Not helpful Notes: _____

What did I learn about my attention?	_____ _____ _____ _____
Which “What” skill was easiest? Which needs more practice?	_____ _____ _____ _____
One situation where I want to use this skill again:	_____ _____ _____ _____

Evidence and safety note

This worksheet is an educational aid for practicing DBT skills. It is not a diagnostic tool and is not equivalent to comprehensive Dialectical Behavior Therapy. If practice brings up overwhelming distress, self-harm urges, or immediate safety concerns, stop and seek appropriate professional or emergency support.

Evidence basis

Based on Marsha M. Linehan, DBT Skills Training Manual: Revised Edition (Guilford Press, 2025) and DBT Skills Training Handouts and Worksheets: Revised Edition (2025).