

# THE LANGUAGE OF TEACHING YOGA

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*“Yoga is the poetry of the body.” ~ Rodney Yee*

Remember the days before cell phones (the Triassic era) when you didn't know who was calling? You could usually discern a friend or family member immediately, simply by the sound of their voice, their inflection, tone, vocabulary, and speech rhythms. Even the way they said hello distinguished themselves.

*As a yoga teacher, one of the most powerful tools you have is your voice. Your voice sets the tone for your class and your students' experience, both literally and figuratively. On a gross level your students are taking in the sound vibration from your lips to their ears. There is a deeper potency behind sound vibration on a subatomic level as well: for example, when you strike a tuning fork it vibrates—place that tuning fork on a table, and the table vibrates at the same frequency. This is why the old adage is true: it's not only what you say, but *how you say it* that matters.*

## **Words are powerful. They are capable of:**

- Stimulating your imagination
- Activating your senses
- Creating associations through metaphor, which reveals the unfamiliar in a familiar way
  - While we don't want to overload our students with too many flowery images, we can sprinkle them in throughout the class to help our students deepen their yoga experience

## THE POWER OF IMAGERY & THE IMAGINATION

It should not surprise us that both the words *image* and *imagination* share the same Latin root (“*imago*”), because our imaginations function primarily and most powerfully through images.

*“An image calls up a physical sensation, appealing to us at any level of the five senses. If you ask several people to describe coffee, one person might describe its smell, another its color, another its taste or the sound of beans being ground. We need to keep all five senses—and possibly a few more—on continual alert, ready to translate the world through their bodies, to reinvent it in language.*

*Images are a kind of energy, a physical exchange, moving from outside to inside and back.*

*An image is more than just decoration. “*

*~ Janet Burroway*

When it's doing its full work, imagery can direct your students toward some insight, help them experience an asana in a deeper way, or embody an abstract idea.

## The Most Powerful Part of Speech

People often think adjectives contain the most power when crafting vivid language, but in fact **verbs contain this power.**

### CUE: Verb + Body Part

By starting most of your cues with a verb, you reduce the repetitive, “throat clearing” tendency (for example, beginning each sentence with “Now we’re going to...”)

**Common verbs** for teaching asana include:

*expand, lift, rise, open, extend, stretch, gather, draw, circulate, step, place, rest, float, melt, power up, fire up, zip up, activate, release*

### Use the Language of Awareness:

Key verbs include *discover, feel, know, notice, observe, and find yourself*

### Consider the Kripalu Method, BRFWA: Breathe, Relax, Feel, Watch, Allow (all verbs!)

The breath can do so many things: it can fill you up, rinse through you, invigorate every cell of your body. Is it literally doing any of that?

No, but it *feels* like it is, which accesses the limbic system of the brain and translates your cues into specific sensations in your students.

### Induce a Positive State of Mind

Communicate in positive present tense: *“Notice your breath rising and falling naturally. Allow the muscles to soften as you rest in awareness.”*

### Language to Avoid

- *But*: If you tell someone “you’re wonderful, BUT” everything that came before the but has been negated in the listener’s mind. Instead, the word “and” acts like a bridge, which connects, layers expressions/cues, and builds momentum.
- *Try*: Do or do not do. There is no try. ;) Try implies effort, struggle, and the potential failure in the subconscious mind.
- *Overly repetitive words*: even too much positive reinforcement negates its purpose and loses its power.

## The Big 5 Hypnotic Power Words

### 1. And

Example: "Give yourself permission to feel comfortable and let go. Allow waves of ease and peacefulness to wash over you."

### 2. As

Example: "As you inhale, lengthen your spine and lift your arms. Now, as you root down through your feet, draw up through the crown of your head."

### 3. Because

Example: As you inhale we lift the heart and broaden the collarbones; as you exhale round the back and draw chin to chest. Because you're synchronizing your breath with your movements here, your attention can draw inward."

### 4. Imagine

Example: "Imagine yourself drifting on a calm and crystal clear river, simply being carried along. Picture your muscles becoming soft. See yourself feeling completely at ease."

### 5. Which Means/Therefore

Example: "You have been studying these language patterns for some time now, which means that you are developing your strength in delivering meaningful and joyful yoga classes."

# Thank you!

**Let's stay connected:**

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