

4 Types of Cues

By Laurel Beversdorf and Mado Hesselink

1. Internal cues:

These cues direct students' awareness to their bodies. For example, they direct students awareness to muscle engagement or joint position.

For example: 'Lift your hips up in bridge by engaging your buttock muscles. Squeeze your thighs towards each other to keep your knees directly over your heels.'

Internal cuing is good for giving the students a direct experience of their tissues. Pre-teaching where a muscle is or a repeating the same action several times is helpful. Demoing the target position and using touch to help students locate certain muscles or body parts are other tools that support this type of cueing.

2. External cues:

External cues direct students' awareness to the spacial relationship between themselves and their environment.

For example: "Lift your hips up away from the floor and toward the ceiling. Squeeze your thighs in toward the brick."

External cues are best for performance and task completion. If you are looking to improve your ability (or your students' ability) to perform a pose based on objective or fixed reference points, then external cues are the most likely path to success.

3. Interoceptive cues:

Interoceptive cues ask questions rather than direct students toward an outcome position or action. For example: "Press into the floor through your feet and feel where do your feet feel like they are making the deepest footprint into the floor? Can you distribute weight to even out the footprint across all edges of the feet. Where do you feel the effort of this work in your legs? Is it in the quads? What happens when you pull the floor toward you with your feet? Do you feel it more in the backs of your legs?"

Interoception leads to more down-regulation of the nervous system which is essential for healing and recovery. It can also lead to big discoveries about small things in your practice. It's challenging for students who want to be told what to do and who want clear signs that they are 'getting it right'. Because of that, interoceptive cues could be thought of as a technique for advanced students, though they do not need to be advanced in a performative sort of way.

4. Lexical choices:

The use of imagery and/or the use of technical, anatomical terminology.

When choosing this type of cue, ask yourself:

- Who might these different types of cues work best for and in what type of class?
- Are these cues best for more beginning or advanced movers, purely students, or students who also teach?

- Is this class meant primarily to educate, entertain or to act as a type of escape for students?

For example:

"Sink your feet and arms down into the soft squishy sand of the ground and make deep foot and arm prints through the whole of the souls of the feet and the backs of the arms. Unfold the and billow the chest toward the face as you smooth out the fabric of the front body and expand."

VS.

"Extend your hips by engaging your gluteus maximus muscles. Couple that muscle contraction with a strong engagement of your adductors to prevent the thighs from externally rotating. Squeeze the brick! Use ground force reaction to extend the spine. Notice how the more you ground down into your feet and backs of the arms, the higher up your torso and pelvis lift. Press down the arms to extend your shoulders. Press down your head to engage your cervical extensors."

This type of cue is often where the yoga magic happens. However, they are the most difficult to pull off skillfully. If you aspire to use language in the most effective way to create magic in your classes, it is worth investing some time to develop this skill. You definitely can (and should) practice using these cues while you actually teach your classes. However, in order to blossom creatively and take bigger risks in your language use, try writing out a class and recording yourself. The time and effort this takes has huge payoffs in terms of improving your skill with language in a teaching context. Most yoga teachers will not do this. Be the person who puts in the extra effort. Be extraordinary.