

The Rule of the Edge

In all of my many challenges and habit changes and book writing and learning, I've found one thing to be the most powerfully beneficial to all growth, learning and training.

I call it **the Rule of the Edge**.

Here's the rule: *practice at your edge most of the time*.

And this rule is what will help you grow the most, over time.

What do I mean by "your edge"? I mean going just to the edge of discomfort, just to the edge of what is difficult for you, what is pushing your boundaries a bit.

If you're practicing music, and you just practice the scales all the time, after awhile, doing the scales is too easy for you. You aren't learning very much by only practicing musical scales. Sure, it's still a good practice, but you have to push to something that's more challenging for you.

If you're exercising, easy exercise is a good thing ... but you also need to push yourself. Just a bit.

But your edge isn't pushing yourself until you're ready to collapse. It's not pushing to injury, pushing so that you can't practice tomorrow. It's not studying all day long until your brain has melted.

It's going to the edge, not diving off it.

And when I say, "Practice at your edge most of the time," notice the phrase "most of the time." You shouldn't be at your edge all the time. It's exhausting, and can take a lot of focus. Instead, try to be there more than half the time. Don't be lazy, but also give yourself some easy practice.

There's a lot of value in easy practice — it cements your learning, keeps you in good shape, keeps you sharp. It locks in the easy stuff as easy. And it can be a lot of fun.

You can also experiment with pushing a little past your edge, if you have the experience to know that it's safe. But best to do this under supervision of a teacher or trainer if you aren't sure.

So mix it up. More than half of your practice should be at your edge, but anywhere from 20-40% of your practice should be easy stuff. A blend is best — not "all easy and then all edge" but "easy, edge, easy, edge, edge, easy easy" or something similar.

What Edge Training Looks Like in Practice

Here's how this kind of edge practice might work in real life:

- If you're practicing yoga, you might do an hourlong practice where about 60% of the poses (roughly) are challenging for you (but not so challenging that you'll be injured or exhausted), and the rest are easy ones that allow you to focus on your breath and recover from the edge poses.
- If you're running, you'll mix up your running days — four days will be challenging but not crazy, and some with easy ones thrown in between. And a rest day or two, of course.
- If you're learning chess or Go, you'll do problems or drills that are hard for you, and also a bunch of easy ones. The easy ones cement the patterns. The edge ones teach you new patterns.
- If you're creating a habit, like learning to meditate, start with just short meditations (let's say 2-5 minutes), as that will be your edge when you start. But eventually you'll want to do longer meditations (10 minutes, 20, even more), finding the spot that's your edge. And mixing in some shorter, easier ones will help you stay sharp at your edge.
- If you want to train yourself to get comfortable with discomfort and uncertainty, you find a way to make yourself uncomfortable each day, and practice mindfulness in the middle of that discomfort. For example, taking a cold shower might be your edge. But another day, you might just go outside when it's a little chilly, with only a T-shirt on, for 20 minutes. You might practice at the edge of your discomfort with exercise, speaking on a stage, meditating for longer, etc.

The Way to Practice at Your Edge

When you're at your edge, it's one thing to just tolerate it, to grit your teeth and bear it until it's over ... and quite another thing to actually practice with the discomfort and uncertainty of being at that edge.

If you want to get the most out of practicing at your edge, here's what I suggest:

1. **Go up to the edge and stay there for a little longer than you'd like.** You want to collapse, you want to exit. Instead, hold the pose for a little longer. See it as your growth in action.
2. **Now drop mindfully into the discomfort & uncertainty.** Drop into your body, noticing the sensations of the discomfort. Standing on stage in front of hundreds of people? Notice the sensations of anxiety or nervousness (or excitement, whatever you'd like to call it). Running a hard mile? Notice the sensations in your legs and torso.
3. **Practice opening in that uncertainty & discomfort.** See what you can do to relax into this feeling of being at your edge. Can you bring a sense of curiosity? Explore the

bodily feeling for a bit, noticing what it's like. Relax your muscles around these sensations. Bring a sense of gentleness to it. A sense of compassion. A sense of humor. Open your mind to all sensations in the present moment, including the sense of discomfort but also all of your surroundings. Open up to a vast skylike mind.

With practice, your edge can even be a place where you find comfort. A sense of easy. A sense of joy at the deliciousness of the groundlessness.

Some Rules About the Rule of the Edge

The Rule of the Edge comes with a few sub-rules:

1. Don't always be at your edge. Ease off. Do some easy stuff too.
2. Sometimes it's OK to go past your edge, if you keep yourself safe. It's a sense of exploration, finding new edges.
3. Your edge will change over time. Notice how it shifts. Keep pushing a little further into your edge, if you sense the shift.
4. Practice mindfully at your edge, don't just try to get through it.