

WOOP TOOLKIT *for educators*



A guide to helping students pursue and accomplish goals

What is WOOP?

Dreaming is important,
but it isn't enough to
make your wishes
come true.

In fact, science tells us that fantasizing may undermine a wish because the positive fantasy tricks your mind into thinking that your wish already came true. Here at Character Lab, we like to think of wishes as goals — things that you can work toward and achieve.

Dr. Gabriele Oettingen developed a powerful method called WOOP that has been proven to help people accomplish their goals.

Character Lab has partnered with Dr. Oettingen to bring this method to the classroom.

Wish:

A meaningful, challenging, and feasible goal

Outcome:

The best result or feeling from accomplishing your wish



visualize it!

Obstacle:

Something inside you that prevents you from accomplishing your wish



visualize it!

Plan:

If [obstacle], then I will [effective action].

About the WOOP process

Start with a clear mind.

WOOP is an imagery technique that involves free thoughts. You should be relaxed, focused, and willing to clear your mind.

Identify a meaningful wish.

This is meant to help you select a personal, academic, or professional desire—one wish that is dear to you. It should be challenging but feasible. It can be a wish you want to come true in a day, a month, or longer. Once you have a wish, summarize it in 3 to 6 words to make it memorable.

Identify and imagine the best outcome.

This part of the process enables you to connect your mind and feelings to the best result of fulfilling your wish. Be willing to think about the best result. Really see and feel what it's like to accomplish it! Once you are ready, make sure to hold the outcome in your mind and imagine it.

Identify the obstacle within you that is holding you back. Imagine it.

Sometimes, our feelings, thoughts, or actions prevent us from fulfilling our wishes.

Identifying your internal obstacle raises your awareness about what is preventing you from achieving your wish.

You may have to dig deeper to find your real obstacle. Once you identify your internal obstacle, hold it in your mind, and imagine it. See and feel yourself experiencing the obstacle.

Create an “if [obstacle], then I will [effective action]” plan.

You can overcome your obstacle. First, identify one effective action you can take to overcome it. Then you will need to create a plan, but not any kind of plan. A WOOP plan has a specific formula: “If [obstacle], then I will [effective action].” This formula ensures that your plan is directly linked to the obstacle. Once you create a plan, you should repeat it aloud and imagine it.

Reflect on the process.

You may need to make adjustments to some or all sections of your WOOP. To do so, ask yourself: “Is this wish meaningful? Is this the real obstacle? Is this action effective? Did I really see and feel it, and feel engaged in the WOOP process? Once you find answers, WOOP again.

Give it a try!

Wish: What is an important wish that you want to accomplish in the next _____ [time period]?

Your wish should be challenging but feasible. Write your response in 3 to 6 words.

Outcome: What will be the best result from accomplishing your wish?
How will you feel?



Hold it in your mind. Take a moment to really imagine it.

Obstacle: What is the main obstacle inside you that might prevent you from accomplishing your wish?



Hold it in your mind. Take a moment to really imagine it.

Plan: Select an effective action to tackle the obstacle.

If _____,

then I will _____.

Bringing WOOP to the classroom

Get to know the process first.

Try out WOOP. Notice how you change while you are practicing the process.

Set up individual conferences with students.

Do the WOOP process one-on-one with each student. Allow at least 20 minutes in a quiet, calm environment.

Follow up.

Check in with students about how the WOOP process is going. Help students refine their WOOPs or WOOP new wishes.

Diego G.

- W:** I want to get an 85 in math.
- O:** I will graduate with honors, and I will be allowed to get my driver's license.
- O:** I am afraid to raise my hand and ask for help.
- P:** If I am afraid, I will write down my question and hand the paper to the teacher.

Kristin M.

- W:** I want to have more friends.
- O:** I will feel like I belong here.
- O:** I am scared that if I talk to people, they won't like me.
- P:** If I am scared to talk to people, I will ask them questions about themselves.

Clara S.

- W:** I want to play this song without making any mistakes.
- O:** People will rock out to my tunes!
- O:** I don't practice the hard parts because I get frustrated.
- P:** If I get frustrated, I will take it slowly and practice one note at a time.

Your first WOOP conference

You'll need:

- A. The WOOP facilitator guide and worksheet (see the next page)
- B. A quiet, calm environment
- C. A student with whom you have a good relationship
- D. At least 20 minutes

1. Start with the right setting.

Help the student clear his or her mind of distractions.

2. Do WOOP in the right order.

The sequence is critical to the effectiveness of the method.
Do not modify the four-step process.

3. Encourage the student to visualize.

Always ask the student to imagine and visualize the outcome and obstacle.
Once the student creates a plan, ask him or her to repeat it.

4. Let the student guide the process.

It doesn't work if you tell the student the wish! It also doesn't work if you give answers to the outcome, obstacle, or plan. Guide the student by asking probing questions.

5. Conclude the process and identify next steps.

If needed, the student can record the WOOP on the worksheet. Remind the student that WOOP can be revisited daily. Decide on a time to follow up.

Other classroom habits to support WOOP

1. Starting the day

Have students set their intention for the day by completing a WOOP. They could do this every morning to begin the day. This routine will help students build a WOOP habit.

2. Journal writing

Set up a regular time when students can reflect on their WOOPs, start new WOOPs, or modify existing WOOPs.

3. Student conferences

Student conferences are a great time for kids to WOOP because they usually leave the conferences with new ideas about what they want to achieve. Use the WOOP method to help students start and pursue new goals.

4. Use the language

Once kids get the hang of the exercise, you can say, "Why don't you WOOP it?" when they name a wish or encounter a challenge. Post the acronym in a visible place in your classroom so students can refer to it.

WOOP facilitation guide

Introduction

Thanks for being here to WOOP with me. This time is for you. Clear your mind. *[pause]*

Wish

What is one wish that you really want to accomplish [in a given time period]? Your wish should be something you care about, and it should be challenging but possible.

Suggested probing question: Is that wish really important to you? Is this something you think you can accomplish in the time period?

Outcome

What will be the best outcome when your wish comes true? How will you feel?

Suggested probing question: Is that the very best outcome?

Hold it in your mind. *[pause]*

Imagine the outcome. *[pause]*

Obstacle

What is something inside you that might prevent you from accomplishing your wish?

Where and when might this obstacle arise?

Suggested probing questions: Is that the real obstacle? Is there something you are feeling, doing, or saying that is standing in the way of your wish?

Hold it in your mind. *[pause]*

Imagine the obstacle. *[pause]*

Plan

What is one effective action you could take to overcome your obstacle? Complete this statement: "If [obstacle], then [effective action]." Repeat your plan once more.

Conclusion

We just completed WOOP: Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, Plan. Let's check in again on [date]. Thank you for doing WOOP with me! You can use WOOP every day.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Wish: What is an important wish that you want to accomplish in the next _____ [time period]?

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Outcome: What will be the best result from accomplishing your wish?
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Hold it in your mind. Take a moment to really imagine it.

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Plan: Select an effective action to tackle the obstacle.

If _____,

then I will _____.

Frequently Asked Questions

How will I find the time to do WOOP individually with each of my students? Can't I just do it with the whole class?

You should first learn how to do WOOP yourself. Then, work with a few students at a time. Until you have mastered the facilitation, we recommend doing WOOP with small groups of 3 to 4 students. If you are ready to do WOOP with the whole class, some teachers have used the following process: Introduce WOOP in a mini-lesson. Guide the class through the WOOP process while students WOOP their own wishes. Assess each student's ability to do an effective WOOP. Once students have mastered the process, set aside five minutes daily to review the process.

Can I suggest wishes for students?

No. WOOP is only effective when students tap into their own goals and desires.

As a facilitator, how directive should I be?

The person him/herself needs to think through and identify their own wish, outcome, obstacle, and plan. This is difficult if you are used to giving direction. You might see the wish and obstacle as obvious for this person, and you want to react by giving direction. You must resist. Waiting is very valuable. You want the person to work it out and have that breakthrough.

Can I make changes to the WOOP process?

No. The science behind the success of WOOP has to do with the exact formula, which includes the sequence of Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, and Plan. The language the facilitator uses, the imagery, and the state of mind WOOP establishes for the participant are critical to the method's success.

Which grade levels is WOOP for?

WOOP has been tested in grades 3 through 12. You can use WOOP with students in grades K to 2, but it has not been studied with students that young. For students in grades K to 2, you might consider using pictures to explain the steps Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, and Plan.

Some of my students don't seem to be into WOOP. Should I force it?

No. For WOOP to be effective, students must be ready and willing to lean into the process.

What makes WOOP different from other goal-setting strategies and positive-thinking strategies?

WOOP focuses on mental contrasting, which asks participants to contrast their wishes with potential obstacles. It follows up with the creation of a specific kind of if-then plan.

The visualization process helps participants vividly experience their desired futures in contrast with the obstacles. Then, when an obstacle arises, a non-conscious signal triggers a participant's effective action. This psychological process is different from other strategies. WOOP is about personal wish fulfillment, exploring what stands in the way, and creating a plan for action. It is a practice people can do daily.

What should I do if students identify wishes that are not within their control?

You can redirect students by reminding them that their wishes should be things that are near and dear, things that are challenging but achievable. For example, "I wish for world peace" would be something that is difficult and certainly not achievable for one person. Wishes like these should be re-directed.

How can I help students identify internal obstacles?

You can use a little humor. You might say, "All excuses aside, what is really the obstacle?" Students may also be quick to blame others. As a facilitator, you will need to patiently direct students toward internal obstacles. You might say, "What is something inside you that stands in the way of your wish?" or "What are you doing or feeling that is preventing you from achieving your wish?"

How do I help students create better if-then plans?

First, help students identify effective actions. You might say, "What is one strategy you can use to overcome your obstacle?" Then, ask them to plug their obstacles and effective actions into the formula: "If [obstacle], then I will [effective action]." Ask them to repeat the formula aloud. If you think a student has decided on a weak plan, ask some probing questions. You might say, "Is this action effective? If not, revise the plan." It is important to communicate that students can try out as many WOOPs as they want. If a WOOP doesn't work, a student can revise it a little and try again.

Thank you.

We want to know how it's going in your classroom!
Please send us an email with questions, pictures,
sample student work, videos of WOOP in action, or
anything else. Send to hello@characterlab.org with
the subject line "WOOP Feedback," and we'll get
back to you!

Reference Material

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