

You can find the flow, and scientists can measure it

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Finding the flow is important for completing tasks. Credit: Colourbox

You know when you've found the flow. You experience it when you are doing something that engages you so fully that time seems to fly by. Maybe it's a job, or something completely different, like chess or computer games or football or shoveling snow.

But flow is not just an expression that people use. It has been a concept used by [psychologists](#) for almost 50 years, because finding the flow can

be useful for people.

"Finding the flow zone can be important when teachers have to adapt their instruction. If we find the flow, we've also found the right level for the students," says Hermundur Sigmundsson, a professor in the Department of Psychology at NTNU.

A new test from NTNU can measure flow. This is useful in several contexts. Sigmundsson has collaborated with research fellow Magdalena Elnes to develop the test.

Flow arises when challenges match skills

Hungarian-American Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi was a professor of psychology. He introduced the theory of flow in 1975 and used the term in [positive psychology](#) to define a very focused state.

"His theory is very important for many people. I have been working with it since 1989," says Sigmundsson.

Csikszentmihalyi's research has so far been cited 170,000 times and is therefore key for this field of study.

Flow zone is essential for good results

You find the flow zone somewhere between boredom and fear or panic. We can find it alone or in groups.

"Flow occurs in the interplay between challenge and skill," says the professor.

Flow is often essential for getting good results, and where we find flow

can tell us something about which challenges are the right ones for us and our skills.

New test to measure flow

Flow can thus be very useful if we have to get something done. Now researchers at NTNU have developed a [new test](#) to measure flow, which they call the General Flow Proneness Scale.

"The test is easy to administer and can be used in several different contexts," says Sigmundsson.

The researchers at NTNU tried the test on 228 people between 18 and 76 years of age. In addition, they tested 23 people twice, one week apart, to see if they got the same result when some time had passed between the tests. The results are good.

"I often use the term flow in my teaching, so it's incredibly fun to have developed a test to measure the [flow](#) state," says Sigmundsson.

Related research is published in the journal *SAGE Open*.

More information: Magdalena Elnes et al, The General Flow Proneness Scale: Aspects of Reliability and Validity of a New 13-Item Scale Assessing Flow, *SAGE Open* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/21582440231153850](#)

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