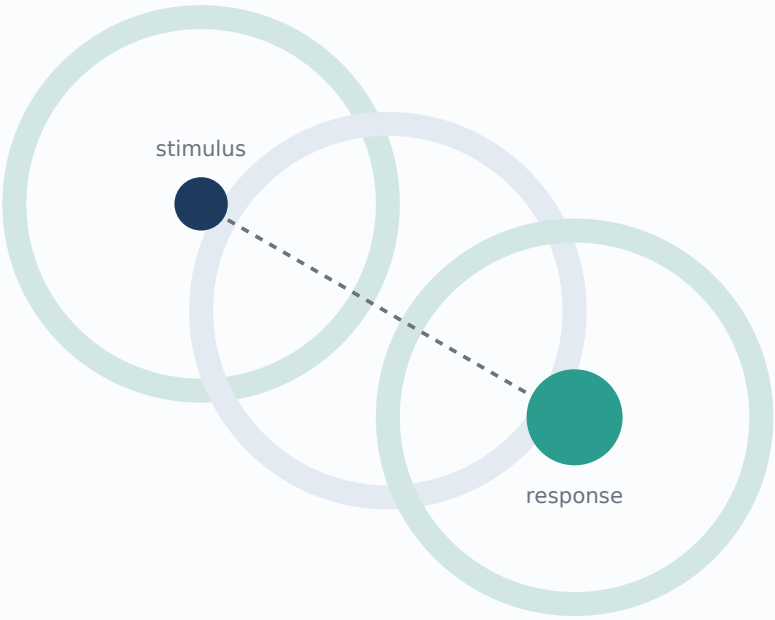


A VISUAL SUMMARY

Anchoring

in Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)

How a sight, sound, touch or word becomes linked to a feeling — and how to build, strengthen, change and use those links deliberately and responsibly.

Origins · States · 5 keys · Techniques · Applications · Evidence · Practice

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SECTION 01

What Is Anchoring?

In NLP, an anchor is any stimulus that reliably triggers a particular internal state or response. Anchoring is the process of creating — or deliberately using — that link.

We all carry thousands of anchors. A song takes you straight back to a summer years ago; the smell of baking brings back a grandparent's kitchen; a ringtone makes your stomach tighten before you even look at the screen. None of these links was planned. They formed because a stimulus happened to occur while you were in a strong state.

NLP treats this everyday learning process as a **skill**. If links can form by accident, they can also be built on purpose: to recall confidence before a presentation, calm before a difficult conversation, or focus before a performance — and to weaken links that no longer help.



Figure 1. An anchor links a stimulus to a response through learned association.

Stimulus

Any sight, sound, touch, smell, taste or word

State

The feeling or way of being it triggers

Link

Formed by pairing; strengthened by repetition

Choice

NLP aims to create helpful links on purpose

Definition

Anchoring is the deliberate creation of a stimulus–response link so that a chosen state can be reliably accessed again later.

SECTION 02

The Roots: Classical Conditioning

Anchoring is NLP's version of a well-established finding in psychology: classical conditioning, first studied systematically by the Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov.



Figure 2. Pavlov's classic demonstration: a neutral bell becomes a trigger for salivation after repeated pairing with food.

Pavlov was studying digestion when he noticed that his dogs began to salivate before food arrived — at the sight of the assistant, or the sound of footsteps. He then showed that almost any neutral stimulus, repeatedly paired with food, could come to produce salivation on its own.

Conditioning term	Meaning	NLP equivalent
Unconditioned stimulus	Something that naturally triggers a response (food)	A vivid memory or experience
Unconditioned response	The natural reaction (salivation)	The state recalled (e.g. confidence)
Neutral → conditioned stimulus	A signal that becomes a trigger after pairing (bell)	The anchor (touch, word, gesture)
Conditioned response	The learned reaction to the signal	The state triggered by the anchor
Extinction	The link weakens when no longer reinforced	An anchor that fades when unused
Counter-conditioning	Replacing a response with an incompatible one	Collapsing anchors

SECTION 03

From Pavlov to NLP

In the 1970s, Richard Bandler and John Grinder noticed that skilled therapists — including Virginia Satir and Milton Erickson — repeatedly used touches, tones and gestures that seemed to trigger states in their clients. They called this anchoring and taught it as a technique.

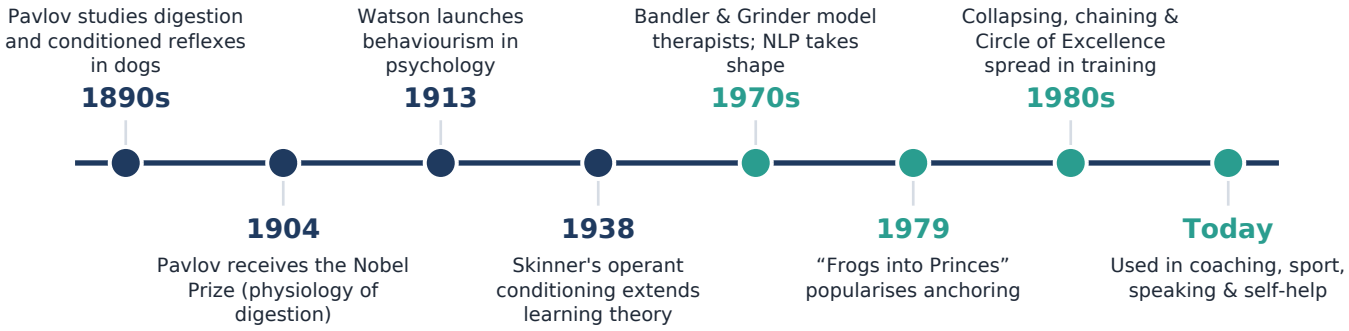


Figure 3. From laboratory conditioning to NLP technique (spacing not to scale).

What NLP added

Behavioural psychology	NLP anchoring
Mainly studied in animals and controlled experiments	Applied to human emotional states in everyday settings
Usually needs many pairings	Claims intense, well-timed states can be anchored in a few pairings
Focus on observable behaviour	Focus on internal states: feelings, images, inner dialogue
Describes how links form	Offers techniques to build, stack, chain and collapse links

Key text

Bandler and Grinder's *Frogs into Princes* (1979), based on their workshops, introduced anchoring to a wide audience, together with techniques such as Change Personal History and collapsing anchors.

SECTION 04

Anchors in Everyday Life

Most anchors are created without anyone intending them. Noticing your existing anchors is the first step to using the skill deliberately.

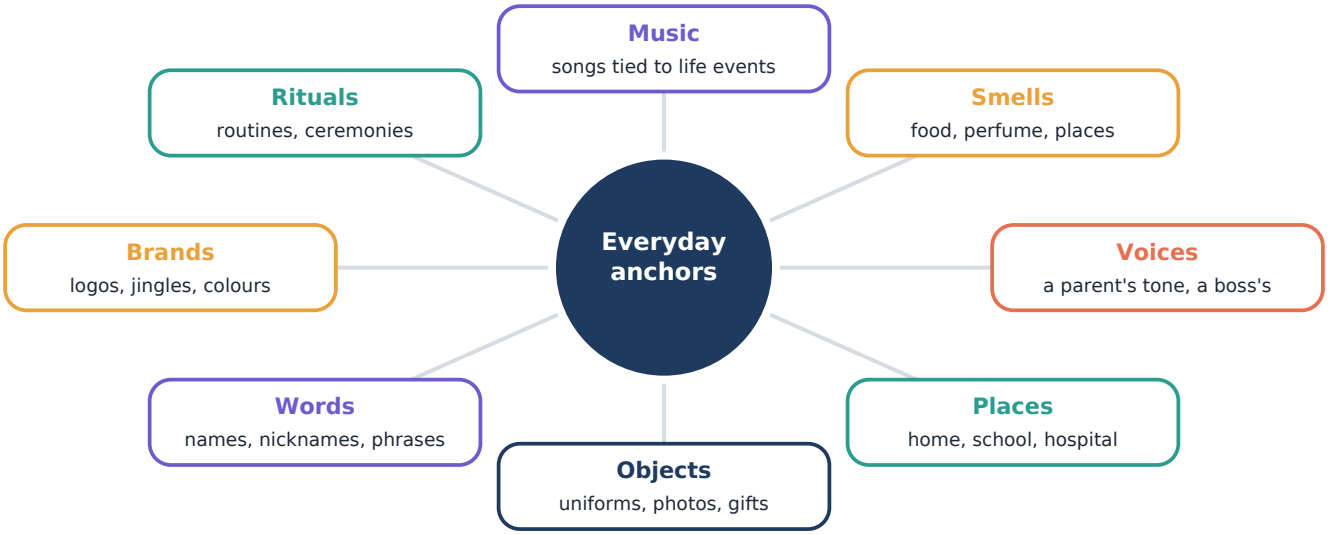


Figure 4. Common sources of naturally formed anchors.

Stimulus	Typical response	How it formed
Your first-dance song	Warmth, nostalgia	Heard during a highly emotional event
Dentist's drill sound	Tension, anxiety	Paired with discomfort in the past
Smell of sunscreen	Holiday relaxation	Repeated pairing with summer breaks
Notification ping	Urge to check the phone	Thousands of pairings with something new or rewarding
Your full name, sharply spoken	Alarm (“I'm in trouble”)	Childhood pairing with being told off
Changing into gym clothes	Readiness to train	A routine repeated before exercise

SECTION 05

Types of Anchors by Sense

NLP groups anchors by the sensory system they use — often summarised as VAKOG: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, olfactory and gustatory.

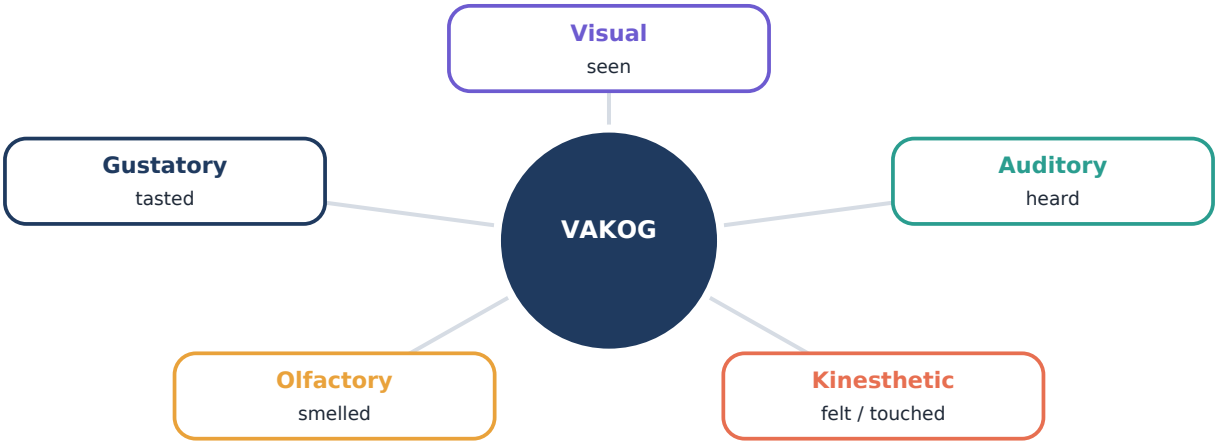


Figure 5. The five sensory channels through which anchors can be set.

Sense	Examples of anchors	Strengths	Watch out for
Visual	A gesture, a picture, a colour, a place on stage	Easy to use with groups and audiences	Needs the person to be looking
Auditory	A word, a tone of voice, a sound, a piece of music	Works without eye contact; easy for self-anchoring	Common words can be diluted by everyday use
Kinesthetic	A touch on the knuckle, pressing thumb and finger together	Precise, private, easy to replicate	Touching others needs explicit consent
Olfactory	A scent, essential oil, perfume	Very strong links to memory and emotion	Hard to control and replicate precisely
Gustatory	A particular mint, tea or flavour	Useful as part of a routine	Rarely practical on its own

Combine senses

The strongest anchors are often **multi-sensory**: a gesture (K) plus a word said in a particular tone (A) plus an image held in mind (V).

SECTION 06

Kinds of Anchors

Besides the senses involved, anchors can be classified by where they come from and whether they help or hinder.

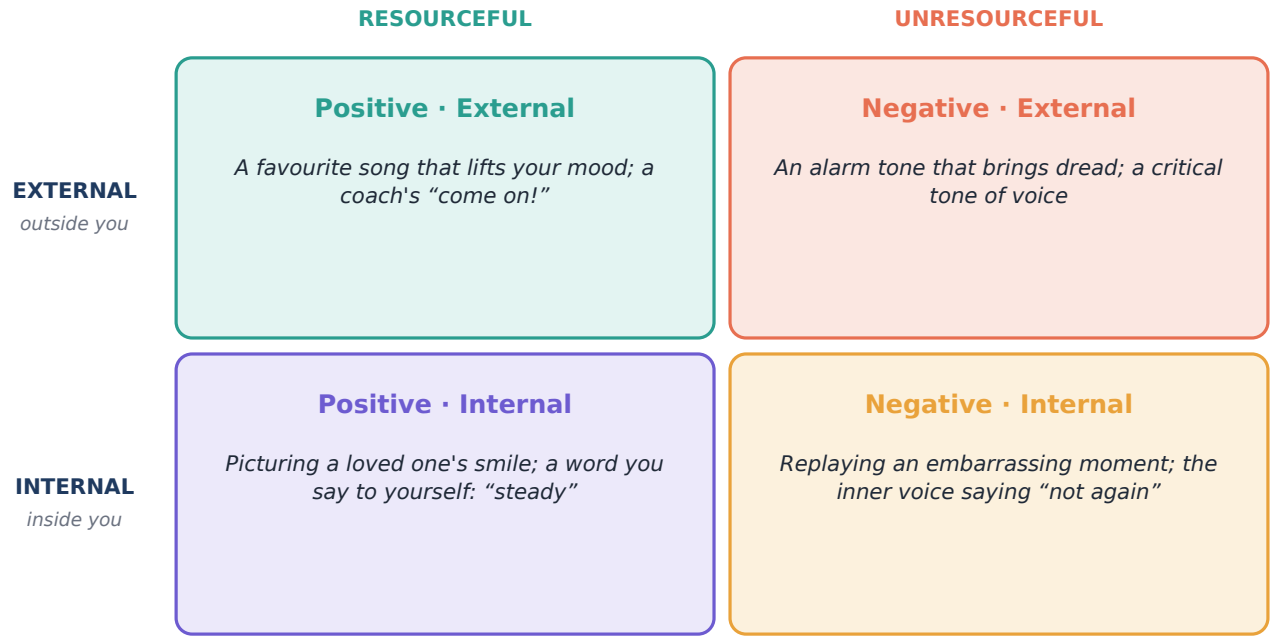


Figure 6. Anchors can be external or internal, and resourceful or unresourceful.

Distinction	Description
Conscious vs. unconscious	Some anchors are set deliberately and you know about them; most work outside awareness until you notice them.
Natural vs. deliberate	Natural anchors form by chance; deliberate anchors are created on purpose through a structured process.
Self vs. other	You can anchor your own states (self-anchoring) or, with permission, help someone else set an anchor.
Simple vs. complex	A single stimulus–response link, or several anchors stacked or chained together.

A useful attitude

Unresourceful anchors aren't “bad”: they're learning that once made sense. NLP techniques aim to add choice, not to judge the old response.

SECTION 07

What Is a “State”?

Anchoring always links a stimulus to a state. Understanding what a state is — and how to recognise one — is essential before trying to anchor anything.

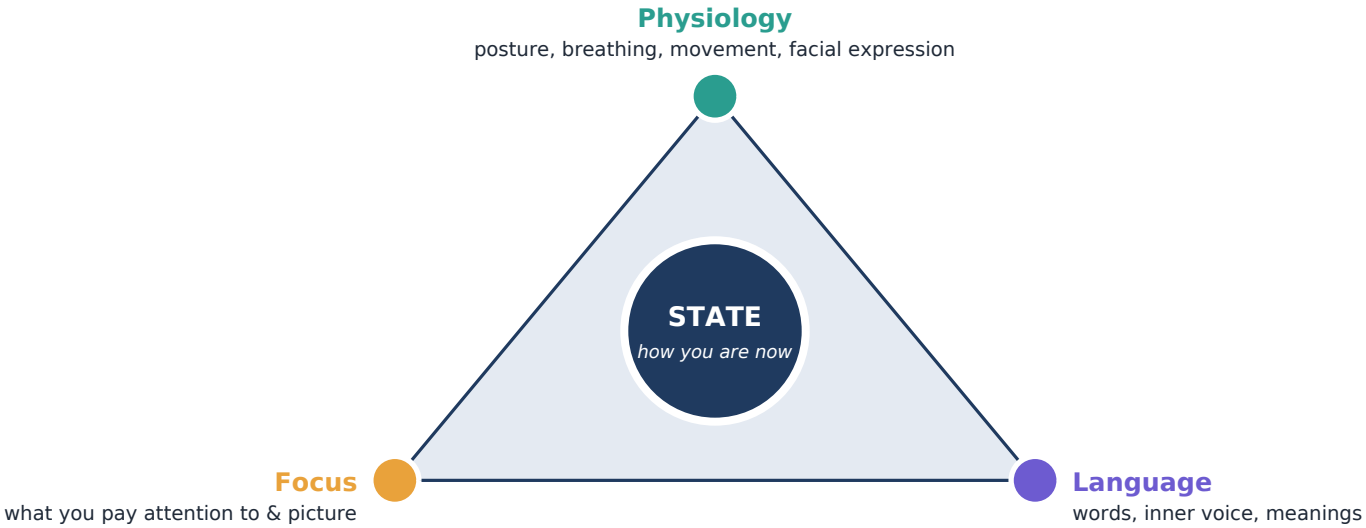


Figure 7. In NLP, a state is shaped by physiology, focus and language; changing any one affects the others.

A **state** is your overall way of being in a moment: the combination of your body, your thoughts and your feelings. Confidence, curiosity, calm, anxiety and boredom are all states. Because states have a physical side, they can be observed by someone paying close attention.

Resourceful states	Unresourceful states
Confident · calm · curious · focused · playful	Anxious · stuck · bored · overwhelmed · defensive
Wide attention, flexible thinking	Narrow attention, rigid thinking
Upright, open posture; steady breathing	Collapsed or tense posture; shallow breathing
Inner voice: “Let's see what's possible”	Inner voice: “This never works”

Three levers for changing state

Lever	Quick ways to shift it
Physiology	Stand up, straighten your posture, slow your out-breath, smile, move
Focus	Remember a success, picture the outcome you want, notice what's going well
Language	Change your inner voice's tone; ask “What's possible here?” instead of “Why me?”

SECTION 08

Calibration: Reading State Changes

Calibration means noticing the small, observable changes that show a person's state is shifting. It is how you know when to set an anchor, and whether it worked.

Signal	What to look for	Example shift into a positive state
Breathing	Rate, depth, location (chest or belly)	Slows and moves lower
Skin colour	Flushing, paling, evenness	Face colour warms slightly
Facial muscles	Tension around eyes, mouth and jaw	Jaw relaxes; lines around eyes soften
Posture	Upright or collapsed, open or closed	Shoulders drop and widen
Voice	Pitch, speed, volume, tone	Fuller, warmer, more resonant
Eyes	Focus, moisture, pupil size, direction	Eyes brighten; gaze defocuses into memory
Gestures	Speed and size of movement	Gestures become larger and freer

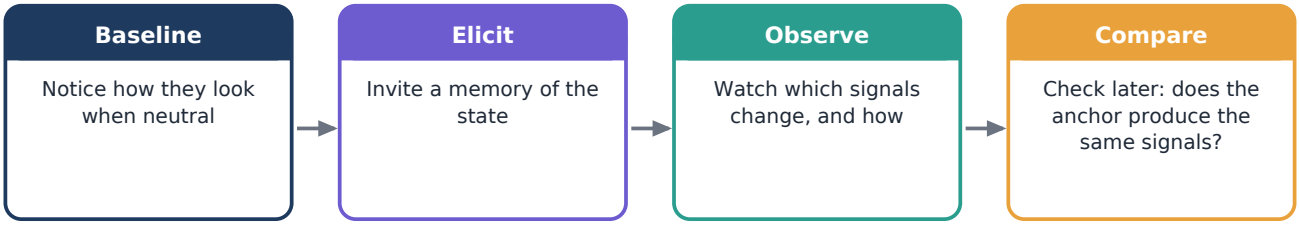


Figure 8. Calibration compares the anchored state with the person's baseline.

Self-calibration

When anchoring yourself, calibrate from the inside: notice your breathing, posture and the quality of your inner voice, or rate the state from 0 to 10.

SECTION 09

The Five Keys to Effective Anchoring

NLP trainings commonly teach five conditions that make an anchor strong and reliable. They are often remembered with the word ITURN.

I
Intensity — the state must be strong and fully associated

T
Timing — apply as the state rises, release before it peaks

U
Uniqueness — the stimulus should be distinctive, not everyday

R
Replicability — you must be able to repeat it exactly

N
Number — repetitions strengthen the link

Key	Why it matters	Good practice	Common mistake
Intensity	Weak states create weak anchors	Use vivid, personal memories; step into them fully	Anchoring a vague, half-remembered feeling
Timing	The anchor links to whatever is happening while it's held	Start as intensity rises; let go near the peak	Holding too long, into the decline
Uniqueness	Common stimuli get diluted by everyday use	Choose an unusual touch, word or gesture	Using a handshake or a common word like “OK”
Replicability	A slightly different stimulus may not fire the link	Same place, same pressure, same tone each time	Changing the location of a touch
Number	Repetition strengthens learned links	Repeat with several memories; refresh regularly	Setting it once and never using it again

Two more factors

Also important for many trainers: **purity** — the state should be as clean as possible, without mixed feelings — and **breaking state** between repetitions, so each pairing starts fresh.

Before you anchor: quick checklist

- ☐ Is the memory specific, vivid and fully associated?
- ☐ Is the anchor something I rarely do or hear otherwise?
- ☐ Can I repeat it exactly — same place, pressure, tone?
- ☐ Will I apply it as the state rises and release before the peak?
- ☐ Will I break state and repeat at least three times?

SECTION 10

Timing: The State Intensity Curve

States rise, peak and fade. An anchor becomes linked to whatever is happening while it is held — so when you apply and release it matters as much as what you anchor.

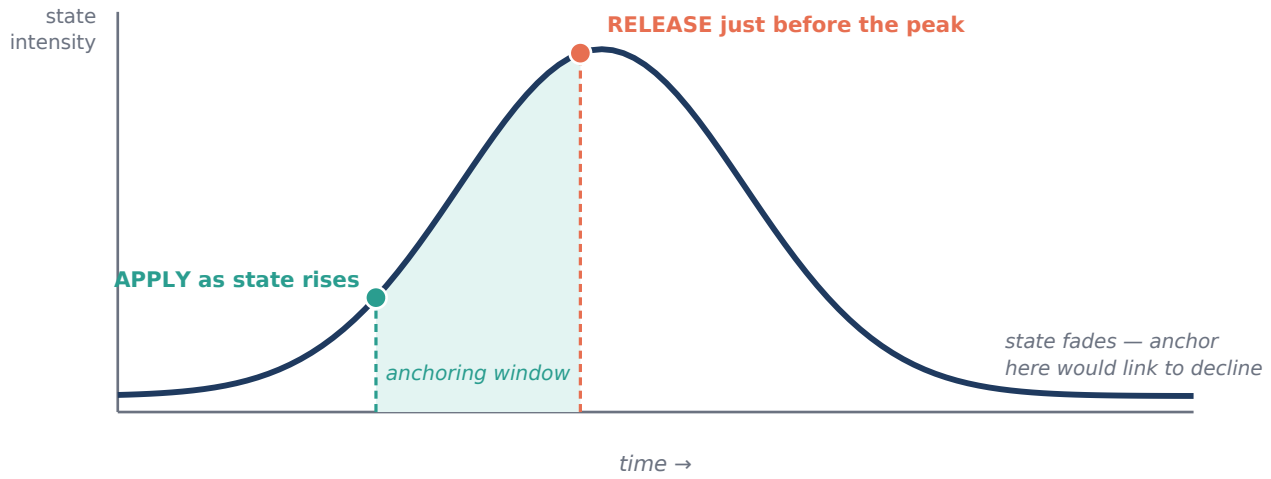


Figure 9. Illustrative state curve. The anchor is applied as intensity builds and released just before the peak.

Phase	What's happening	What to do
Rising	The memory is becoming vivid; feeling grows	Apply the anchor
Approaching peak	The state is close to its strongest	Hold the anchor steady
Peak	Maximum intensity	Release just before or at the peak
Declining	Attention drifts; the feeling fades	Anchor must already be released
Break state	Change the subject, move, look around	Prepare for the next repetition

Practical tip

A useful signal: ask the person to nod (or notice for yourself) when the feeling is “about to be at its strongest”. Typical anchoring windows last only a few seconds, depending on the person and the memory.

Signs the state is approaching its peak

Breath
deepens or catches

Face
softens or lights up

Posture
shifts noticeably

Eyes
brighten or defocus

SECTION 11

The Basic Anchoring Process

Most anchoring techniques build on the same core sequence. Master these steps first.

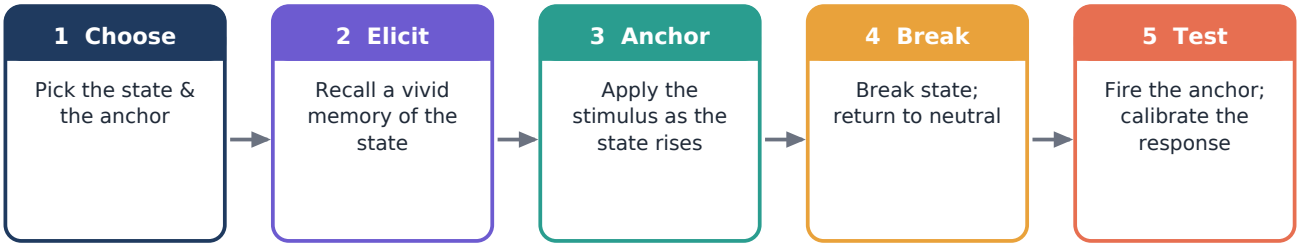


Figure 10. The five-step anchoring sequence. Steps 2–4 are usually repeated several times.

Step	How to do it	Example language
1 Choose	Decide which state is needed and in what situation; choose a unique, repeatable anchor	“What state would help you most in that meeting?”
2 Elicit	Help the person recall a specific time they had the state; go into sensory detail	“Remember a time you felt really confident… what do you see, hear, feel?”
3 Anchor	Apply the anchor as the state builds; release near the peak	(Touch knuckle) “That's right… more and more…”
4 Break state	Shift attention completely	“What did you have for breakfast?”
5 Test	Fire the anchor without recalling the memory; watch for the same changes	(Touch knuckle) — notice breathing, posture, colour
6 Future pace	Imagine using the anchor in the future situation	“Imagine Monday morning… and fire your anchor.”

If the test fails

If the test produces only a weak response, return to step 2 and repeat with more intensity, better timing, or additional memories (stacking).

SECTION 12

Eliciting a Strong State

The quality of an anchor depends on the quality of the state. Elicitation is the skill of helping someone step fully back into a memory.

Do	Avoid
Ask for a **specific** time (“one particular moment”)	General questions (“Are you a confident person?”)
Use present tense: “See what you saw… hear what you heard…”	Past, distant phrasing: “What was it like back then?”
Invite all senses: sights, sounds, feelings, even smells	Staying only in thoughts and descriptions
Speak in the tone of the state (energetic for excitement, slow for calm)	A flat or mismatched voice
Model the state yourself	Asking for excitement while looking bored
Let them be “associated” — looking out through their own eyes	Watching themselves from the outside (dissociated)

Associated vs. dissociated

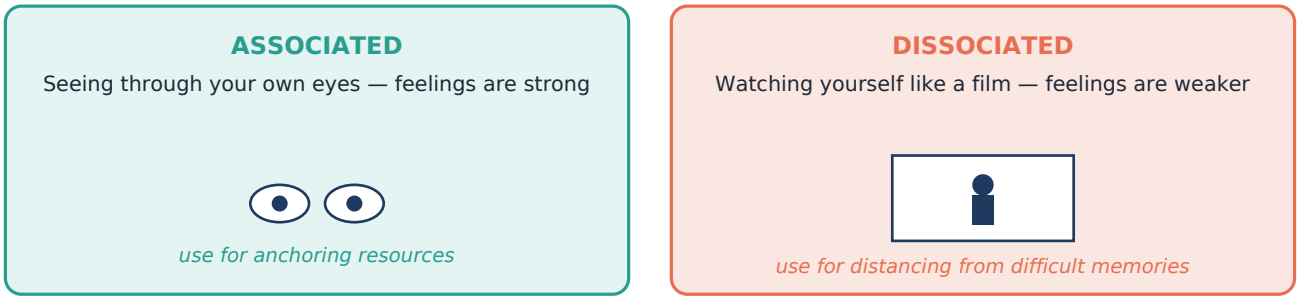


Figure 11. Associated memories carry stronger feelings — ideal for anchoring a resource state.

SECTION 13

Resource Anchoring: A Worked Example

A coach helps Priya, who freezes when speaking in meetings, anchor a state of calm confidence. The dialogue is illustrative.

Stage	Dialogue / action	What's happening
Choose	“When you speak in meetings, what state would you most like to have?” — “Calm and sure of myself.”	Defining the target state in her words
Choose anchor	“Let's use pressing your thumb and middle finger together — something you rarely do.”	Unique, discreet, replicable kinesthetic anchor
Elicit	“Think of a specific time you felt really calm and sure of yourself… step back into it… see what you saw…”	Associated, multi-sensory recall
Anchor	As her breathing deepens and shoulders drop, she presses her fingers; releases a few seconds later.	Timing with the rising state
Break state	“What's the name of your street?”	Clears the state before repeating
Repeat	Two more memories: teaching her nephew to ride a bike; a presentation at university.	Stacking for strength
Test	She presses her fingers without recalling anything. Her posture settles and she smiles.	Calibrating the response
Future pace	“Imagine Thursday's meeting… you're about to speak… press your fingers.”	Linking anchor to the future context

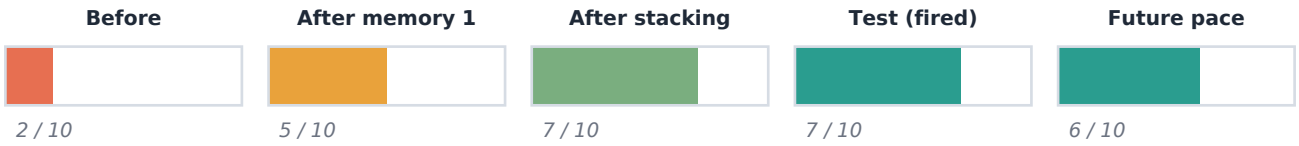


Figure 12. Self-rated confidence during the session (hypothetical example).

SECTION 14

Stacking Anchors

Stacking means anchoring several separate experiences of a state — or several related states — to the same stimulus, producing a stronger, richer response.

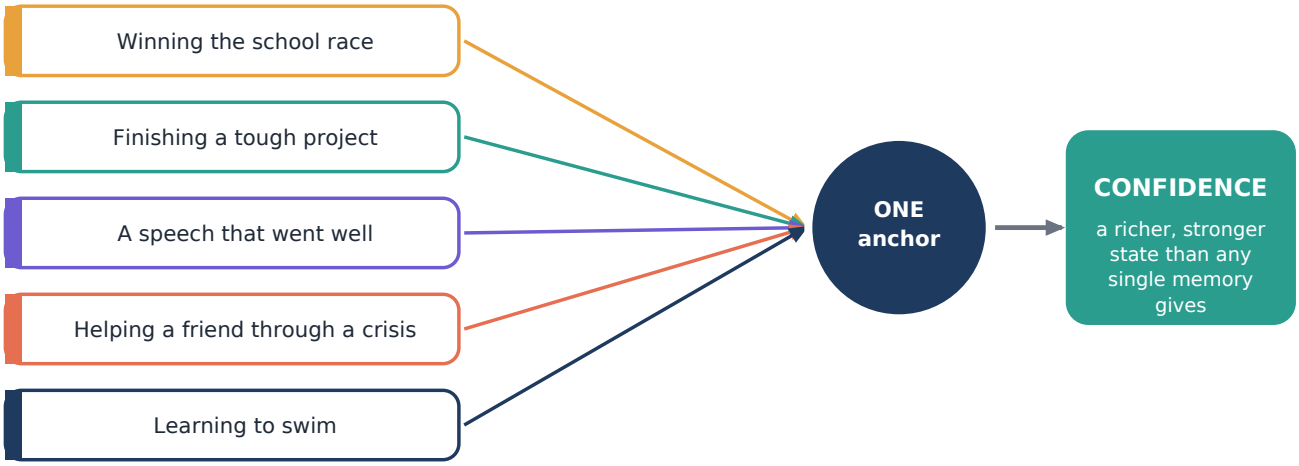


Figure 13. Several memories of the same state, each anchored in the same place, combine into one powerful anchor.

TECHNIQUE

Stacking anchors

Use when a single memory produces only a modest state, or when you want a blend of resources (e.g. calm + confidence + humour).

1	**Choose the anchor**	A precise, unique location or gesture
2	**Elicit memory 1**	Fully associate; anchor as the state rises
3	**Break state**	Return to neutral
4	**Repeat with memories 2–5**	Same anchor, identical in pressure and place
5	**Test**	Fire the anchor; check intensity
6	**Future pace**	Rehearse using it where it's needed

Variation

You can stack **different** resource states on one anchor (e.g. calm, confident, playful) to build a "resource state" for a specific challenge — just make sure they fit together.

SECTION 15

Chaining Anchors

Some problem states are too far from the desired state to jump in one step. Chaining links a series of anchors, each leading naturally to the next.

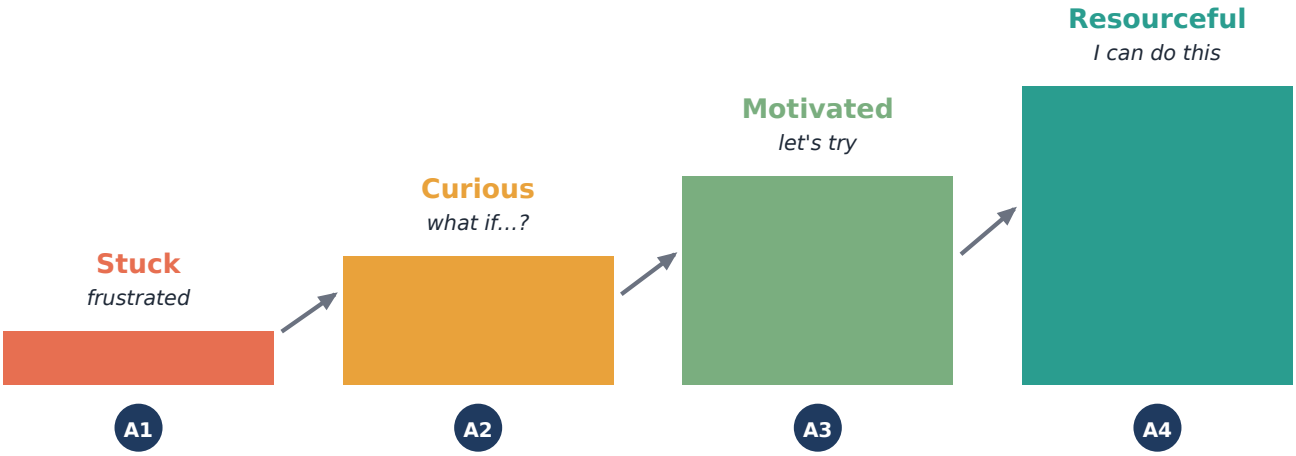


Figure 14. A chain moves gradually from a stuck state to a resourceful one; each anchor (A1–A4) triggers the next.

TECHNIQUE

Chaining anchors

Use when a direct switch would feel too big — for example from panic straight to confidence.

1	**Map the chain**	Identify the problem state, the goal state and 2–3 intermediate steps
2	**Anchor each state**	Set a separate anchor for every state in the chain (e.g. four knuckles)
3	**Link the chain**	Fire A1; as it peaks, fire A2 and release A1; continue to the end
4	**Break state**	Return to neutral between runs
5	**Repeat**	Run the chain several times until it flows automatically
6	**Test**	Fire A1 alone: does the person move through to the final state?

Choosing bridge states

Each step should be a believable “next step” from the previous one. Curiosity is a popular bridge state because it is close to frustration and close to motivation.

SECTION 16

Collapsing Anchors

Collapsing anchors aims to neutralise an unwanted response by firing a negative and a stronger positive anchor at the same time — NLP's version of counter-conditioning.

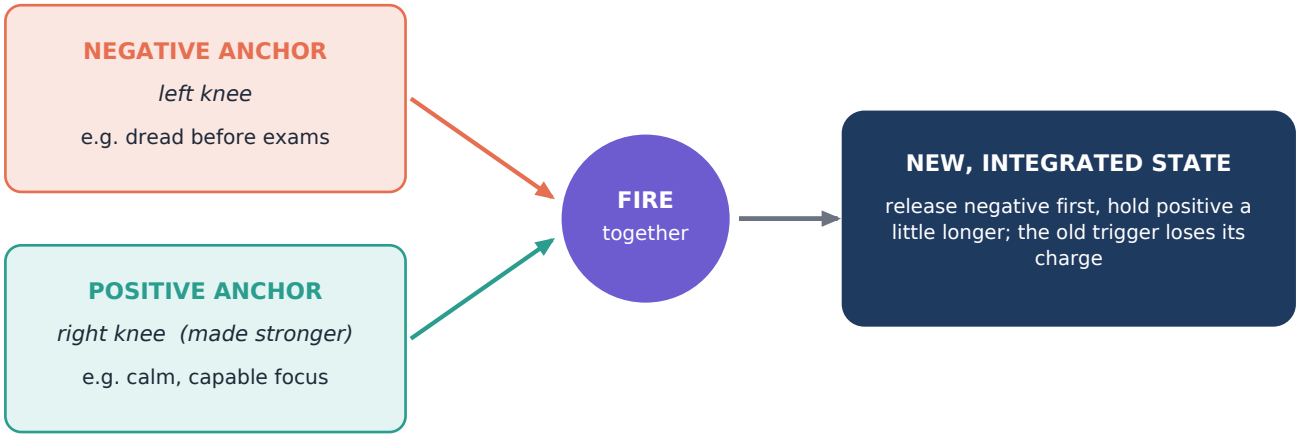


Figure 15. Two incompatible states are triggered together; the stronger positive state changes how the old trigger feels.

TECHNIQUE

Collapsing anchors

Use for a specific unwanted reaction that has a clear trigger, such as nervousness at a particular kind of event.

1	**Anchor the positive**	Stack several resource states on one location; make it strong
2	**Break state**	Neutral
3	**Anchor the negative**	Briefly elicit the unwanted state (mildly); anchor on another location
4	**Break state**	Neutral
5	**Fire both**	Fire both anchors together; release the negative first, hold the positive longer
6	**Test & future pace**	Fire the negative anchor: the response should now be neutral or mixed

Important

The positive anchor must be **stronger** than the negative one. Never use this for trauma or severe anxiety outside a properly qualified therapeutic setting.

SECTION 17

The Circle of Excellence

A popular self-anchoring technique that uses an imagined space on the floor as a spatial anchor for a peak performance state.

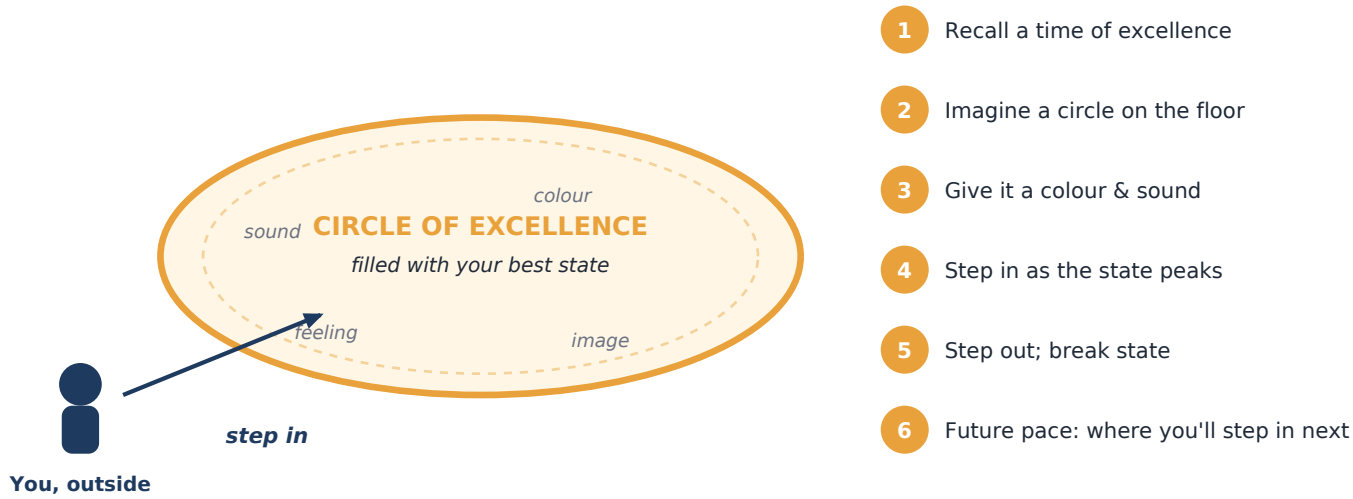


Figure 16. The Circle of Excellence: a resource state is anchored to an imagined circle you can step into whenever you need it.

Step	Details
Recall excellence	Remember a time you were at your best — capable, resourceful, absorbed.
Create the circle	Imagine a circle on the floor in front of you, about a metre across.
Make it vivid	Give it a colour, perhaps a sound or hum, and a sense of warmth or energy.
Step in	As the memory reaches full intensity, step into the circle and feel the state fill you.
Step out	Before the state fades, step out and leave the feeling in the circle. Break state.
Repeat & add	Repeat with more memories, stacking them in the circle.
Future pace	Imagine the next situation where you'll need it. Step in and experience it going well.

Many people later "carry" the circle with them, imagining it beneath their feet before a meeting or a performance.

SECTION 18

Anchoring Across Time

Anchors can carry resources into the past (to change the meaning of old memories) and into the future (to prepare for coming events).

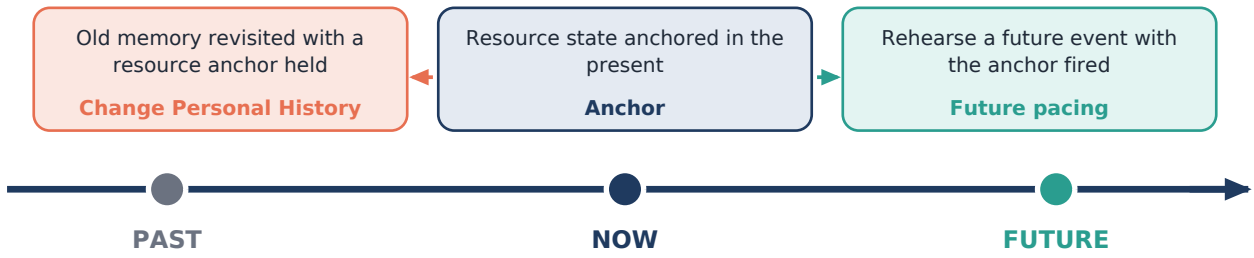


Figure 17. A present-moment resource anchor can be taken back to old memories or forward into future events.

TECHNIQUE

Change Personal History

Described in Frogs into Princes. Used to change how a recurring unhelpful feeling relates to past experiences.

1	**Anchor the problem feeling**	Briefly, mildly; anchor it
2	**Trace back**	Holding the anchor, recall earlier times the feeling occurred
3	**Find resources**	For each memory, ask what resource would have helped; anchor it separately
4	**Revisit with resources**	Fire the resource anchor while re-experiencing each memory
5	**Test**	Recall the memories without anchors: has the feeling changed?

TECHNIQUE

Future pacing

Mentally rehearsing a future situation while the anchor is fired, so the new response becomes linked to future cues.

1	**Identify the cue**	What will you see, hear or feel just before you need the state?
2	**Fire and imagine**	Fire the anchor and rehearse the event going well
3	**Link the cue**	Notice the future cue itself starting to trigger the state

SECTION 19

Spatial Anchoring for Presenters

Speakers can anchor ideas and moods to places on the stage. After a few repetitions, simply moving to a spot can bring back the associated mood for the audience.

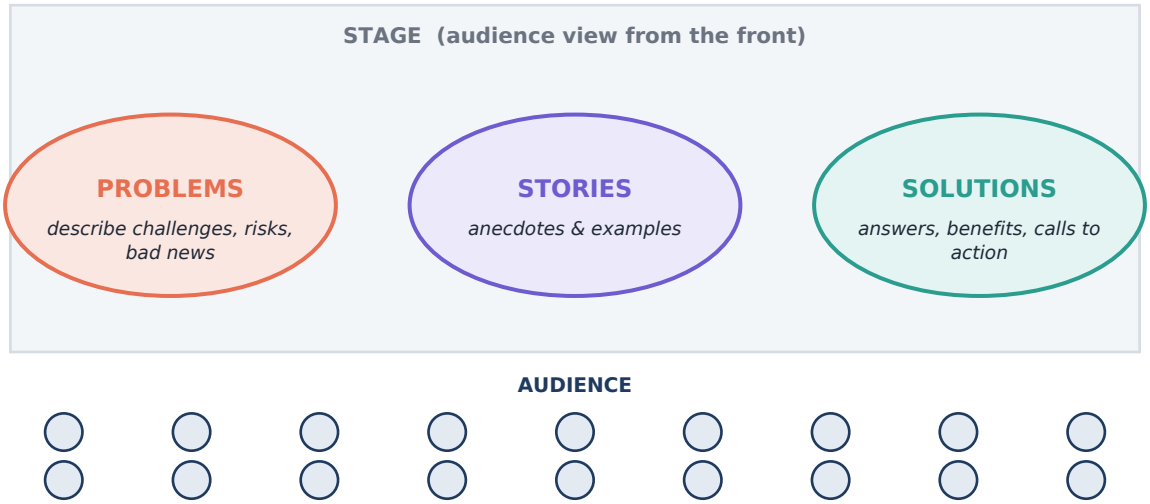


Figure 18. A simple three-zone stage plan. Each zone is used consistently for one kind of content.

Technique	How it works	Example
Problem / solution spots	Discuss problems in one place and solutions in another	Step to the right each time you present the answer
Story spot	Tell stories from one place; the audience relaxes when you go there	Sit on a stool for every story
Past / present / future	Use left-to-right (from the audience's view) as a time line	Past results on their left, future plans on their right
Q&A; spot	Take questions from a neutral place	Move centre-front, away from “problem” areas
Vocal anchors	Use a particular tone or phrase for key points	A slower, lower voice for each key takeaway

Keep spaces clean

Avoid delivering bad news from the place you'll later use for your call to action — otherwise you risk linking your request to the earlier negative mood.

SECTION 20

Self-Anchoring

You can create anchors for yourself without a coach. A private, kinesthetic or auditory anchor is usually easiest.



Figure 19. A five-step self-anchoring routine.

Need	Possible anchor	When to fire it
Calm	Slow out-breath + pressing palms together lightly + the word “settle”	Before difficult conversations
Confidence	Squeezing thumb and index finger + an inner “yes”	Just before speaking up
Focus	Touching the edge of your desk + picturing a target	At the start of deep work
Energy	A specific playlist track + standing tall	Before exercise or long tasks
Sleep readiness	A particular scent + dim light routine	At bedtime

A 21-day practice plan

Days 1–3
Build: stack 3–5 memories, twice a day

Days 4–10
Test: fire in calm, low-stakes moments

Days 11–17
Use: fire before real challenges; note results

Days 18–21
Refresh: add new peak memories

SECTION 21

Anchors in Coaching & Therapy

Anchoring is one of the most widely used NLP tools in coaching. In therapeutic contexts, it should only be used within a practitioner's training and scope.

Use	Example	Technique
Performance anxiety	Calm, focused state before exams or interviews	Resource anchor, collapsing anchors
Motivation	Moving from procrastination to action	Chaining anchors
Habits	Interrupting a craving with a resource state	Anchor + pattern interrupt
Confidence	Speaking up in meetings	Stacking, Circle of Excellence
Relationships	Staying calm when a partner raises a sensitive topic	Self-anchor, future pacing
Grief or old memories	Bringing comfort to painful recollections	Change Personal History — with qualified support

The coach's own anchors

Coaches also notice the anchors they create unintentionally. If you always lean forward and frown when a client talks about problems, that posture may become linked to tension. Many coaches deliberately keep a relaxed, open posture during sessions so that their presence itself becomes an anchor for resourcefulness.

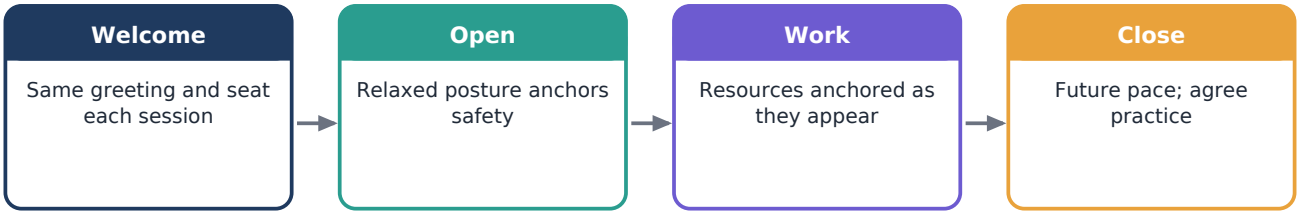


Figure 20. Consistent session rituals act as anchors for a productive coaching state.

SECTION 22

Sport, Performance & Education

Athletes, performers and teachers use anchor-like routines to access the right state at the right moment.

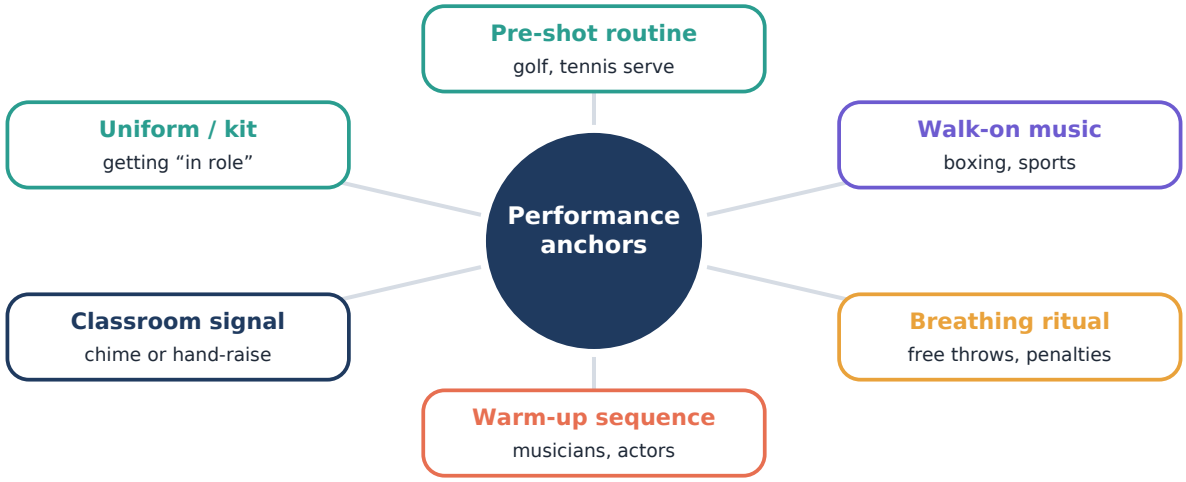


Figure 21. Common performance anchors.

Setting	Anchor	State it supports
Tennis	Bouncing the ball the same number of times before serving	Focus and rhythm
Theatre	The same vocal warm-up before every show	Readiness and presence
Classroom	A chime that signals quiet work time	Calm attention
Classroom	A “brain-break” song	Energy and reset
Exams	A cue word practised during revision	Calm recall

Evidence note

Sport psychology studies of pre-performance routines offer some related support for consistent, practised cues before performance — though these are not tests of NLP anchoring as such.

SECTION 23

Business, Sales & Marketing

Brands, sellers and leaders create anchors all the time — intentionally or not. Understanding them helps you use them well and recognise them when they are used on you.

Area	Anchor	Intended association
Branding	Logos, colours, jingles, a signature sound	Recognition and feelings tied to the brand
Advertising	Pairing a product with happy people, music or celebrities	Positive mood transferred to the product
Retail	Store scents and music	Relaxation, browsing, a premium feel
Leadership	A consistent phrase for celebrating success	Pride and team identity
Meetings	Opening with a recap of wins	A positive, constructive tone
Customer service	A warm, consistent greeting	Trust and reliability



Evaluative conditioning: repeated pairing transfers feelings to a neutral object

Figure 22. Advertising often relies on pairing — the same principle as anchoring.

Protecting yourself

Ask yourself: *"Is this feeling about the product, or about the music, the people and the setting?"* Noticing the anchor reduces its automatic pull.

SECTION 24

Troubleshooting: Why Anchors Fail

When an anchor doesn't work, the cause is usually one of a handful of predictable problems.

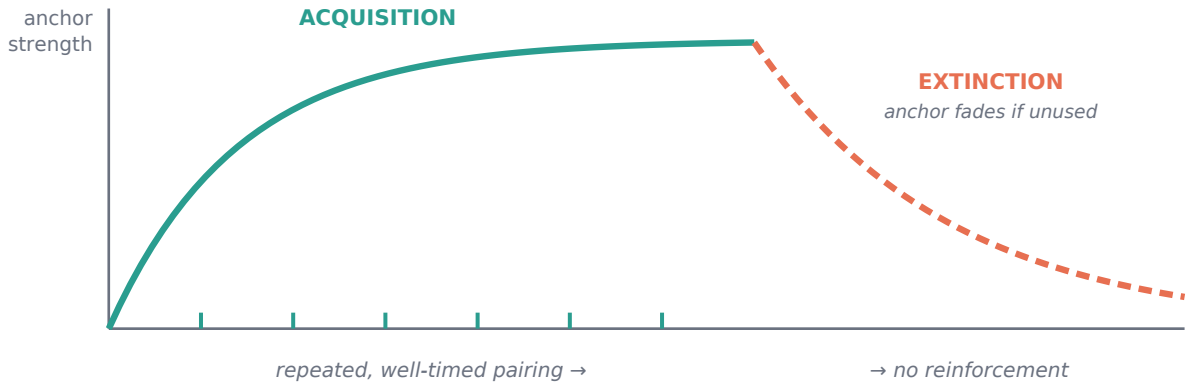


Figure 23. Illustrative learning curve: anchors strengthen with repeated pairing and fade without use.

Symptom	Likely cause	Fix
Little or no response when fired	State not intense enough; too few pairings	Use more vivid memories; stack
Response is mixed or muddy	Memory contained mixed feelings; poor timing	Choose purer memories; release earlier
Works in session, not in real life	No future pacing; context too different	Rehearse the real situation with the anchor
Worked at first, then faded	No reinforcement (extinction)	Refresh regularly with new memories
Triggers the wrong state	Anchor overlaps a common gesture or word	Choose a more unique stimulus
Anchor fires inconsistently	Stimulus not replicated exactly	Same place, pressure and tone every time
Person feels uncomfortable	Rapport or consent problem	Stop; discuss; use a self-anchor instead

SECTION 25

Two Meanings of “Anchoring”

In psychology and economics, “anchoring” also refers to a well-studied cognitive bias. The two concepts share a name but are entirely different.

	NLP anchoring	Anchoring bias
Field	NLP, coaching, self-help	Cognitive psychology, behavioural economics
What it is	A stimulus linked to an emotional state	Over-reliance on the first number or piece of information
Key source	Bandler & Grinder (1970s)	Tversky & Kahneman (1974)
Example	Touching your knuckle triggers confidence	A high “original price” makes a discount seem bigger
Mechanism	Learned association (conditioning)	Insufficient adjustment from a starting point
Research status	Little direct experimental testing	Extensively replicated across many studies

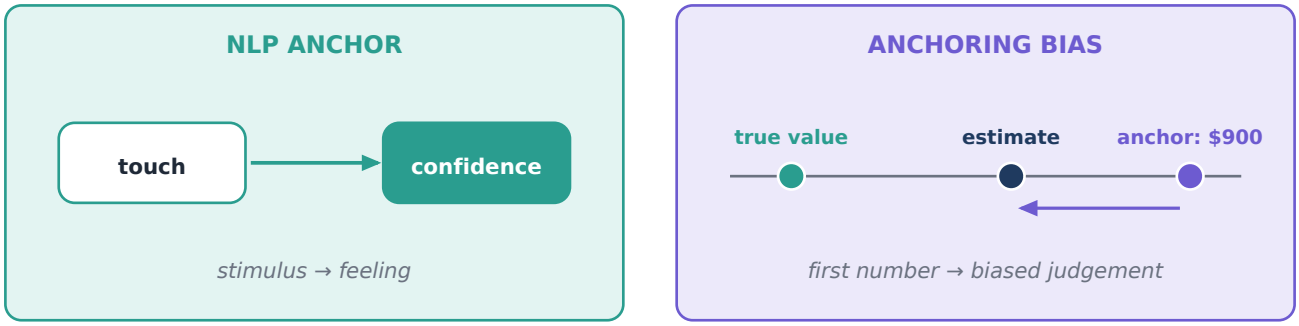


Figure 24. NLP anchoring links a stimulus to a feeling; the anchoring bias pulls numerical judgements toward a starting value.

Where both appear together

In negotiations, the first offer often acts as an *anchoring bias*, pulling the final price toward it. A friendly handshake ritual at the start may act as an *NLP-style anchor* for goodwill. Same word, two very different processes.

SECTION 26

Evidence & Criticism

Anchoring rests on a solid foundation — conditioning is one of psychology's best-established findings — but NLP's specific claims about anchoring have rarely been tested directly.

Claim	Status	Comment
Stimuli can become linked to emotional responses	Well supported	Classical and evaluative conditioning are robustly demonstrated
Links weaken without reinforcement	Well supported	Extinction is a standard conditioning finding
Routines and cues can support performance	Some support	Research on pre-performance routines in sport
Strong anchors form in one to a few pairings	Limited evidence	Conditioning usually needs repetition; intense emotion can speed learning
Collapsing anchors removes unwanted responses	Little direct evidence	Related to counter-conditioning, but not well tested as an NLP technique
NLP as a whole	Not supported	Reviews (e.g. Witkowski, 2010; Sturt et al., 2012) found little or insufficient evidence



Six claims from the table above, grouped by evidence status

> **A balanced view**
> Anchoring is best treated as a **practical application of conditioning principles** that many people find useful, not as a proven or precise therapeutic method. Expect variation between people, and seek evidence-based treatment for clinical problems.

What stronger evidence would look like

- Randomised controlled trials comparing anchoring with a credible placebo exercise
- Objective outcome measures (e.g. heart rate, performance scores), not only self-report
- Follow-up over weeks or months to test whether anchors last
- Independent replication by researchers outside NLP organisations

SECTION 27

Ethics of Anchoring

Anchors can influence people outside their awareness. That creates responsibilities for anyone who uses them with others.



Figure 25. Four principles for using anchors with other people.

Situation	Ethical approach
Using touch anchors	Ask explicitly; choose neutral places like the back of the hand or knuckle; offer a non-touch alternative.
Coaching clients	Explain the technique; the client chooses the state and the anchor; teach them to self-anchor.
Sales and persuasion	Use anchors to create a good experience, not to pressure people into decisions against their interests.
Groups and audiences	Anchor positive states openly (e.g. celebrating wins), not to hide information or create false urgency.
Trauma and severe anxiety	Do not attempt collapsing or Change Personal History; refer to a qualified mental health professional.

The transparency test

A simple test: *would the person be comfortable if they knew exactly what you were doing and why?* If not, don't do it.

SECTION 28

Practice Exercises

Work through these exercises to build anchoring skills. Space is provided for notes.

#	Exercise	Notes
1	List five anchors in your life that trigger positive states and five that trigger negative ones.	
2	Spend a day noticing what changes in a friend's breathing, posture and voice when they talk about things they love.	
3	Choose a unique kinesthetic anchor and stack three memories of calm on it.	
4	Fire your calm anchor once a day for a week in low-stakes moments; rate the effect from 0 to 10.	
5	Design a three-step chain from “stuck” to “motivated”. Name each state and its anchor.	
6	Plan a 10-minute talk using a problem spot and a solution spot on stage.	
7	Find three adverts that use pairing. What feelings are they trying to transfer?	

Anchor log

Date	State	Anchor	Situation used	Strength (0–10)

SECTION 29

Cheat Sheet, Glossary & Further Reading

Technique	Use it for	Core move
Basic anchor	Accessing one state on demand	Elicit → anchor as it rises → break → test
Stacking	A stronger, richer state	Several memories on one anchor
Chaining	Big gaps between states	A1 → A2 → A3 → goal
Collapsing	Neutralising an unwanted response	Fire negative + stronger positive together
Circle of Excellence	Peak performance	Step into an imagined circle at the peak
Change Personal History	Unhelpful feelings linked to the past	Take resources back to old memories
Future pacing	Transferring change to real life	Rehearse the future with the anchor fired
Spatial anchoring	Presentations and training	Consistent places for consistent content

Term	Meaning
Anchor	A stimulus that triggers a particular state or response.
Break state	Interrupting a state to return to neutral.
Calibration	Observing the signs of a person's state.
Associated	Experiencing a memory through your own eyes.
Extinction	Weakening of a learned link without reinforcement.
State	Your overall mind–body condition at a given moment.

Further reading

Work	Why read it
Bandler, R. & Grinder, J. (1979). *Frogs into Princes*.	Original workshop presentation of anchoring
O'Connor, J. & Seymour, J. (1990). *Introducing NLP*.	Accessible overview of NLP techniques
Pavlov, I. P. (1927). *Conditioned Reflexes*.	The foundational conditioning research
Tversky, A. & Kahneman, D. (1974). “Judgment under Uncertainty”, *Science*.	Source of the separate anchoring bias
Witkowski, T. (2010). *Polish Psychological Bulletin*, 41(2).	Critical review of NLP research