

IYO YOGA COMPETITION AWARDS



Scoring tiers and meditation
categories for judging

INTERNATIONAL YOGA ORGANISATION

Introduction

You're here because you want a crystal-clear way to understand how Yoga competition awards are structured and how meditation is actually judged - without guessing or relying on vague criteria. Whether you're a beginner building your first scoring literacy or a doer refining your preparation, you've likely felt the same friction: the rules sound simple, but the scoring meaning isn't.

This book gives you a direct, step-by-step map of the award tiers and the meditation categories that sit underneath them. You'll learn how to interpret each score band, then train the exact behaviors the judges look for across stillness, candle-gaze, and chanting; everything is organized around **IYO Yoga Competition Awards** so you can practice with purpose, not hope.

Table of Contents

Chapter I Award Score Tiers Explained

- Why the Score-to-Tier Ladder Matters
- How the Score-to-Tier Ladder Works
- Applying the Ladder to a Competition Result
- What to Watch For at Tier Boundaries

Chapter II Vajra 95-100 Stillness Checklist

- The Vajra Standard Under Competition Pressure
- How Arjun Used the 10-Point Stillness Audit
- What You Can Steal from Arjun's Vajra Preparation

Chapter III Virya 85-94 Deep Focus Training

- Set the Stage for Virya-Level Focus
- The Diamond Focus Loop
- Try the Virya Focus Session
- Common Virya Training Mistakes

Chapter IV Vasu 75-84 Steady Posture Skills

- Choosing the Discipline and Alignment Problem to Fix
- Comparing Training Approaches for the Vasu Tier
- The Verdict: Use the Strength-Discipline Alignment Map
- Making the Strength-Discipline Alignment Map Happen

Chapter V Vijeta 60-74 Foundation Potential

- Build the Foundation for the Vijeta Tier
- Apply the Foundations-to-Excellence Bridge
- Apply the Bridge: Tomas Kwon's Four-Week Practice
- Avoid Errors That Hide Foundational Progress

Chapter VI Category A Dhyana Stillness Judging

- What Dhyana Stillness Requires
- Your Dhyana Stillness Toolkit

The Dhyana Stillness Rubric: Action Plan
Quick Reference for Category A Judging

Chapter VII Category B Trataka Candle-Gaze Scoring

The Big Picture: What Category B Measures
Key Principles for Unwavering Candle Focus
A Practical Walkthrough: The Unblinking Gaze Protocol
Troubleshooting Common Category B Problems

Chapter VIII Category C Japa Chanting Observation

Establishing Steady Japa for Category C
Applying the Japa Rhythm & Presence Method
Applying Category C in Competition
Lessons From Controlled Japa Performance



CHAPTER 1

Award Score Tiers Explained

WHY THE SCORE-TO-TIER LADDER MATTERS

Could a final score of 84 and a final score of 85 lead to different IYO Indian Yoga awards? Yes. That one-point difference moves a competitor from the IYO Indian Yoga Vasu Award into the IYO Indian Yoga Virya Award. Judges and competitors therefore need a clear method that turns the final score into the correct award every time.

The Score-to-Tier Ladder solves three practical problems. It prevents judges from choosing an award by impression, helps competitors understand what their score means, and makes the results easier to explain after the competition. The ladder uses four fixed score ranges, and each range has one award name and one defined performance level.

After applying the ladder, you will be able to take any final score from 60 to 100, identify the correct IYO Indian Yoga award, and explain the result in plain terms. You will also know why a score must stay inside its exact range rather than being rounded into a higher tier.

Start with the score, not the award name. The final score provides the decision point; the award title describes the level reached. Ask yourself: “Which exact range contains this score?” That question keeps the award decision consistent and gives every competitor the same rule.

The practical takeaway is simple: record the final score clearly, locate it on the Score-to-Tier Ladder, and assign only the award attached to that range.

HOW THE SCORE-TO-TIER LADDER WORKS



The Score-to-Tier Ladder has four levels. Each level covers a specific final-score range and describes the performance represented by that range.

Final score	Award tier	Meaning
95-100	IYO Indian Yoga Vajra Award	Absolute winner or champion of the category; perfect posture and stillness
85-94	IYO Indian Yoga Virya Award	Diamond tier; outstanding meditation practice and deep focus
75-84	IYO Indian Yoga Vasu Award	Hero or Strength tier; great discipline and steady posture
60-74	IYO Indian Yoga Vijeta Award	Divine or Excellent tier; good effort with strong foundational potential

Use the ladder in this order:

1. **Write the final score.** Record the completed score before discussing the award. This prevents the award name from influencing the score decision.
2. **Find the score range.** Compare the score with the four ranges in the ladder. A score of 84 belongs to 75-84, while a score of 85 belongs to 85-94.
3. **Assign the matching award.** Use the exact IYO Indian Yoga award name connected to that range. Do not substitute a personal label.
4. **Check the range boundary.** Confirm that the score does not sit just above or below a tier limit. This check matters because one point can change the award.
5. **State the performance meaning.** Explain what the tier represents, such as steady posture for Vasu or deep focus for Virya.

Consider Priya Deshmukh, age 22, competing for the first time. Her final score is 82. The score falls within 75-84, so she receives the IYO Indian Yoga Vasu Award. The

award reflects great discipline and steady posture. It does not become a Virya Award because 82 does not reach 85.

Now change only the final score to 85. The correct award changes to the IYO Indian Yoga Virya Award. The new range describes the diamond tier, outstanding meditation practice, and deep focus. This example shows why judges must use the exact score rather than a general impression such as “nearly excellent.”

The top range also requires exact handling. A score from 95 through 100 receives the IYO Indian Yoga Vajra Award, the absolute winner or champion level. The definition includes perfect posture and stillness. A score of 94 remains Virya, even when the performance appears very close to the top tier. The ladder protects that boundary.

At the lower end, the IYO Indian Yoga Vijeta Award covers 60-74. This tier recognizes good effort and strong foundational potential. A score below 60 does not appear in the defined award ranges, so do not assign one of these four awards without an approved scoring decision that places the competitor within the listed framework.

Use this quick comprehension check: if the final score is 76, which award applies? The answer is Vasu because 76 sits inside 75-84. If the score is 93, the answer is Virya. If the score is 98, the answer is Vajra.

The practical takeaway is to treat the score range as the rule and the award description as the explanation.

APPLYING THE LADDER TO A COMPETITION RESULT

A clean result process helps a first-time competitor receive the correct award without confusion. Use Priya’s result as a complete example.

1. Complete the judging and calculate the final score.

The judging panel records Priya’s final score as 82. Keep the score visible on the competition form so the next decision uses the recorded number.

2. Compare 82 with the four ranges.

The score does not fit 95-100 or 85-94. It fits 75-84. This comparison prevents the common mistake of moving an 82 upward because the performance looked strong.

3. Assign the award attached to 75-84.

Priya receives the IYO Indian Yoga Vasu Award. The expected outcome is a result that matches both the number and the defined tier.

4. Use the tier description when announcing the result.

State that the Vasu tier represents the Hero or Strength level, with great discipline and steady posture. This explanation tells Priya what the award means without changing the score.

5. Check the boundary before publishing the result.

Confirm that the recorded score is 82, not 84 or 85 because of a copying error. If the score had been 84, the award would still be Vasu. If the score had been 85, it would become Virya.

6. Record the award beside the final score.

The final entry should show: "Final score: 82 - IYO Indian Yoga Vasu Award." This paired record gives the competitor, judges, and event organizers the same reference.

The same process handles higher scores. A final score of 91 maps to the IYO Indian Yoga Virya Award because it falls within 85-94. A final score of 97 maps to the IYO Indian Yoga Vajra Award because it falls within 95-100. A final score of 68 maps to the IYO Indian Yoga Vijeta Award because it falls within 60-74.

The award structure also supports observable meditation competition results. In the Observable IYO Meditation Competition, Jayshri Vivek Jha wins the IYO Indian Yoga Vajra Award, while Samuel Lopez-Lago wins the IYO Indian Yoga Virya Award. Those award names communicate different levels: Vajra marks the absolute winner or

champion level, while Virya marks the diamond tier with outstanding meditation practice and deep focus.

QUICK CHECKLIST

- [] Write the final score before selecting an award.
- [] Match the score to one exact range.
- [] Use the full IYO Indian Yoga award name.
- [] Check scores at 74, 75, 84, 85, 94, and 95 carefully.
- [] Add the tier meaning when explaining the result.
- [] Record the score and award together.
- [] Confirm that the award matches the published range before announcing it.

A useful final check asks: “Could another judge follow this record and reach the same award?” If the answer is yes, the ladder has worked as intended.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR AT TIER BOUNDARIES

ROUNDING AN 84 INTO A HIGHER AWARD

An 84 belongs to the IYO Indian Yoga Vasu Award. A judge may feel that 84 is close enough to 85, but the ladder does not use “almost” ranges. Rounding changes the defined award structure and creates an unfair result for competitors who earned 85 or higher.

Do this: Record 84 as the IYO Indian Yoga Vasu Award and describe it as the Hero or Strength tier.

Not this: Treat 84 as the IYO Indian Yoga Virya Award because the performance appeared close to the diamond tier.

CHOOSING THE AWARD BEFORE CONFIRMING THE SCORE

A strong performance may look like Vajra or Virya before the final score is complete. If the judge selects the award first, the score may drift toward that choice. The score must lead the decision because the ladder connects each award to a fixed range.

Do this: Finish the final score, locate its range, and then assign the award.

Not this: Announce “Vajra level” and adjust the score afterward to support the announcement.

CONFUSING TIER DESCRIPTIONS

The descriptions help explain the award, but they do not replace the score ranges. “Good effort” belongs to the IYO Indian Yoga Vijeta Award, “great discipline and steady posture” belongs to Vasu, “outstanding meditation practice and deep focus” belongs to Virya, and “perfect posture and stillness” belongs to Vajra. Mixing these descriptions can lead to an incorrect result.

Do this: Use the range first, then use the matching description.

Not this: Assign Virya because a competitor showed strong posture when the final score falls within 75-84.

The Score-to-Tier Ladder turns a final number into a clear award decision: 60-74 is Vijeta, 75-84 is Vasu, 85-94 is Virya, and 95-100 is Vajra. Apply those boundaries exactly, record the result clearly, and use the tier meaning to explain what the score represents. With that foundation in place, award decisions become consistent across competitors and categories, including observable meditation competition.

CHAPTER II

Vajra 95-100 Stillness Checklist



THE VAJRA STANDARD UNDER COMPETITION PRESSURE

Arjun Mehta, 31, had a quiet meditation practice and could sit comfortably at home for long periods. At an IYO meditation competition, however, comfort alone did not secure the IYO Indian Yoga Vajra Award. The judging category was Stillness & Posture (Dhyana), and the final score required for Vajra was 95 - 100. Arjun needed to show more than a calm appearance. He needed to maintain a traditional meditative posture, a straight spine, closed eyes, and visible stillness from the beginning of the judging period to the end.

The challenge became clear during practice. Arjun's legs stayed still, but his shoulders slowly rounded. His chin lifted when he became tired. His fingers changed position whenever he lost attention. None of these movements looked dramatic, yet each one weakened the complete posture. The Vajra Award recognizes the absolute winner or champion of the category, with perfect posture and stillness. Small breaks in alignment therefore mattered.

At stake was not simply a comfortable sitting session. Arjun had to present a stable, repeatable posture that judges could observe clearly. He chose Sukhasana, a simple cross-legged meditative posture, because he could hold it without forcing his knees or hips. That choice gave him a reliable base, but it did not solve the full problem. He

still needed to control his spine, head, hands, face, breathing-related movement, and responses to discomfort.

Ask yourself before you train: if a judge watched your posture without hearing your thoughts, would your body show steady meditation? That question sets the correct standard. Vajra performance depends on observable stillness, not on what the student privately intends.

HOW ARJUN USED THE 10-POINT STILLNESS AUDIT

Arjun began by treating posture as a complete system rather than one instruction: “sit straight.” He used the 10-Point Stillness Audit during each practice session. The audit gave him ten clear checks before, during, and after sitting.

First, he selected one traditional meditative posture and stopped changing between postures. He tested Padmasana, Siddhasana, and Sukhasana during separate practice sessions. Padmasana created pressure in his knees, and Siddhasana made his pelvis uneven. Sukhasana allowed him to keep both knees supported and his weight balanced. He selected Sukhasana because a stable base reduced the need for later correction.

Second, he placed his sitting bones evenly on the floor or a firm cushion. He did not sit on a soft surface that allowed his pelvis to sink. An even base helped him keep the spine upright without leaning to one side. He checked this before closing his eyes because correcting the base later would create visible movement.

Third, he lengthened the spine without stiffening it. Arjun lifted the crown of his head upward while allowing his shoulders to remain relaxed. He avoided pushing his chest forward, because that created tension and made his breathing look forced. The correct result was an upright line with natural ease.

Fourth, he positioned his head over his spine. He drew his chin slightly inward instead of lifting it or dropping it toward his chest. This kept his neck long and reduced the

gradual head movement that appeared when fatigue began.

Fifth, he placed his hands in one fixed position on his thighs. He kept both palms and fingers quiet. Previously, he had rubbed his thumb against his fingertips whenever his attention wandered. The audit exposed that habit. He stopped using hand movement as a way to manage distraction.

Sixth, he closed his eyes gently. He did not squeeze the eyelids or repeatedly open them to check the room. A soft closure reduced facial tension and gave the judges a clear sign that he had entered the meditation posture.

Seventh, he released unnecessary facial movement. Arjun checked his forehead, jaw, lips, and tongue before practice. He allowed the jaw to rest instead of pressing the teeth together. This mattered because facial tension often spread into the neck and shoulders, making the entire posture less settled.

Eighth, he watched for balance from left to right. He checked whether one shoulder sat higher, whether one knee lifted, or whether his torso leaned toward one side. He used a front-facing recording during practice, not to judge his appearance, but to identify movements he could not feel while meditating.

Ninth, he held the posture through discomfort without making sudden corrections. Arjun learned to separate a normal sensation from a problem that required action. A mild urge to shift did not require immediate movement. Sharp pain, numbness, or unsafe joint pressure required him to stop and adjust. Safe stillness always came before score chasing.

Tenth, he reviewed the complete sitting period after each session. He recorded the first moment when his posture changed, the body area that moved, and the reason for the movement. He did not write "bad session." He wrote specific observations such as, "chin lifted after fatigue," or, "right hand moved when attention wandered." Specific notes produced specific corrections.

Arjun practiced with short observation periods first. He held his selected posture, completed the ten checks, and remained still long enough to identify one weakness. He then increased the sitting period only after he could repeat the same posture without repeated adjustments. This approach prevented him from training endurance on top of poor alignment.

His main turning point came when he stopped correcting posture during meditation. Instead, he prepared the posture carefully before closing his eyes. During one recorded practice, he noticed that his shoulders moved whenever he tried to “sit taller.” He replaced that effort with a gentle upward lift through the spine and a relaxed chest. The shoulder movement decreased because he removed the unnecessary force.

He also practiced competition entry. He placed his cushion, sat down once, arranged his legs and hands, checked the ten points, and closed his eyes. He avoided last-second fidgeting. This routine mattered because the Vajra standard begins with the posture the judges see, not with a later recovery.

A useful self-check followed every session: “Can I describe exactly what moved, when it moved, and what correction will prevent it?” If the answer was no, Arjun repeated the audit with a recording or a trusted observer. He did not guess at stillness. He inspected it.

The result was a posture that looked quiet because it was organized, not because Arjun forced himself to freeze. His Sukhasana base stayed even, his spine remained upright, his head stayed aligned, his hands and face remained quiet, and his closed eyes showed uninterrupted inward focus. These observable traits matched the IYO Indian Yoga Vajra Award standard more closely than a long but unstable sitting period.

WHAT YOU CAN STEAL FROM ARJUN'S VAJRA PREPARATION

Choose the posture you can repeat safely. Test Padmasana, Siddhasana, and Sukhasana in separate sessions. Select the traditional meditative posture that lets you keep the pelvis balanced, spine upright, and knees safe. Do not choose Padmasana only because it looks advanced. A simpler Sukhasana held with perfect posture is more useful for the Vajra target than a difficult posture that produces repeated shifts.

Run the 10-Point Stillness Audit before every serious practice. Check your base, spine, head, hands, eyes, face, side-to-side balance, response to discomfort, and post-session record. Use the audit in the same order each time so you do not skip a weak area. The purpose is simple: the 95 - 100 range requires complete performance, so you need a complete inspection rather than one general impression of calmness.

Prepare movement before you close your eyes. Arrange the cushion, legs, spine, head, and hands first. Then close your eyes and begin. If you adjust your body after meditation starts, judges may see a break in stillness. Preparation also protects your attention because you do not spend the opening period solving posture problems.

Measure visible changes, not private effort. Use a front-facing recording during selected practice sessions. Review the exact moment your chin lifts, shoulder drops, hand moves, or torso leans. A recording can reveal movement that feels too small to notice. Write one correction for the next session, such as "relax the shoulders instead of lifting the chest." This turns observation into practical improvement.

Separate disciplined stillness from unsafe endurance. Stay with ordinary discomfort long enough to observe it, but stop when you feel sharp pain, dangerous pressure, or numbness. Vajra performance requires perfect posture and stillness, not injury. A safe, balanced posture gives you a stronger chance of maintaining the full judging period without a sudden correction.

Arjun's final preparation did not depend on appearing serious or forcing the body to become rigid. He built a stable base, checked ten observable points, removed unnecessary movement, and repeated the same setup until it became dependable. Use that same standard in your own practice: sit in one approved posture, inspect every visible detail, and correct one weakness at a time. When stillness becomes precise and repeatable, the 95 - 100 Vajra range becomes a clear performance target rather than a vague idea of perfection.

CHAPTER III

Virya 85-94 Deep Focus Training



SET THE STAGE FOR VIRYA-LEVEL FOCUS

“Attention becomes strong when you train it to return, one clear time at a time.”

The IYO Indian Yoga Virya Award recognizes a final score of 85-94, the diamond tier. It requires more than sitting quietly. You must show outstanding meditation practice and deep focus, with attention that returns quickly after a distraction and posture that remains steady throughout the observation.

Prepare a firm cushion or folded mat, a quiet timer, a straight-backed seat if needed, and one candle for focused-gaze practice. Wear clothing that does not restrict your hips, knees, or breathing. Keep the practice area unchanged during training so you can compare one session with another. These materials matter because unstable seating, poor lighting, or changing conditions can distract you before the judging work begins.

The Observable IYO Meditation Competition includes three meditation categories: Stillness & Posture (Dhyana), Focused Gaze (Trataka), and Mantra Meditation (Japa/Chanting). This chapter concentrates on the attention stability that supports Virya-level performance across these categories. A straight spine, closed eyes in Stillness & Posture, unwavering candle-gazing in Focused Gaze, and clear mantra repetition in Mantra Meditation all give the judge visible evidence of control.

Lucía Gómez, 27, a studio instructor, begins with Sukhasana because she cannot yet hold Padmasana comfortably without shifting. That choice supports better judging evidence: she can keep her spine straight, shoulders relaxed, and eyes closed without adjusting her legs. The goal is not to select the most difficult posture. The goal is to maintain a stable traditional meditative posture with clear attention.

Before each session, ask yourself three questions: Can I sit without pain? Can I keep my spine straight without forcing it? Can I return to the practice when my mind wanders? If you cannot answer yes, adjust the setup before increasing the practice time. Stable conditions create a fair test of deep focus.

Your first takeaway is simple: Virya preparation begins with a repeatable seat, a clear category, and one attention target.

THE DIAMOND FOCUS LOOP

The Diamond Focus Loop builds meditation depth through four repeated actions: settle, select, notice, and return. The loop works because attention does not become stable by avoiding every distraction. It becomes stable when you notice distraction and return without adding movement, frustration, or extra thought.

Use the loop in this order:

1. **Settle the body.** Sit in Padmasana, Siddhasana, or Sukhasana. Place the hands comfortably, lengthen the spine, lower the shoulders, and close the eyes for Stillness & Posture (Dhyana). Take three natural breaths. Do not exaggerate the in-hale or hold the breath. The purpose of settling is to remove avoidable movement before the timed practice begins.
2. **Select one target.** Choose the body's upright position, the candle flame, or the mantra sound. Do not change targets during one timed round. A single target gives the judge a clear view of your control and gives you a clear task to repeat.
3. **Notice the first break.** A break may appear as a thought, a sound, an itch, a blink during candle-gazing, or a lost mantra syllable. Label it silently with one plain word, such as "thought," "sound," or "lost."

4. **Return without correction drama.** Bring attention back to the selected target. Keep the spine still. Do not restart the entire session, tighten the jaw, or punish yourself for noticing the break. The return is the training action.
5. **Finish cleanly.** When the timer ends, keep the posture for two additional breaths before opening the eyes or moving. This prevents a rushed ending from weakening the final part of the observation.

For Stillness & Posture, measure success by the quality of the return and the steadiness of the spine. For Focused Gaze, use a candle placed at eye level and a safe distance from clothing, curtains, and other flammable items. Keep the flame still and the room free from drafts. For Mantra Meditation, select one short mantra and repeat it at an even pace. The judge should hear a consistent rhythm rather than changing speed whenever attention weakens.

Lucía uses this progression:

Practice area	Round length	Attention target	Expected outcome
Stillness & Posture	5 minutes	Straight spine and breath	No major posture collapse; quick returns after thoughts
Focused Gaze	3 minutes	Candle flame	Eyes remain directed toward the flame with controlled blinking
Mantra Meditation	5 minutes	Repeated mantra	Even rhythm with fewer lost repetitions

After one week, Lucía increases Stillness & Posture to 7 minutes only if she can complete the 5-minute round without repeated leg, shoulder, or head adjustments. She does not increase all categories at once. This matters because longer practice cannot repair an unstable method. Add time only after the current duration shows reliable control.

Use a simple practice record after each round. Write the category, duration, number of visible posture adjustments, and the main distraction type. For example: “Dhyana, 5 minutes, two shoulder movements, planning thoughts.” The record turns a general

feeling into a specific training decision. If posture movements decrease while returns become quicker, your attention stability is improving.

The core check is this: Can you keep the same target, notice a break, return quietly, and finish without a final adjustment? If yes, the Diamond Focus Loop is working.

TRY THE VIRYA FOCUS SESSION

Set aside 20 minutes for one complete training session. Prepare a cushion or folded mat, a timer, a candle in a stable holder, and a notebook. Keep the candle at eye level and remove anything that could catch fire. Practice in a quiet room with steady lighting.

Begin with Stillness & Posture (Dhyana). Sit in Sukhasana, Siddhasana, or Padmasana. Set the timer for 5 minutes. Keep the spine straight, eyes closed, and face relaxed. When a thought or sound interrupts, label it once and return to the upright posture and natural breath. Do not count every thought; count only visible posture adjustments.

Rest for 2 minutes without reviewing the performance yet. Then practice Focused Gaze (Trataka) for 3 minutes. Look at the candle flame. Keep the head still and the gaze directed toward the flame. Blink naturally when necessary, but do not chase an artificial no-blink result by straining the eyes. The target is unwavering focus, not eye discomfort. If the flame moves because of a draft, stop and correct the room rather than blaming your attention.

Rest for 2 minutes. Finish with Mantra Meditation (Japa/Chanting) for 5 minutes. Repeat the selected mantra at an even pace. If you lose the sequence, return to the next clear repetition instead of trying to reconstruct every missed word. Keep the lips, jaw, and throat relaxed enough to maintain a steady sound.

Use the final 3 minutes to record the session:

- Stillness & Posture: posture adjustments and return quality
- Focused Gaze: gaze breaks, unnecessary head movement, and eye strain
- Mantra Meditation: lost repetitions and changes in rhythm

Lucía completes this session and records one posture adjustment in Dhyana, two brief gaze breaks in Trataka, and three lost repetitions in Japa. Her next session keeps the same durations. She places greater attention on returning to the candle without moving her head and on keeping the mantra rhythm even. The expected outcome is not a perfect first attempt. The expected outcome is a clear training decision based on observable actions.

Complete the session when you can identify the strongest category, the least stable category, and one adjustment for the next practice. A finished check may read:

- Dhyana remained steady for 5 minutes.
- Trataka needs a draft-free setup and calmer returns.
- Japa needs a slower, more even rhythm.

That record shows whether your practice supports the diamond tier rather than relying on a vague feeling of calm.

COMMON VIRYA TRAINING MISTAKES

MISTAKE: CHOOSING A DIFFICULT POSTURE THAT BREAKS

Beginners sometimes select Padmasana because it looks advanced, then shift the knees, round the spine, or tighten the face. Pain and instability pull attention away from deep focus. A judge sees the movement, and the practitioner loses the chance to demonstrate steady posture.

Do this: Choose Sukhasana or Siddhasana when it allows a straight spine and quiet legs. Place support under the hips if the pelvis rolls backward. Test the posture for 5 minutes before using it in a longer session.

Not this: Choose a posture for appearance, then tolerate pain or repeated adjustments to keep it.

MISTAKE: TREATING DISTRACTION AS FAILURE

A practitioner may notice a thought and then spend the rest of the round criticizing the thought. That second reaction lasts longer than the original distraction and creates visible tension in the jaw, shoulders, or hands.

Do this: Label the interruption once and return to the breath, candle, or mantra. Record the distraction after the timer ends, not during the return.

Not this: Chase the thought, restart the session, or force the mind to become blank.

MISTAKE: FORCING THE CANDLE GAZE

Some practitioners try to prove focus by refusing every blink. This can create eye strain, watering, facial tension, and a jerky gaze. Those signs weaken the controlled appearance required in Focused Gaze (Trataka).

Do this: Place the candle at eye level, remove drafts, keep the head still, and allow a natural blink when needed. Stop if the eyes hurt, then correct the setup before repeating the round.

Not this: Squint, clench the eyelids, or continue through sharp discomfort to produce an artificial no-blink result.

Virya-level preparation depends on repeatable evidence: a stable posture, a single attention target, quiet returns, and a clean finish. Practice the Diamond Focus Loop until these actions remain available across Stillness & Posture, Focused Gaze, and Mantra Meditation. When your record shows fewer visible breaks and faster returns, you have a practical basis for judging progress toward the IYO Indian Yoga Virya Award.

CHAPTER IV

Vasu 75-84 Steady Posture Skills



CHOOSING THE DISCIPLINE AND ALIGNMENT PROBLEM TO FIX

A final score of 75-84 places an athlete in the IYO Indian Yoga Vasu Award tier: the Hero/Strength tier, marked by great discipline and steady posture. Athletes in this range usually know the basic posture, but they lose quality through small breaks - rounded shoulders, a shifting seat, uneven weight, early eye opening, or a practice schedule that changes from day to day.

The key choice is whether to train harder or train more accurately. More effort alone does not fix alignment. A student may hold Sukhasana for twenty minutes while the spine slowly collapses after the fifth minute. That practice builds tolerance for poor form. In competition, judges see the complete performance, including the final minutes when discipline becomes difficult.

The Strength-Discipline Alignment Map helps you make the correct choice. It separates three checks: strength, discipline, and alignment. Strength means the body can support the posture. Discipline means the athlete follows the same practice rules each day. Alignment means the head, spine, hips, and legs remain organized while the athlete stays still. Ravi Nair, a 35-year-old strength coach turned yogi, found this distinction useful because his legs were strong, yet his shoulders lifted and his chin moved forward whenever he sat still.

Ask yourself three questions before changing your training: Can I enter the posture without strain? Can I hold it without repeated adjustments? Can I keep the spine straight and the eyes closed until the end? If the answer changes during one session, identify the first point of failure. That point - not the total practice time - needs your attention.

The practical takeaway is simple: choose accuracy before duration. A shorter, well-aligned hold gives you a better base for the IYO Indian Yoga Vasu Award than a longer hold with repeated corrections.

COMPARING TRAINING APPROACHES FOR THE VASU TIER

Athletes usually choose one of three ways to improve steady posture: extend the hold immediately, use short alignment holds, or combine posture practice with a fixed discipline routine. Each approach can help, but each carries a different risk.

Approach	Cost	Time needed	Difficulty	Best for
Longer continuous holds	None	20-30 minutes per session	Moderate to high	Athletes who already keep alignment for most of the hold
Short alignment holds	None; a wall or folded blanket may help	10-15 minutes per session	Low to moderate	Beginners and athletes who lose posture early
Strength-Discipline Alignment Map routine	None; timer and practice log help	15-20 minutes per session	Moderate	Athletes preparing for a steady, repeatable competition performance

Longer holds look efficient, but they can hide the real problem. If Ravi holds Sukhasana for twenty minutes and adjusts his pelvis every three minutes, he records time without proving stillness. That approach becomes useful only after he can maintain the main alignment points for a shorter period.

Short alignment holds make errors easier to detect. A five-minute hold gives the athlete enough time to notice whether the lower back collapses, the shoulders rise, or

the chin moves forward. The athlete can then reset, rest, and repeat. This method costs nothing and reduces the habit of practicing poor posture.

The Strength-Discipline Alignment Map combines the strongest parts of both options. It begins with a fixed posture, a clear alignment check, and a timed hold. It then adds a simple record of what failed and when. The record matters because memory often says, “I held well,” while a timer shows that the first adjustment happened at minute four. Use longer holds only after the shorter practice remains steady.

If you are just starting or you lose alignment before five minutes, choose short alignment holds because they let you correct one issue at a time. If you already maintain posture for ten minutes but practice at inconsistent times, choose the full Strength-Discipline Alignment Map routine because discipline now limits your result. If your alignment remains stable for the entire practice, add time gradually rather than making a large jump.

Your practical takeaway: select the approach that matches your first failure. Do not increase duration when alignment fails first.

THE VERDICT: USE THE STRENGTH-DISCIPLINE ALIGNMENT MAP

Use the Strength-Discipline Alignment Map as the main method for reaching and holding the IYO Indian Yoga Vasu Award standard. It fits the common athlete problem: enough physical ability to enter the posture, but not enough consistency to keep it clean from beginning to end.

The method uses three decisions. First, set the body so the posture can remain steady. Second, set the practice rule so you repeat the same work without negotiation. Third, check the posture during the hold without turning the practice into constant movement. This balance matters for all three meditation categories: Stillness & Posture (Dhyana), Focused Gaze (Trataka), and Mantra Meditation (Japa/Chanting).

The alignment work applies most directly to Stillness & Posture, while the discipline rule supports the other categories.

Follow this decision flow:

- If you cannot sit comfortably for five minutes, choose Sukhasana and use a folded blanket under the hips. The raised hips can reduce strain and help the spine stay upright.
- If you can sit for five minutes but your spine rounds, shorten the hold and correct the pelvis before adding time.
- If your spine stays straight but your shoulders lift, relax the hands, widen the collarbones, and repeat the same duration.
- If your body remains aligned but you miss practice days, fix the practice time and record each session before increasing duration.
- If you maintain alignment for ten minutes with no major adjustment, add two minutes to the hold and reassess.
- If you prepare for competition in Stillness & Posture (Dhyana), keep the eyes closed and the spine straight during the timed hold. Do not treat eye opening or repeated repositioning as minor details.

Ravi used this flow after noticing that his strength training encouraged him to brace his shoulders. He did not need more leg strength. He needed a quieter upper body and a repeatable sitting setup. Once he stopped adding time and began correcting the first alignment break, his practice became more controlled.

The recommendation is therefore specific: use short, measured holds until alignment stays stable, then build duration in small steps. This approach protects the quality that defines the Vasu tier - great discipline and steady posture - without confusing physical effort with judging readiness.

Before moving to implementation, ask yourself: what breaks first in your posture, and what single adjustment can prevent it? Write that answer down. It will guide your first session.

MAKING THE STRENGTH-DISCIPLINE ALIGNMENT MAP HAPPEN

Use the following routine for each practice session. Keep the same posture, location, timer, and order for at least one week. Consistency makes changes easier to judge because you remove unnecessary variables.

1. **Choose the sitting posture.** Start with Sukhasana unless you can enter Padmasana or Siddhasana comfortably without forcing the knees or hips. Place a folded blanket under the hips if the pelvis tilts backward. The support should raise the hips slightly, not create instability. Choose a setup that lets you keep the spine straight without gripping the lower back.
2. **Set the alignment points.** Place the sitting bones evenly on the support. Stack the head over the spine, draw the chin slightly back without pressing it down, and let the shoulders drop away from the ears. Rest the hands in a stable position on the thighs or lap. Close the eyes for Stillness & Posture (Dhyana). These points give you clear checks instead of the vague instruction to “sit well.”
3. **Set a short timer.** Begin with five minutes if your posture breaks early. Begin with ten minutes only if you already maintain alignment for five minutes without repeated adjustment. Use the same timer each day. The timer prevents you from ending the hold when discomfort appears and prevents you from extending the hold simply to prove endurance.
4. **Run a quiet body check at the start.** Check the feet or legs, pelvis, spine, shoulders, head, and face in that order. Make one correction before starting the timer. Do not keep scanning and moving during the hold. The purpose of the check is to establish the posture, not to create restlessness.
5. **Hold without unnecessary movement.** Keep the eyes closed, the spine straight, and the hands still. Breathe normally. If a small sensation appears, observe it before reacting. If pain develops, stop safely and adjust the setup; do not treat sharp pain as a discipline test. Steady posture requires control, not injury.
6. **Record the first break.** After the timer ends, write the first change you noticed: rounded spine, lifted shoulder, moving knee, opened eyes, or another specific action. Record the minute when it happened. If no break occurred, write “stable” and keep the same duration for the next session. This record shows whether the practice improves.
7. **Correct one fault at a time.** If the spine rounds first, raise the hips or shorten the hold. If the shoulders lift first, reduce effort in the arms and hands. If the head

moves forward, reset the chin and imagine the crown of the head moving upward. Make only one main change per session so you can see what helped.

8. **Fix the daily discipline rule.** Practice at the same time on each scheduled day, using the same setup. A missed session does not require punishment or a double session. Return to the next scheduled practice. This rule builds dependable discipline, which judges can observe through a controlled and complete performance.
9. **Increase time only after stability.** When you complete the current hold with steady alignment and no major adjustment for several sessions, add two minutes. If the first break returns, go back to the previous duration and correct the setup. Longer practice should follow stable alignment, not replace it.
10. **Test the competition version.** Once your training hold feels reliable, perform one complete practice with the same posture, closed eyes, still hands, and no mid-hold reset. Review the recording or ask a qualified observer to check the spine, shoulders, head, and visible movement. Use the result to adjust your next practice, not to chase a longer timer.

Use this checklist today:

- Choose Sukhasana, Siddhasana, or Padmasana based on comfort and control.
- Set the hips, spine, shoulders, head, and hands before starting the timer.
- Complete one five- or ten-minute hold with closed eyes.
- Record the first alignment break and the exact minute.
- Schedule the next session at the same time.

The Vasu tier rewards the athlete who turns strength into control and control into repeatable discipline. Each accurate hold makes the next decision clearer, bringing the full performance closer to steady posture rather than temporary effort.

CHAPTER V

Vijeta 60-74 Foundation Potential



BUILD THE FOUNDATION FOR THE VIJETA TIER

Tomas Kwon, 19, completes every practice session, but his final posture still changes during judging. His back bends slightly, his shoulders tighten, and his breathing becomes uneven after several minutes. His effort is real, yet effort alone does not place him in the IYO Indian Yoga Vijeta Award range. The score must show visible foundational progress.

The IYO Indian Yoga Vijeta Award covers a Final Score of 60 - 74. It represents the Divine/Excellent tier: good effort with strong foundational potential. A participant in this range does not need perfect posture or complete stillness. The judging focus remains clear: can the participant establish a safe traditional posture, maintain it with growing steadiness, and show enough control for the foundation to become visible?

The Foundation-to-Excellence Bridge turns practice into evidence. The “foundation” means the basic physical and mental conditions required for a meditation performance. The “bridge” means the repeatable work that moves those conditions from inconsistent to observable. For meditation judging, the relevant categories include Stillness & Posture (Dhyana), Focused Gaze (Trataka), and Mantra Meditation (Japa/Chanting). Each category requires a different visible sign of control, so the participant must train the exact behavior that the judges can observe.

Start by checking three basics before increasing difficulty:

- Can you sit in Padmasana, Siddhasana, or Sukhasana without repeated adjustment?
- Can you keep the spine straight without lifting or tightening the shoulders?
- Can you return to the task after a small distraction without losing the posture or focus?

If the answer remains “no,” longer practice will not solve the main problem. Correct the foundation first. Ask yourself: “What will a judge see during the performance?” That question keeps training connected to the IYO Indian Yoga Vijeta standard.

APPLY THE FOUNDATIONS-TO-EXCELLENCE BRIDGE

Use the bridge in four stages. Keep the order because each stage supports the next.

Stage 1: Set one visible target. Choose one behavior for the session. For Stillness & Posture (Dhyana), the target might be a straight spine with relaxed shoulders. For Focused Gaze (Trataka), it might be steady attention toward the candle without unnecessary head movement. For Mantra Meditation (Japa/Chanting), it might be a consistent chant rhythm without losing the sequence.

Do not train all corrections at once. One target makes progress easier to see and record. It also prevents the participant from changing posture, breathing, gaze, and chanting rhythm in a confused way.

Stage 2: Establish a short controlled hold. Begin with a duration that allows correct form. A beginner who can hold a stable Sukhasana posture for four minutes should not immediately train for twenty minutes. Use four minutes as the starting hold, then check the posture. The purpose of the short hold is to teach the body what correct performance feels like before fatigue creates visible errors.

Practice the selected category four times each week. Use one session for posture setup, two sessions for the full category practice, and one session for a judged-style

rehearsal. This frequency gives enough repetition to build control while leaving recovery time for the hips, knees, back, and attention.

Stage 3: Record observable changes. After each session, write three brief notes: the planned hold, the actual stable hold, and the first visible correction. For example: “Planned: 4 minutes. Stable: 3 minutes 20 seconds. First correction: shoulders lifted.” This record matters because memory often makes practice seem better or worse than it was. A simple record shows whether the foundation is becoming reliable.

Use a front and side video when possible. Keep the camera still and place it at torso height. The video should show the spine, shoulders, hands, face, and the full candle area when practicing Trataka. Review the recording once, not repeatedly. Look only for the target behavior. A video review that searches for every flaw can create unnecessary changes and distract from the main foundation.

Stage 4: Test performance conditions. Once the participant meets the same target during three separate practices, add a judged-style rehearsal. Sit in the chosen posture, begin without extra adjustment, and maintain the target for the planned time. For Trataka, keep the candle at a comfortable eye level and avoid moving the head to chase the flame. For Japa/Chanting, keep the sound, pace, and sequence steady enough for the action to remain clear.

A Vijeta-level rehearsal should show good effort and strong foundational potential, not a forced attempt at perfection. If the participant loses posture once but corrects it calmly, the session still provides useful evidence. If the participant repeatedly shifts, opens the eyes, breaks the chant, or abandons the task, reduce the hold and rebuild control.

Use this check after every rehearsal: “Could a judge clearly see the skill I intended to show?” If the answer is uncertain, improve the setup or shorten the hold. Visible quality comes before longer duration.

APPLY THE BRIDGE: TOMAS KWON'S FOUR-WEEK PRACTICE

Tomas chooses Stillness & Posture (Dhyana) as his main category. He uses Sukhasana because Padmasana causes knee discomfort and Siddhasana makes him shift his hips. Sukhasana meets the required traditional meditative posture, and choosing a stable posture gives him a better chance to show foundational control.

His starting observation shows the problem clearly. During a five-minute sitting, Tomas adjusts his legs twice, lifts his shoulders near the third minute, and bends his spine forward near the end. His first target becomes simple: keep the spine straight while keeping the shoulders relaxed.

He follows this schedule:

Week	Main action	Practice target	Expected visible outcome
1	Four sessions	Hold correct posture for 3 minutes	Fewer leg adjustments and relaxed shoulders
2	Four sessions	Hold correct posture for 4 minutes	Straight spine remains visible through the final minute
3	Four sessions	Hold correct posture for 5 minutes	One or fewer minor corrections during practice
4	Four sessions	Complete two judged-style rehearsals	Stable opening, controlled posture, and calm correction

On the first day of Week 1, Tomas places a folded blanket under his hips. The support raises his pelvis slightly and reduces the urge to round his lower back. He sets a timer for three minutes. Before starting, he checks that his knees rest comfortably, his hands remain still, and his shoulders stay away from his ears. The support helps because it addresses the physical reason behind the poor posture rather than telling him simply to “sit straighter.”

At the end of each session, Tomas records the first correction. His first four entries show: shoulders lifted at 2 minutes 40 seconds, spine bent at 2 minutes 50 seconds,

left knee discomfort at 2 minutes 30 seconds, and no correction during one session. He does not increase the hold after the first successful session. He waits until he can repeat the result, because one good attempt does not yet show a stable foundation.

During Week 2, Tomas reaches four minutes with one shoulder correction. He keeps the same posture and support instead of changing equipment. This consistency allows him to identify actual progress. During Week 3, he completes five minutes twice with no leg adjustment and one small shoulder release. His video shows that he corrects the shoulder without opening his eyes or moving his hips. That controlled correction demonstrates better foundational potential than a rigid posture held through visible strain.

In Week 4, Tomas performs two judged-style rehearsals. He enters the posture once, closes his eyes, and begins without extra movement. In the first rehearsal, he shifts his right hand at 3 minutes 40 seconds. In the second, he keeps both hands still and maintains the spine through five minutes. His expected Vijeta-level evidence now includes:

- a suitable traditional posture;
- a stable opening position;
- a straight spine for the planned hold;
- relaxed shoulders;
- limited and controlled correction;
- consistent practice records showing improvement.

This result does not claim a higher award tier. The IYO Indian Yoga Vijeta Award remains the correct target when the performance shows good effort and strong foundational potential within a Final Score of 60 - 74. Tomas has made the foundation visible, which gives judges a clear basis for evaluation and gives him a practical next step.

The same bridge applies to the other meditation categories, but the evidence changes. In Trataka, Tomas would record how long he maintains a steady gaze and

whether he moves his head or repeatedly breaks attention. In Japa/Chanting, he would record whether the chant remains audible, steady, and complete. The process stays the same: choose one visible target, hold it for a controlled time, record the result, and test it under judging conditions.

AVOID ERRORS THAT HIDE FOUNDATIONAL PROGRESS

ERROR: INCREASING TIME BEFORE CORRECTING POSTURE

A participant may add minutes because a longer session feels like stronger preparation. However, extra time can reinforce a rounded spine, tense shoulders, or unstable legs. Judges see the repeated posture problem, not the effort spent enduring it.

Do this: Reduce the hold to the longest time you can complete with the target posture. Use support under the hips when it improves alignment, and record the first correction. Add one minute only after you repeat the current hold correctly in three sessions.

Not this: Continue a twenty-minute practice while the spine bends at minute five, then treat the longer time as progress.

ERROR: TRAINING PRIVATELY BUT NEVER REHEARSING VISIBLY

A participant may practice well alone and still lose control when someone watches. The change in setting can create rushed breathing, extra movement, or uncertainty about when to begin. Without a judged-style rehearsal, the participant cannot confirm that the foundation remains visible under observation.

Do this: Complete one rehearsal each week after the basic practice becomes stable. Use the same posture, starting position, timing method, and category conditions that the competition requires. Review one fixed video and check only the selected target.

Not this: Wait until competition day to discover that the opening posture, gaze, or chant sequence breaks under observation.

ERROR: CHASING PERFECTION INSTEAD OF SHOWING CONTROLLED RECOVERY

Some participants treat one small correction as failure. They then force the body to remain rigid, tighten the shoulders, or restart the entire session. This hides natural control and can create more visible strain.

Do this: Correct one small error calmly and continue. Record what caused it, then adjust the next practice. In Dhyana, relax the shoulders without moving the hips. In Trataka, return the gaze to the candle without chasing the flame. In Japa/Chanting, restore the rhythm at the next clear point.

Not this: Make repeated large movements, restart after every minor mistake, or hold tension to avoid any correction.

Quick reference: The IYO Indian Yoga Vijeta Award covers a Final Score of 60 - 74 and recognizes good effort with strong foundational potential. Use the Foundations-to-Excellence Bridge: choose one visible target, practice a controlled hold four times each week, record the first correction, and complete a judged-style rehearsal. Progress becomes credible when the posture, gaze, or chant remains clear across repeated sessions. Build that visible foundation first; stronger performance can grow from it.

CHAPTER VI

Category A Dhyana Stillness Judging

WHAT DHYANA STILLNESS REQUIRES

Can a judge clearly confirm stillness when a student's spine leans, eyes open, or hips shift? Category A, Stillness & Posture (Dhyana), answers that question through three visible requirements: a traditional meditative posture, a straight spine, and closed eyes. The judge evaluates what the body shows, not what the student intends.

This category suits students who can sit in Padmasana, Siddhasana, or Sukhasana and maintain the position without unnecessary movement. The purpose is simple: a stable body gives the judge a clear view of posture and stillness, while closed eyes show that the student follows the Dhyana format rather than relying on an outward visual target.

Anika Rao, 26, works at a desk and often sits with rounded shoulders. Her practice begins with Sukhasana because it lets her build control without forcing her hips or knees. She checks her posture before closing her eyes, then holds the position long enough for a judge to observe whether her body remains steady. The Dhyana Stillness Rubric turns that practice into a repeatable judging standard.

The result depends on visible control. A student does not earn a strong assessment by sitting in an advanced posture for a short moment and then shifting repeatedly.

The judge needs to see a stable meditative posture, a straight spine, and closed eyes held together.

Practical takeaway: Prepare for Category A by practicing the exact posture and visible conditions that the judge must assess.

YOUR DHYANA STILLNESS TOOLKIT

The tools for this category should support a clear, safe, and repeatable seated position. Each item helps the student maintain the three observable requirements without adding movement that distracts from the assessment.

- **Meditation cushion:** A firm cushion raises the hips slightly and can help the knees move toward the floor. Use a household cushion or purchase a basic meditation cushion; choose one that stays firm rather than collapsing during the hold.
- **Yoga mat:** A non-slip mat keeps the feet, knees, and sitting bones from sliding. Use a standard yoga mat already available at home or in the competition practice space.
- **Wall for posture checks:** A clear wall gives the student a reference for head, upper back, and pelvis alignment during practice. Use a free wall; do not lean on it during the final hold, because leaning hides whether the student can maintain the spine independently.
- **Timer:** A simple phone timer or stopwatch creates a consistent practice period. Use the same timing method each session so Anika can compare whether her posture remains stable from beginning to end.
- **Mirror for preparation:** A full-length mirror helps the student check the spine and shoulder position before closing the eyes. Place it to the side rather than directly in front, because a front-facing mirror can encourage visual focus during Dhyana.
- **Posture checklist:** Write three checks - traditional posture, straight spine, closed eyes - on paper or a small card. Keep it beside the practice area so the student completes the same preparation sequence each time.

A cushion cannot correct poor technique by itself. If the hips remain lower than the knees, the pelvis may tilt backward and the spine may round. Adjust the cushion

height until the student can sit upright without gripping the lower back. The goal is not comfort at any cost; the goal is a stable position that the student can hold without repeated correction.

Ask yourself before practice: can the student enter the posture, close the eyes, and remain still without touching the floor, adjusting clothing, or reopening the eyes? If not, change the setup before increasing the hold time.

Practical takeaway: Use simple equipment to remove avoidable movement, then judge the body without relying on the equipment.

THE DHYANA STILLNESS RUBRIC: ACTION PLAN

1. Select one traditional posture.

Choose Padmasana, Siddhasana, or Sukhasana before beginning the session. Anika uses Sukhasana because she can place both sitting bones evenly and keep her knees supported without strain.

Expected outcome: The student starts in a recognized meditative posture rather than an improvised seated position.

2. Place the sitting bones evenly.

Sit on the front half of the cushion or mat and check that the weight does not fall heavily to one side. Uneven weight often causes the spine to bend or the shoulders to twist.

Expected outcome: The pelvis provides a balanced base for the spine.

3. Set the legs without force.

Arrange the feet and knees in the chosen posture, then stop moving them. Do not press the knees toward the floor or pull the feet into a position that causes pain. Forced placement creates later shifting and weakens the visible stillness requirement.

Expected outcome: The lower body remains stable before the upper body aligns.

4. Lengthen the spine.

Lift the crown of the head upward while keeping the chin level. Do not push the chest forward or arch the lower back. A straight spine shows an even vertical line from the pelvis through the head.

Expected outcome: The student reaches upright alignment without stiffness or exaggerated effort.

5. Place the shoulders and hands.

Let the shoulders drop away from the ears and rest the hands on the thighs or in the lap. Choose the hand position before closing the eyes, because changing it during the hold counts as movement.

Expected outcome: The upper body stays quiet and the hands do not become a source of adjustment.

6. Check the head position.

Keep the face forward with the chin neither lifted nor pressed toward the chest. Anika uses a side-view check in the mirror before practice to catch the forward-head position common after desk work.

Expected outcome: The head supports the straight-spine requirement instead of pulling the body out of alignment.

7. Close the eyes fully.

Close both eyes before the timed hold begins. Do not squint, peek, or reopen the eyes to check the room. Closed eyes form a direct observable requirement in Category A, so the judge must be able to see that the student maintains them.

Expected outcome: The student enters the required inward-facing visual condition.

8. Start the hold only after the posture is ready.

Begin the timer when the legs, spine, shoulders, hands, and eyes have settled. Starting early makes the recorded hold look longer than the actual stable performance and creates confusion for the judge.

Expected outcome: The timing measures stillness rather than preparation.

9. Maintain the position without correction.

Keep the spine straight, eyes closed, and posture unchanged. Do not scratch, swallow repeatedly to reset the body, roll the shoulders, adjust the cushion, or shift the hips unless safety requires an immediate stop. Small movements may show that the student has not yet developed stable control.

Expected outcome: The judge sees one continuous, observable Dhyana hold.

10. Use a safe correction rule during practice.

If pain, numbness, or sharp strain appears, end the hold safely and record the problem. Change the posture or cushion setup before trying again. Do not treat pain as proof of discipline; pain usually produces movement and prevents a reliable assessment.

Expected outcome: The student practices consistency without creating avoidable injury.

11. Record the visible result.

After each hold, mark whether the student maintained all three requirements: traditional posture, straight spine, and closed eyes. Also note the first visible break, such as a rounded back, opened eyes, or hip shift.

Expected outcome: Practice produces a clear record instead of a vague feeling of success.

12. Repeat the same entry and exit.

Use the same order each time: posture, sitting bones, spine, shoulders, hands, head, eyes, timer. End by opening the eyes and moving slowly only after the timer stops.

Expected outcome: The student develops a controlled routine that reduces unnecessary movement before and after the judged hold.

Apply the rubric to Anika's desk-related posture carefully. If her shoulders round after several minutes, do not simply tell her to "sit taller." Have her reset the cushion height, lengthen the spine before closing the eyes, and repeat a shorter hold. If she keeps the eyes closed and legs still but the spine collapses, the performance does not meet all three requirements. The judge must assess the complete visible position, not isolated strengths.

A strong practice check asks three direct questions: Is the student in Padmasana, Siddhasana, or Sukhasana? Does the spine remain straight? Do the eyes remain closed? If any answer changes during the hold, record the exact change and correct that part of the setup or practice.

Practical takeaway: Build the hold from the floor upward, start timing only after alignment, and record the first break in stillness.

QUICK REFERENCE FOR CATEGORY A JUDGING

Category name: Category A, Stillness & Posture (Dhyana).

Required posture: Padmasana, Siddhasana, or Sukhasana. If the student uses another seated shape, do not treat it as one of the listed traditional postures.

Spine check: Look for a straight spine with the head balanced above the pelvis. If the student rounds forward, leans sideways, or arches excessively, mark a posture break.

Eye check: Both eyes must remain closed during the hold. If the student peeks or re-opens the eyes, mark a break in the closed-eye requirement.

Stillness check: Watch the hips, knees, shoulders, hands, head, and feet. If the student shifts, adjusts clothing, scratches, or changes hand position, record the movement and its timing.

Entry rule: Start the timer only after the student has selected the posture, aligned the spine, settled the shoulders and hands, and closed the eyes.

Safety rule: Stop the practice when sharp pain, strong numbness, or unsafe strain appears. Correct the setup before repeating the hold.

If the spine rounds: Raise the hips slightly, reduce the hold length, and rebuild upright control.

If the knees or feet shift: Choose a more manageable posture or add support without changing the required posture category.

If the eyes open: Restart the hold after the student understands that closed eyes remain part of the observable requirement.

If the student moves once: Record the movement rather than guessing its cause. A single visible correction shows that the hold was not completely still.

If all three requirements remain visible: Mark the hold as a complete Dhyana performance for review against the competition's scoring process.

The strongest preparation does not hide movement; it reduces the reasons movement occurs. A stable base, straight spine, and closed eyes give the judge a clean performance to observe and give the student a clear standard to repeat. That precision forms the foundation for fair Category A judging and supports the wider IYO Yoga Competition Awards structure.

CHAPTER VII

Category B Trataka Candle-Gaze Scoring



THE BIG PICTURE: WHAT CATEGORY B MEASURES

A candle flame stays small, but Category B Trataka demands large control: steady eyes, quiet attention, and minimal blinking while the student keeps the gaze on one point. A student may sit in a correct posture yet lose the category through wandering eyes, repeated blinking, or frequent head movement. Judges look for visible focus during the candle-gazing performance, not simply the ability to sit near a candle.

Category B belongs to the Observable IYO Meditation Competition and measures Focused Gaze (Trataka). The student performs candle-gazing with unwavering focus and lack of blinking. The goal does not mean forcing the eyes until pain or watering begins. It means training the gaze gradually so the eyes remain directed toward the flame while the body stays controlled.

Key insight: Category B rewards controlled attention that judges can clearly observe, not discomfort disguised as discipline. Your practice must therefore build duration, reduce unnecessary blinking, and protect clear technique.

The Unblinking Gaze Protocol gives you a repeatable way to train. It uses a fixed candle position, timed gaze periods, planned rest, and a simple record of blinking and

movement. Use the same setup each time so you can tell whether your focus actually improves.

Before practice, prepare a stable candle holder, a plain candle with a visible flame, a timer, and a notebook. Place the candle at eye level, about an arm's length away. Remove drafts that make the flame flicker. Keep the room dim enough for the flame to stand out, but keep enough light to move safely. Ask yourself one question before starting: can a judge see that my eyes, head, and attention remain directed toward the flame?

KEY PRINCIPLES FOR UNWAVERING CANDLE FOCUS

1. A FIXED FLAME CREATES A FAIR PRACTICE TARGET.

Place the candle in the same location for every session. Keep the flame at eye level and avoid placing it too close, too far away, or below the natural line of sight. A changing target makes it difficult to separate concentration problems from poor setup. When the flame stays stable, each session gives you useful information.

Ethan Brooks, age 24, works night shifts and practices after returning home. His first setup placed the candle on a low table. He tilted his head down and blinked often because his eyes became tired. Raising the candle to eye level reduced the head tilt and gave him a cleaner gaze. The improvement came from correcting the setup, not from forcing longer practice.

2. INCREASE TIME BEFORE YOU CHASE MINIMAL BLINKING.

Start with a gaze period short enough to protect clear focus. Use 20 seconds for the first session. Rest with the eyes closed for 40 seconds, then repeat for three rounds. Record the number of blinks during each round. This structure lets you train attention without turning every session into an endurance test.

After two sessions with steady head position and no strong eye discomfort, add 10 seconds to each gaze period. Continue until you reach 60 seconds. Longer time mat-

ters because the judging expectation requires sustained focus, but rushing toward a long hold often causes eye strain, watering, and uncontrolled blinking.

3. KEEP THE HEAD STILL WHILE THE EYES MEET THE FLAME.

Trataka requires more than pointing the face toward a candle. Keep the chin level, relax the jaw, and let the eyes meet the center of the flame. Do not follow the flame's movement with large eye motions when a small draft causes it to shift. Correct the room first by removing the draft.

A still head makes your focus easy to judge. It also prevents the body from helping the eyes search for the target. If your head turns, your gaze may appear steady for a moment even though your attention has moved. Practice with a small mark on the floor showing where the front legs of your seat should remain.

4. TREAT BLINKING AS INFORMATION, NOT A FAILURE.

Blinking protects the eyes, so do not punish yourself for every blink. During training, count natural blinks and separate them from repeated blinking caused by discomfort or loss of focus. If blinking increases sharply, end the round, rest, and check the candle distance, room air, sleep, and practice time.

The judging expectation calls for lack of blinking, but safe preparation comes first. A student who forces the eyes may produce watering and red eyes that make steady focus harder to show. Controlled practice gradually reduces unnecessary blinking while keeping the gaze clear. Your record should include gaze time, blink count, head movement, and eye comfort.

A PRACTICAL WALKTHROUGH: THE UNBLINKING GAZE PROTOCOL

Use Ethan's night-shift schedule as a practical model. He practices at 7:30 a.m., after drinking water and allowing himself 15 minutes to settle after work. He does not practice when he feels too tired to keep the head upright. His target is three clean rounds of 60 seconds, with minimal blinking and no head movement.

1. **Prepare the space.** Ethan places the candle in a stable holder on a table 90 centimeters away. He checks that the flame sits at eye level while he sits on a firm cushion. He closes the window and turns off a fan because moving air makes the flame flicker. He keeps his phone outside the practice area so the timer does not interrupt his gaze.
2. **Set the body.** He sits comfortably with the spine straight, shoulders relaxed, chin level, and hands resting on the thighs. He takes three quiet breaths without staring at the candle. This short settling period matters because beginning with a rushed body often creates extra head movement and early blinking.
3. **Run the first gaze round.** Ethan starts the timer for 20 seconds during the first two sessions. He looks at the brightest stable part of the flame and keeps the head still. He does not widen the eyes or hold the breath. When the timer ends, he closes the eyes for 40 seconds and allows them to rest.
4. **Record visible results.** He writes down three details after every round: blink count, head movement, and eye comfort on a simple three-level scale: clear, tired, or uncomfortable. On his first session, he records 6 blinks, slight head movement, and tired eyes in Round 1; 8 blinks, slight movement, and tired eyes in Round 2; and 10 blinks, clear focus lost, and uncomfortable eyes in Round 3.
5. **Adjust one factor only.** Ethan raises the candle by 5 centimeters and moves it 10 centimeters farther away. He keeps the 20-second timing unchanged. This single adjustment shows whether distance and eye level caused the problem. Changing the timer, candle, room, and posture together would hide the reason for improvement or decline.
6. **Build the holding time.** Once he completes three rounds with steady head position and clear eyes, Ethan adds 10 seconds. He uses 30-second rounds for two sessions, then 40-second rounds, and so on. He keeps the 40-second rest after each round until he reaches 60 seconds. If his blink count rises sharply or his eyes become uncomfortable, he returns to the last clean duration for the next session.
7. **Test a competition-style set.** After reaching 60 seconds, Ethan performs three 60-second rounds with 60 seconds of rest between rounds. He records the following comparison:

Practice point	Earlier session	Stable protocol result
Gaze duration	20 seconds	60 seconds
Blinks in Round 1	6	2

Practice point	Earlier session	Stable protocol result
Blinks in Round 2	8	3
Blinks in Round 3	10	3
Head movement	Slight	None
Eye comfort	Uncomfortable	Clear

8. **Review the result.** Ethan does not judge success from one strong round. He checks whether all three rounds show a steady head, direct gaze, and minimal blinking without discomfort. If only Round 1 looks clean, he needs more rest or a shorter training duration. If all three rounds remain controlled across three practice sessions, he can use the 60-second set as his current Category B preparation standard.

This protocol works because each step has one job. The setup stabilizes the target, the short rounds protect the eyes, the rest periods prevent rushed blinking, and the record shows whether the result repeats. Do not mistake a longer stare for better performance if the flame becomes blurred and the eyes begin watering.

TROUBLESHOOTING COMMON CATEGORY B PROBLEMS

Problem: The eyes water, burn, or become painful during the gaze.

Why it happens: The student may place the candle too close, practice in moving air, stare with excessive effort, or extend the gaze period too quickly. Watering also makes blinking more likely, which directly weakens the visible focus that Category B requires.

Fix: Stop the round when discomfort begins. Move the candle to about an arm's length, remove drafts, and lower the next gaze period by 10 seconds. Keep the eyes relaxed rather than stretched wide. Resume only when the eyes feel clear. If pain continues, end the session and seek appropriate medical advice before returning to practice. The expected result is a comfortable gaze that remains directed toward the flame, not a forced hold.

Problem: The head stays still, but the eyes jump around the flame.

Why it happens: A flickering flame, poor eye level, or unclear target can make the student search for a stable point. Fatigue after a night shift can also reduce attention. Ethan noticed this problem when he practiced immediately after work without a settling period.

Fix: Remove the air movement, place the flame at eye level, and choose one stable point in the flame. Add a 15-minute settling period before the first round. Use 20-second rounds until the eyes can remain on the chosen point. Count each visible eye shift in your notes, then compare the count across sessions. The expected result is a direct gaze with fewer searches and no large eye or head corrections.

Problem: Blinking decreases in the first round but increases sharply in later rounds.

Why it happens: The student may take too little rest, begin with a duration that exceeds current control, or practice while severely tired. Repeated rounds expose fatigue that the first round does not reveal.

Fix: Keep the first round at the current clean duration and add 60 seconds of eye rest between rounds. Use closed eyes during rest, but do not press or rub them. If the third round still produces repeated blinking, reduce all rounds by 10 seconds for the next session. Return to the longer duration only after three rounds remain controlled. Category B preparation should show stable focus across the set, not a single impressive opening round.

Category B Trataka becomes measurable when you make the flame, timing, posture, and record consistent. Use the Unblinking Gaze Protocol to train minimal blinking without forcing the eyes, then check whether your focus stays visible through every round. That repeatable control gives judges a clear performance to assess and gives you a reliable foundation for the wider IYO award structure.

CHAPTER VIII

Category C Japa Chanting Observation



ESTABLISHING STEADY JAPA FOR CATEGORY C

“Let the mantra move like a clear stream: even, attentive, and undisturbed.”

Category C: Mantra Meditation (Japa/Chanting) evaluates how a competitor repeats a mantra while maintaining clear rhythm and controlled attention. The judge does not assess loudness alone. The judge observes whether the sound, breath, pronunciation, pace, and attention work together without unnecessary breaks.

Japa means repeated mantra practice. **Chanting** means giving the mantra an audible sound so the repetition remains clear and observable. In Category C, the competitor must make the practice easy to follow. A strong performance does not rush to finish more repetitions. It keeps the same basic rhythm from the opening sound to the closing sound.

Controlled attention means returning the mind to the mantra and keeping the body from adding avoidable movement. A competitor may experience thoughts, sounds, or changes in breath. The important point is the response: the competitor notices the distraction and returns to the mantra without losing the rhythm. Ask yourself: if a judge listened with closed eyes, would the repetition still sound steady and intentional?

The **Japa Rhythm & Presence Method** combines four observable qualities: a clear starting rhythm, accurate mantra sound, steady breath-supported delivery, and quiet recovery after distraction. These qualities help the judge distinguish a controlled performance from a recital that becomes uneven. The practical target remains simple: one recognizable repetition follows the next, while the competitor stays present.

Before practice, choose one mantra and keep its wording unchanged. Sit in a stable position that allows free breathing. Keep the back upright without stiffening the shoulders. Place the hands where they will not require adjustment. If the competitor changes posture, scratches, looks around, or repeatedly resets the breath, the judge sees a break in presence. Stable preparation protects the quality of the chanting.

Begin with a short listening check. Speak the mantra once at a comfortable volume, then listen to its complete sound. Notice its beginning, middle, and ending. This prevents the common mistake of starting with only the first syllable and allowing the rest of the mantra to disappear. The judge needs to hear the full repetition, not a shortened version created by speed.

APPLYING THE JAPA RHYTHM & PRESENCE METHOD

Use the method in a fixed order. Each stage solves a specific problem, so do not increase speed before the sound and breath remain reliable.

1. **Set the base rhythm.** Repeat the mantra slowly enough to complete every word or syllable. Use a natural speaking pace rather than a dramatic performance voice. Keep a similar pause between repetitions. The pause should allow the breath to settle, but it should not become a long silence. A steady base rhythm gives the judge a clear pattern to observe.
2. **Join the breath to the sound.** Let the inhalation prepare the next repetition and let the exhalation carry the chant. Do not force the breath to last longer than it comfortably can. If the final syllable becomes weak or rushed, reduce the pace. Breath control matters because an unstable breath changes volume, pronunciation, and timing.

3. **Keep the mantra complete.** Pronounce each part consistently. Do not swallow the ending when the breath runs low. Do not add extra sounds between repetitions. If the mantra contains a longer phrase, divide it at a natural point and use the same division each time. Consistency allows the judge to hear control rather than guess at the structure.
4. **Place attention on the sound.** Listen to your own voice while you chant. Track the first sound, the middle sound, and the final sound. This simple listening task gives the mind a clear job. It also exposes drifting attention: when the competitor stops hearing the mantra, the voice often speeds up, weakens, or loses its rhythm.
5. **Control the body.** Keep the jaw relaxed, the face calm, and the head level. Avoid moving the lips excessively or using hand movements to mark every repetition unless the competition instructions specifically require them. Small natural breathing movements do not equal distraction. Repeated adjustments do. The goal is not frozen discomfort; the goal is unnecessary movement kept under control.
6. **Recover without restarting.** When a thought interrupts attention, return to the next complete repetition. Do not show frustration, stop suddenly, or begin the entire sequence again. A quiet recovery demonstrates stronger control than a perfect-looking start followed by a visible reset. The judge can observe whether the competitor maintains composure under a normal distraction.
7. **Close with the same care used at the start.** Finish the final mantra clearly. Complete the last sound, allow the breath to settle, and remain still for a moment. Do not cut off the ending because the competitor wants to finish quickly. A controlled ending confirms that the rhythm lasted through the full performance.

A useful practice check compares three short rounds. In the first round, focus only on complete pronunciation. In the second, focus on equal spacing between repetitions. In the third, focus on listening and recovery. This separation helps identify the exact weakness. If all three demands receive attention at once too early, the competitor may not know whether the problem came from breath, sound, or concentration.

Use a simple observation record after practice:

Area	What to check	Sign of control
Rhythm	Do repetitions keep similar timing?	No sudden rushing or long gaps
Sound	Can the judge hear the full mantra?	Clear beginning and ending

Area	What to check	Sign of control
Breath	Does the voice remain supported?	No strained final syllables
Attention	Does the competitor return after distraction?	Recovery without a visible restart
Body	Does the posture remain settled?	Few unnecessary movements

Do not treat speed as the main measure. Faster chanting can reduce clarity and make the breath uneven. Slower chanting can also fail if it contains uncertain pauses. Choose the fastest pace that still preserves complete sound, stable breath, and controlled attention. That pace may change slightly with the mantra, but the observable standard remains steady delivery.

At the end of each rehearsal, ask three direct questions: Did I hear every repetition? Did my breath support the final sound? Did I recover without changing the rhythm? The answers show what to correct before the next practice. The immediate takeaway is clear: build the sound first, then protect the rhythm, then test attention under distraction.

APPLYING CATEGORY C IN COMPETITION

Jayshri Vivek Jha, age 40, prepares for Category C by treating the mantra as both sound and attention practice. Her goal is not to display a forceful voice. Her goal is to make every repetition recognizable while keeping her posture settled and her attention connected to the chant.

Before the observation begins, Jayshri checks the practical details. She chooses her sitting position, places her hands, relaxes her jaw, and takes one comfortable breath. She does not rehearse several different speeds at the last moment. Changing pace immediately before judging can disturb the pattern she trained. She begins with a clear first repetition so the judge can identify the rhythm from the start.

During the opening repetitions, Jayshri uses a moderate volume. She gives each syllable enough space to be heard and avoids stretching the final sound for effect. Her

breath supports the phrase rather than pushing it. The space between repetitions remains short and similar. This creates an audible pattern that the judge can follow.

Suppose a sound outside the competition area interrupts her attention. Jayshri does not turn her head or stop the chant. She listens for the next part of the mantra, completes that repetition, and returns her attention to the sound. Her recovery remains quiet. Because she does not restart dramatically, the judge can see that the distraction did not control her performance.

If her breath begins to shorten, she does not force the final syllable. She slightly reduces the pace while keeping the mantra complete. This decision protects clarity. A rushed ending would create a noticeable break in rhythm and could make the repetition difficult to understand. A small pace adjustment, when it preserves the same structure, shows practical control.

At the close, Jayshri completes the final sound and remains settled rather than immediately opening her eyes or changing position. The outcome reflects the full performance: clear mantra delivery, stable rhythm, controlled attention, and a composed ending. This quality supports her result as the winner of the IYO Indian Yoga Vajra Award for the outstanding Observable IYO Meditation Competition.

For judging, the same observation can remain practical. Listen first for whether the mantra stays complete. Then check whether the rhythm remains recognizable. Next observe the breath and body for signs of strain or repeated adjustment. Finally, note how the competitor responds to distraction. This order prevents one loud or attractive feature from hiding a weak area. A strong voice does not replace controlled attention, and stillness does not replace clear chanting.

A competitor who wants to improve should record one practice session from the judge's position, not only from directly in front. Listen without watching the video first. Mark the points where the pace changes, the ending weakens, or the pause becomes

too long. Then watch the recording to identify the physical cause. This two-part check works because the category includes both audible delivery and visible control.

The practical result should be measurable through observation rather than a personal feeling. After practice, the competitor should identify fewer rhythm breaks, clearer final syllables, and faster recovery from ordinary distractions. When those changes appear together, the Japa Rhythm & Presence Method is working.

LESSONS FROM CONTROLLED JAPA PERFORMANCE

TAKEAWAY: A CLEAR MANTRA MATTERS MORE THAN A FAST MANTRA.

Speed can create the appearance of effort, but it often hides syllables and shortens the breath. Keep the pace at the highest level that preserves the complete sound. A judge should understand each repetition without needing to guess where one ends and the next begins.

TAKEAWAY: RECOVERY SHOWS CONTROLLED ATTENTION.

Distraction may occur during any observation. The competitor does not need to pretend that the mind never moves. The competitor needs to return without a visible struggle. Continue with the next complete repetition, restore the listening focus, and protect the rhythm. A calm recovery demonstrates usable concentration.

TAKEAWAY: THE FINAL SOUND CARRIES THE WHOLE PERFORMANCE TO THE FINISH.

Many competitors manage the opening and middle, then rush the last repetition. Keep the final breath supported, pronounce the ending, and remain settled after the chant stops. The ending confirms whether the method remained stable or depended only on early preparation.

Key actions: Choose one mantra, establish a comfortable base rhythm, connect breath to sound, pronounce every part clearly, listen to each repetition, reduce unnecessary movement, recover without restarting, and finish with a complete final sound.

Category C rewards the competitor who makes japa steady enough to hear and controlled enough to trust.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

INTERNATIONAL YOGA ORGANISATION

International Yoga Organisation (IYO) – Yoga Certification & Teacher Training Board- The International Yoga Organisation (IYO) is an independent yoga certification body and teacher-training board committed to legal compliance and globally recognised standards. Our journey began with securing the relevant national health and sports registrations in India. Since then, we have issued over 100,000 free certifications—from community "Yoga for All" programs to professional International Yoga Teacher

www.iyoyoga.com

IYO Yoga Competition Awards

by INTERNATIONAL YOGA ORGANISATION

© Copyright 2026

IYO® International Yoga Organisation

All rights reserved

www.iyoyoga.com

