

ABOUT THE MANUAL

This manual has one objective only: to enable you to improve your performance through mental skills training.

The mental skills discussed in this manual are based on over twenty years of research in the area of high performance. Top athletes across a variety of sports were asked to describe the “tricks” they used to stay focused and perform at the top of their abilities. What did they do to have a mental “edge” over their competitors? It was found that whether we’re talking about individual sports, team sports, winter sports, summer sports, land sports, or water sports, the same basic skills apply to top performance. These skills are:

- Relaxation
- Stress Management
- Positive thought control
- Focusing and concentration
- Visualization
- Goal-setting

This manual is designed to be self-directed. For each of the mental skills, there will be:

- a self-assessment to determine your need for the skill,
- guidelines on how to implement the skill, and
- a training log to record skill usage.

These exercises are designed to help you recognize what works well for you. People differ in what will facilitate their performance. You may wish to work on developing only a few of the skills presented in this manual. That’s O.K. Remember, you want to use what works best for you. You may also wonder whether the skills should be learned in a particular order or whether they need to be learned all at once. Again, this is a matter of personal choice. You want to individualize your mental training so that it suits your preferences. If you feel you need to focus on one skill at a time, then that’s what you should do. If you need variety in your mental training, then rotate the skills that you wish to work on.

In using this manual, keep in mind that as with any other training procedures, developing mental skills takes time and it requires practice, patience and perseverance. Don’t expect overnight miracles. Like physical training, mental training requires discipline. It is unlikely that you will see dramatic changes in your performance initially. But as you improve your mental skills, you should start to see the rewards of your dedication. So, stick to it and you will reap the benefits!

KNOW YOUR COMPETITION SELF

If you want to use mental skills to improve your performance, it is important to identify those areas in your performance where mental skills may help you. In order to do this, you need to develop an awareness of what is going on mentally when performance is up and compare that to what is happening when your performance is down. This will help you pinpoint areas that need refinement. Once you've identified what you need to work on, you can select the appropriate mental skill. For example, if you find that the difference between a good performance and a bad performance can be traced to anxiety, you will want to learn relaxation techniques.

The following questions are designed to help you reflect upon your personal competitive history, and to help you become aware of what works for you and what doesn't.

Think of your all-time **best** performance(s) and answer the following question keeping that/those event(s) in mind:

How did you feel just before the event?

No activation (mentally and physically flat)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Highly activated (mentally and physically charged)
Not worried or scared at all	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Extremely worried or scared

What were you saying to yourself or thinking shortly before the start of the event?

How were you focused during the event (what were you aware of or paying attention to while actively engaged in the performance)?

Now think of your **worst** competitive performance(s) and answer the following question keeping that/those event(s) in mind:

How did you feel just before the event?

No activation (mentally and physically flat)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Highly activated (mentally and physically charged)
Not worried or scared at all	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Extremely worried or scared

What were you saying to yourself or thinking shortly before the start of the event?

How were you focused during the event (what were you aware of or paying attention to while actively engaged in the performance)?

What were the major differences between your thinking (or feelings) prior to your best and worst performances?

How would you prefer to feel just before an important performance?

No activation (mentally and physically flat)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Highly activated (mentally and physically charged)
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What would you prefer to focus your attention on during an important performance?

Is there anything you would like to change about the way you approach competition or training?

At this point, you should have some idea about the sorts of things that may be interfering with your performance. The next few sections will present skills that you may use to work through these obstacles. Keep in mind that mental skills training is not just about “fixing” problems but is useful to help you improve on what you are already doing. So, if after doing this initial assessment, you feel like you’ve got it all under control, you might still want to read through the manual to see if there are any tips that you can pick up. Tips that may help you blitz the competition!

RELAXATION TRAINING

Being able to relax your body gives you control over muscles important to your performance. Relaxation facilitates blood circulation throughout the body, including the brain. So, being relaxed can help improve your concentration and focus. Relaxation is considered a basic skill that can help you develop other mental training techniques such as visualization and stress management.

Relaxation training occurs in three stages. In Stage 1, you will learn a technique called progressive relaxation, where you alternate between tensing and relaxing different muscle groups. After 3-4 practice sessions, you will be ready to move onto Stage 2, where you will practice relaxation through deep breathing. Finally, in Stage 3, you will work on relaxing when it counts the most, on site.

STEP 1 – HOW RELAXED ARE YOU?

A. Using the scale below, with 0 = extremely tense and 10 = extremely relaxed, rate yourself for the following situations: /

During competition	
After stretching exercises	
During good competition performance	
During poor competition performance	
When you had your "personal best"	

What do you notice from your answers? Do you show higher relaxation with good performances?

B. Muscle tension may interfere in a variety of ways. Answer the following questions to determine your need for relaxation training. /

π Yes π No Do you find yourself wound up the night before performances, finding it difficult to fall asleep and/or do you wake up tired?

π Yes π No Does your sport involve flexibility? smooth movements? coordinated motions?

π Yes	π No	Does staying relaxed muscularly help you to prevent cramping during your sport performance?
π Yes	π No	Are you relaxed and easy during practice, but tight during competition?
π Yes	π No	Do you sometimes feel that you have low energy even though you think you slept well (and this is not due to poor nutrition or health problems)?
π Yes	π No	Do you lack good control over your mind and muscles, and are unable to relax and be loose through a quick method of your own?

If you answered YES to any of these questions, you can benefit from relaxation training.

STEP TWO - LEARNING TO RELAX

Stage 1 – Progressive relaxation

The first step in learning relaxation is to become familiar with what tense muscles feel like. This will allow you to recognize when you are tense and need to relax. This stage will involve tensing up muscle groups, **focusing on how that feels**, then letting go, and noticing the contrasting feelings. This exercise should take 10-20 minutes. Use a steady slow pace without rushing.

Find a place where it's quiet and you won't be interrupted. Sit quietly in a comfortable position, feet apart and your hands on your lap. We will alternate between tensing and relaxing 3 muscle groups, (1) the feet and legs, (2) the abdominals, and (3) the arms and shoulders. Once you learn the exercise, it is best to do it with your eyes closed.

- To begin, raise your legs and stretch them straight out so that your toes are pointing toward you.
- Tense every muscle in your legs and feet and hold that position for a count of ten.
- Concentrate on that feeling of tension as you count to ten.
- **RELAX**
- Now tense your abdominals as tightly as you can.
- Feel that tension.
- Hold that position and count to ten.
- **RELAX**
- Now bend your arms, make a fist, and raise your shoulders.
- Flex your muscles as if you were Superman / SuperWoman.

- Hold that position and count to ten.
- **RELAX**
- Take a slow deep breath, drawing in air through your nose.
- Draw in as much air as you can and then exhale through the mouth making as loud a noise as you can.
- Repeat this deep breathing three times.
- Return to normal breathing and open your eyes. You have finished the exercise.

Record your level of relaxation before and after each progressive relaxation exercise. Use the scale from 0 to 10, where 0 = extremely tense and 10 = extremely relaxed. /

Session 1: _____	level before exercise		_____	level after exercise
Session 2: _____	level before exercise		_____	level after exercise
Session 3: _____	level before exercise		_____	level after exercise
Session 4: _____	level before exercise		_____	level after exercise

When your level after the relaxation exercise has consistently reached +7 or better, you are ready to move on to Stage 2. This usually takes 3-4 practice sessions.

Stage 2 – Relaxing through Deep Breathing

In this stage, we eliminate the muscle tensing and rely upon the deep breathing technique to achieve a state of relaxation.

Once again, pick a quiet place and get into a comfortable position. Scan your body for tense muscles. Focus on one tense body part at a time and use the following deep breathing exercise to loosen and relax that muscle or group of muscles. Again, it is best to do this exercise with your eyes closed.

- Take a slow deep breath, drawing in air through your nose.
- Draw in as much air as you can, while focusing on the tense body part.
- Exhale through your mouth and as you breathe out, imagine the tension flowing out of your body.
- Repeat this deep breathing exercise three times for each body part that you wish to relax.

When you are comfortable with this breathing exercise, try including some key words or cues as you breathe and relax. For example, you could repeat the words “breathe” or “relax” to yourself as you exhale. Or you could imagine that you are as calm as a lake. Experiment to find what works best for you. When you discover a cue that seems right, use that along with the breathing exercise.

Again, you'll want to record your level of relaxation before and after each deep breathing exercise. Use the scale from 0 to 10, where 0 = extremely tense and 10 = extremely relaxed. /

Session 1:	_____ level before exercise	_____ level after exercise
Session 2:	_____ level before exercise	_____ level after exercise
Session 3:	_____ level before exercise	_____ level after exercise
Session 4:	_____ level before exercise	_____ level after exercise

When your level after the relaxation exercise has consistently reached +7 or better, you are ready to move on to Stage 3. This usually takes 3-4 practice sessions.

Stage 3 – Relaxing on-site

Now that you've learned your relaxation skill, you want to practice using it in "the real world". In this stage, you want to practice achieving a relaxed state quickly (in less than a minute). Remember, your goal is to be able to use this skill to help you relax before, during and/or after a competition. So, try to practice relaxation in situations that in some ways resemble your competition environment. For example, you might want to practice your skill when you find yourself in a crowded and noisy environment. Also, try using your relaxation skills at different times during practice. This will give you a good indication of how much you need to refine your skill in order to use it successfully in competition. Remember to use your cue word or trigger when practicing your relaxation skills.

Keep a log of your attempts to use relaxation at different times. Record the event or situation and your level of relaxation before and after trying to use the skill. This will allow you to see under what conditions you are able to use relaxation effectively.

Use the scale from 0 to 10, where 0 = extremely tense and 10 = extremely relaxed. /

Event:	_____ level before exercise	_____ level after exercise_____
Event:	_____ level before exercise	_____ level after exercise_____
Event:	_____ level before exercise	_____ level after exercise_____
Event:	_____ level before exercise	_____ level after exercise_____

STRESS MANAGEMENT

High level sport requires a high level of energy and activation. You want to be psyched, you want to be pumped so that you can go out there and put in a top performance. Sometimes, however, if your level of activation is too high, your excitement can turn to stress. Stress can be detrimental to performance because it ruins your concentration, it increases the risk of injury, it causes negative thoughts, and it interferes with coordination, endurance and smooth performance. So, it is very important to be able to distinguish between healthy excitement and unhealthy stress. And it is equally important to have strategies to manage the stress (because it will happen) once it has been recognized.

STEP 1 – RECOGNIZING STRESS

Stress disguises itself in many ways, so it's important to know what your stress signs are. In the box below is a list of stress signals. Think back to your best performance and how you felt at that time. Now, go through the list and tick off the stress signals that you recall being present at that time. Now, think of your worst performance and go through the list again. /

A. What are Your Stress Signals?

	Best	Worst
Hand(s) clenched	π	π
Throat went dry	π	π
Shoulders hunched	π	π
Teeth clenched	π	π
Palms sweaty	π	π
Heart rate increased	π	π
Neck tensed	π	π
Stomach knotted	π	π
Negative thoughts	π	π
Self-doubts	π	π
Felt irritable	π	π
Couldn't concentrate	π	π
Mind wandered	π	π
Felt isolated from body	π	π
Doubts about training	π	π
Mind racing	π	π
Felt jumpy	π	π
Worried a lot	π	π
Felt drained	π	π
Other _____	π	π

Do you notice any difference in the amount of stress signals present in your best versus worst performance? Another way to do this exercise is to watch for occasions when you start to feel stressed (it doesn't have to be a sport situation) and try to notice your body signals. You can make a third column in the table above and record the signals present the next time you feel stressed.

B. When Are You Stressed?

Now that you recognize what stress feels like, it's important to become aware of when you are stressed.

At the next competition or practice match, record your level of stress during the following times. Use a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 = no stress and 10 = high tension (stress)./

_____	Night before competition/practice
_____	Morning of competition/practice
_____	On the way to the venue
_____	In the change/preparation room
_____	Going into the competition area
_____	During warm-ups
_____	Just before the event/practice
_____	At the start of the event/practice
_____	During the event/practice
_____	At the finish of the event/practice
_____	Other _____

STEP TWO – PREVENTING & CONTROLLING STRESS

1. During competition, **always** practice deep breathing (deep breath in and big breath out) at the times you discovered are your high stress points (from list above).
2. Get into the habit of checking your body for “stress signals” to make sure you're staying loose.
3. If you notice stress signs, immediately do a deep breathing exercise to lower your stress. You want to prevent stress from getting out of control.
4. If conditions do get out of control and you find yourself experiencing high stress:
 - a) Slow down physically, e.g., by walking and moving with slow movements (including your speech – avoid talking in excitable tones).

- b) Refocus your mind and attention internally and away from outside events and interactions with people. Instead of looking at the scoreboard, focus on the weave of your shoelaces, for example. This will remove your mind from external distractions and pressures.
- c) Now, try doing the deep breathing exercise. Deep breath in through the nose and long exhale through the mouth.
- d) Let your hands become loose, let your shoulders relax to a lower position. Focus your attention on letting your shoulders relax.
- e) Be **aware** of your body settling down, your breathing becoming more deep and relaxed, your muscles losing their tightness.
- f) You are now in control again – and ready!

STEP 3 – STRESS MANAGEMENT TRAINING LOG

It's a good idea to keep a record of your attempts to control your stress. This will allow you to see when relaxation is working for you and it will allow you to identify areas that still need work. Eventually, you will become proficient at managing your stress and will no longer need to record your relaxation skill usage. But it's a good idea to monitor your progress with relaxation at the very beginning so that you have direct feedback on your efforts. You may not feel 100% relaxed the first few times you try your deep-breathing on site but you may notice that your level of relaxation is better than before you started using relaxation techniques. This should encourage you to stick with it. Remember, it will come with time and with practice, so don't be discouraged if it doesn't happen right away.

In the box below, is a sample training log. You can modify it to more accurately suit the area you are working on. For example, you may just be using the relaxation exercise before the competition because this is the time you've discovered that you are most stressed. In this case, you may want to record somewhere in the training log that it applies to before the event only.

Again, for assessing stress levels, use the scale of 0 to 10, where 0 = no stress and 10 = high tension (stress). For the column referring to level of performance, use the following code: A = better than expected, B = as well as I had expected, and C = poorer than expected. /

Competition	Date of Comp.	Stress level before relaxation	Stress level after relaxation	Performed how well?
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

POSITIVE THOUGHT CONTROL

The one thing over which you have absolute control is your thinking. Control your thoughts or they will control you.

Every one has negative thoughts, doubts about readiness, ability to perform well, etc. What distinguishes the winner from the loser is what that person does with these negative thoughts. Clearly, having a bunch of negative thoughts can contribute significantly to your stress level. So, part of managing your stress, includes managing your negative thoughts.

Negative thoughts can quickly erode your enthusiasm, your motivation, your self-confidence, and your performance. So, it's important that you learn to keep matters in perspective and view things in a constructive way, that is, in a way that can help you. You will always come across situations and people who have the potential to upset you – but the only way they can upset you is if you let them.

STEP 1 – ARE NEGATIVE THOUGHTS INTERFERING WITH YOUR GAME?

Listed in the box below are different occasions that are likely to cause you to have negative thoughts. Place a tick next to those situations in which you have responded negatively and indicate whether or not these thoughts helped your performance./

	Negative thoughts	Helped	Did not Help
When tired	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When stressed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When I've made an error	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When my opponent scored	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When I feel that I'm not doing well	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When the ref makes a bad call	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When someone is critical of my performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When the crowd cheers for my opponent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can you think of other situations?			
How did negative thoughts help?			
How did they not help?			

STEP 2 – MANAGING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

FOCUS ON WHAT'S WITHIN YOUR IMMEDIATE CONTROL

Many negative thoughts stem from focusing energy on those things that are not within one's control. Are you wasting energy focusing on things that you have no control over? Are you thinking about the weather conditions? Are you getting stuck on decisions that others have made? Are you preoccupied with the performance of others? Do you have any direct control over these situations?

Clearly, you need to acknowledge what's going on around you. But you don't want to dwell on it. You just want to use the information to help you devise your strategy. Only consider the information that can be useful to you, discard the rest. Otherwise, you'll get distracted. That's what others do when they are trying to psyche you out. They're trying to switch your focus and energy to away from what is in your control (your performance) to something that is not within your control (their performance). Don't fall for it – stay focused on your task!

If something is happening that is bothering you, ask yourself what you can do about it immediately. If you can modify the situation right away, then do it. If you can't, let it go and tell yourself you will deal with it later. Remember, you have to get the job done, so concentrate on those things that will help you do this.

FOCUS ON YOUR STRENGTHS

Sometimes, during an event, you might find yourself doubting your abilities. You might feel overwhelmed by the situation. You might start feeling tired. Sometimes, you really are outmatched and other times it is a lack of self-confidence that is causing you to doubt yourself. Whatever the case, you have two options. You can decide there and then to pack it in mentally, e.g., "it's not going to happen, I don't even know why I'm bothering", and have a horrible performance **OR** you can acknowledge the situation and decide to focus on your strengths, e.g., "OK, my serve may not be as fast as my opponent, but I'm damn on my returns – I might be able to gain an advantage that way." Accept the challenge and do your best, you might surprise yourself. Remember, others are likely to have doubts of their own.

THINK POSITIVE THOUGHTS!

Be kind to yourself. When you make a mistake, tell yourself it's OK, you'll nail the next one. Tell yourself that you can handle it, you're in control, you are strong, you are in top physical form, you have trained mentally for this, etc. But be realistic! Know what your limitations are **before** you go into competition. There's no use telling yourself a bunch of fibs when you're out there, it's not going to work. Positive affirmations will only work if they're based on fact. You can't tell yourself you are in top condition if you haven't been able to train due to injury or other health reasons. So, be honest about what you can expect from yourself – but try to be optimistic at the same time.

STEP 3 – POSITIVE THOUGHT CONTROL TRAINING LOG

In the table below, list the negative thoughts that are holding you back and what you can do to deal with these thoughts.

Negative thought	Strategy
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

In the table below, list positive affirmations that can be helpful to you, and identify when during performance you would want to remember these positive thoughts.

Positive thoughts	Time during performance
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

In the table below, record your attempts to use positive thinking during, the impact the positive thought had on the way you felt (e.g., energized, in control, confident), and whether you think positive thinking helped your performance.

Situation	Positive thought	Impact	Helped performance?
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

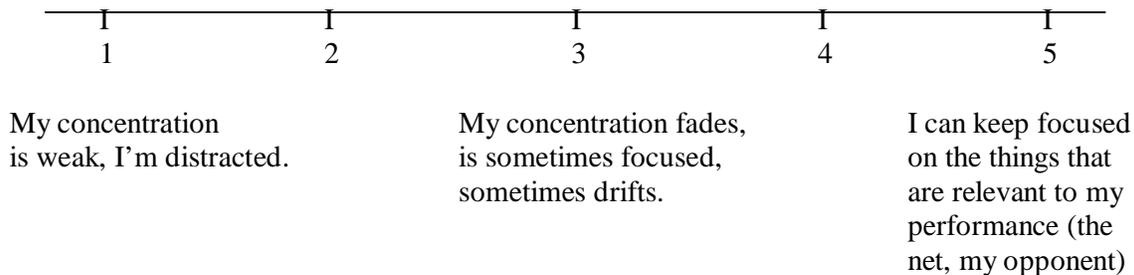
FOCUSING AND CONCENTRATION

Focus and concentration are the same thing and they refer to your ability to pay attention to something. High level sport places a demand on your concentration abilities. You have to be able to pay attention to many cues, process the necessary information and direct your energy to achieve a desired outcome. Maintaining a high level of concentration can be physically and psychologically draining. So, it's important to identify when in your game you need to concentrate fully and what sorts of things draw your attention away from the game. You want to be able to use your energy efficiently so that you can stay "up" for as long as is required.

STEP 1 – IDENTIFYING FOCUSING NEEDS

A. WHAT IS YOUR LEVEL OF CONCENTRATION?

Place an X on the scale below to rate your attention or concentration during competition./



Using the scale above, what do you think is the ideal level of concentration for your sport? _____

Is it necessary to maintain a high level of concentration throughout the entire game or can you think of game segments when you can give yourself a mental break? For example, between shots. Write them down in the space below. /

B. WHAT SORTS OF THINGS DISTRACT YOU?

When you enter the competitive situation, many things have the potential to distract you. Distractions come from a variety of sources: family members, relationships, coaches, competitors, scores, officials, the media, sponsors, your own expectations, changes in your surroundings, etc. All these things are an ongoing part of sport and life but they don't have to have an impact on your performance. They only become distractions when you draw your attention to them and away from your game. It is important to recognize those things that cause you to become distracted during your performances because these are the things you

want to eliminate from your focus. If they are not relevant to your game, then there is no need to pay them any attention during competition.

In the box below, list as many situations, people, thoughts or feelings that cause you to become distracted during competition. Next to the distraction, identify whether this is something that is within your control.

Distraction	Controllable?	
_____	π Yes	π No
_____	π Yes	π No
_____	π Yes	π No
_____	π Yes	π No
_____	π Yes	π No

STEP 2 - REFOCUSING TECHNIQUES

It will sometimes happen that your mind will begin to wander or that you feel overwhelmed by the distractions. Don't panic. You can regain control of the situation. The following is a list of pointers which should help you stay focused and regain control.

- Know that you can perform to capacity even in the face of distractions.
- Commit yourself to remaining positive.
- Focus on doing what will help you stay positive and in control. A strong positive focus protects you from distractions.
- Get yourself into a positive state of mind before the event – and stay focused on your job within the event. Make positive thinking a way of being.
- Look for advantages in every possible situation, even if the conditions are less than ideal. Look for reasons why you can still be confident, strong, and optimistic.
- Remind yourself that distractions do not have to bother you. You can refuse to get caught up in them.
- Expect conditions to be different at major competitions. Expect a faster pace, a busier place and more waiting around.
- Prepare yourself to deal with potential distractions. Expect the unexpected.

- Expect people to behave differently at major competitions, even those who would normally be calm and supportive. Don't let their anxiety stick to you.
- Know that you can perform well regardless of distractions. Focus on your mental strength.
- Practice getting back on track quickly. Use a cue word to remind you to refocus.
- Make a real effort to remain positive no matter what happens.
- If you get distracted, find your own space, regroup your thoughts, and focus on realistic personal goals.
- Remember that distractions suck your energy away from where it is really needed.
- Focus on what is within your control.
- Remind yourself that you can control your mood and your perspective.
- Remember what you came to do and do what is necessary to achieve your goals.

STEP 3 – REFOCUSING LOG

From the list of distractions you created earlier, list different strategies you can use to handle these distractions the next time they occur. What will you tell yourself to get back on track?

Distraction	Strategy/Cue word or phrase
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

In the table below, record your attempts to use distraction control during competition, the impact this had on the way you felt (e.g., more in control), and whether you think distraction control helped your performance.

Competition	Date of Comp.	Strategy or thought	Impact	Helped performance?
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

VISUALIZATION

Now that you've got the positive thoughts all worked out, it's time to put some visuals to it. Visualization or imagery, as some people refer to it, is all about using images to achieve a positive and energized state of mind. Visualization is based on the notion of what you see is what you get. If you program positive images into your mind, you are likely to have positive outcomes. Similarly, if you program negative images into your mind, you are likely to have negative outcomes. So, if you learn to use it right, visualization can be a very powerful tool for peak performance.

Now the first thing I want to point out is that visualization is not a new skill. You have been using your imagination since you were a child. What you want to do now is develop an ability to create specific images in your mind that will help you in your sport. You can create images of yourself executing your skills flawlessly. You can create images of yourself being in total control. You can create images of yourself not losing your cool in a stressful situation. Visualization is another way of preparing for an event. The more situations you can anticipate and see yourself dealing with, the better prepared you will be to handle the real thing!

Some people prefer to use the term mental rehearsal because they are using their minds to rehearse a specific outcome. Also, some people find it hard to "see" images in their mind and are better able to conjure up a feeling or state during mental rehearsal. The important thing is to feel like you are there, at the scene. Whether you can achieve that through visual images or a kinesthetic feeling is irrelevant, as long as you can feel that you are there.

STEP 1 – LEARNING TO CREATE IMAGES

If you have never used visualization before, it is best to begin with Exercise 1 and progress through the exercises as recommended. If you feel you have a pretty good handle on visualization techniques, you might want to go straight to Exercise 3, where you will learn to use visualization to achieve specific goals.

EXERCISE 1

This exercise is a basic technique to become familiar with calling up images. It should take 10 –15 minutes to complete. Try not to rush through it and remember it is best to do it with your eyes closed. So, read through the instructions first and then try it. You should repeat this exercise for at least three consecutive days before moving on to Exercise 2. Only proceed to Exercise 2 when you are able to develop your relaxation scene vividly and really feel like you are there.

- Pick a quiet place and time, and sit or lie down comfortably.
- Take three deep breaths to achieve a relaxed state.

- Now, switch on a scene of a familiar activity or situation that is **relaxing** for you when you are there. It might be a scene where you are listening to your favorite music or lying on the beach watching the waves roll in.
- Let this scene develop, allowing yourself to be there and using any senses (smell, sounds) that make the experience real for you. Don't try to force the scene, just let it come together slowly.
- As you experience this relaxing scene, allow yourself to feel fully relaxed as if you were really there.
- Allow yourself to **be in the scene** for at least thirty seconds (don't worry about keeping time, just try to guess it).
- Now switch off the scene and return to deep breathing.
- Try to focus on your breath flowing in and out of your body.
- Switch on the scene again. Retain it, and be there, in the scene, for another 30 seconds. Then turn it off again.
- Resume normal breathing and open your eyes.

Be sure to rate each session in terms of the level of relaxation achieved and how realistic the image or scene felt. Use the scales below./

<p>(a) How relaxed were you at the end of the session?</p> <div style="text-align: center;"> </div>
<p>(b) How realistic was your relaxation scene?</p> <div style="text-align: center;"> </div>

Repeat Exercise 1 until you are able to achieve a relaxed state and your images are vivid.

EXERCISE 2

In this exercise, you will learn to replace the relaxation scene with a performance scene in which you were successful. This exercise might take a little bit longer since you want to be able to experience as much of your competition scene as possible. Repeat this exercise at least once a day for three consecutive days before moving on to Exercise 3.

- Pick a quiet place and time, and sit or lie down comfortably.

- Take three deep breaths to achieve a relaxed state.
- Switch on a your relaxation scene. Let it become realistic and be in it for about 30 seconds.
- Switch off the relaxation scene.
- Repeat the deep breathing exercise.
- Now, switch on a success competition scene – a specific event in which you functioned at a peak performance level. Let the scene become real and vivid. Let yourself be there again. Be in it long enough to experience the major parts of the event. Try to re-experience the feeling of success.
- Switch off the success scene and return to deep breathing.
- Focus on your breath flowing in and out of your body.
- Switch on the success scene again. Re-experience the moment. Retain this scene and be there, in the scene, for another 30 seconds. Then turn it off again.
- Resume normal breathing and open your eyes.

Remember to rate each session in terms of the level of relaxation achieved and how realistic the success competition scene felt. Use the scales below./

<p>(a) How relaxed were you at the end of the session?</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> </p>
<p>(b) How realistic was your success competition scene?</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> </p>

Repeat Exercise 2 until you are able to achieve a relaxed state and your success competition scene is vivid.

EXERCISE 3

You are now at the point where you can apply visualization to specific goals. If your goal is to mentally rehearse an upcoming competition over and over until it becomes so familiar that

you feel you have a mental edge, you first need to decide what aspects of your performance you want to cover in your mental rehearsal. For example, you might want to:

- Practice what you will do under different conditions (bad weather, you've just made an error, something unexpected happens, etc.).
- Practice the entire event so every move becomes familiar.
- Practice feelings of success that will be useful when you need that extra motivation when tired – picture yourself pushing to win, being ahead, and winning.
- Practice the strategy you need to win. For example, to overcome your opponent's strengths or to adjust to anything your opponent might try in the match or competition.

Whatever goal you wish to rehearse, you would proceed in the following manner:

- Pick a quiet place and time, and sit or lie down comfortably.
- Use deep breathing to achieve a relaxed state.
- Switch on a your competition scene and rehearse the activities that will best prepare you for what you wish to achieve. For example, you may want to visualize yourself performing specific movements.
- Hold that scene until it becomes realistic.
- Notice the way in which your body moves and how it feels as you correctly perform the movements.
- Switch off the scene and repeat the deep breathing exercise.
- Repeat the entire process again and end the session with deep breathing.

STEP 2 – VISUALIZATION TRAINING LOG

As with the previous exercise, you want to keep a record of your usage of this skill. This will help you see when visualization is working for you and where there may be room for improvement.

Mental rehearsal scene used for performance preparation	Effect on performance	How can mental rehearsal scene be revised to help next performance?
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

GOAL-SETTING

Goal setting is a popular motivational technique for enhancing performance and productivity. You might like to think of goal setting as providing you with a map or set of directions to help focus and direct your efforts. You may wish to set goals in your sport, work and social life.

Effective goal setting is a self-motivating process that you can control to help you prepare and perform at an optimal level. However, like any skill you must practice to become proficient and follow certain guidelines to develop and improve your ability.

STEP 1 – LEARNING EFFECTIVE GOAL-SETTING

Listed below are a few helpful guidelines to help you set goals that will work for you.

- **Identify goals that are important to you** - Don't select a goal based on what someone else thinks or wants. What do you want to accomplish?
- **Set challenging, but realistic goals for yourself.** On the one hand you shouldn't set goals that are so difficult, or unrealistic you will fail to take them seriously; on the other hand, they shouldn't be so easy that they fail to present you with a challenge.
- **Set specific, measurable goals.** You need to be clear about what your goals are and have some way of measuring goal achievement. Your coach and teammates may be able to assist you with the measurement of a particular goal, through observation. Alternately, you may set yourself the task of performing a particular skill a certain number of times. Once you have achieved that particular goal you can then move on to the next.
- **Set time-based goals.** While you should focus on your short term goals (e.g., daily), you should set medium and long term goals (e.g., for the coming months, years or life-long) so you know where you want to go. Short term goals help you focus on 'here and now' and provide the stepping stones to your long term goals. Goal setting demands personal commitment. Setting target dates ensures this commitment. However, you must also be flexible and re-evaluate your goals if your target dates for achievement are not met. Don't be too hard on yourself. There are many factors such as illness and injury that may affect your ability to reach your goals.
- **Base your goals on things within your control.** This means you should try and set performance goals, rather than outcome goals. They may be sport-specific and related to your technique, e.g., I need to extend my arm fully when I serve. Alternately, they could involve your attitude or thought processes when you compete, e.g., I need to focus very positively on everything I do. Be creative and believe in yourself!
- **Set goals for practice and competition.** Your attitude, effort and commitment in practice is often reflected when you compete. Setting goals in practice will help you put

in 100% effort, because you will have personal targets to aim for. So, develop productive, helpful habits by setting goals for both practice and competition.

- **Set individual and team goals.** You should focus on your individual goals since failure to achieve these can have a negative impact on both you and your team. However, if you are part of a team, you should be aware of the goals of your team. Often achieving your individual goals will provide the stepping stone towards the team achieving its goals.
- **State all your goals in a positive way.** Don't say don't and never say never!
- **Write down your goals** - "Ink it, don't think it!"
- **Constantly evaluate your progress toward your goals.** If you find your goals are too easy, you will need to increase their level of difficulty. If you find them too hard, you should simplify them. One of the best forms of motivation to improve your performance comes from feedback about your journey down the road to your goals.

COMMON PROBLEMS WITH GOAL SETTING:

- Setting goals that are too general.
- Setting too many goals too soon.
- Setting unrealistic goals.
- Failing to evaluate and adjust goals.
- Setting uncontrollable (outcome-based) versus controllable goals (performance-based).

In summary, remember to set goals that are **SMARTER**:

<p>Specific</p> <p>Measurable</p> <p>Aceptable</p> <p>Realistic</p> <p>Time based</p> <p>Evaluated</p> <p>Recorded</p>

STEP 2 – USING GOAL SHEETS

It's always a good idea to write your goals down. This helps you focus your energies and stay on task. The following is a sample goal sheet. Modify the sheet according to your needs. Remember, it's best to tackle your goals one at a time.

Date: _____

Outcome Goal # 1: _____
(remember to be specific + make the goal measurable)

1. How important is this goal to me?
2. How committed am I to achieving this goal?
3. When do I want to achieve this goal?
4. Is this realistic given my other commitments?
5. What are the steps I have to achieve this goal? (Identify time lines for each step)
6. What will I do if I can't achieve some of these steps? What is my back-up plan?
7. Do I believe I can successfully achieve this goal?
8. Can I still feel good about myself if I am unable to achieve this goal?

STEP 3 – GOAL-SETTING TRAINING LOG

You want to monitor your progress in using goal-setting. Make sure you do a post-event evaluation to see if you were able to implement your goals successfully.

In the box below, record the goal and whether or not you were successful in implementing it. If you encountered some difficulties, try to determine what the problem was and devise a plan for rectifying the problem in the future. You might want to consider the common goal-setting problems mentioned earlier. Were your goals too general? Were you working on too many goals at once? Were your goals unrealistic? Did you forget to adjust your goals throughout your performance? Were your goals based on uncontrollable events?

Goal	Successful?	Problem	Solution
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

Now that you've learned all these terrific mental skills, you need to pull them all together and make them work for you when it really counts. The best way to do that is to develop a mental plan for your activity or competition. Just as you would not go into a competitive or important situation without a game plan, you shouldn't go into competition or important situation without a mental plan. Mental plans help you anticipate what can happen and prepare you to respond in a manner that will help your performance. The better prepared you are, the more rapidly you can respond to situations. This is what physical training is based on – the same principle applies to mental training.

Here are a couple of planning sheets to get you started. Keep in mind that plans are meant to help you not control you. If for some reason, things don't go according to plan, just forget the plan and try to respond as well as you can to the situation at hand. Be flexible and adaptable.

PRE-EVENT PLAN

Decide what kinds of activities, thoughts or images you will include in each category. Draw upon what has worked for your best performance and upon what you think will be most helpful or most appropriate in upcoming competitions.

General physical warm-up	General psychological warm-up	Pre-event physical preparation	Pre-event psychol. preparation

Based on what you listed above, prepare an on-site pre-event plan listing the activities, thoughts and strategies in the order that you would like them to occur at competition. For example, first do stretching, then deep breathing, then imagery, etc.

General warm-up – physical and mental	“Start” preparation – physical and mental

EVENT FOCUS PLAN

Divide the activity into segments and decide what you want to feel and focus on during those segments. Draw upon what has worked for your best performances and upon what you think will work best in upcoming competitions.

Segment	Desired focus	Desired feeling

List the critical situations you are likely to face during the activity. Then indicate how you would prefer to respond to each of these situations. Again, draw on what has worked for you in the past or what you think might work best in the situation. Think of a cue word that will allow you to focus properly and bring on the desired response

Critical situation	Preferred response	Cue word or phrase

REFOCUSING PLAN

As was mentioned earlier, distractions are a reality in life. Many things can throw your focus off when you are involved in your activity. Listed below is an example of the types of things that are likely to happen during a competition that might be a distraction for competitors. If applicable, complete the worksheet or create your own. For each situation, write down how you could deal with the situation. Give yourself a number of options to choose from in case your first strategy doesn't achieve the desired outcome. Feel free to add on any other events that can be a distraction for you.

Distraction	Preferred strategy	Alternate strategies
Pre-event hassle		
Non-ideal conditions		
Delay in start		
Loss of ideal focus in event		
Mistake in event		
Poor performance		

POST-EVENT EVALUATION

Finally, it's a good idea to reflect on your performances. You want to be able to relish the things you did well and learn from any mistakes you may have made. Do this for all performances good and bad – this will give you a more balanced picture of your achievements. Try to complete this form as quickly as possible following a competition so that events and feelings are still fresh in your mind.

Event _____ Date _____
 Location _____ Result _____

1. How do you feel about your performance in this event?

2. Did you have a performance outcome goal (or result goal) for this event? If so, what was it?

3. To what extent did you achieve this outcome goal?

Did not achieve goal at all 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Achieved goal completely

4. What was your on-site focus goal for this event?

5. To what extent did you achieve this on-site focus goal?

Did not achieve goal at all 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Achieved goal completely

6. Circle your feelings going into this event:

No determination 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely determined to achieve goal

No physical activation (flat) 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Highly physically charged

No worries or fears 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely worried, scared, or afraid

Completely out of control 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 In complete control

....feelings going into this event:

Mentally calm	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Mentally uptight
No task focus	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Complete task focus
No commitment to fully extend myself	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Complete commitment to fully extend myself
No confidence in my physical preparation	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Complete confidence in my physical preparation
No confidence in my mental preparation	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Complete confidence in my mental preparation
No confidence in my abilities to achieve goal	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Complete confidence in my abilities to achieve goal
Not willing to take necessary risks	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Willing to take necessary risks

7. Did you follow a previously practiced pre-event plan?

Yes _____ No _____ Partly _____

If partly, which parts were followed and which parts were not?

8. What were you saying to yourself (or thinking) immediately before the start of the event?

9. Were you able to follow your pre-planned event focus plan?

Yes _____ No _____ Partly _____

If partly, which parts were followed and which parts were not?

10. Rate your overall feeling of effectiveness during the different segments of your pre-event preparation and performance. Use a scale from 0 to 10 where 10 is “going great” (right on target) and 0 is the “absolute pits” (right off the target), and 5 is somewhere in between.

_____ 30-60 min. before event (warm-up)
 _____ Warm-up before start
 _____ Moments before start
 _____ Start
 _____ Event
 _____ Finish

11. Were you able to fully extend yourself to the limit during the event?

Did not extend myself at all 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely extended myself to the limit

12. What were you saying to yourself or focused on to extend to the limits?

13. During the event did your focus of attention stay on your performance or drift to other things?

Drifting most of the time 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely focused, absorbed in performance

14. When you were going your best, where was your focus?

15. If you were going less well in parts, where was your focus?

16. Did you have to make a recovery to get back “on track” during the event? If so, were you able to recover and focus again quickly? If you used a “cue word” to refocus? Did it work?

17. Did anything unforeseen or unexpected happen either before or during the event that may have had an impact on your performance?

18. Should anything be changed or adapted for the next competition?

OTHER MENTAL SKILLS RESOURCES

Much of the information used in this course has been borrowed from a variety of sport psychology resources. We wish to acknowledge those authors and invite you to read these excellent texts to further your understanding of sport psychology.

Psyching for Sport: Mental Training for Athletes. Terry Orlick. (1986). Human Kinetics Publishers.

In Pursuit of Excellence: How to Win in Sport and in Life Through Mental Training. Terry Orlick (1980). Human Kinetics Publishers.

Seven Steps to Peak Performance: The Mental Training Manual for Athletes. Richard Suinn (1986). Hans Huber Publishers.

Sport Psychology in Action. Richard J. Butler. (1996; 1997). Butterworth-Heinemann Publishers.