

Imagery



Imagery is defined as using all of your senses to create or recreate an experience in your mind. Think of imagery as “practicing in your head,” or as “going to the movies of your mind.” When used systematically in conjunction with physical practice and good coaching, it can have amazing results.

In a survey conducted with collegiate student-athletes, the majority reported that they regularly daydreamed about their sport performance. Visualization is a natural part of their daily experience. Daydreaming and visualization can be further refined into formalized imagery training which can set the stage for athletes to consistently perform close to their full potential.

Olympian, Leonard Myles-Mills, the 1998 Division-I National Champion in the 100M dash, reported that much of his success on the track is due to his regular use imagery. He stated,

I visualize the race being run and I have won... I see the other athletes trailing behind me and that is exactly what happened when the race is actually run... the similarity between my imagery and the race is scary sometimes... it really increases my confidence.

Consider the following excerpt taken from a highly successful Olympic diver:

I did my dives in my head all of the time. At night, before going to sleep, I always did my dives. Ten dives. I started with a front dive, the first one I had to do at the Olympics, and I did everything as if I was actually there. I saw myself on the board with the same bathing suit. Everything was the same... if the dive was wrong, I went back and started all over again. It takes a good hour to do perfect imagery of all my dives, but for me it was better than a workout. Sometimes I would take the weekend off and do imagery five times a day. (*Psyched: Inner views of Winning*. Orlick & Partington, 1988, p. 112)

GUIDELINES

- **Practice imagery on a regular basis** – 12-minutes each day. This is over an hour a week. Like any skill, regular practice will eventually make it easy and natural.
- **Use all of your senses** – See yourself performing, hear the sounds and smell the scents present in your performance environment, feel the movements and emotions related to competition. The more multisensory and vividness you can make it the better.
- **Develop imagery control** - Start simple and increase complexity as your imagery skills improve.
- **Use both internal and external perspectives** - Internal imagery is from the first person perspective of the performer. External imagery is from the perspective of the spectators.
- **Facilitate imagery through relaxation** - Simple relaxation exercises can help set the stage for effective imagery. A relaxed body and clear mind will enhance the experience.
- **Imagine different aspects of your performance** - Imagine your peak performances, positive responses to adversity, times when you exhibit mental toughness, your pre-performance routine, being a good leader, and winning. It is your movie so be creative. Variety will keep it fresh.
- **Use imagery in practice and competition situations** - Once your imagery skills improve, you can use “snap-shot” images. These are brief images that are from 3-5 seconds in length that can be used in the practice and performance environment.
- **Use videotapes to enhance imagery skills** – Watch video of yourself or someone you want to emulate performing the skill. Then, turn off the video and mentally imagine yourself executing the same skills to perfection. See it in your mind and feel it in your body.
- **Use imagery to “re-write the ending” to recent poor performances and “re-live” your most recent successes** – Post-performance imagery is a great time to make mental adjustments and reinforce what went well.

Reference:

Williams, J. M. (1993). *Applied Sport Psychology: Personal Growth to Peak Performance*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.

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