

Improve Your Sport Performance with Visualization Techniques

Many athletes routinely use visualization techniques as part of training. There are stories and examples of how such techniques provide not only a competitive edge, but a renewed mental awareness and sense of well-being.

Visualization has also been called guided imagery, mental rehearsal, mediation, and a variety of other things -- no matter the term, the basic techniques and concepts are the same. Generally speaking, visualization is the process of creating a mental image or intention of what you want to happen or feel.

An athlete can use this technique to 'intend' an outcome of a race or training session, or simply to rest in a relaxed feeling of calm and well-being. By imagining a scene, complete with images of a previous best performance or a future desired outcome, the athlete is instructed to simply 'step into' that feeling. While imagining these scenarios, the athlete should try to imagine the detail and the way it feels to perform in the desired way.

These scenarios can include any of the senses. They can be visual (images and pictures), kinaesthetic (how the body feels), or auditory (the roar of the crowd). Using the mind, an athlete can call up these images over and over, enhancing the skill through repetition or rehearsal, similar to physical practice.

With mental rehearsal, minds and bodies become trained to actually perform the skill imagined.

Research is finding that both physical and psychological reactions in certain situations can be improved with visualization. Such repeated imagery can build both experience and confidence in an athlete's ability to perform certain skills under pressure, or in a variety of possible situations. The most effective visualization techniques result in a very vivid sport experience in which the athlete has complete control over a successful performance and a belief in this new 'self.'

Guided imagery, visualization, mental rehearsal or other such techniques can maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of your training. In a world where sports performance and success is measured in seconds, most athletes will use every possible training technique at hand. Visualization might be one way to gain that very slim margin.

How to Use Imagery - Step-by-Step Guide

The first time you try imagery it's helpful to have a skilled facilitator or practitioner walk you through the process. This is referred to as guided imagery. You can also use CDs or tapes, or record your own script to use as your guide. After you are comfortable with the technique, it's easy to practice these techniques on your own.

1. Sit in a comfortable place where you won't be interrupted.
2. Relax your body and take several long, slow breaths.
3. Close your eyes and create a vivid and convincing image. This image can be one you've previously experienced, or one you simply desire.
4. If you become distracted or find you are thinking about something else, simply

acknowledge it and let it go.

5. Focus on your breathing if you lose the image.
6. Maintain a positive attitude.
7. Imagine the sights, sounds, tastes, feelings, and even smells of the experience.
8. Take note of as much detail of the scene as possible. What are you wearing, who is there, what are you hearing, how do you feel?
9. If your imagery session is not going the way you want it to, simply open your eyes and start over with your breathing.
10. Always end an imagery session with a positive image.

Imagery and Sports

Athletes have many opportunities to try the various imagery or self-hypnosis techniques. From injury recovery to improved sports performance, these techniques are showing promise as a standard part of an athlete's training program.