



Building A Mental Toolbox

2: IMAGERY

Our year-round, multi-level aquatic programs emphasize
Personal Achievement, Team Unity & Competitive Excellence

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Imagery Exercise 1: Imagery Sensory Checklist

This is an exercise designed to help you begin to integrate your senses into your imagery. As you create each of the following images in your mind, rate your ability to do so based on this scale:

0 = No Image 1 = Some Image 2 = Clear Image

- ___ 1. The room you are currently in
- ___ 2. The suit you will wear in practice this afternoon
- ___ 3. Tasting a juicy lemon
- ___ 4. The sound of your alarm clock
- ___ 5. The pool you last competed in
- ___ 6. The feel at the end of a long kick set
- ___ 7. Performing dryland exercises
- ___ 8. Jumping into a cold pool at 5:30 in the morning
- ___ 9. The roaring approval of a crowd
- ___ 10. Feeling dry mouthed and tired after a workout
- ___ 11. The discomfort in your muscles during the last 50m of a race
- ___ 12. The anticipation and anxiety waiting in the ready room.

You may notice as you review your scores, that certain senses produce clearer images than others. This may provide direction for extra attention and practice--create your own images to test those senses you have the most difficulty with.

Imagery Exercise 2: Imaging Sport Skills

As you refine your ability to image with all of your senses, you want to begin using imagery to see yourself performing a skill in your sport. Work through the progression at your own pace. For example, if you can't image yourself performing sport skills right now, keep working on your practice situation and movement imagery until they are very vivid and controllable before trying the sport skill section again.

Following these steps may make it easier to do this:

1. Imagine that you are in the pool in which you generally practice. Use your imaging skills to look around your practice environment:

- feel the deck under your feet
- see what is generally around you: walls, scenery, equipment.
- imagine yourself in your suit, cap and goggles.

What are some other things you can incorporate into this image from where you practice?

- a.
- b.

2. Incorporate some movement. "Feel" yourself:

- walking around the deck
- doing some warm-up stretches.

Other movements common in your sport?

- a.
- b.

3. Image yourself performing a skill in your sport. Start with a specific stroke drill. Imagine yourself swimming the drill correctly. Progress to imaging swimming each of the strokes in practice.

Some skills in your sport you need to focus on? (I.e., starts, turns, rotation)

- a.
- b.

What was easy and what was hard to image? Did you have a hard time using one sense or another? Could you see some things and not others? You'll want to practice more the images that were harder to create.

Imagery Exercise 3: Competitive Situation Imagery

After mastering the exercises on the previous page, you may find that you experience more “real life” emotion if you imagine yourself in a competitive situation.

1. Approach a place, through imagery, where you have recently competed or have vivid memories of a competition. Allow yourself to experience the sensations that may accompany a competitive experience for you--that is, if you typically get nervous or psyched up before competitions, allow yourself to feel those emotions.

List some typical emotions or feelings that you experience before competing:

a.

b.

2. Imagine yourself at varying times before competition, making it as real and vivid as possible. If you typically have a pre-competition routine, imagine yourself following the steps of that routine up to the point where you are competing. Remember to use all your senses.

Write down in the space below what you typically do before competition:

3. Competition time: imagine yourself in an actual competition situation, doing what you would typically do, with your typical emotional and physical reactions.

At the beginning and throughout competition, **I feel:**

At the beginning and throughout competition, **I do:**

At the beginning and throughout competition, **I think:**

At the beginning and throughout competition, **I see:**

Imagery Exercise 4: Controlling Outcome

The key to imagery as a performance enhancement tool is not just to make vivid images, but ones that **you** can control--making happen what you want to have happen.

Go back to Exercise #3, but decide beforehand how you **want** to be feeling and saying to yourself before you approach that competition site. Repeat each step, but with the addition of changes that reflect those changed thoughts and feelings.

1. Approach a place, through imagery, where you have recently competed or have vivid memories of a competition.

How I **want** to be feeling:

What I **want** to be saying to myself:

2. Imagine yourself at varying times before competition.

How I **want** to be feeling:

What I **want** to be saying to myself:

3. During competition:

How I **want** to be feeling:

What I **want** to be saying to myself:

If this is a difficult change to make, you may find yourself lapsing back to images of what typically happens rather than what you wanted to happen. If this happens, "rewind" or repeat the image experience until you are able to control it. It is counterproductive to image scenes that you cannot control or that lead to undesirable outcomes.

Sample Imagery Script for Swimming Race Simulation

(100 meter freestyle race...you may adapt this as needed for other events)

As you enter the pool, you immediately recognize the familiar smell of the chlorine...You scan the scene...taking in the overall layout of the pool deck and it's inhabitants...You notice the sounds of the pool...the coaches and the swimmers talking...the sound of the water splashing...the periodic beep of the start, as other heats go off before you.

You imagine yourself getting ready for the race...getting into your suit...spending some time stretching...and going over last minute details in your head...This is your best race...you're well prepared for this event and you are feeling mentally strong...

The official calls your event...Imagine yourself on the blocks...the starter commands "take your marks"... you bend down into the starting position... At the sound of the beep you take off...A strong powerful dive into the water...neat, clean and streamlined...a powerful kick to propel you to the surface...As you surface you begin strong beautiful strokes...You feel the water slipping off your skin...the sound of the water splashing as you move quickly through the water.

Each stroke you begin to feel stronger and stronger...moving through the water with speed...You notice another swimmer near you...you put him out of your mind ...and strive to race your own race...Even more you concentrate on each stroke... as you approach the first turn...You come to the wall quickly...start the turn... throw your legs over your head ...and push off hard into a tight streamline...You take several quick kicks and again surface...attacking the second half of your race.

As you begin your swim home, you are still feeling very strong...you've trained all year for this race and it feels great...stroke after stroke you propel yourself forward...with about 35 meters to go, you kick it into over drive...more on the legs...faster...faster...As you pull towards the finish...you feel your speed increasing...You are completely focused on your stroke...your breathing...you are doing everything as it should be done...with poise and purpose...With each stroke you dig into your reserves...pushing yourself above and beyond your expectations...Pulling, propelling...surging forward...you move yourself forward...put your head down and lunge towards the wall.

You immediately look up at the scoreboard...a best time...and a win on top of that...You slowly begin to regain awareness, colors come into focus, you hear the roar of the crowd...you realize you've achieved your goal...you get out of the pool and dry yourself off...you become aware of the feelings of excitement and accomplishment...pride builds inside you...you have succeeded...you are a great swimmer.

How to Track Your Imagery Skill Improvement

There are a number of ways to measure your imagery skill development. The most basic is to track the time you practice each day. As described in Chapter 1, keeping logbooks of both practice and competition are important, add a section for imagery to your workout/competition logbook.

Another possibility for tracking your improvement include seeing how long you can consistently hold an image, by timing yourself throughout an imagery session. Imagery takes a lot of concentration, and you may find that you cannot hold an image for very long at first, but you can develop this part of your skill with consistent effort.

Good luck!!!

If at any time the formatting does not come up correctly, please email us and we will send a copy of any chapter as an attachment.

