



Building A Mental Toolbox

3: SELF TALK

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

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Self Talk Exercises

The following is a description of exercises designed both to identify what swimmers say to themselves and how they say it. Feel free to pick and choose the exercises that best suit you.

Exercise 1 is a thought stoppage exercise. Sometimes as swimmers are talking to themselves they get into a habit of using negative words and phrases, this exercise will help athletes to stop those negative thoughts and come up with new positive ones.

Exercise 2 is designed for swimmers to recognize what they are saying to themselves and how they can change those thoughts from negative ones to positive ones.

Exercise 3 teaches the swimmers how to use cue words in developing a race plan. Developing a race plan of positive cue words can help to control self-talk. If you already know what you are going to say during specific points of the race, the chances of negative thoughts entering your mind can be decreased.

Exercise 4 is the worksheet designed to accompany the Grab Em' exercise.

Self-Talk Exercise 1: Thought Stopping Example

Example: Amber is a perfectionist. Each time she dives into the water she expects not only to win but also to have perfect technique and a PR. After all, she is practicing harder than anyone else, up to 6 hours a day, and has sacrificed a lot. She doesn't just **want** to swim well but believes she has to and should swim superbly every competition. Over time, Amber realized that such thoughts are harmful to her performance so she started working on controlling her overly demanding self-talk. What follows is an example of a "Thought Stopping" form that Amber has completed and has been implementing in practice:

- 1. Situation:** During warm-ups before the competition I am very demanding of myself. This seems to put a lot of pressure on me and causes me to get tense and anxious knowing I have to perform perfectly.
- 2. Negative statement:** "I have to win." "I can't make any mistakes."
- 3. Stopping the negative thought:** "Stop it, Amber." (I say this to myself while taking a slow, deep breath and focusing on staying loose.)
- 4. Positive replacement:** "Hold tight turns." "Work the first 25." "Hold your stroke rate." (Self-talk will be focused on what I need to **do** to perform well).

Go on to the next page to fill out your own "Thought Stopping" form.

Self-Talk Exercise 1a: Thought Stopping Form

1. Describe a situation in which you often tend to think/talk negatively to yourself.
2. Identify the negative statement you say to yourself.
3. Identify words or thoughts you can use to help you **stop** the negative thought.
4. List positive, beneficial statements you can use to replace your negative, harmful thoughts. These should be meaningful to **you**.
5. Practice! Practice! Practice this technique while training.

Self-Talk Exercise 2: Changing Negative Thoughts to Positive Thoughts

Identify the negative and positive thoughts that you have in practice, before a competition and during a competition. Make sure you examine the differences carefully. If you do not have any positive thoughts, work on changing your negative thoughts into positive ones.

Thoughts I have in practice...

Negative Thoughts	Positive Thoughts

Thoughts I have before a swimming meet...

Negative Thoughts	Positive Thoughts

Thoughts I have during a swimming meet...

Negative Thoughts	Positive Thoughts

Self-Talk Exercise 3: Race Plan

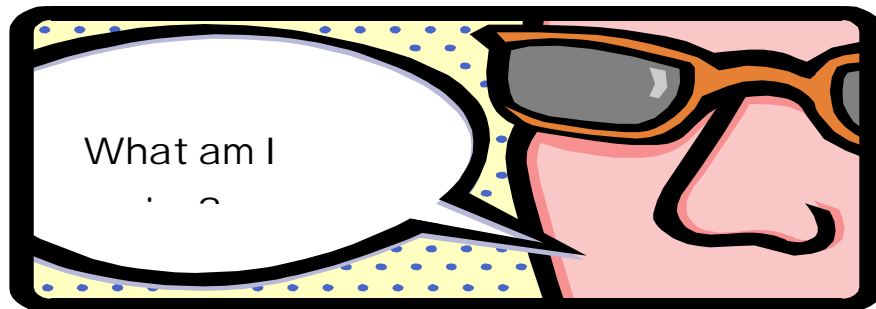
In the table provided below include positive cue words (such as kick, drive, push, surge, turnover, be ready...) you would like to say to yourself before each race. Take this sheet and commit your cue words to memory. When you visualize your races try to incorporate these cue words to make the whole visualization seem more real.

Specific Points Before, During and After a Race	Cue Words
1 Hour before the race.	
5 minutes before the race.	
Start	
Break out and first 10 strokes	
Middle of the race.	
Last 15 yards of the race.	
Finish	
End of the race.	

Exercise 4: Grab em'

Think about the last time you missed a turn, false started, your goggles feel off, or you missed your event entirely at a swim meet.

What did you say to your self?



Restate what you said to yourself in a more positive productive manner.

Now what would you say?