



Building A Mental Toolbox

8:

MENTAL PREPARATION

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

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Coaches Guide

- Start by talking to your swimmers about what mental preparation is and why it is important to have a mental plan.
 - Define some of the key components that make up a mental plan, such as imagery, goal setting, self-talk, concentration and energy management.
- Explain to your athletes that there is no right or wrong way to create a mental plan. Each swimmer will have his/her own personal mental plan.
 - Have your athletes take some time to complete the Competitive Reflections exercise (exercises 1, 2 and 3). Explain to them the importance of being honest on this exercise.
 - Next have your swimmers examine their competitive reflections exercise and begin to understand how they feel when they perform well and what they need to do in order to ensure good performances. Also make sure they examine how they feel when they do not perform as well and what do they need to do to get out of this state.
 - Now have your athletes spend some time creating a mental plan using exercises 4 and 5.
 - Set up a swim practice before a big meet and let your swimmers practice their mental plans. Give them a chance to do their own pre-meet warm-up. This will allow them to take ownership for their pre race readiness routines and allow them to make changes if needed.

Stress to your athletes the importance of WRITING IT DOWN!

Mental Preparation Exercises

Exercise 1 and Exercises 2 and 3 are both designed to help swimmers think about how they feel in their best and worst conditions. **Exercise 1** is adopted from Competitive Reflections form that was developed by Orlick (1986). It's main purpose is to get older swimmers thinking about how they feel and act when they are perform well and how they feel and act when they are not performing well. **Exercise 2 and 3** are similar forms developed for younger swimmers. From these forms each swimmer can begin to create their own individual mental plan.

Exercise 4 and 5 are similar worksheets designed to help swimmers of all ages in creating a mental and physical plan. Exercise 4 is for younger swimmers while Exercise 5 is for older swimmers.

Exercise 1: Competition Reflections

How do I get started on developing a routine that will work for me? Begin with the end in mind. You need to identify how you need to think and feel to perform your best. Then, you need to identify what to do to get you into this “ideal mindset.” It is helpful to refer to past experiences to figure out what seems to work for you. Respond to the questions from this Competitive Reflections Form (developed by Orlick, 1986) to help you get started on developing a mental routine that will work for you.

Think of your best performances in the past year and respond to the following:

1. How did you feel just before the event?

No Activation
Mentally/Physically Flat 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Highly Activated
Charged

Not Worried/Scared 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely Worried

2. What were you saying or thinking to yourself before the start of the competition?

3. How were you focused during the competition? What were you aware of or paying attention to during the competition?

Now, think of your worst swimming performances in the past year when responding to the following:

4. How did you feel just before the event?

No Activation
Mentally/Physically Flat 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Highly Activated
Charged

Not Worried/Scared 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely Worried

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

6. How were you focused during the event? What were you aware of or paying attention to during the event?

7. What were the major differences in your energy level and your thoughts prior to these two performances? In your focus of attention during the performance?

Review your responses to the questions from the Competitive Reflections Form. In particular, note the differences between your thoughts, focus, and energy level before your best versus worst competitions. How would you prefer to think/feel before you perform? How would you prefer to focus before and during the competition? With this in mind, you now need to begin figuring out specific strategies to help you reach this optimal mind state. For example, if you tend to perform your best when you are intense and aggressive, identify specific things you can think, say, and do to help you attain this feeling. Or, if you tend to get overly anxious when you think too much about the competition, figure out what you can do to purposely distract yourself until moments before the competition (listen to music, talk with friends/family, play cards).

8. Before I perform, my optimal mind state consists of:

9. Strategies to help me achieve my optimal mind state include:

Exercise 2: How Do You Feel and Act When You Swim Your BEST?

Take some time to think about your best swim ever. Write about what you were thinking, what you were feeling and how you were acting before, during and after your best performance.






What/How were you...	Thinking	Feeling	Acting
B e f o r e Y o u r R a c e ...			
D u r i n g Y o u r R a c e ...			
A f t e r Y o u r R a c e ...			

Exercise 3: How Do You Feel and Act When You Swim Your WORST?





Take some time to think about your best swim ever. Write about what you were thinking, what you were feeling and how you were acting before, during and after your best performance.

What/How were you...	Thinking	Feeling	Acting
Before Your Race ...			
During Your Race ...			
After Your Race ...			

Exercise 4: Create a Competition Race Plan. Take some time to look at your worst and best performance sheets. Use the information on these sheets to create a competition race plan. Examples of elements to possibly include in your mental preparation: mental imagery, cue words, positive self-talk about what you CAN do, Belly breathing or another relaxation strategy, and reminders about YOUR goal. In the boxes relating to your physical readiness you could write down what you like to do in warm-up and how you need to feel physically.

	What do you need to do to be mentally ready?	What do you need to do to be physically ready?
Warm-up		
10 minutes before the race		
One minute before the race		
Specific time during the race #1		
Specific time during the race #2		

Exercise 5: Create a Competition Race Plan. Complete the following worksheet to aid in developing your pre-competition routine. Examples of elements to possibly include in your mental preparation: mental imagery, cue words, confidence building self-talk, strategy rehearsal, competition goals, and energy management strategies. In the boxes relating to your physical readiness you could write down what you like to do in warm-up and how you need to feel physically.

	What do you need to do to be mentally ready?	What do you need to do to be physically ready?
Warm-up		
10 minutes before the race		
One minute before the race		
Critical time during the race #1		
Critical time during the race #2		