



SportPsych Manitoba

The Psychology of Quality Training

Since the time you spend practicing is largely responsible for your competition outcomes doesn't it make sense to get the most out of every training session? For this reason we have developed a module that will help you use your practice time to its optimal potential. Although you may spend 20 hours a week training this does not automatically transfer in to 20 hours of improvement. What you put in to practice is what you are going to get out of it.

The pie below illustrates all the aspects that go in to a quality practice. A circle is used to clearly demonstrate the interconnected relationship between all areas. To get the most out of every practice you should engage in each aspect every time you train. Initially this may seem like a lot of work and extra time, but by making this a regular part of your training routine the benefits will far outweigh any perceived drawbacks.



“Health, Happiness, & High Performance.”

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Time Management

Use it or Lose it

How to Make the Most of Your Time

Why put off until later what you can do now?

Elite athletes have less free time than non-athletes. It's important to find balance in your schedule to enable you to be an effective athlete, a student, a brother/sister, girlfriend/boyfriend, friend, etc. Not only do you need to find time to play your various roles but you also need to have time to do them well! Rather than procrastinating (avoiding or delaying doing something) if you do it now and put in the effort it deserves you will end up accomplishing more. Not to mention that your finished product will be of higher quality because you have been able to complete them to the best of your ability, rather than scrambling to get them done on time.

Below are some helpful tips on how to improve your time management skills and make the most of your time.

- **Have a weekly routine.** Use a planner or calendar to keep track of where and when you need to be places. Make sure you include things like doing homework, travelling to competitions and spending time with your friends.
- **Use small blocks of time.** When you have a busy schedule it's important to make the most of your time between activities. For example, when you're taking the bus to a training session you might read some pages from a textbook.
- **Prioritize.** Decide what is most important. These are the things you should spend the most time on. Academic, athletic and other responsibilities are tough to balance, so put your effort where it counts the most, e.g. spend more time studying for the exam worth 30% than the quiz worth 5%.

Finding Balance

To be effective at managing our time we need to try to balance our roles over the long term. If we don't find a balance we won't reach our potential and may get burned out. Think about the roles you play (e.g., athlete, student, family, friends, part-time employee, etc.) and rate them according to their priority at this point in your life. Use the chart below to figure out how many hours you spend in each role in a typical week. Remember, about 60 hours per week should be designated for sleeping.

Role	Hours/week

Are you spending most of your time on the role you identified as being your priority right now? If not, are there some changes you can make to your weekly schedule that would allow you to spend more time on the roles you've identified as most important?

If you are interested in assessing your time management skills and learning where you can improve check out the web site below:
<http://www.literacynet.org/icans/chapter03/timemgmt.html>

Goal Setting

Setting Effective Goals

A goal is something we want to work toward, for example being selected to the Canada summer or winter Games teams. But, some goals are better than others and will help us reach our potential faster and easier than not setting goals or setting only "do your best" goals. To help us be the best we can be it's a good idea to set **S.M.A.R.T.** goals:

Specific goals

Specific goals are better than do your best goals. Set goals for both the long term (e.g., one year from now) and short term (e.g., today's practice).

Setting a goal of improving your free throw percentage by 7% is a specific goal. Saying you want your free throws to get better is **not** specific...how do you decide what better is?

Measurable

Write your goals down, they can be even more effective if you share them with your coach and parents and friends!

Being able to measure your goal, like running a faster time, is helpful because then you know when you've reached your goal and if you're on your way to reaching your goal.

Adjustable

Goals must be adjustable in case something comes up like illness or injury that makes it tough to reach the goal you've set. Evaluate your goals every couple of weeks and adjust them if you need to.

If you are injured you might change your goal from racing a certain time to completing all of your rehabilitation exercises everyday.

Realistic

If you set goals that are too far away they might discourage you. Try to set goals that you have to work toward but are possible to achieve.

Getting a perfect score may not be possible, but improving your own score each time you compete may be realistic.

Time-based

It's not enough just to set a goal, decide on a deadline for achieving your goal and come up with a plan for reaching that goal.

For example to reach your long term goal of competing at the Canada Summer Games you will need to develop a plan that involves: setting daily practice goals, arriving on time for practices, having a healthy diet, getting plenty of sleep and listening to the coach, etc.

Follow the SMART guidelines to help set effective daily practice goals. Goals help focus our attention, increase effort and increase persistence. Keep track of your goals in your training log or you can print off the goal setting section at the bottom of this page. A good strategy to use is when you are putting on your shoes (or getting your equipment) for practice ask yourself "what is one thing I'm working on today?" When you're taking your shoes off ask "did I accomplish that thing I was working on today?"

Date:	Willingness to train Low 1 2 3 4 5 High Training intensity Low 1 2 3 4 5 High
Practice goals (before practice):	Practice assessment (how did practice go?):
Were practice goals met? Not at all -2 Almost -1 As expected 0 More than expected +1 Way beyond expectations +2 Goals were: Too easy 1 2 3 4 5 Too hard	What can you change for next time?

Practice Intensity

Expert performers make the most out of the time they spend on an activity. In other words, they engage in purposeful practice; using their time wisely, with everything they do, done for a specific reason. Often your coach will have you do drills or exercises designed to improved your performance but you don't really think about why you are doing them or how they make you better. Below is an example of a purposeful practice sheet. Use the example as a guide to identify the content of some of the drills you do in your sport, then explain the purpose or what you are trying to get out of doing the drill.

It's important to match your practice intensity to the purpose of the practice. The activities and drills you do in a practice session should compliment the practice goals you've set for yourself. This will allow you to make the most of out of every practice, allowing you to see how every drill will assist you to become a better, more proficient athlete. You can do an activity like the individual purposeful practice sheet to help you match your intensity, purpose and goals.

Individual Purposeful Practice Sheet

(An example from tennis)

Note: courtesy of Chris Harwood, PhD, School of Sport and Exercise Sciences, Loughborough University, UK

Date:

Time:

Duration:

Hitting Partners:

Practice Content:

Warm-up *gentle jog, skipping, stretching, hitting in service box*

Exercise 1 Purpose *hitting, running drives, keeping depth, pace and consistency*

Content *one player hits cross court (singles court). Other player hits down line, after 6 shots point is played out*

Exercise 2 Purpose *to rally consistently and wait for right shot to attack on (patience)*

Content *both players hit cross-court until on particular player chooses to go down line and approach (if possible) point then played out.*

Exercise 3 Purpose *making sure you keep rally going and don't make mistakes early on*

Content *same as exercise 2, i.e. a player makes mistake while rallying cross-court, opponent has 1 point – player makes a mistake when court is open, opponent received two points*

Matchplay points *Best of 3 set match (match practice for nationals) vs. No Name L 3-6, 4-6* Elite athletes assess their intensity levels at scheduled times to be sure they are working hard enough to achieve their goals. You can check your intensity, or how hard you are

working, during breaks in a training session or while you're waiting for your turn.

For example, a basketball player might check their intensity levels during a water break, when doing an inbound play or when approaching the foul line. You can use an intensity meter from 1-10 to rate your intensity. 1 = almost asleep to 10 = very high intensity, making focusing difficult.

It is important to track your intensity levels in practice to determine what level goes with your best practices and performances. It's common for your intensity to be too low during practice however, to become an elite performer you need to achieve the right level of intensity to work hard in practice and become an optimally performing athlete. Below are some methods you can use to increase your practice intensity:

Goal Setting – set goals to remind yourself what you are working toward and to help keep you focused

Cue words – use phrases or words that are motivating e.g., “come on, let's go” or “time to put the effort in”

Imagery – think of powerful images such as a cheetah sprinting or a rocket launching to increase intensity

Below you will find some helpful information on how to imagine yourself experiencing success.

Imagining Success

Mental imagery is a powerful way to help prepare for competitions. Sometimes in practice we have a hard time motivating ourselves to work hard, but by using imagery we can become more focused and our practices may be more intense and effective.

Imagery is: "an experience that mimics real experience. We can be aware of "seeing" an image, feeling movements as an image, or experiencing an image of smell, tastes or sounds without actually experiencing the real thing...It differs from dreams in that we are awake and conscious when we form an image" (White & Hardy, 1998).

When you first learn to use imagery you may find it helpful to get into a comfortable position and close your eyes. With practice you'll find using imagery will get easier and you'll be able to do it almost anywhere without needing to relax first.

Focus on the center of your body and take several slow deep breaths. With each inhalation, imagine that you are pulling all of the tension from your body into your lungs. With each exhalation, imagine that you are releasing all of your tension and negative thoughts from your body. Continue this focused breathing until your body becomes relaxed and your mind is alert and open for productive thoughts (Pause for 30 seconds).

Imagine yourself at a training session. You are preparing to begin practicing. You are focusing on feeling calm, confident, and physically and emotionally in control (Pause for 10 seconds). You take some time to run through your mental warm-up by imagining several repetitions of a few basic skills in your sport, such as a warm-up drill (Pause for 30 seconds). Now in your mind's eye, focus on the specific goals and strategies for this particular training session. Imagine yourself executing the drills perfectly, achieving your goals for the practice and successfully executing specific strategies that you're working on in practice (Pause for 60 seconds).

During practice you may also use imagery to put yourself into a competition environment. For example, a cyclist doing a time trial in practice may imagine that they are competing at the Canada Games. A basketball player might imagine that they must make a 3-point shot in order to win the game. Try to imagine yourself in different scenarios and see yourself being successful.

Debriefing Practice

Most athletes will admit they have had practices where everything just goes right while other practices make it seem as if they just started playing their sport yesterday. Do you ever wonder why your performance can vary so much?

Although common, it is something that elite performers have learned to reduce, if not completely eliminate. Elite athletes do not have high peaks and low valleys in their performances, rather they have developed the ability to perform consistently day in and day out, in both practice and competition.

One of the methods elite athletes use to help them determine what occurs when they have an optimal practice and when they don't is to debrief every practice.

By debriefing you will gather the necessary information needed to re-create your optimal practice environment every training session. Although you will still have "off days" having optimal practices on a regular basis will allow you to get more out of every practice and continue down the path of excellence.

Practice Debrief Form

Name:

Date:

Practice Site:

Complete this form as soon as possible after the completion of each practice.

Note: Adapted from Terry Orlick's *Psyching For Sport*, 1986.

1. How did you feel about your performance during this practice?

2. Did you set practice goals? If so, what were they? If not, why did you not set any?

To what extent did you achieve your goals?

Did not achieve goal at all	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Achieved goal completely
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3. Circle your feelings going in to this practice

No determination	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Completely determined to achieve goal
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No physical activation	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Highly physically activated
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No worries or fears	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Extremely worried, scared, or fearful
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Completely out of control	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	In complete control
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Mentally calm	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Mentally uptight
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No task focus	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Complete task focus
No commitment to fully extend myself	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Complete commitment to fully extend myself
No confidence in my physical preparation	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Complete confidence in my physical preparation
No confidence in my mental preparation	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Complete confidence in my mental preparation
No confidence in my abilities (to achieve goals)	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Complete confidence in my abilities (to achieve goals)
Not willing to take necessary risks	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	Willing to take necessary risks

4. Did you follow your pre practice or pre competition routine?
(Specific pre event warm up, positive self talk)

Yes No Not at all Partly

If partly, which parts were followed and which were not?

5. What were you saying to yourself or thinking to yourself immediately before the start of this practice?

6. Rate your overall feeling of effectiveness at the practice site and during the different segments of your pre practice preparation and performance. Use a scale from 0 to 10 where 10 is going great (right on target), 0 is absolutely off, and 5 is somewhere in between.

30-60 min before event	Warm up before	Moments before you
Rating	Rating	Rating
_____	_____	_____

7. Were you able to fully extend yourself to the limit during this practice?

Did not extend my limits 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Completely extended myself

Why or why not?

8. What were you saying to yourself or what did you focus on to extend the limits?

9. During the practice did your focus of attention stay on the practice or drift to other things?

Drifting most of the time

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Completely focused, absorbed in performance

10. When you were going best, what were you focused on?

11. If you were going less well, what were you focused on?

12. Did you have to make a recovery to get back on track during the practice? If so, were you able to recover and focus again quickly?

Recovery

It is extremely important for elite athletes to train hard. However, many athletes fail to acknowledge the importance of adequate, quality recovery from training. Those that fail to schedule recovery in to their training routines place themselves at a greater risk for developing over training or complete burnout. Once an athlete enters in to either of those states reversing the effects is very difficult and usually requires complete cessation of training for an extended period of time; something no athlete ever wants to do.

Overtraining or burnout are difficult states to recognize. They are often confused with the regular fatigue and decreases in performance that are associated with hard training. Listed below are the common signs of either state you may use to recognize you are in one of these states.

Signs of Overtraining

- Poor Performance
- Low Energy
- Apathy
- Lethargy
- Disturbed Sleep
- Weight Loss
- Elevated Resting Heart Rate
- Muscle Pain and Soreness
- Mood Changes
- Elevated Resting Blood Pressure
- Appetite Loss

Signs of Burnout

- Low Motivation or Concentration Problems
- Lowered Self-esteem
- Loss of Desire to Play
- Lack of Caring
- Overuse Injuries
- Mood Changes
- Substance Abuse
- Emotional Isolation
- Increased Anxiety
- Physical/ Mental Exhaustion

One common misconception among athletes regarding recovery is that there is only one type; passive recovery. This involves doing absolutely nothing exerting little to no energy. However a second type of relaxation; active relaxation is equally important. Active relaxation involves simply participating in activities you enjoy other than your sport. Proper stretching, massage, hiking, and reading are all great ways to actively relax.

Also, recovery is not only physical. Emotional and mental recovery is vital to optimal performance. Effective management of schoolwork, relationships, and other daily demands can help you stay mentally and emotionally healthy... remember those time management skills.

Below you will find step-by-step instructions on how to perform Progressive Muscle Relaxation. This activity is somewhat time consuming at first, taking up to 45 minutes to complete, however with practice you will be able to reduce the time it takes you to release your muscle tension. It is best to engage in Progressive Muscle Relaxation initially after practice or on a day off from training. Progressive Muscle Relaxation is most useful when performed the night before a competition or when you are feeling nervous or stressed and need to relax.

After the Progressive Muscle Relaxation instructions you will find a chart that you may want to use to record how successful you were during your relaxation session. It is helpful to keep track of your progress to illustrate how proficient you are becoming at relaxation.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Perform this exercise while lying down on a comfortable surface but do not use a pillow or support for your head.

Start lying on your back with your arms at your side.

Check to make sure;

- The middle of your head is touching the support surface so that you are looking directly ahead
- Your shoulders are exerting equal pressures on the surface
- Your butt is exerting equal pressure on the surface
- Your knees are touching
- Your calves are pressing equally on the surface
- Your heels are pressing equally on the surface

You should be lying so that your spine is straight, your thighs and calves are close together or touching lightly, and your arms are extended by your side with your palms facing slightly upward

Check for the last time that you are straight, comfortable, and that the pressure of your body parts on the surface is equal on both sides of your body. Make any adjustments now. Pause for eight seconds.

You most probably will find the exercise easier if you are able to do this with your eyes closed once you have learned the technique. Or, make an audio recording to make it easier to follow along.

Each exercise will contain a hard contraction of no more than 90 percent effort that will last for at least eight seconds and then will be followed by a controlled release of the developed tension. That release should take about 10 seconds. When you do the exercises only contract the muscles involved.

Raise your arms to a position that is like praying, where your hands are together, fingers straight, and palms touching. Now press your hands together with about 90% of your maximum strength and hold for eight seconds. Relax and slowly let your arms sink back to your side as you were before. Pause for 10 seconds.

Repeat the exercise again making a point of only contracting the muscles involved. Do not tighten any unnecessary muscles. Raise your arms to the position where your hands are together, fingers straight, and palms touching. Now press your hands together and hold for eight seconds. Relax and slowly let your arms sink back to your sides as you were before.

Feel your arms relax. Make them feel heavier than they were before the contractions. Feel the surface pressing against your arms more than before.

The first exercise is a toe curl backwards. Moving only your toes and not your ankles curl your toes back toward your shins. Use about 90% effort. Pause for 8 seconds now relax and let your toes return to a natural position. Pause for 10 seconds.

The next is the opposite of what you have just done. A curl under. Remember, do not move your ankles. Curl your toes under your feet using 90% effort. Pause for 8 seconds now relax. Let them return to where they feel most natural. Pause for 10 seconds.

Start to concentrate on your breathing control. When you do a contraction do not breathe. When you relax let the air in your lungs in a controlled manner. After the inhalation breathe with as little chest movement as possible. After each exercise do six breaths where you concentrate on making them even and very slight: six identical, hardly noticeable breaths.

The next exercise is an ankle bend. Pull your toes and feet back toward you shins as much as you can. Contract, pause for eight seconds and relax. Let out all the air. Take 6 very even deep breaths, pause for 15 seconds.

The next exercise is an ankle stretch. Point your toes and feet as much as you can. Contract, pause for eight seconds and relax. Let out all the air. Take 6 very even deep breaths. Pause for 15 seconds.

Feel that your feet are heavy, they may even tingle slightly when compared to the rest of your body. See that there is no tension in your toes or ankles and that both your heels are pressing on the surface with exactly the same amount of pressure. Keep your breathing even. Pause for 5 seconds.

The next exercise is to press your knees together. If your knees are not touching move them slowly together. Pause for 8 seconds. Ready, contract using only 90% of your maximum pressure. Hold for 8 seconds. Relax and breathe out. Steady even breathing. Pause for 20 seconds.

The next exercise is a thigh contraction. Make the muscles in the front as small and as bunched as you can. Contract, pause for 8 seconds, then relax and breathe out. Breathe evenly for 20 seconds and feel your legs getting heavier. The pressure on the surface should be equal being your toes, your ankles, and thighs. Breathe evenly, pause for 20 seconds.

The next exercise requires you to make your butt as small as possible. Make the muscles very hard and small. Contract, pause for 8 seconds, then relax and breathe out. Relax and breathe out to achieve your maximal breathing state. Pause for 20 seconds.

Now you have completed all the leg exercises. This means you are at a check point. At this time you go back and check each segment of your legs for the same feel of heaviness, the same loss of sensation, and the same pressure on the surface. If there is still some tension in a muscle group repeat the exercise for that group. Otherwise if no tension is detected breathe evenly and with as little effort as possible. Pause for 10 seconds

Check that your toes are loose. Check that your ankles have no tension, they are hanging in a natural position. Feel that your values are totally loose. Your thighs should feel heavy and droopy. Your butt should be very soft. Check that you have the same feeling of heaviness in your feet, your lower legs, and the tops of your thighs. Pause for 10 seconds.

Feel where your legs touch the surface. Make sure they feel super heavy where they touch. There should be the same amount of heaviness in each leg. You should feel that the surface is pressing against your legs. Concentrate on the heavy, dead feeling. If you wanted to move your legs you could not because they are so heavy. Do twelve even easy breaths while you lose all feelings in your legs. Pause for 30 seconds.

The next set of exercises concentrates on your body and shoulders. As you do these keep your legs totally relaxed. Also, after each exercise take 6 controlled minimal breaths.

Press your stomach muscles into your abdomen as hard as you can. Contract, pause for 8 seconds and relax. Breathe in and out evenly. Pause for 20 seconds.

Now make all the muscles in your back contract inwards towards your spine. Pull your shoulder blades together and push the points on your shoulders in to the surface. Remember, only contract your back muscles. Do not rise off the surface. Contract, pause for 8 seconds, and relax. Breathe out slowly. Pause for 20 seconds.

Now do the opposite exercise. Compress your chest muscles together and tighten all the muscles on the front of your body. Contract, pause for 8 seconds, relax and breathe out. Feel your body expanding and getting heavier on the surface. Pause for 20 seconds.

The next exercise requires you to contract the muscles that would pull your shoulders towards your ears. However, try not to move much but just contract them in place. Contract, pause for eight seconds. Relax and let the tension flow out of your body. Feel it getting very heavy and losing its sensations. Do six very shallow breaths. Pause for 20 seconds.

The last body exercise is to contract the muscles that would pull your shoulders towards your feet. Contract those muscles but do not allow much movement. At the same time clench your fists and arm muscles

hard. Contract, pause for 8 seconds, relax and focus on your heaviness and breathing. Pause for 20 seconds.

That completes the body exercises. This is now the second check point. Here you check your body and legs for the same feeling of heaviness, and the same loss of sensation. Pause for 10 seconds.

Check your shoulder looseness and heaviness- the middle of your back- your chest and stomach- your butt. They should all be very loose and heavy as if they were balloons filled with water. Make your thighs, calves, ankles, and toes very loose and heavy. Pause for 10 seconds.

Since you did arm exercises at the start of relaxation focus on the sensations in your neck and head. Pause for eight seconds. Experience the sensation of only being aware of your brain and its mental activity.

Take time now to think positive things about yourself. Only concentrating on good things. This activity should take about 5 minutes.

Now focus on good things that you do in your sport. Only concentrating on good things. This activity should take about 5 minutes.

It is time now to come out of the relaxed state. This has to be done slowly and under control. You have imagined being injected with a deadening drug, now imagine being given an antidote that will cause you to regain sensitivity and to become super energized. You are being first injected in your toes. They are the first things you feel. Wiggle them slowly. Now feel your ankles. Move them slowly backward, forward, and sideways. Pause for 8 seconds. At this time become aware that the feelings you have are super and that your energy and strength levels are higher than they were prior to the relaxation. Pause for 8 seconds.

Feel super energy creeping up your legs. Move your knees ever so slightly. Then bend them to about half their range. Feel a terrific powerful sensation in the muscles. Pause for 8 seconds.

Let the super energy go to your body. As it enters muscles let them move slightly. Flow the energy in to your arms. Let your body and arms move and feel exceptionally strong and alive. Pause for 8 seconds.

Finally, let your neck and head experience the energizing phenomenon. Move them slightly. Pause for 8 seconds.

As you lie there start to move each joint fully. At the same time tell yourself how wonderful you feel and that you have been super-energized. Pause for 20 seconds.

Gradually sit up and/or stand up and smile. Make yourself feel the best that you have for quite some time. Pause for 20 seconds.

Note: Adapted from Jacobson, E. 1939. Progressive Relaxation. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Charting Relaxation

Session	Date	Tension Level Before Relaxation Exercise	Tension Level After Relaxation Exercise

Tension Level

1 Sleepy Calm	25 Fairly relaxed	50 Mid Range	75 Fairly Tense	100 Really Up-tight
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Note: Adapted from Terry Orlick's *Psyching for Sport*, 1986.