

Visualisation and Mental Rehearsal

Strictly, 'visualisation' or 'imagery' relate pretty specifically to 'picturing things in your mind'. Here, in common with most 'applied' uses of imagery in sports, I'm talking more generally about any form of imagined experience; imagined feel, imagined movement; imagined sight, smell, situation, or whatever.

Topics covered on this page and its dependents:

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Why imagery matters

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-  Mental rehearsal is 'real'

Research has shown that imagined performance generates appropriate muscle responses. It's not clear why, but the implication is that imagined performance really does exercise much of the brain's motor function - it isn't all imagination.
-  Imagery affects learning

Experimental tests show that visualisation during training improves the resulting performance.
-  Imagery improves performance

In sports like archery, or similar 'closed' situations in other sports (penalty shots in basketball etc.), previsualisation seems to improve performance.
-  Imagery improves preparation

Imagining scenarios helps you work out what will happen, how you'll feel and how to deal with possible situations.
-  Imagery can support arousal management

Just about everybody has felt the effects of remembering a seriously embarrassing moment; the emotional effect of the 'image' is quite real. That 'real' effect of an image can help in a variety of ways in anxiety management; see the [anxiety](#) and [arousal](#) pages for more on the topic.



Quotable quote

Visualisation in practice

Roy Matthews was reported to use visualisation in pre-shoot practice, on the following principle:

-  Go down to your practice field, and start shooting at a comfortable distance
-  When you've settled into a rhythm, start visualising the competition venue.. put in the background; hear the sounds of the competition and the spectators; feel the sun and the breeze... Carry on shooting to your established rhythm, reinforcing the visualisation at every shot, so that when you get to the shoot, every arrow is familiar and in context.

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Imagery isn't all pictures

In fact, many of the most important components of 'imagery' and mental rehearsal are not visual at all. 'Feel' is very important; so are recalled sounds, textures, smells... Many archers say their 'feel' for the shot is critical for good shooting, and that 'feel' can be recalled even if there is no picture to go with it.

Accurate imagery needs accurate observation

If you're going to practice your shot sequence mentally, you should at least practice the sequence you intend to shoot! It pays to spend time observing your shooting simply so that you have a good recollection of exactly what you do. Since that also helps build consistency, there is a double benefit. Go  [here](#) for advice on building a detailed shot sequence.

Involve all the senses

Imagery is more effective if it involves more than just one sense. For effective mental rehearsal, add more sensory inputs to the image.

Example: For a vivid recollection of a great performance, recall not only the visual aspects, but the quality of the light, feel of the breeze, smell of the grass (or the [beer](#) tent), the sound of arrows leaving the bow and the 'thump' as they strike the gold...

New skill learning may benefit more from an 'outside view'

Research suggests that in learning a *new* skill, a picture of good performance seen from outside - like a clear recollection of a known good performer or trusted coach's demonstration - is more effective than internal visualisation. Note, though, that in rehearsing a familiar skill, an 'internal' focus is usually recommended - perhaps because you are rehearsing something with a known 'feel'.

Applying imagery skills

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Applications of imagery are found elsewhere on this site. Follow the links below: