

Name: .....

Date: .....

# Focus



*“Focus on how much you can absolutely love what you’re doing” –Leo Babauta*

## What is focus?

This is the mental quality to concentrate on the task in hand. If the athlete lacks focus then their athletic abilities will not be effectively or efficiently applied to the task.

Research has identified the following types of attention focus:

- Broad/Narrow continuum
  - o The athlete focuses on a large or small number of stimuli
- Internal/External continuum
  - o The athlete focuses on internal stimuli (feelings) or external stimuli (ball)

The demand for concentration varies with the sport:

- Sustained concentration (distance running, cycling, **tennis**, squash)
- Short bursts of concentration (cricket, golf, shooting, athletic field events)
- Intense concentration (sprinting events, bobsleigh, skiing)

Common distractions are: anxiety, mistakes, fatigue, weather, public announcements, coach, manager, opponent, negative thoughts etc.

## How can you improve your focus?

Focus is one of the most powerful tools in sports psychology. Whatever sport you compete in, the ability to focus is essential to success. When you’re in the middle of a practice or competition, does your mind ever wander? If so, your performance is taking a hit, because you aren’t completely focused on the task at hand. You can improve your focus by following these tips:

- 1) Know what you need to focus on.**
  - o The clearer you are about what you want to focus on, the more likely you’ll be to stay focused on the factors that contribute to your success.
- 2) Stay relaxed under pressure.**
  - o When you’re stressed and anxious, your focus drops. Find ways to stay calm in high-pressure situations, such as taking deep breaths, stretching muscles to loosen them, engaging in effective routines to keep your focus where it needs to be, or listening to music that keeps you centered.
- 3) Use cue words.**
  - o Cue words are simple words and phrases that remind you of your focus points. Repeating words and phrases such as relax, play hard, or quick feet will remind you to focus on what you need to do. If your mind is focused on your cue words, your body will follow.
- 4) Develop effective routines.**
  - o A routine is like a funnel — it channels your focus and gets you ready to compete. Your routines help you maintain your focus on the right things and prevent many potential distractions from entering your mind. For example, listen to three or four songs on your iPod before games to get yourself ready, or eat a certain meal, arrive at the playing field in enough time to get prepared, or go through a specific type of warm-up.
- 5) Use mental imagery (more on this next week).**
  - o Practice seeing yourself perform exactly as you want to perform, focusing exactly as you want to focus. The more you train your mind to focus on the right things, the more it will respond.
- 6) Rate your focus daily.**
  - o Keep a journal in which you rate your level of focus before and after each practice or competition. Simple daily evaluations are critical to improving your focus. By consistently being consciously aware of improving and evaluating your focus, you’ll automatically do so. This type of daily “mental muscle” work will gradually improve your focus in practice and games.

## Assessing the situation

Let us try an exercise based on the previous section. Think of a situation and how you will work to keep your focus on it. Do not worry about too much detail; the point of this exercise is to gain some ideas. Perhaps they can be further developed later on.

- 1) What task do you want to focus on? It can be anything, but try to keep it in the context of sport.

---

---

- 2) How do you plan to stay relaxed if the pressure becomes too much?

---

---

- 3) Think of eight cue words you can use to remind you to focus in the situation.

---

---

- 4) Think of one or two routines you can develop to help you stay focused (they do not have to be complex).

---

---

- 5) We will speak more on this topic more next week, but here is a start. Picture yourself performing well on the task you want to focus on, what does that look like?

---

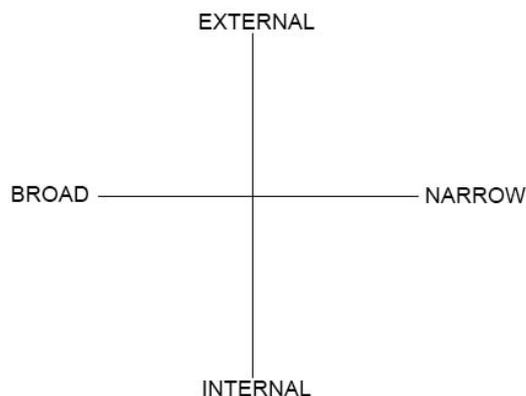
---

- 6) Finally, how do you plan to keep track of your focus and progress?

---

---

## Think of one example of each view of focus



Broad/External

Broad/Internal

Narrow/External

Narrow/Internal