

Name:

Date:

Focus



“The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new” –Socrates

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.

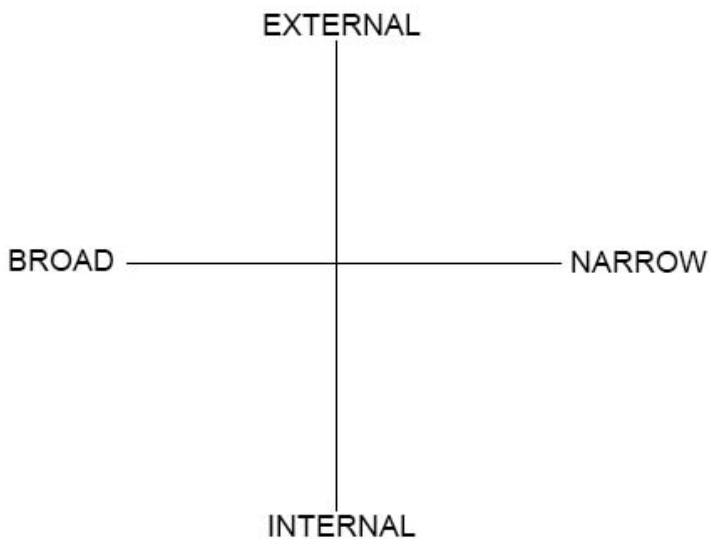
How can you improve your focus?

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.

The different views of focus

After the previous material, you might have gained a better idea on how to focus on the task at hand. Let us see if you understand the main concepts. Put the number of each statement in the appropriate box.



- 1) Assessing your offense and defense.
- 2) Focusing on how you are going to play the next game.
- 3) Focusing on the person you are defending.
- 4) Assessing your level of self-confidence

Focus has a lot to do with self-talk

Ways to Talk to Yourself

by @Inner_Drive
www.innerdrive.co.uk

Say Stop
Saying «Stop» straight after a negative thought helps people manage frustrations, overcome nerves, sleep better and not dwell on the worst case scenario.

Ask Questions
By asking yourself «how am I going to do this?», your brain starts to generate potential answers. This means you start focusing on solutions and not dwelling on the problem.

Give Yourself Instructions
Telling yourself what to do focuses attention, helps you learn new tasks quicker and helps you perform more consistently under pressure.

Energising Language
Talk to yourself in an energising way - This can increase your motivation, effort and endurance as well as keeping potential distractions at bay.

Second Person
In studies those who give themselves instructions in the first person («I»), perform worse than those who give themselves advice in the second person («You»).

Positive People
Surround yourself with positive people - Researchers have found that negative statements made by teachers were predictive of how negatively boys talked to themselves.

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BROAD
 EFFECTIVE
 EXTERNAL
 FOCUS

INTERNAL
 NARROW
 POSITIVE
 RELAXED