




# IMAGERY

Imagery, also called mental rehearsal or visualization, allows athletes to prepare for competitions by creating or recreating experiences in their minds. This technique is useful because the mind responds to mental rehearsal in the same way it does to physical practice. When athletes vividly imagine competition scenarios, they mentally practice skills and responses to various competition-like scenarios. The deliberate practice of visualization replicates “real” practice and improves overall “real” performance.

## IMAGERY HELPS ATHLETES:


- Perform well and execute skills<sup>4</sup>
- Be more motivated<sup>3</sup>
- Feel more confident<sup>3,5</sup>
- Have better focus<sup>3</sup>
- Recover from injury<sup>1</sup>
- Execute a task automatically<sup>2</sup>
- Regulate emotions<sup>3</sup>
- Learn new skills<sup>1</sup>
- Develop strategy<sup>1</sup>

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 TYPES OF IMAGERY



**Cognitive:** Goal is to develop general and/or specific skills or strategies needed for competition


- Imagine oneself calm and focused while in a specific sport situation (e.g., a diver visualizes a calm and collected mindset when approaching the platform).
- Visualize oneself navigating different emotions to reduce anxiety (e.g., a fencer visualizes a stressful bout scenario and imagines breathing to calm her nerves).



**Motivational:** Goal is to feel inspired


- Imagine achieving a personal goal (e.g., a swimmer visualizes getting out of the pool after achieving a personal record in the 100M freestyle).
- Use imagery to increase excitement among players to achieve team goals (e.g., a basketball team imagines cutting down the net after winning the state championship).

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 QUALITIES OF EFFECTIVE IMAGERY



**Vividness:** Be realistic and bring as many details to the image.

- Use all five senses (e.g., smell, taste, kinesthetic, sound, etc.).
- Include emotional responses to the imagined situation (e.g., excitement, sadness, anxiety, frustration, etc.).



**Controllability:** Focus and sustain attention on an imagined scenario.

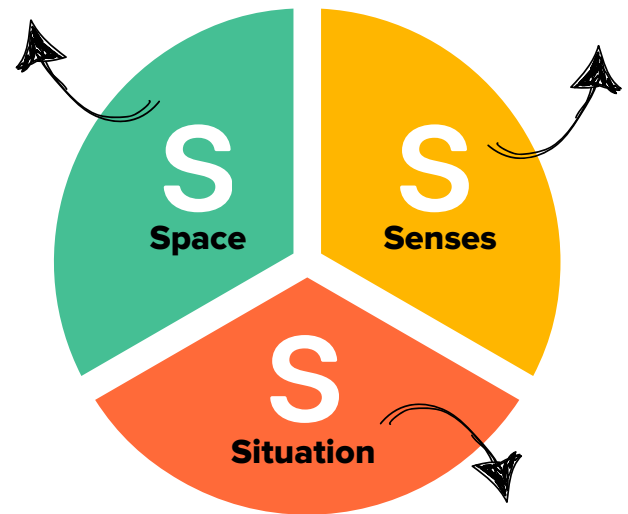
- Slow down the imagery to a pace that is easy to control. Half speed may work best for athletes new to imagery.
- The more athletes practice their imagery the more likely they can control their visualizations and call upon them in similar sport contexts.

## ROLE OF THE COACH

- Work with athletes to **practice imagery**. Start with creating a visualization for the team to experience in practice. Then ask athletes to develop their own “scripts” of scenarios they can imagine when outside of practice.
- Encourage athletes to practice mental imagery **during AND outside of practice**.
- Communicate the **benefits of imagery** for performance and life.

Imagine all surroundings where the situation will be experienced.

Engage all five senses - sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.



Imagine the exact scenario and how and when to respond.

## EXAMPLE IMAGERY SCRIPT

*Sit comfortably and breathe slowly for a few moments. When you are ready, close your eyes or lower and soften your gaze, continuing to breathe deeply and slowly. [pause]*

*I would like you to imagine now that you are a softball player standing in the on-deck circle waiting for your turn to bat. First, imagine what the batter's box looks like. What does the field look like in front of you? Where are the fans? Where are your teammates? What is the weather like? [pause]*

*Next, start to imagine yourself in this space. What do you hear? Are your teammates talking loudly or quietly? Is the coach giving instructions? What do you smell? What does your bat feel like? What do your gloves feel like on the bat? What does the pitcher's motion look like? What do you feel? Anticipation? Excitement? Dread? [pause]*

*Now, start to imagine the situation in front of you. You see the pitcher prepare to throw. If you are feeling nervous, practice taking a deep breath in your mind, then looking back at the pitcher. How do you feel now? [pause]*

*Now, imagine a strike coming across the plate. Continue to imagine yourself and how you want to swing the bat the next time so it connects with the ball. Maybe you imagine where you want the ball to go on the field. [pause]*

*You connect with the ball. You sprint to first base. After you make it to first base, go ahead and start to bring yourself back into this space. Wiggle your fingers and toes, then slowly open your eyes. You've completed the visualization.*

**Make sure to debrief the visualization activity and ask them how they might apply this to their own situations.**

### References

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