

## Mental Skills Assessment

**D**o you use mental skills to enhance your performance in sport? To answer this question, you

need to know what the term “mental skills” refers to; that is, you need to know the mental skills that relate to enhanced performance.

A group of international sport psychologists worked together to develop an inventory to measure athlete’s use of mental skills. In the development of this tool, a critical step was figuring out what mental skills to measure. The question asked by these researchers was, “What mental skills positively influence performance in sport?” By studying elite level athletes, the scientists were able to uncover the mental skills that these athletes used to achieve success—it is these skills

that were integrated into this inventory. To understand if and how well you make use of mental skills in sport, you need to start by assessing and evaluating how well you use the skills that are implemented most often by elite level athletes.

So, are you up to it? Are you ready to test your mental skills/ abilities? The following questions are adapted from the mental skills inventory and will help you assess your use of the mental skills that have been found to enhance performance in elite athletes. Certainly, elite athletes don’t use all the mental skills all the time. But, they consistently make use of some of these skills in practice and competition to help manage the mental aspect of their performance. The intent of this exercise is to get you to think about how you use psychological skills and how effective (or ineffective) they are for you.



## Arousal/Energy management

Elite athletes use various mental skills and strategies to manage their physical and mental energy. This requires using strategies for relaxation and activation (to get your body “fired up”).

- Are you able to increase your energy when feeling lethargic or flat?
- Do you effectively psych yourself up to get ready to practice or compete?
- Are you able to relax if you get too nervous?

## Imagery

As you’ll remember, this skill was discussed in detail in the Golf (volume 1, number 3) issue. Imagery involves creating or recreating an athletic experience in your mind.

- Do you imagine specific skills in practice and/or competition before skill execution?
- Do you mentally rehearse the feel of performance?

## Goal Setting

This is an important strategy for planning and tracking your performance level. Both short-term and long-term goals and process and outcome goals are important for maximizing performance. Elite level athletes set both types of goals in their training and competition.

- Do you set long-term and short-term personal performance goals?
- Do you evaluate your progress towards your goals on a consistent basis?

## Self Talk

As discussed in an earlier issue, this skill relates to managing what you mentally say to yourself during practice and competitions to facilitate performance.

- Do you talk positively to yourself? Are you your own best friend?
- Do you purposefully manage what you say to yourself in practice and competition?

## Emotional Control

Elite athletes are characterized by an ability to manage their emotions effectively. This means being able to deal with frustration and negative emotions and get on with the business of performing.

- Are you able to manage your emotions under pressure?
- When something upsets you, does your performance suffer?

## Attentional Control

This skill focuses on concentration, or the ability to maintain focus on relevant cues, and is a critical mental skill to train since distractions are commonplace in most athletic endeavors.

- Does your attention wander during training?
- Are you able to focus your attention on effective performance cues?

## Negative Thinking

Elite athletes use specific skills to deal with negativity and to mentally get back on track following a mistake or distraction.

- Are you able to refocus when distracted?
- Do you have thoughts of failure or images of screwing up?

How did you do? Are you pretty good at managing your images, self-talk, attention, emotions, energy and using them as an asset to performance? Read through the questions again to identify mental skills that would be beneficial for you to address. Seek resources to help in areas you identified as needing improvement—and stay tuned to this monthly feature, as I’ll be addressing these and other mental skills.

## About the Author

*Suzie Tuffey Riewald received her Master’s and PhD in Sport Psychology/Exercise Science from the University of North Carolina-Greensboro. She has worked for USA Swimming as the Sport Psychology and Sport Science Director, and now is Associate Director of Coaching with the USOC where she works with various sport national governing bodies (NGBs) to develop and enhance coaching education and training. Additionally, Suzie is an NSCA-Certified Personal Trainer.*