

ATHLETE'S MENTAL EDGE WORKBOOK

MENTAL GAME
STRATEGIES
FOR OPTIMAL
CONCENTRATION



WORKBOOK 2



MENTAL EDGE WORKBOOK 2

MENTAL GAME STRATEGIES FOR OPTIMAL CONCENTRATION



Copyright © 2012 Peak Performance Sports

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form
without written permission from the publisher.

Published by Peak Performance Sports, LLC

7380 Sand Lake Road PMB 5012

Orlando, FL 32819

Mental Edge Workbook 2

Mental Game Strategies for Optimal Concentration

Session 2 Objective

You'll learn how to focus on the process by understanding what a process focus is, as well as how to refocus your mind when you're distracted or off-task.

What You Need to Know

Improving your concentration is top priority for any athlete. Focusing on the right things during competition will ensure your success. Having good concentration means that you have ability to focus on the process, and on the correct cues that will help you perform.

When you focus on the process, you think about the present moment (the here and now). In golf this is called playing "one shot at a time." Similarly, in many sports this is called playing "one play at a time." In this workbook, you'll learn how to focus on execution so you can perform your best in competition and training.

Performing your best in any sport occurs when you focus on the "execution" of a skill, instead of the results or outcomes. This means focusing on your performance and the objective of the task. For example, instead of thinking about missing the last free throw attempt, you need to visualize the shot and focus on the target. Thoughts about outcome, such as "I hope I don't miss" or "Don't strike out" are irrelevant to executing a free throw or having a good at-bat in baseball.

Five Steps to Focusing on the Process

Here, you'll learn how to focus on the important or relevant "performance cues" to help you execute a play, routine, or shot: instead of thinking too far in the future (or in the past). Performance cues are any thoughts, images, feelings, or sensory information that helps you perform a skill well.

You'll learn how to stop thinking too far in the future, such as worrying about losing a match or game. Unfortunately, focusing on execution and not results is much easier said than done. To simplify, we have broken this strategy down into 5 steps.

1. Know what's important to focus on
2. Focus only on your performance cue
3. Notice when you are distracted
4. Use the 3 R's to refocus
5. Use process goals to focus on execution

Know what's important to focus on for execution

Performance cues include any thoughts, images, or feelings that will help you plan and execute a skill. Step one will ask you to think about the performance cues in your sport, in which you'll learn to do here.

Likewise, you'll also want to know what not to think about when performing, which are called **task-irrelevant cues**. For example, thinking about missing a putt is not relevant because it detracts your mind from thinking about execution. Irrelevant cues can be any thought, image or feeling that takes your focus away from what's really important – executing a skill or play.

What are the important performance cues for your sport that help you execute your skills? Use the examples below to help you complete this exercise.

Example Performance Cues for Sports Tasks:

- **Batting:** On-deck preparation, having a plan, digging into the batter's box, taking a practice swing, and focusing on the release of the ball from the pitcher.
- **Putting:** Reading the green, picking a line or target, feeling speed with a practice swing, setting up and aiming, and trusting your stroke.
- **Swimming (on the blocks):** Having a plan for the race, using positive self-talk, visualizing the plan, and feeling yourself swim with effortless speed.
- **Soccer corner kick:** Having a plan, visualizing the plan, setting up for the kick, looking at your target, focusing on your target, and trusting your kick.
- **Tennis serve:** Choosing the type of serve, picking a location, visualizing the serve, setting up and bouncing the ball, the ball toss, and trusting your swing.

Your first task is to think about the performance cues for each type of task you perform in your sport. Ask yourself a simple question: What do I focus on right now to execute or perform this play, routine, point, or shot?

Important note: Keep in mind that your performance cues for competition will differ from your performance cues for practice, because you're in a training mindset in practice. During practice, you are learning how to

improve instead of just performing what you have already learned. Now, list your top distractions under task-irrelevant cues in the table below.

First, consider what tasks you routinely perform in your sport. For example, baseball players bat, run bases, pitch, and play defense, for example. Golfers hit full shots, putt, chip, and hit sand shots. Soccer players attack, defend, keep possession, and shoot. Now, it's your turn. Please complete the table below.

Exercise 1: What Are Performance Cues for Your Sport

In the table below, list four common tasks or skills you do in your sport. Under performance cues, write down what you think about to help you execute that task or skill. Also, list the task-irrelevant cues in the right column. A task-irrelevant cue is anything that distracts you during practice or competition.

Sports Tasks	Performance Cues for Each Task
Task 1	
Task 2	

Task 3	
Task 4	

What Are Your Top Distractions?

You also want to consider your top distractions during competition.

Distractions can start either internally or externally. Internal distractions start within your own mind, such as “I hope I don’t double-fault again like in the last game.” External distractions are triggers on the outside from the environment or other people. Below are some examples of common distractions or task-irrelevant cues.

Internal Distractions	External Distractions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinking you need to win • Worrying about disappointing others • Thinking about who’s watching you perform • Over-analyzing your technique or form • Wondering what you will do after the competition • Thinking about the last point, play or shot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hearing your coaches yell • Seeing your friends at the game • Hearing parents in the stands yell • Teammates yelling after a mistake • The other team trash talking • Bad weather • Hecklers behind the basket • Poor court or field conditions

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thinking about the next point, play, or shot• Imagining a poor outcome (don't miss...)• Dwelling on a past mistake	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bad calls by the referee• Faulty equipment• Not being a starter• Being subbed out
--	--

Exercise 2: What Distracts You?

What are your top distractions? You can pick ones from the table above or think of your own.

List Your Top Distractions During Competition:

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

STEP 2. Focus Only on Your Performance Cues

Now you have a better idea of what performance cues you'll focus on during each skill or play. Your next step towards a process focus is to immerse your mind into your performance cues. Your process goals (from Workbook 1) help you accomplish this task because they can be based on your performance cues, as they are sometimes one and the same. However, typically process goals are broader in scope, such as to focus on

your pre-shot routine: whereas performance cues are much narrower, such as visualizing your performance during a pre-shot routine.

STEP 3. Notice When You're Distracted

Step three is the MOST important skill to help you stay focused. You must be aware of when your mind drifts away from what's important to execution or when you lose focus (distracted, thinking too far ahead, indecision, etc.). You want to catch yourself before it turns into a mental mistake or physical error. The objective is to be aware when these distractions pop into your head. When you are aware of a distraction, you can make the appropriate adjustment. This is called refocusing.

STEP 4. Use the Three R's to Refocus

The main objective of this lesson is to teach you how to refocus when your mind wanders to the wrong cues. Therefore, you'll learn how to **refocus** quickly when you are off-task or distracted during competition. To do this, you'll use a simple strategy called the **Three-Rs for Refocusing**, which includes:

1. **Recognize** - that you are distracted or not focused on the moment.
2. **Regroup** - tell yourself to stop and get back to the task.
3. **Refocus** - on the task-relevant performance cues of the current shot.

The three R's refocusing strategy is designed to help you regain your focus as quickly as possible after a distraction. When you notice you are distracted or off-task, you must act on this and not allow your mind to wander for an inning, period, game, or match!

You can ask yourself this question to help you refocus: *What do I focus on right now to execute my best play?* Your answer will help you think about execution and the correct performance cues.

Exercise 3: Applying the Three R's to Your Sport

Directions: In the table below, list the top distractions that cause you to lose focus. Use your top distractions from the previous page, and then write down a statement to regroup and refocus on the current task.

Distraction	Regroup	Refocus
I'm dwelling on the last missed shot!	Stop! That's over, move on.	Focus on the next play!

You'll want to know the most critical times to refocus your mind. For some self-paced sports tasks such as pitching, putting, bowling, and field goal

kicking, you have the advantage of restarting your routine when you are distracted.

However, in most instances, athletes are forced to refocus quickly or “on the fly,” such as when you are in the middle of a 100 fly or full-court press. Refocusing on the fly only takes one to two seconds to complete. In this case, you use a quick three-R's approach.

STEP 5. Use Process Goals to Focus on Execution

Please remember your daily process goals (discussed in Workbook 1) to help you focus on your performance and mental game. For review, below are examples of process goals:

- **Performance goals:** play aggressive, control the ball, hit fairways, have good rhythm in the water, take the open shot, etc.
- **Mental game goals:** pick a target, stay in the present, stick to a game plan, think one play at a time, let go of the last mistake, etc.

How do you decide on good process goals? *What is the one part of your game you want to improve immediately?* What you focus on, you improve. However, keep in mind that you don't want to think too much about technique during competition; save your thoughts about mechanics for practice. During competition, you want to think about strategy and other non-technical objectives, such as how you will run the play.

You don't have to keep track of process goals during competition. Just make your process goals more important than the outcome or the score. Your process goals will keep you focused on executing your skills instead of results.

Other Tips To Improve Your Focus:

1. Become the warrior athlete - Enter the role of a focused athlete. Don't carry worries or distractions from your life into competition. Commit to focusing on your sport for the next 2-3 hours or the entire length of the competition.
2. Always focus on what you want to do instead of what you want to avoid doing (e.g., hit the ball hard instead of don't strike out).
3. Treat each play, point, or shot as a 20-second burst of focus. Train yourself to focus intently for a few seconds at a time in stop and go sports such as baseball, tennis, or bowling. Relax your focus between plays or points. Have fun and enjoy the day!
4. If you have a bad habit of focusing on scores or results, make your process goals more important than the score. Use the three R's and refocus when you start to think about the score.

Summary

Every athlete has the power to concentrate, but it's easy to become distracted during play. Your goal is to immerse yourself with the important performance cues that will help you to perform better. You will also want to become familiar with your own personal distractions so you can refocus quickly. "Refocus, refocus, and refocus" is your mantra for today's lesson. Don't allow distractions to run unchecked and turn into mental or physical errors.

Pre-Competition Mental Preparation

Please remind yourself of the mental skills you are working on this week to help you take it to practice and competition.

1. Simply remind yourself to focus on one play, point, shot, or race at a time. Nothing matters but the current moment, not the past or the future unless you use the past to help you with your strategy.
2. What is your plan for dealing with your "typical distractions" when competing? Have a planned strategy - a refocus statement, such as "refocus on_____."
3. It's helpful to have refocus statements you'll use during practice and competition. Rehearse these refocus statements so they are well-learned and easy to recall.
4. Set two or three process goals to help you stay in the moment and make them more important than the outcome.

Post-Competition Mental Game Assessment

After your next practice or competition, please answer a few questions about your mental game. It's best if you answer them on the same day as your practice or competition. After you answer the questions below, **please return your answers via email or fax.**

1. What are two things you did well today with your mental game and performance?
2. What are two things you would like to improve for the next competition?
3. How successful were you in focusing on the moment and not looking back or thinking ahead?
4. At what times did you become distracted or not "present-focused"?
5. When did you have to refocus during competition? Were you successful?
6. How well did you focus on your process goals today to help you stay in the present?
7. What did you learn about your mental focus and concentration that you can apply to future competitions?