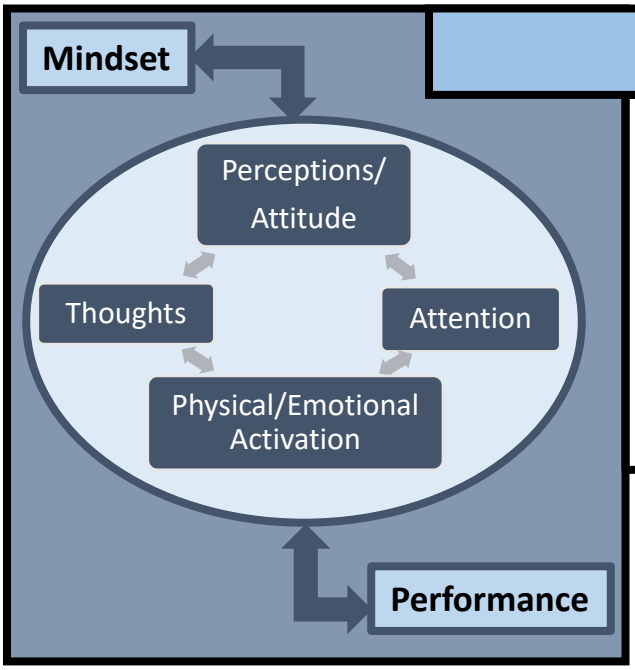
Mental Performance Training Guidelines

In the pages that follow, you will find theories, concepts, skills and techniques, and suggestions from past A&S candidates that will allow you to mentally prepare for A&S. Several quotes from previous A&S candidates have been included to provide you with real-world applications. The intent should not be to use everything in this packet. In fact, if you were to try to use everything you would clutter your mind and probably not perform as well. The goal is to: (1) provide you with instructional and practical content allowing you to prepare mentally for A&S; (2) drive increased self-awareness for some things you may currently be doing so you will continue to do it at A&S, (3) provide you with mental practice opportunities so you can apply and practice the concepts, skills and techniques, and (4) provide you with a variety of resources (podcasts, apps, books) allowing you to increase the depth of your mental preparation.

Mental Preparation for A&S

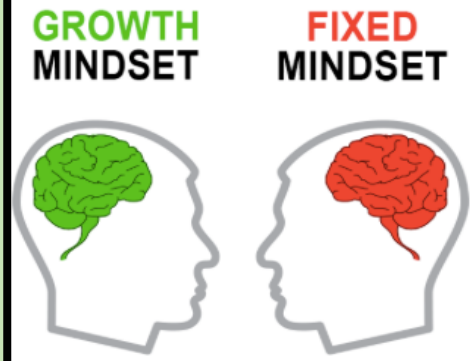


As you begin preparing mentally for A&S, consider the figure to the left where perceptions/attitude, thoughts, attention/concentration, and your physical/emotional activation levels interact to produce performance. Furthermore, consider how performance then impacts these variables in return. When facing an unpredictable environment such as A&S, mentally preparing and training to enhance your control of these variables can enhance your performance, give you a greater sense of control in an uncontrollable environment, increase your learning and development, and improve your overall experience. Consider the following questions as you move through this packet:

Mindset

….a set of beliefs that guide their thinking, emotions, and behavior (Dweck, 1999).

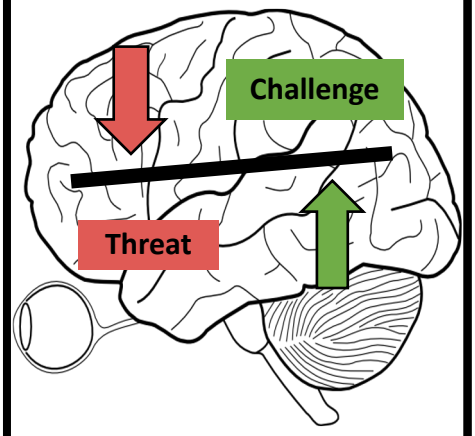
- Believe effort matters regardless of previous performances
- Focus on what they can control, the process, the present moment, and their progress
- Engage effective thinking and establish process and mastery goals
- Use pre-event anxiety to their advantage
- Understand failure can ultimately lead to success
- View events or other candidates' good performances as challenges



- Preoccupation with results or performing perfectly
- Overly negative/self-critical after failure or perceived failure
- Do not learn/improve following failure
- Excessive concern with how other candidates are performing
- View other candidates' good performances as threatening to you
- View events or Cadre as threats
- Stuck on past performances (good or bad)

A fixed mindset is not bad and can be an asset for you in certain situations. It can even drive higher levels of performance when a fear of failure or a competitive drive to outperform other candidates is used properly. However, a growth mindset has been associated with more adaptive behaviors, enhanced performance, and greater overall enjoyment of the process. The key is to understand when your operating with a fixed mindset and whether it's benefitting you at that moment. If not, shifting your mindset may be the best thing for you.

Perception/Attitude



How you perceive the A&S process interacts, and influences, how you think, where you direct your attention, your activation levels, and how you act. Generally speaking when perceiving the various experiences at A&S as threats performance will suffer. Threat-based perceptions may lead to negative thinking, loss or lack of confidence, decreased motivation, lack of focus on the right things at the right time, and a host of detrimental emotions (i.e. frustration) and physiological reactions (i.e tight muscles, increased heart rate, rapid/shallow breathing, etc.). Alternatively a challenge-based attitude can lead to better, and more sustainable and consistent, performances. At the heart of a challenge attitude is an individual's desire to see what he's capable of and the actual enjoyment of the experience. The challenge-focused approach can lead to a total commitment to the process, trust, enhanced and sustainable motivation, increased confidence, well-directed attention, and facilitative activation levels. Physiologically, the challenge-based approach may lead to the same increased heart rate, greater muscle activity, and rapid breathing as with a threat-based approach, but it's more intentionally directed and controlled. In addition, these individuals may react with a physiologically calming effect through the use of deep breathing, lower heart rates, and slower respiration rates.

Checking your Mindset

Summary Questions to Consider:

(1) What is your mindset during your preparation? What is your mindset going into A&S? Will your mindset facilitate higher levels of performance? If not, what changes do you need to make?
(2) How are you (or how can you) mentally training for A&S? What are your mental performance strengths and weaknesses?
(3) Fear of failure can be a good thing when it drives optimal performance. However, fear of failure is also one source driving a threat mindset. Are you overly worried about failing to the point where it could drive you to have a threat-based attitude?
(4) What risks are you going to take at A&S and how does your mindset and attitude support or inhibit you? When will you come out of your comfort zone? When will you step up into leadership roles? When will you stay back and be a follower? How will you get to know the other candidates in a competitive environment? How will you balance focusing on your individual performance with being a good teammate? How will you balance having a growth mindset with sticking to what got you there in the first place?

Mindset: Voices from the Past

Throughout this packet you will see quotes from candidates of past selections. They will always be highlighted with the same color box as this one. The intent is to use their voices to highlight specific mental performance components that will help you better prepare for A&S.

I always used mini goals and only thought ahead one mini goal at a time. Selection for me was thousands of very small events broken into pieces I could chew. I used a lot of self-talk mostly reminding myself to stay present. I used diaphragmatic breathing as soon as I felt anxiety for an upcoming event. I also thought of assessment less as me vs. assessment and more as assessment as a positive challenge that would make me better (20-01).

I think I had an effective mindset during selection. I came into selection with the idea that I would compete and thrive rather than just survive the events. Also, I had the mindset throughout that I would focus only on what I could control, which proved difficult at times especially following failures (20-01).

I had high standards for myself throughout and when I would make mistakes, it would start to slowly chip away at my confidence. I started getting stressed and nervous more and more as the mistakes added up. A huge factor also was the fact that I had not slept, rested, eaten well in the week prior (loose stool, nausea, jet lag). I began to get frustrated and upset that all the hard work and prep I did was taking a huge hit because I did not show up on my A-game (20-01).

I knew you guys only had a week to test me. I knew effort is more highly regarded here than physical fitness. My focus was on performing each task in the moment. I constantly reevaluated what my techniques/form/hydration/nutrition were doing. I tried to keep my "why's" in the back of my mind during all physical events. I focused on helping my team to stop self-pity. I know nothing requires super-human ability. I'm confident with what my abilities are and my goal was to demonstrate those (20-01).

Worried about performing well. Worried about performing commensurate with my rank. Anxiety about how well/poor I was leading in regards to my position in the troop (20-02).

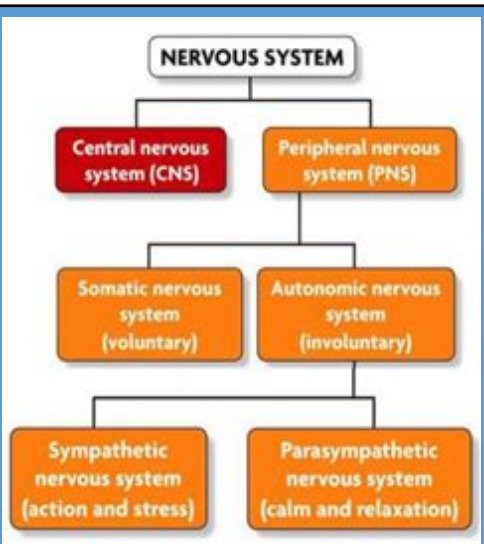
Calm, confident, prepared to be challenged and perform at a high level. I understood I would fail, make mistakes, and compare myself to others. But I also was ready to test myself and trust my preparation. Relied heavily on positive self-talk, open-mindedness, and goal setting to grow and maintain a positive edge throughout during of selection)20-02).

The opportunity is a humbling experience and I felt blessed to be invited. My convictions are strong in regards to the mission and team of the 724. It was easy to stay positive, hungry and continue to drive. I will never quit and I focused on what I could control. Take critical feedback, learn from an event and dial into the next (20-01)

Energy and Activation Management

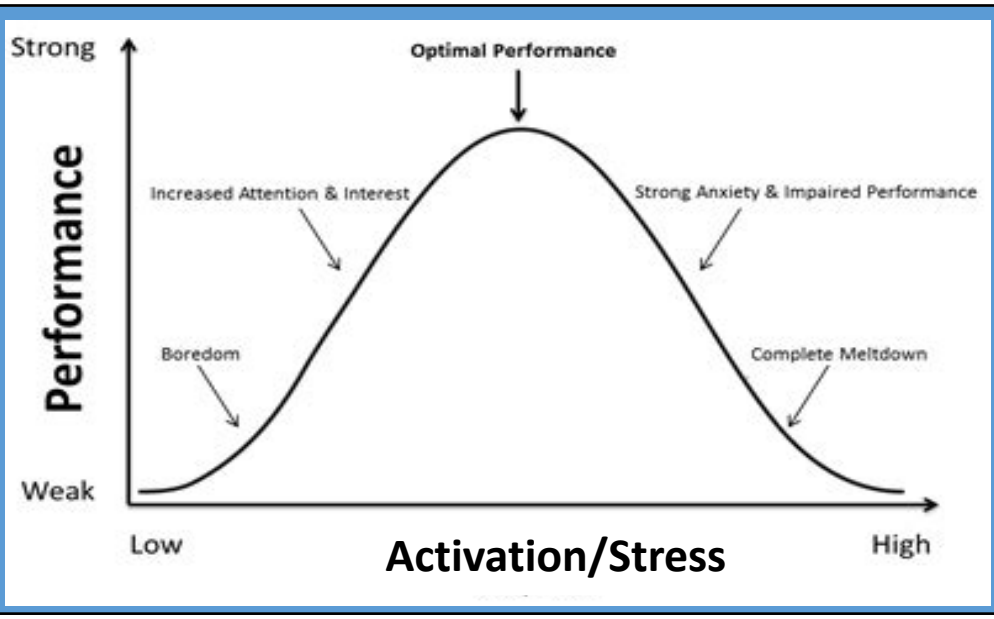
The Nervous System

When discussing/understanding energy and activation management, the autonomic nervous system (ANS) is the psycho-physiological system of interest. The interplay and coordination of the sympathetic (fight or flight response) and parasympathetic (rest/digest) helps drive optimal performance. There are times during A&S when the sympathetic system needs to be the primary driver of your performance and other times where the parasympathetic system to be dominant.



Activation

Activation refers to physical and mental states needed by an individual to perform or be ready to perform a specific task or activity. When viewed on a continuum deep sleep (parasympathetic activation) might be positioned on one end and extreme excitement (sympathetic activation) on the other (Hardy, et al., 1996). Generally speaking performance during a given task increases as an individual reaches optimal/peak activation levels and then decreases after that peak zone has been reached (Yerkes & Dodson, 1908).

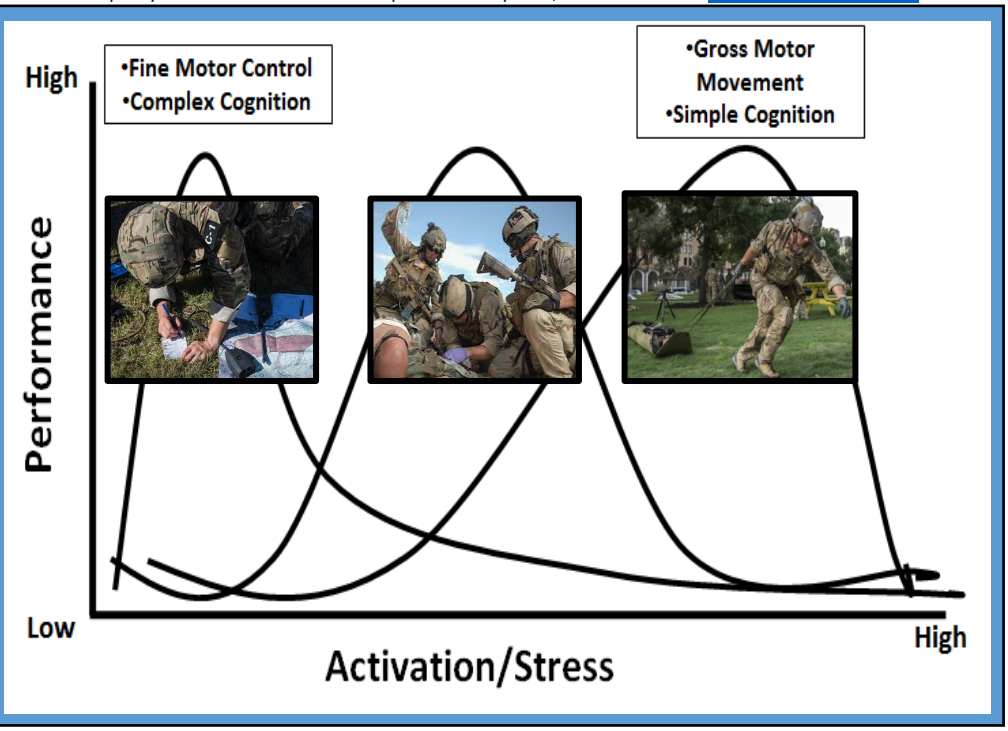


Hardy, L, Jones, G., & Gould, D. (1996). Understanding psychological preparation for sport: Theory and practice of elite performers. Chichester, England: Wiley.

Yerkes, R.M. and Dodson, J.D. (1908), The relation of strength of stimulus to rapidity of habit-formation. J. Comp. Neurol. Psychol., 18: 459-482. doi:10.1002/cne.920180503

Individual Zone of Optimal Functioning (IZOF) (Hanin, 2000)

IZOF suggests each individual has an optimal level of activation needed in order to perform at his highest level. This optimal level of activation is dependent on the task being completed and the individual. Tasks requiring larger amounts of attention, complex thinking/problem solving, and fine motor movement require lower levels of activation while tasks requiring speed, power, and strength require higher levels of activation.



THINK ABOUT IT: Energy Management Plan

In unpredictable environments such as A&S, focusing on uncontrollable factors sucks your energy and leaves you feeling defeated. Below is one candidate's response to the question: What was your greatest obstacle during A&S?

I think it took a lot of my emotional energy to bounce back from setbacks of performance, which I felt able to do, but was challenging, especially when my body/legs didn't seem to respond to how I was visualizing. I still could move but hadn't figured out why I wasn't moving as fast, which was tough. So I tried a different technique each time to address the same problem (e.g. food, hydration, stretch, breathing, hype up, etc.).
(Candidate in Class 20-01)

Make a flexible plan that allows you focus on controlling the controllables:

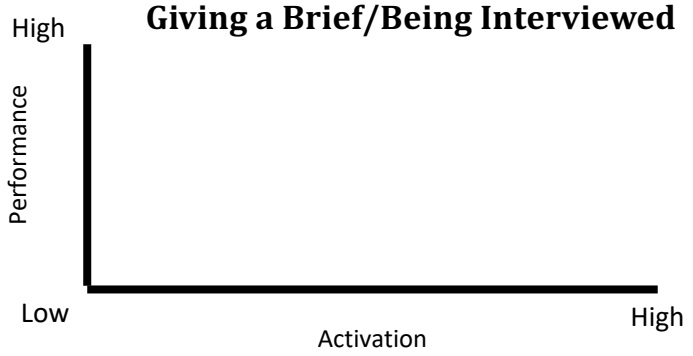
- **Knowing what you can and cannot control**
- **Accepting what you cannot control**
- **Taking action to influence the things you can control**

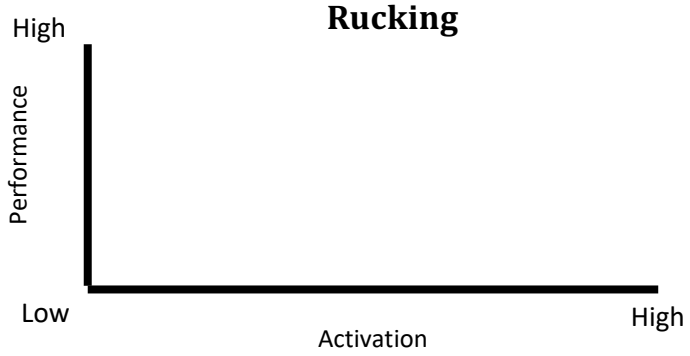
Controllables *In relation to A&S, what can you control?*	**Uncontrollables** *In relation to A&S, what can you not control?*

Putting it into practice: This needs to become an automatic thing so practice focusing on controllable factors in everyday life and key situations at work or training: mindset, attitude, effort, thoughts, energy/activation, attention.

Taking a more formal leadership approach was difficult in the initial phase. I had to balance the informal road, making sure the guys knew I was there for them and when it is time crank up the intensity. During exfil, I saw some doubt, nervousness in their faces and I used my fiery motivation to take lead. This helped overcome doubt, that I can be that leader.
(Candidate in Class 20-02)

On the graphs below, draw the type of activation curve you want for each performance.





Putting it into practice: The goal here is to improve self-awareness for when you may be lacking or have too much activation and then integrating self-regulation techniques (i.e. breath control, visualization, progressive muscle relaxation, acceptance, etc.) to help you manage your energy levels better across time.

Try these Energy Management Practice Tasks during your physical training sessions:

(1) Practice diaphragmatic breathing before your workout (1-5 minutes); during your workout (10-60 seconds) between reps/sets; and after your workout (1-5 minutes)
(2) Using a heart rate monitor incorporate repetitions where you are unable to begin the next iteration/set until you've achieved a predetermined heart rate (a percentage of your max HR) that gets you to engage your breath control techniques.
(3) During ESD or iterative conditioning sessions, incorporate a mental challenge (checkout concentrationsgrid.com) so you have to shift between periods of high and low activation.

Diaphragmatic Breathing

Objective: Use diaphragmatic breathing to increase your ability to control physical and cognitive states before, during and after performances. Proper breathing enhances performance by increasing the amount of oxygen in the blood and carrying more energy to the muscles (Hanton, et al., 2015). Proper breathing also helps you better regulate the parasympathetic (rest/digest) and sympathetic nervous system (fight/flight). A slow, deep, diaphragmatic breath triggers a relaxation response. Practicing this technique exercises the parasympathetic system and this helps to regulate the sympathetic system. Essentially, the two systems begin working together more effectively, allowing your nervous system to be more adaptable to challenging and changing environmental demands.

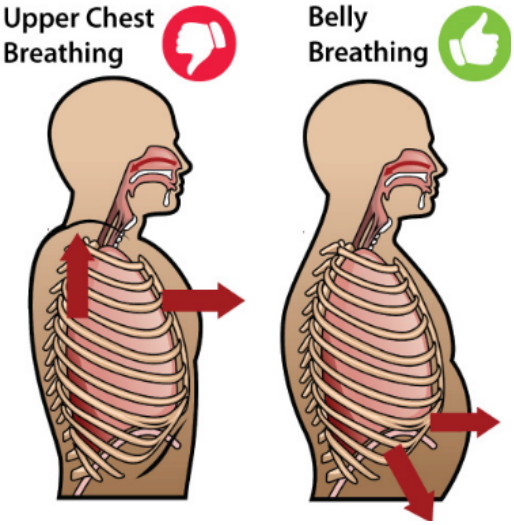
Instructions:

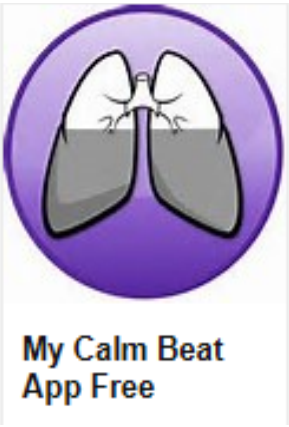
Two Components:

Physical: Breathe diaphragmatically at a rate of 5 to 7 breaths per minute.

Mental: Focus on your breathing or a single object or cue word that enables you to maintain concentration on breathing diaphragmatically.

Practice while sitting to begin with, and then progress to standing. Use good posture when sitting (back straight, feet flat on the floor). Until you feel comfortable performing the technique, place one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach. Begin breathing comfortably – notice which hand moves. The goal is to make the hand on your stomach move in and out. This means you are breathing diaphragmatically from the lower portion of your lungs. Try to inhale through your nose for ~4-6 seconds and exhale through your mouth for ~4-6 seconds.





Individual Practice: Breathe diaphragmatically for 5 minutes one time per day. Progress to breathing diaphragmatically for 5 minutes two times per day. If you are pressed for time, or you are finding that five minutes is too long to maintain attention on this technique to begin with, break the sessions into shorter increments (i.e. 1 or 2-minutes). Rather than using a time-based format, you may choose a repetition-based approach. For example, you may simply take 30 diaphragmatic breaths (at six breaths per minute, this is approximately 5-minutes) or 12 breaths (~2-minutes worth of diaphragmatic breathing). Download the following apps to install breath pacers on your phone: MyCalmBeat or Breathe2Relax. These apps are free and provide you with a pacer that helps you practice this technique. Follow the attached practice plan and check off practice sessions for accountability.

Effecitve Applications: Incorporate 6-12 diaphragmatic breaths every 1-2 hours throughout your day. Incorporate 6-12 diaphragmatic breaths (~1-2 minutes) before and/or after PMR. Incorporate 6-12 diaphragmatic breaths as part of your routine before events/training. Use 1-3 diaphragmatic breaths as part of a refocus routine when you find yourself tense or "off your game" during a performance. Incorporate ~2-5 minutes of diaphragmatic breathing to trigger your relaxation response and help you declutter your mind prior to going to sleep at night.

Selected References

Hanton, S., Millalieu, S., & Williams, J.M. (2015). Understanding and managing stress in sport. In J.M. Williams and V. Krane (Eds.) Applied Sport Psychology: Personal Growth to Peak Performance. (7th Edition) (pp.207-239). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Lehrer, P.M. & Gevirtz, R. (2014). Heart rate variability biofeedback: how and why does it work? Frontiers in Pscyhology, 5, (756), pp. 1-9.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Objective: Teach and train your awareness of what muscular tension and relaxation feels like.

Instructions: Practice while sitting or lying down to begin with, and then progress to standing.

- If you are lying down, ensure your head, neck and trunk are aligned, legs are straight and approximately 6-12 inches apart with your heels inward and toes pointing outward; arms should be at the side with palms up and fingers bent comfortably.
- If sitting, do-so in an upright position without crossing your legs and arms. Hands should be on the thighs palms down and feet should be flat on the floor.

For each muscle group below, tense the muscle group for approximately 5-7 seconds and then relax the muscle group for 20-30 seconds. Follow all instructions passively – especially on the relaxation phase. When relaxing your muscles, do not strain. Relaxing should naturally happen throughout this process. Put another way, relaxation should be no more than the absence of tension.

1) *Tense the muscles in the dominant hand, lower arm, and upper arm by making a tight fist, bending your hand back at the wrist, and pushing your elbow down so you can feel tightness in your biceps (5-7 seconds). Release the tension and relax the muscles (20-30 seconds). Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. **Repeat this for the non-dominant hand, lower arm, and upper arm.*

2) *Tense the muscles in your face by squinting your eyes and slightly gritting your teeth (not too tight, just enough to understand the feel of relaxation) (5-7 seconds). Feel the tension in your forehead, jaws, and scalp. Release the tension and relax the muscles (20-30 seconds). Notice the difference between tension and relaxation.*

3) *Tense the muscles in the neck and shoulders by raising your shoulders upward as high as possible and pulling your neck down into your shoulders (5-7 seconds). Feel the tension in your neck, throat, and shoulders. Release the tension and relax by allowing your shoulders to drop back down (20-30-seconds). Notice the difference between tension and relaxation.*

4) *Tighten your abdomen as if you are expecting a punch and squeeze your buttocks together at the same time (5-7 seconds). Feel the tightness in your stomach and glutes. Release the tension and relax (20-30 seconds).*

5) *Tighten your dominant leg by tightening the muscles in your thighs (straighten your leg), flexing your toes towards your ankle and then pointing your toes away from your ankle (5-7 seconds). Release the tension and relax (20-30 seconds). **Repeat this for the non-dominant leg*

6) *Take 12-15 diaphragmatic breaths.*

Momentary Muscle Relaxation

Takes approximately 10-30 secs and can be incorporated into pre-mission/training routines and during the mission/training to decrease tension

1.) **Quick Body Scan**: Head to toe scan – stop where muscle tension is too high for the performance and release the tension.

2.) **Neck and Shoulder Check**: too much tension is common in these areas. Scan these areas – if they are tight, tense them, then release the tension. "Releasing excessive tension in these two areas tends to spread relaxation to the rest of the body; it may also have a calming effect on the mind (Hanton, et al, 2015, p. 225)."

3.) **Training/Mission-specific muscle check**: same as neck and shoulder check, but focus on specific muscles that are most important to training/mission performance (i.e. wrist, forearms, shoulders for shooting).

Practice and Application

Individual Practice: Initially, practice daily. Once you understand the differences between tension and relaxation, shorter sessions may be used. Performing modified sessions when distractions are present will help with the transfer to key performances.

Application: Incorporate PMR into your strength and conditioning warm-ups. Incorporate PMR into a routine before you conduct any type of training/mission. During performances, transfer skills gained from PMR. Notice when your body is too tight to perform at the most efficient level. Do your movements feel tight and constrained – do certain movements require too much effort? If so, use momentary muscle relaxation exercises to promote a more relaxed state (i.e. notice where the tightness is, and simply perform a quick release of the tension – as it was practiced during PMR sessions). Use PMR to target a single muscle group that is important for a specific performance. For example, you may target the hand and arm muscles before shooting practice.

Understanding Energy Management/Recovery during your Train-Up

	Symptoms	Consequences	Interventions
Underrecovery	Physiological: Physical complaints; increased muscle soreness Psychological: Reduced stress tolerance; sleep disturbances; lack of energy; phases of emotional disturbances	Short-Term: Tiredness; exhaustion; lethargy; decreased motivation; negative cognitions Long-Term: Performance decrements; health issues; overtraining; burnout	Short-Term: Systematic application of relaxation/ recovery techniques in early stages of underrecovery Long-Term: Rest periods (days to weeks); periods of lower training intensity; individualized, proactive recovery activities
Overtraining	Physiological: Chronic muscle or joint pain; elevated resting heart rate; increased physical fatigue Psychological: Increased cognitive fatigue; irritability; lack of enthusiasm/ambition; personality/mood changes	Short-Term: Tiredness; exhaustion; concentration deficits; apathy towards training Long-Term: Hormonal changes; injuries, illnesses and infections; performance collapse	Short-Term: Lack of effective short-term interventions Long-Term: Acquisition of coping strategies; restoration of energy reserves; rest periods (weeks to months)
Burnout	Physiological: Physical exhaustion; immunodeficiency Psychological: Emotional exhaustion; reduced sense of personal accomplishment; domain devaluation	Short-Term: Injuries, illnesses, and infections; break from domain Long-Term: Withdrawal from domain participation	Short-Term: Lack of effective short-term interventions Long-Term: Consultation of specialist (e.g., psychologist) extensive break from domain-related activities

Table from: Heidari, J., Kolling, S., Pelka, M., & Kellmann, M. (2018). Monitoring the recovery-stress state in athletes. In M. Kellmann & J. Beckmann (Eds), Sport, Recovery and Performance: Interdisciplinary Insights (pp. 3-18). Abingdon: Routledge.

Multi-Disciplinary Energy-Management/Recovery Options to Incorporate during your Train-Up

Natural Strategies	Physical Strategies	Psychosociological Strategies
Sleep Nutrition Active Recovery Stretching Spending time in nature Alone time Time with Friends and Family	Cryotherapy/Ice/Ice Bags Cold water immersion Whirlpool/Sauna Light Bed Massage/Foam rolling Flotation (Float Pod) Compression therapy	Progressive Muscle Relaxation Imagery Meditation/Mindfulness Music/Sound Breathing Exercises/Biofeedback Communication with significant others Plan and Prioritize/Goal Setting

Venter, R., & Grobbelaar, R. (2018). Perceptions and practices of recovery modalities in elite team athletes. In M. Kellmann & J. Beckmann (Eds), Sport, Recovery, and Performance: Interdisciplinary Insights (pp. 33-48). Abingdon: Routledge.

Daily/Weekly/Monthly Plan to Incorporate Specific Strategies

Focus Area	Daily Strategy	Weekly Strategy	Monthly Strategy
1.)			
2.)			
3.)			

Attention Control

"Concentration is the ability to direct attention to appropriate cues in the present task instead of being controlled by irrelevant external or internal stimuli (Williams, et al., 2015, p. 322).

Attention and Optimal Human Performance

Self-Focused Attention: Appropriate when you are reviewing, critiquing, and analyzing your performance with the goal of identifying strengths and weaknesses. Inappropriate and potentially detrimental to performing at your optimal level during a performance.

Task-Focused Attention: "…***optimal human performance*** can be seen as requiring minimal self-judgment, minimal attention to external or internal threat, and minimal future-oriented focus on possible performance consequences and ramifications. This can be summarized as active absorption in the task as opposed to active absorption in the self (Gardner & Moore, 2007, p. 29)."

Self-Focused Attention	Task-Focused Attention
- Internal thoughts and processes - Self-judgment - Focused on past or future - Uncontrollable aspects of the performance	- Focused on external stimuli, options, contingencies - Process-focused - Present-moment - What can be controlled

Gardner & Moore, 2007

I was determined to make it through selection. I think the constant negative feedback started to get in my head and make me over-think the events and how I should respond. My mindset was to come here and be myself and trust the process. Over the course of the week, though, the constant internal focus driven by the emphasis on feedback started making me question myself. (Class 20-01 Candidate)

This quote emphasizes how one candidate remained self-focused as a result of the constant feedback he was receiving. Self-focused attention, when adopted at the right points in time, is effective for reflecting on your performances, analyzing feedback to make quick adjustments or to simply decide there's nothing you can do about it at that point in time. Remaining self-focused (i.e. constantly judging yourself, focusing on future/past performances, uncontrollable aspects, etc.) during performance can be detrimental: "in your own head", slow decision making, poor/lack of leadership, miss key aspects of the TCS, freezing up, not coming out of your comfort zone, etc.

"My greatest obstacle was self-doubt. I'm never going to be the physical stud on a team, but those early performances in front of everyone with the constant negative feedback from Cadre about my leadership put me into a mental place with a lot of self-doubt (CLASS 20-01 Candidate)."

Attentional Errors	
Internal Distractions	External Distractions
- Focused on past failures or successes or the unknown/ unpredictable - Overanalyzing feedback - Mental or physical fatigue - Comparing your performance to other candidates	- Other candidates - Cadre/Assessment Personnel - The environment (weather/living conditions, etc.) - Equipment/Gear

Attentional Errors at A&S

- Failing to focus on the most relevant cues/parts of the TCS
- Maintaining effective concentration over increasing periods of time due to limitations of attentional resources.
- Failing to bounce back quickly from early setbacks
- Failing to manage energy effectively throughout A&S – causing increases on attentional resources and ultimately driving more self-focused attention at inappropriate times.
- Failing to transition or shift between roles and responsibilities between events demanding different activation levels: individual vs. team; leading vs. following; interviews vs. physical events; "coming out of your shell" vs. being the "gray man".
- Overall, viewing events, assessors, other candidates, etc. as threats instead of challenges.

"The greatest obstacle was fear of the unknown. I never knew what was coming next and this led to overthinking and anxiety. To overcome this I would take long deep breaths and remind myself to just focus on the present until selection was completed (Class 20-02 Candidate)."

THINK ABOUT IT: Attention Control Plan

Guidelines for Attention Training

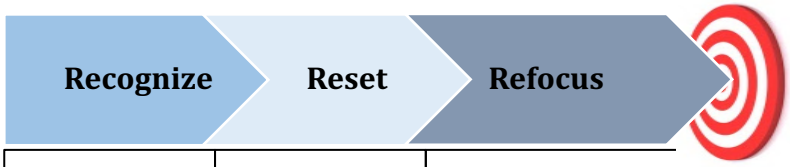
- Apply individualized strategies to promote optimal activation for performance.
- Train/focus with intention – intention leads to attention. Intent primes attention.
- Identify how best to shift your focus and when to compartmentalize thoughts until after the performance.
- Practice attentional strategies that are best for specific situations within your tactical performances.
- Identify and use anchors to focus your attention in specific situations
- Practice focus and re-focusing skills during training sessions and with mental imagery.
- Develop pre-performance and performance routines to focus concentration and refocus when you need to (Williams, et al., 2015, p. 322).

"I think I physically prepared pretty well to maintain for a long time. With that, I mentally prepared to try to not think if/when it will end, but to be present in the moment because I knew what the end goal was and what is required is for me to be present/forward thinking only when given the chance/respite from the past event. I also would only allow a little/certain amount of time to "dwell". I would allow, once in a while, time to dwell/process. I remember thinking/saying "you are allowed to feel like this for one minute. Soak it in, bask in it, now move on. What's next?" And what can you do right now to improve? Is anyone else hurting? Does someone look like they need help? Help them, you are fine, now get out of your head and move on. And other things, such as "Go" or "How is everyone/someone else?" If I didn't have time to dwell (Class 20-01 Candidate)."

This quote represents one candidate's way of shifting from self- to task-focused attention efficiently and effectively. Sometimes what the "present" moment looks like is difficult to identify. Here the candidate clearly shifts to controllable factors (i.e. task-focused attention) after allowing himself a brief period of self-focused attention to deal with his previous performance and feedback. The key point is to have a simple mental game plan for dealing with setbacks, successes, previous performances, feedback, etc. that will allow you to recognize when your attention is in the wrong place for too long, to reset mentally, and refocus on the task at hand. Practice your mental game plan before A&S so you make it automatic.

Refocusing or Resetting

"There were times when my mental preparation for each event was automatic, but when tired, I noticed my mind wandering or starting to spiral. I would reset by saying that 'it doesn't matter/I will think about that later'. What matters is now. I asked/answered three questions if I was really down. (1) Where are you? Here (2) When is it? Now (3) What are you? This moment (Class 20-01 Candidate)."



Recognize	Reset	Refocus
Be aware of: --Self-focused thoughts -Attention Thieves	Clear your mind Take a Deliberate breath W.I.N.	Cue word Present-Focused Task-Focused

(1) Where are you? Here
(2) When is it? Now
(3) What are you? This moment
Reemphasized from above

What strategies are you using/can you use to remain focused and controlled in the moment:

Pre-Event/ Performance:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

During Event Performance:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Refocusing:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Ultimate Goal: Remain focused and controlled "in the moment" – this entails blocking out all irrelevant or unnecessary stimuli/distractions while being able to broaden or narrow your focus as required by the task.

Training Present-Focused Awareness: Drills to Promote Task-Focused Attention

Attention Strength Training Drill (Narrow-External)

Focus on a single object. Notice all of the details of the object without being distracted by other stimuli. When you notice your attention has wandered from the object, simply bring your focus back to the object. Vary the time but try to increase the length of the drill as you get more comfortable and as you begin to strengthen your attention control. Start with 30-seconds and progress from there.

Task-Focused Attention Exercise

Turn around with your back to the person with whom you are speaking (no eye contact). Have the person tell a two-minute story about a recent life event (tell them to try to incorporate an event that uses multiple names, location(s) – provide dates/times, etc). Concentrate on the story. Afterwards, recount the story in as much detail as possible. Following the description, write down any other stimuli (internal thoughts or external noises for example) you were aware of during the story telling. The goal is for you to be able to accurately recount well over 50% of the story. Answer the following questions:

1.) What information can you recall from the story – record as much of it here as possible. Check information recalled with your partner.

2.) Besides the story, where else did your attention go during this task? What distracted your attention?

3-minute Centering Exercise

Sit in a comfortable position. Close your eyes if it feels comfortable. Take six diaphragmatic breaths. Now focus your attention on your surroundings by noticing any sounds that are occurring inside and outside the room. Next, focus your attention to where your body is touching the chair. Notice the physical sensations where your body is touching the chair. Next notice any other physical sensations in your body without changing them – just realize they are there. Now, focus on what's on your mind. Don't try to change your thoughts – just realize what they are. Now, identify what is the most important thing you should be doing right now and focus on it for a few seconds. Identify what do you need to do to accomplish this thing. Focus on this for a few seconds and then take 3-6 diaphragmatic breaths.

3 X 3 X 3

At least three times during your day (or anytime your attention is self-focused when it shouldn't be) identify three things in your current environment, three bodily sensations. thoughts or emotions you are currently experiencing, and take three diaphragmatic breaths. Finish by clearly identifying where your attention should be at this given moment.

Perform the attention strength training drill by focusing on a single object for 30-seconds to two minutes. This object should be viewed as the "anchor" for your attention in this task. Perform the task three times and answer the prompts below.

Session #1 (30-seconds)

What was your anchor?

_____

Where did your attention go during this repetition? _____

What was your strategy for anchoring your attention? _____

Session #2 (1-minutes)

What was your anchor?

_____

Where did your attention go during this repetition? _____

What was your strategy for anchoring your attention? _____

Session #3 (2-minutes)

What was your anchor?

_____

Where did your attention go during this repetition? _____

What was your strategy for anchoring your attention? _____

Based on: Gardner & Moore, 2007

Mental Strategies for Controlling Attention

Below are a series of mental control techniques. The point is NOT to use all of these, but to understand what you are already using or could easily adopt to effectively direct and/or re-direct your attention when needed.

Strategy	Description	Application
Attentional Cues and Triggers	Visual, verbal, or kinesthetic cues can be used to focus or refocus your concentration when it's not on the right thing at the right time. The goal is to focus your attention on the most important aspect of the task at hand, speed the detection of, and response to, stimuli, and minimize the effect of distracting thoughts, feelings, or the environmental distractors. Cues should be present-moment focused, process-oriented (as opposed to outcome), and positive rather than negative. Practice using the attentional cues/triggers throughout your practices and performances so they initiate automatic responses (focusing and refocusing your attention).	
Focus Training	Hold your attention on a specific object or task. Each time your attention wanders, refocus your attention on this object or task. To provide yourself with feedback, make a tally mark on a scrap sheet of paper each time your mind wanders with the goal of reducing the number of tally marks across training sessions.	
Pre-Performance Routine	These are pre-planned and include a systematic sequence of thoughts and behaviors you engage in prior to warm-ups, practices/training, or missions. They are designed to divert your attention away from irrelevant aspects of the immediate environment, keep you in the present moment, direct your attention to controllable factors associated with mission and skill execution. Develop a routine and then practice it regularly so that it becomes routinized – with the goal of automatically triggering the optimal arousal, thinking, and focused concentration needed for the current task/performance. Pre-performance routines may include diaphragmatic breathing, attentional cues, and/or imagery.	
Reset/Refocus Routine	Similar to cues/triggers, but designed specifically to reset or refocus you when your attention wanders, during short breaks in performance, or when you make an error. Reset/refocus routines may include an attentional cue and one or two diaphragmatic breaths to activate greater physiological and mental control.	
Self-Talk	Self-talk includes instructional or motivational words or phrases you say to yourself for performance execution. Self-talk should be: (1) short and specific phrases; (2) said from a first-person person perspective and be in present-tense; (3) positive or effective; (4) said with meaning, intention and attention; (5) repeated multiple times.	
Thought-Stopping	A form of self-talk designed to stop negative thoughts before they harm performance. Thought-stopping requires awareness that the thought is there, stopping the thought with an attentional cue word or trigger and then re-directing your attention with an effective thought, cue word or phrase.	

Concentration Grid

Task #1: Start with 00, cross it off, then cross of 01, 02, 03, etc. working your way up to 99. Time how long it takes you to complete all 100 numbers.

91	54	34	08	16	61	48	92	81	44
04	05	33	89	72	45	73	83	77	64
06	78	27	14	28	09	39	32	95	23
07	65	37	93	99	87	29	19	96	20
24	31	30	49	70	01	55	43	22	75
50	80	12	58	46	82	76	59	26	57
90	10	52	15	17	21	35	18	79	03
56	38	60	51	85	02	42	00	88	62
66	40	69	13	63	74	53	68	71	25
11	86	84	97	67	94	41	98	47	36

Concentration Grid

Task #2: Find three numbers you've pre-identified (ex. 71, 32, 58), but do not strike them off. Close your eyes, count to 10, drop down do a few burpees, and then cross them off as quickly as possible based on your memory for where they are.

58	74	52	70	83	54	34	46	77	20
84	71	94	98	22	81	16	76	95	12
68	37	64	31	44	02	05	39	60	08
11	26	59	90	19	57	13	29	42	33
21	27	45	87	92	80	09	62	88	48
56	32	97	28	00	78	01	55	07	14
99	25	15	49	38	96	72	36	17	73
61	30	63	85	67	35	53	18	23	47
41	40	50	03	93	91	24	69	10	65
89	04	75	43	79	06	51	86	66	82

For more concentration grids or to complete on your phone, go to concentrationgrids.com

Effective Goal Setting: Establish the What, How, and Why

GENERAL GUIDELINES

Objectively Establish Present Ability – identifying strengths and weaknesses allows you to establish meaningful goals by directing you to key performance areas that need improving.

Specific and Measureable – explicit, specific, measureable goals are more effective than general goals (i.e. "do my best"; don't quit; "improve my shooting", etc.).

Challenging and Achievable – moderately difficult or challenging goals lead to better performance (Kyllo & Landers, 1995).

Set Short- and Long-Range Goals – short range goals can lead to greater motivation while providing performance feedback about your progress towards the long-range goal.

Set Training and A&S Goals – it's not all about the A&S. Improvements in performance are typically made in practice – setting practice goals can help with this and becomes the cornerstone for deliberate practice (Ericsson, et al., 1993) and ultimately becoming an expert.

Identify Obstacles or Challenges to Goal Attainment – pre-identify obstacles that may get in the way of goal achievement and specific strategies for overcoming each obstacle.

Establish Dates for Goal Attainment – improves motivation and allows for on-going feedback so you can adjust your goals up or down.

Get Feedback – if your goal is specific and measureable, it sets you up for feedback so you know how you're progressing towards your goals. Immediate feedback is necessary so you can focus on your weak areas in effort to improve overall performance.

SET OUTCOME, PERFORMANCE, AND PROCESS GOALS

Outcome Goals: a standard of proficiency focused on the end result of a contest, win-loss record, etc.

Performance Goals: a standard of proficiency focused on improving one's own past performance in relation to the task/activity.

Process Goals: a standard of proficiency aimed at the procedures engaged in during the performance.

HASTY (IN THE MOMENT) GOAL SETTING

- Mentally define your goal/end-state
- Mentally identify obstacles or triggers to adapt (things that should force you to modify/change your end-state).
- Mentally establish if-then plans to produce goal-directed responses.

***Ultimate goal: pre-plan a series of responses to obstacles or situations that will change how you go about meeting your goal.*

Oettingen, G., & Gollwitzer, P.M. (2010); Oettingen, et al., (2010); Kirk Oettingen, & Gollwitzer, 2011)

SAMPLE APPLICATIONS

- Improving performance in general domains that support operational performance (e.g. strength and conditioning, speed and agility, mental performance, nutrition, etc.)
- Improving operational-specific performances (e.g. shooting accuracy/speed, mission planning, AFSC-specific skill sets, etc.).
- Acquiring new skills in an accelerated format (e.g. using concepts of deliberate practice to accelerate skill acquisition and performance)
- Making your work-week, work-day, work-hour as efficient and productive as possible.

SAMPLE FORMAT ON THE NEXT PAGE

- What do you want to accomplish?
- Why do you want to accomplish it?
- How are you going to accomplish it?
- What does not help you?
- Statement and Signature
- Make it visible – look at it everyday.
- Track and monitor

I always used mini goals and only thought ahead one mini goal at a time. Selection for me was thousands of very small events broken into pieces I could chew.

Goal setting - once I knew what the event was (the one on the tower) I set the goals of clear/concise direction as well as easy to follow communication.

Used goal setting for each event on where exactly I wanted to place; visualized finishing every event before starting, and held image throughout event. Continually told myself to stop being such a bitch.

I would set broad goals for myself such as: be deliberate with words/guidance, stay calm, use your teammates as resources, etc.

Gould, D. (2015). Goal Setting for Peak Performance. In J.M. Williams & V. Krance (Eds.) Applied Sport Psychology: Personal Growth to Peak Performance (7th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, (pp. 188-206).

SAMPLE GOAL SETTING AND TRACKING SHEET

Primary Goals

By When: _____

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Why do I want to do this?

Short-Term Goals

1.)

By When: _____

2.)

By When: _____

Obstacles/Challenges	How I will overcome this obstacle

Identify 3-5 things you can do each week to help you meet your goals. Be specific and make them measureable. Put a check mark on the day or days when you did these things

What am I doing this week to work towards my goals?	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun

Performance Values Form

The following is a list of performance values that may help direct your actions on a daily basis. After each value is recorded, please identify the barriers to, and the actions that must be take in pursuit of, those values.

Teammate: What type of teammate are you? (get feedback). What are your strengths and weaknesses? (get feedback from your teammates). What type of teammate do you want to be? What does it mean to be a good teammate at A&S?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Barriers | Necessary Actions

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Leadership: What type of leader are you? (get feedback). What are your strengths and weaknesses? (get feedback). What type of leader do you want to be? What does it mean to be a good leader? What do you want/need to do more of?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Barriers | Necessary Actions

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Technical Skills: What type of _____ (fill in AFSC) are you? (Get feedback). What are your strengths and weaknesses? (get feedback). What type of _____ do you want to be? What does it mean to be a good _____? What issues or behaviors related to technical skill development do you care about? What do you need/want to do more of?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Barriers | Necessary Actions

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Tactical Skills: What issues or behaviors related to tactical skill development do you care about? What are your strengths and weaknesses? (get feedback). What do you need/want to do more of?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Barriers | Necessary Actions

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Briefing/Interview Skills (Communication): How would your leadership/teammates rate you on communication? (get feedback). What are your strengths/weaknesses? What do you need/want to do more of?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Barriers and Necessary Actions

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Mental Performance: What are your strengths/weaknesses (i.e. energy management, attention control, confidence, adaptability, etc.)? (get feedback). How are you mentally preparing for A&S? What do you need to mentally prepare for? How do you typically respond to failure? How do you typically approach training or other performances? How do you want to approach them?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Barriers and Necessary Actions

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Physical Skills: What are your strengths/weaknesses (e.g. strength, power, endurance, flexibility, movement quality, agility, speed, etc.)? What do you need to improve? What do you need/want to do more of?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Barriers and Necessary Actions

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Nurition: What is your approach to nutrition? How do you make nutrition an emphasis throughout your day? What does fueling your body mean? What do you need/want to do more of?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Barriers and Necessary Actions

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

CONTINUE WITH ANY OTHER AREAS YOU FEEL YOU NEED TO ADDRESS

Imagery (i.e. Visualization)

Imagery Defined

"using the senses to create or recreate an experience in one's mind" (Vealey & Forlenza, 2015; Vealey & Greenleaf, 2010).

How Imagery Works

- Images are the fundamental language of the brain and nervous system.
- The brain and body process vividly imagined events as though they actually happened (Jeannerod, 1994, 2001).
- **Functional Equivalence**: imagery results in a similar mental outcome as the actual movement. Imagery that is more functionally equivalent resulted in better sports performance (Smith, et al. 2007).
- How to increase **functional equivalence**:
  - Include important senses and emotions associated with the performance
  - Mentally practice in a posture similar to the actual posture, wearing the clothes you perform in, holding the weapons/tools/etc. you typically hold, and when performed in a similar environment as the physical action
  - Timed at the same pace as the physical performance/skill
  - Using an internal perspective (Go-Pro View)

Strengthening Your Imagery

Vividness: Refers to the clarity of the image and how detailed it is. Imagery is a polysensory experience - Use as many senses as possible to bring the imagery to life (visual, auditory (sound), olfactory (smell), gustatory (taste), tactile (touch), kinesthetic (feel or sensation of the body as it moves)). Imagery will be more effective if it is more vivid. Vividness also refers to the emotions associated with practice and performance (Vealey & Forlenza, 2015).

Image from: https://jesicagreenblog.wordpress.com/2017/06/15/our-current-understanding-of-aphantasia/

Controllability: Refers to imagining exactly what is intended and the ability to manipulate and/or change various aspects of the images (Vealey & Forlenza, 2015). Rehearse effective images. Imagery could hurt skill development and performance if you picture yourself failing.

Perspective: External perspective for learning techniques/tactics, ensuring proper mechanics, error detection and correction and strengthening motivation/confidence. Internal perspective for executing techniques/tactics, proper feel and timing, strengthening muscle memory.

Using Imagery Effectively

Enhance Your Use of Imagery

- Use imagery in a variety of places and positions.
- Timing is important – Overall, try to make your imagery as realistic as possible in timing. Slow motion imagery may be used to enhance the learning of new skills, breaking down complex movements, correcting bad habits or mistakes, and focusing on one part of a larger task. When time is limited or you simply need to remind yourself of an already-mastered task, use fast-paced imagery to enhance focus and/or confidence.
- Image vivid mental, physiological and emotional responses to situations. For example, what mental, physiological, and emotional responses might you have when there is added pressure?
- Image the performance and outcomes.
- Individualize, and be specific, with your use of imagery.

Recommended Ways to use Imagery:

- Learning and practicing skills, techniques and performance strategies (i.e. techniques, tactics, decision-making, etc.)
- Preparing a mental focus for training, missions, etc.
- Building and enhancing cognitive/mental skills (i.e. self-confidence, energy management, stress management, increasing self-awareness).
- Using verbal triggers and symbolic images (cues)
- Automating pre-performance routines
- Practicing your refocus/reset routine
- Directing attentional focus – developing an individual plan designed to direct your attention to critical features of the current task
- Training/conducting missions with confidence – completing your roles and responsibilities as efficiently as possible.
- Goal programming for upcoming performances.
- Re-creating past successful performances
- Decision-making, leading and directing, being adaptable and/or flexible in the moment.
- Managing stressful situations before they happen

Times to Use Imagery:

Daily Mental Practice:

- ~10-20 minutes per day
- Focus on key areas you want to enhance (see above for a variety of suggestions).

Pre-performance Routine

- ~5-10 minutes
- Before every physical performance (training/mission) and focused on techniques, tactics, goal programming, etc.

Post-performance Review

- ~10-20 minutes
- To increase awareness of what actually happened during the training/assessment.
- To correct errors made during the physical training session.
- To get additional mental repetitions of the skill in a variety of environments/conditions.

Vealey & Forlenza, 2015

Imagery Ability Questionnaire

Once we heard the TCS I would go over visually what I thought was a good goal and ran with it until I needed to adjust. I would take deep breaths to try and slow my heart rate. If I felt it speeding up, so I could think more clearly (20-01).

Use this form as a self-assessment of your current imagery ability level and to strengthen your use and application of imagery. For each item, bring the image to your mind with your eyes CLOSED. Then rate how easy it is for you to form this image (1=very hard, 4=not easy or hard, 7 = very easy). Circle the appropriate rating based on the scale provided. For example, some Soldiers may find imaging themselves completing an IV neither easy nor hard and therefore select 4.

After completing the 15-items, use the subscales at the bottom of the page to determine your strengths and weaknesses in relation to your use of imagery. Any subscale or specific item number receiving a 5 or below could be improved using the strategies on the previous page (i.e. vividness, controllability, perspective). As you conduct your train-up combining mental reps with your physical reps will be the best way to strengthen your use of imagery and to improve your overall performance.

In relation to your operational-specific skill-sets, how easy is it for me to image….	**Very hard to image**	**Hard to image**	**Somewhat hard to image**	**Neutral (not easy or hard)**	**Somewhat easy to image**	**Easy to image**	**Very easy to image**
1.) Making up new plans/strategies in my head							
2.) Giving 100% effort even when things are not going well							
3.) Refining a particular skill							
4.) Effective mental and physical activation needed to complete tasks/skills							
5.) Completing the task successfully during A&S or another time when pressure is increased.							
6.) Alternative plans/strategies							
7.) The anticipation and activation associated with completing tasks							
8.) Improving a particular skill							
9.) Being an effective and efficient Operator/performer							
10.) Staying positive after a setback							
11.) The mental and physiological activation associated with performing							
12.) Making corrections to physical skills							
13.) Creating a new event/action plan							
14.) Myself completing tasks successfully							
15.) Remaining confident in a difficult situation							

Scoring:

Skill Imagery Ability:	**Item 3 + Item 8 + Item 12 / 3 =**	_____
Strategy Imagery Ability:	**Item 1 + Item 6 + Item 13 / 3 =**	_____
Goal Imagery Ability:	**Item 5 + Item 9 + Item 14 / 3 =**	_____
Affect Imagery Ability:	**Item 4 + Item 7 + Item 11 / 3 =**	_____
Mastery Imagery Ability:	**Item 2 + Item 10 + Item 15 / 3 =**	_____

I used imagery and goal setting the most. I envisioned winning and doing well on the physical events for goal setting I would choose something I did last time and aim to surpass that initial performance. I also rested in my abilities to speak and answer questions during interviews (20-01).

Modified and Adapted from:
Williams, S.E., & Cumming, J. (2014). The Sport Imagery Ability Questionnaire Manual. Birmingham, UK: Author.

Additional Resources of Interest

PODCASTS

Insight Thru Experience Podcast

Nourish Balance Thrive

APPS

Morpheus Recovery

Key Point: Synch a compatible heart rate monitor to monitor HR during your workout

Elite HRV (just like the Podcast)
Key Point: Synch your heart rate monitor to monitor HR during your workout

UCLA Mindfulness

Free app for practicing mindfulness

Head Space

Free version or paid subscription: MIndfulness

Mindfulness Coach

Free app for practicing mindfulness

SOMA – Breathe

Free App allowing you to practice box breathing

Breathe 2 Relax

Free app allowing you to practice breathing with a pacer

Books