



Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission



Imagery

Imagery is one of the mental skills most used by athletes at all sporting levels. It is among the most important of the skills required for winning the mental game in sport. However, it is also one of the most misunderstood.

WHAT IS IMAGERY?

Have you ever spent the day after an important race going over different stages of the race in your mind? Did you think through all the different parts of it and replay them over and over again? If so, you have essentially been using imagery. Imagery is when you go through an event or activity in your mind without making any physical movements. Ideally it involves all of your senses, including sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch and movement.

HOW DOES IMAGERY WORK?

Imagery is actually a form of simulation. As you imagine yourself performing a skill or competing, you are creating muscle memory within the nervous and muscular systems of how to do the skill.

IMAGERY PERSPECTIVE

There are two ways to see the image in your mind:

- > **internal** perspective (seeing the image from behind your own eyes as if you were actually racing), or
- > **external** perspective (seeing the image from outside your body as if watching a video of yourself).

You may find that you prefer one perspective over the other, or that you switch back and forth between the two. It will depend on your personal preference and the situation.

Try imaging your last race from both perspectives and see which one you find easiest. Remember to feel the movements you made and focus on creating the full experience using all your senses.

HOW CAN IMAGERY IMPROVE PERFORMANCE?

Imagery can:

- > improve your technique by imaging good technique between training sessions
- > assist you to practise skills when you are too tired to physically train or when you are unable to train and want to get an edge on your competitors
- > increase your competition confidence by running through your performance in your head before competing
- > increase your activation levels if you are feeling lethargic. Image yourself riding fast through pain with everything moving effortlessly
- > calm your activation levels if you are feeling nervous or stressed. Image yourself moving effortlessly in the bunch and use calming music to help you relax
- > help you get to sleep by distracting you from all the thoughts racing through your head. Think of a place that you find relaxing. Image yourself on a quiet beach just chilling out.

TIPS FOR USING IMAGERY

- > Practise imagery on a regular basis
- > Do some relaxation before using imagery
- > Use all of your senses when doing imagery
- > Use imagery for training as well as for competition
- > See yourself as successful and in control of your performance

TAKE ACTION

You can develop this skill further with the support of a performance psychologist. If you have access to a performance psychologist speak to them of your interest in this area. You can also go to our free on-line course designed to help you develop this skill. To complete the course, register here: <https://learning.ausport.gov.au> and search the topic of interest. Finally, your coach, state institute or academy, or national sporting organisation are good places to start looking for further help.