

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PERFORMANCE
Stewart T Cotterill (2018)

Table 2.1 – Key points to remember about learning and expertise

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1. Repetition leads to learning
 2. You can learn from failure – as long as you understand what went wrong (so you can fix it next time)
 3. Practice makes permanent – not perfect. Be careful what it is that you are practicing
 4. Experts perform better because they know what to look for so can make decisions earlier
 5. Experts only have an advantage in their field of expertise, they are not generally better than non-experts at other tasks
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Table 2.2 – Practical strategies to enhance learning for performance

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1. Your brain learns what you repeat (practice) – so practice getting things right!
 2. The more you practice (repeat) the more likely you are to do the thing that you have practiced
 3. If you get it wrong, make sure you understand why (so you can correct it)
 4. It is important to ‘learn’ in a similar environment to performance
 5. Learning and tiredness don’t go together. Learn when you are fresh
 6. Learning is tiring for the brain – so take plenty of breaks!
 7. Learning mental skills taking practice (the same as physical skills)
 8. It is not always about practicing more, but practicing smarter
 9. A sleep after learning helps the brain to make permanent changes
 10. The context is as important as the skill, so make sure you understand what is required (e.g., active decision-making in team sports) as well as the skills you need to play/performance
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Table 3.1 Key points to remember about confidence

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1. Confidence in your ability to perform is the most important factor – not necessarily being a confident person all the time
 2. There are lots of different ways to get confidence, make sure you understand what works for you
 3. Performance anxiety is a common phenomenon, but can be reinterpreted to be a positive sign
 4. For teams, collective confidence is as important as individual confidence
 5. Optimism can be more productive than pessimism – so be an optimist
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Table 3.2 Practical strategies to enhance confidence for performance

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1. Understand where your confidence comes from (After xxxx I feel confident)
 2. Focus on different aspects of your confidence during your practice (e.g., trying it, listen to the coach tell you about it, how did it feel, what were the physical sensations)
 3. Work on your ability to ‘visualize’ yourself being successful
 4. Remember times when you have been successful in the past
 5. Set goals that you can achieve (this gives you confidence)
 6. Write down examples of good performance that you can refer back to in the future
 7. Work on developing your mental skills (e.g., positive self-talk)
 8. Develop (or stick to) the training plans that have been designed (if you do a plan then you should be in good shape to perform well)
 9. For teams, develop a collective understanding of how well the team have prepared
 10. Similar to individual goals, develop team goals to build confidence
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Table 4.1 Key points to remember about decision-making

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1. A decision is choosing a specific course of action
 2. Intuitive decisions are based upon experience and knowledge – so the more you have the more likely your ‘gut feeling’ will be an effective decision
 3. Often you are looking for an effective rather than ideal decision
 4. Your emotional state can impact your decisions, so the calmer you are the more likely you are to make effective decisions
 5. In teams, developing a ‘shared understanding’ is crucial so everyone is ‘on the same page’ when it comes to making decisions
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Table 4.2 Practical strategies to decision-making for performance

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1. Remember, decision-making is not just about the choice you make, but the ability to execute the required skills – so practice both!
 2. The more you experience the ‘real environment’ the more intuitive some decisions become
 3. For decisions that have thinking time, talk through options with relevant ‘experts’ during practice
 4. For ‘instant’ decisions it is still important to talk through options of what you could do (but do this outside of practice)
 5. Tiredness affects decision-making, so as much as possible make sure you are rested, fit, and healthy
 6. Other factors such as hydration, nutrition, and oxygen all also impact upon decision-making – so stay hydrated, and eat a balanced diet
 7. Making decision under pressure is hard, try to practice your decisions beforehand
 8. For team decisions, make sure everyone in the team understands each other’s role and what they need to do in order for the team to be successful
 9. Have an agreed ‘style’ that makes it easier for the team to make similar decisions (or to predict what decision a teammate will make)
 10. Practice, practice, practice!
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Table 5.1 Key points to remember about mindset

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1. Developing a growth mindset (you can improve through practice) is better in the long run
 2. Effort is the key to future success – so passion and dedication will determine what you achieve
 3. If you know your mindset when you perform well you can take steps to try and achieve that mindset on a more consistent basis
 4. You are what you eat – a healthy diet and good hydration are the best way to ensure you are mentally ‘sharp’
 5. Psychological skills can help performance (e.g., goal-setting, imagery, relaxation, etc.), and as skills the more you practice them the better they become
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Table 5.2 Practical psychological strategies to enhance performance

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1. Be an optimist – life always looks better when the glass is half full (yes, you can choose to be optimistic)
 2. See the link between practice and performance, as a rule of thumb the more you put in the more you will get out
 3. Think about what you do when things go well, and try and replicate them
 4. A good night sleep can help you cope with a lot (so plan for sleep – especially when travelling)
 5. Set goals – they give you a way to get from A (the start) to B (where you want to get to)
 6. Develop your relaxation and mindfulness skills, great for performance and great for life
 7. Understand what you say to yourself (we all talk to ourselves) and make sure it is positive and supportive
 8. Develop a routine for pre-performance – it gives you something to think about and blocks any unwanted thoughts
 9. In teams, make sure everyone knows exactly what they should be doing, and check everyone else has the same understanding
 10. Be aware of how your emotions impact upon performance (both individual and team) and understand how to create your preferred response (excited rather than nervous)
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Table 6.1 Key points to remember about preparation

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1. Practice (getting better at skills) is not the same as preparation (learning to apply those skills in the real environment)
 2. Under pressure you revert to your learnt habits – make sure you develop the right ones
 3. Unlearning bad habits is often difficult to achieve
 4. The closer preparation is to the real performance environment the better the transfer of performance
 5. In teams the emotions of one person can impact upon the feeling of the whole team
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Table 6.2 Practical strategies to enhance preparation for performance

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1. Practice as you want to perform – so give 100%
 2. The closer the practice environment is to the ‘real thing’ the better the transfer
 3. Make sure you understand the difference between practice and preparation
 4. Performance is tiring – so make sure you also practice when tired
 5. Form the right performance habits (that is what you revert to under pressure)
 6. Make it as real as you can (in your head) – don’t accept silly mistakes
 7. Teams need to practice the ‘full’ performance, not just shorter/smallest adaptations
 8. Various on the real environment are ok, as long as they replicate the performance conditions (e.g., intensity, duration, skills required, etc.)
 9. Factor in preparation for performance between normal practice and the real performance
 10. Evaluate then repeat (making changes if required)
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