

"I'M SO FRUSTRATED, I CAN'T GET MY TECHNIQUE RIGHT"

Sport psychology consultant **Helen Davis** explains how to use visualisation to perfect your technique

It's so irritating! You are committed to training regularly, you work hard at drills, and you put in lots of effort every time you swim. You have set yourself a goal of wanting to improve your technique; you have watched videos, listened to your coach, asked fellow swimmers for their advice, yet it just doesn't seem to be happening... you are getting increasingly frustrated and feeling demoralised. Why is getting technique right so hard?

When you are physically

working hard on drills to improve technique in the water and whatever you try isn't working, it is worth considering a psychological technique to help you make improvements. It really is worth it, as if used effectively, this psychological tool has consistently

given good results for athletes in a wide range of sports, including swimming. Using visualisation to help get that tricky element of your technique right can be really powerful. Visualisation is when you use your senses to recreate or create an experience in your mind. The power of visualisation allows you to practise an element of your technique without physically having to get in water. Evidence says that the brain cannot distinguish between an actual event and one that we visualise, so if you know how you want your technique to be, you can train your brain for successful outcomes.

So how do you do it? Following these steps can help you recreate the correct technique you are striving for.



PRACTISE!
Just like most things, practising **visualisation** if done diligently and consistently will yield **improvements** and progress. **Celebrate** the successes you have with visualising, by noticing all the small steps of **progress to technique** improvement.

CONSIDER USING TRIGGER WORDS OR IMAGES

Verbal triggers are words, phrases, actions, gestures or smells that can help swimmers focus on key aspects of technique. Symbolic images are mental symbols or models for desired elements of the technique you are wanting to achieve, eg, pulling over a barrel to achieve high elbow on front crawl.

should be specific to you and your personal preferences, focusing on the same thoughts, feelings and actions as during your usual swimming. Precise timing is key here, so when you visualise it, do it in real time.



LEARNING
Recognising learning is an important component as you work on visualising your technique. When you first visualise your stroke, you will probably be thinking about movement a great deal, therefore your visualising may focus heavily upon correct technique elements such as hand entry or elbow position. However, as you improve at visualising, update how you visualise. You may start to focus less on thinking about the specific technique, but more on the 'feel' of the movement.

EMOTIONS
Research suggests that including an emotional component by including the meaning you attach to the scenario should be included for optimal behavioural change to take place. Take care to ensure positive emotions are felt during visualisation. Negative thoughts can be dealt with by replacing them with positive ones; for example, the excitement you might feel at perfecting your new technique and the speed you would then go.

PERSPECTIVE
This refers to the way you view the visualisation and which perspective is the most effective for you. Viewing from an internal perspective is the same as what you would experience if physically swimming. An external perspective is an outside-of-body or videotape perspective. Visualising internally is more likely to be successful with technique and will help you gain that 'feel' you are after.

Helen Davis is a swimmer and sport psychology consultant who works with individuals, teams and coaches on their sporting performance. Each month, Helen will suggest psychological techniques to help overcome difficult open water swimming scenarios. www.thinkbelieveperform.co.uk @HelenDav2245

