

Techniques for Improving Focus and Concentration in Sports



The best athletes learn how to control their thoughts and focus their attention. They can concentrate" on the present" while minimizing interference from external or internal distractions. There are several ways that athletes can learn to focus and concentrate better:

- **Practice Weaker Areas.** If you tend to lose focus when you're fatigued, arrange your practices when you are fatigued. Then practice concentrating while being fatigued. If you don't like being watched, practice while people watch you. Most of all, you should approach practice as if it were the real thing. The game face should not be reserved for game day only. Every time an athlete goes out onto the court, field, or ice s/he should go out there focused and ready to perform.
- **Use pre-performance routines.** These can be very subtle or extremely elaborate. Routines help increase concentration and focus because they help block out both internal and external distractions. The consistency a routine provides also helps you perform consistently.
- **Relax.** It is almost impossible to focus and concentrate if you are not relaxed. Stressed athletes have a hard time controlling their thoughts, which is imperative to concentration. Relaxation techniques will differ depending upon the athlete, but some ways of relaxing before a match or game include meditation, listening to music, or the above-mentioned pre-game rituals.
- **Use visualization and imagery.** Athletes who use visualization and imagery feel more in control of their situations and are therefore better able to concentrate and focus. Imagine that you are in a distracting situation, then visualize yourself acting in a way that leads to a positive outcome. When faced with the situation it will feel familiar and you will be more confident that you can deal with it. This will help you focus on the task at hand instead of being distracted by possible bad outcomes.
- **Use cues and triggers.** These are effective tools in improving the ability to concentrate. Cues that are task-related help the athlete focus on exactly what they are doing and keep them in the present. For example, a tennis player having trouble with her forehand might use the cue "follow through" to get back on track.
- **Intentional Distractions.** You have probably heard or read stories of sports teams practicing with various distractions to prepare them for upcoming challenges such as loud, hostile away-crowds or bad weather conditions. You can do the same to a certain extent. Ask friends or family to intentionally try to distract you while you practice some part of your sport.
- **Concentration Grids.** Concentration grids are simple, but powerful tool individuals can use to help improve their mental focus. The Concentration Grid is a simple exercise that helps you build your mental skills. Just practice completing the concentration grid a couple times a week. As you complete these exercises week

after week, you will see dramatic improvements! For the greatest improvements, experts recommend that you do 1-2 grids every day. There are two ways to work the exercise: 1) Time how long it takes you to find all the numbers starting from 00 up to 99. When you are finished, record your time to chart your progress, or 2) Set a countdown timer from 15 seconds up to 2 minutes. Find as many numbers in order from 00 up to 99 as you can. When the timer goes off, record the highest number you found to chart your progress. You can do the [concentration grid online](#), or download a [concentration grid pdf](#) and print it out.

- **Other Fun Ways to Promote Concentration.** Learning to play chess, playing Jenga or one of its variations, or assembling puzzles can improve concentration if practiced regularly. One-Word-at-a-Time-Storytelling is an activity used to train people in improvisational comedy. As the name implies, two or more players set out to tell a story by having each player share one word then moving on to the next player who adds one word, and so on. This can be done in person or via some form of video chat/meeting.