

Beat Fear And Succeed

Mind Training Tips for Swimmers - Sports Psychology Tips for Swimmers

From [Craig Townsend](#)

Fear is one of the greatest hurdles for a swimmer to overcome in their quest for greatness. Just to make your quest a little tougher, fear arrives in many different masks so that you never quite know where it will be lurking, or when to expect it. However, today I will show you one of the most potent ways of overcoming it - and at first, you're going to think I have gone a little crazy (But you will also see that I am right!).

First of all, do you really love your swimming? I hope so, because the sure way to beat fear is through love. OK, OK, let me explain. Anyone who really 'hates' competing at a particular pool is actually feeling fear when they swim there - and swimming with fear means they will almost always 'bomb out' there. Right? Whereas the Club swimmers from that particular pool (who think it's the greatest pool in the world!) will always do well there. Why? Because they love it.

Another example - a swimmer 'hates' competing against a particular competitor. Why? Because deep down they fear this competitor - and while they fear them, they will never beat them. Yet other swimmers who get on fine with this competitor will never have any problem beating them, because they will not be wasting their precious energy worrying about them!

My point is that Fear saps your energy, whereas Love energizes you. In short, loves beats fear every time. Let me show you how to use this principle better. Whenever you dislike any of the conditions at a meet - the pool, the warm-up pool, the competitors, coaches, etc you must visualize in your mind the exact opposite. The only way to succeed over conditions you dislike is by regularly imagining that you really 'love' the conditions - the pool, enjoying the competitors, just feeling how much FUN the whole experience is going to be. When you do this, the fear will slowly but surely evaporate and disappear.

If the whole meet is an ORDEAL to one swimmer, and great FUN to another - you tell me, who's going to swim better? It's a no-brainer. The swimmer who's relaxed and enjoying the meet - including ALL of its conditions, such as the pool and your competitors. Imagine every meet being a fun, positive experience, and don't waste your precious energy hating the conditions - we ALL know who wins the race between swimmers with a positive and a negative attitude.

The Mind controls the body, and the mind is unlimited. The best of success,

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You Must Conquer The Doubts

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To be truly successful in swimming, it's not always the case of trying to achieve a goal, but being able to break through your own resistance to it. What is this resistance? The doubts you have in your own ability. But why would anyone have resistance to success? Surely everyone wants to be successful in their swimming?

Yes, this is true, on the surface everyone wants success, but down at the deepest level, the fact is that many people are actually scared of succeeding! To explain this more clearly, it means they don't feel they DESERVE or are WORTHY of success, and this what can stop them from achieving their dreams. Every race is a battle between your belief and your resistance, and a win or a great time is a triumph of belief over doubt. Don't worry, every single swimmer you compete against also has their own wall of resistance they must scale before they can truly make the big time.

So all we need to do to succeed is break through our own resistance to success! Once we've done this, what can possibly stop us? The answer is - nothing. Nothing can stop you once you conquer the fear of failure, and the fear of success. But be prepared, before every big race there will always be whispering doubts trying to de-rail your dreams, which can only be overcome through KNOWING that you are worthy of success. This is why the mirror tip from a few weeks ago is so powerful, because it challenges your own resistance and increases your belief. Don't think that the doubts will ever completely disappear - because these are a necessary part of the 'test' on your journey to success. Belief is the only weapon capable of smashing through your own wall of resistance, and you must use this belief every time you are on the block.

So right now, I want you to close your eyes and imagine for a moment that you have ALREADY achieved your ultimate goal - that your goal has arrived, you've finally done it, and it's yours. My question is - does this picture feel REAL? Do you truly and honestly feel worthy and deserving of this goal, or does it just feel like a nice little make-believe fantasy?

Because this is the most crucial ingredient when you visualize your goal - you have to OWN it and really enjoy basking in its glory. Live it, feel it, BE it - until it this image simply becomes an inseparable part of you. That is true belief, and this is what achieves goals. This belief must travel with you everywhere you go, because it's the only weapon to battle your own doubts and resistance. But always keep your eyes on the grand payoff - once you've overcome the doubt, there's nothing left to stop you. No one will get in your way. The goal will be yours.

So when you next visualize your goal, make sure you believe it so much you can taste it. This is what brings dreams into reality.

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Ups and Downs

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Are your results always strong and consistent, or do you experience extreme highs and lows, up and down like a yo-yo? It seems that some swimmers would do almost anything for more consistency in their results, which can sometimes range from brilliant to terrible all on the very same day. So where can you buy some consistency? There's only one place you can get it, but there's no need to hurry, because it will always be right there waiting for you... in your mind. This is where consistency lives. Let me show you how you can get hold of it.

Consistency from your body originates from consistency in your mind. Listen to this again - if you want consistency from your body, you must have consistency in your mind. This means that if you put in a consistent daily effort in your training, you will achieve consistent, solid results in your meets.

This is not always easy. There will always be occasional training days when you will feel less inspired, less strong or less energized than you normally would - but the key is to put in the same amount of mental and physical anyway, regardless of how you feel. It was said at the end of the Sydney 2000 Olympics that this was the true secret behind Susie O'Neill's success - it came from mental and physical consistency in her daily training.

Of course, this is not to say that you should do try to do this if you're feeling ill, but assuming that you are feel physically OK, always try to put in a similar consistent effort each day, physically and also mentally. This routines your mind into 'expecting' consistency in your results, and this will begin to be reflected in your results at the meets as well. Basically what I am saying is to make consistency a daily habit, not just something you hope will happen on the day of a big meet. If you make consistency a 'way of life', then you will know what to expect when you go out to a meet, instead of wondering what results your body is going to bring you that day!

They say success lies in our daily habits, and this is so true - your training is the key to your success, so use it wisely. Your attitude each day is going to reflect your results in the meets, so how is your attitude today? Are you ready to put in a strong, consistent effort? If consistency is what you want in the meets, this is what you have to do. Make success a habit - a daily habit. This way you can't miss at the meets, your success will be assured.

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Mind Games

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It was interesting to notice many high-profile and successful swimmers, who are well-known for their mental strength, using subtle, legal and clever mind games to unsettle their competitors at this 2000 Sydney Olympics. These psychological ploys can be simply labeled as 'everyday psychological warfare' in swimming. As we all know, in a sport such as swimming (where every hundredth of a second counts) even a slight advantage can make a big difference to the result.

I am not saying that these ideas will necessarily work for you, or that you should even necessarily consider using them, but part of my job is to point out what is going on at the psychological level of swimming, and some of the things I noticed included 'Body language' and swimwear changes for finals races, designed to provoke thought in the minds of their competitors - negative thought! These thoughts can also distract their competitors' minds temporarily from the job they are meant to be focusing upon - swimming.

- For instance, Kieren Perkins wore only the bottom half of his fastskin swimsuit in the heat for the 1500m heat (in which he broke the 15 minute barrier for the first time in 4 years), yet he emerged in the full-body version for the final. This was designed to say "you thought I was good in the heats, I'm going to be even tougher now!". It was testimony to Grant Hackett's mental strength not to fall for the ploy. I'm fairly certain that Susie O'Neill used the same ploy in her winning event.
- Lenny Krayzelburg did not wear a cap for the semi final of the backstroke, yet he emerged wearing a cap for the final, which also made his appearance look quite formidable.
- Even Cathy Freeman, the Australian athlete who won the 400m sprint, did the same and ran for the first time wearing a special sprint suit for the final.
- These are a little more subtle than a long-distance swimmer I heard about, who wore a different colour of nail polish on each of her fingers and toes, just to attract attention and simply be an eyesore to her competitors!
- Gary Hall Jnr used the power of body language to convey to his competitors that he was going to be tough to beat, flexing his muscles and playing up to the crowd.
- Another example is the 'fastest man on earth', the great runner Maurice Greene, who also uses amazing body language to demonstrate how confident he is, strutting around like a winner even before races begin.
- Some, such as Ian Thorpe, Inge DeBruijn and Pieter van den Hoogenband do not seem to use any particular ploys, though of course their body language always conveys a very powerful and formidable message to other swimmers.

These little psychological tricks can often work to a swimmer's advantage by occasionally striking fear into the minds of their competitors, but these can only work as long as the tricks do not become a hindrance to the actual swimmer. For instance, it would not be clever to suddenly swim without a cap in a final if you've never swum without one before!

Powerful, confident body language should probably be regarded as one 'minimum requirement' these days for swimmers to compete at the elite level, as not only can it affect your competitors, but it can provide a physical and mental boost to your own performance. Remember, however, that if you decide to try using some 'mind games', make sure you have rehearsed them thoroughly in training before you consider using them in competition, so you're not trying them for the first time in competition. Also, ensure they do not take your focus off your OWN swimming, or they can actually backfire and end up working to your competitor's advantage!

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Nervousness Is Energy - Sports Psychology Tips for Swimmers

Mind Training Tips for Swimmers

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Ian Thorpe, Inge DeBruijn and Lenny Krayzelburg all won gold medals at the 2000 Sydney Olympics - which in some respects is not surprising as they were considered the 'swimmers to beat' in their particular events. However, as experienced as these swimmers are, they all admitted battling with severe bouts of nervousness - even with THEIR levels of inner-belief! Lets examine the sports psychology of it and see how you can put it to use.

Ian Thorpe said afterwards that he hadn't expected to feel any nervousness at all - but when he came out from the marshalling area and the huge crowd began cheering for him, he felt the emotion rise up from inside of him, which is exactly the feeling many competitors experience in times of great stress or nervousness. Despite this, he won the 400m freestyle in world record time, and backed up an hour later to claim another world record in the 4x100m relay. Inge DeBruijn revealed that she used to battle severe bouts of nervousness to compete at the highest level, but said (a day before her race) that she was confident and ready to go.

As a gold medal at the Olympics was her main goal, plus the fact that she had never swum at an Olympics before, you can almost be sure that when she walked out to the blocks for her first ever Olympic final, she would have experienced the same sort of nerves Ian Thorpe did in the 400m freestyle. Yet she won the 100m butterfly in world record time (her 9th world record for the year). Lenny Krayzelburg is probably the closest thing we can imagine to a machine when it comes to performing in the pool, his confidence and consistency are legendary - yet even he said that he felt extremely nervous before the final race. Despite a close tussle with Josh Watson, he came out on top as usual - that is what true champions do.

When you feel nervous next time you're about to swim a race, remember these two important things. First of all, everyone else is feeling exactly the same way. It's much more comforting to know that you are not the only one going through this! If even these great champions can feel the nerves of us 'mere mortals', then it means that everyone must go through it - it's our RESPONSE to the nervousness which is important.

You see (and this is the second thing to remember) nervousness is simply energy - nervous energy, which can be used and channeled into your performance! That's what the champions do, they use it to their advantage, whereas most others stress out about being nervous and allow it to destroy them. So actually, if a swimmer is NOT nervous at all, they may not have the power and energy available to them that a nervous swimmer possesses!

Being a little nervous is an advantage, not a disadvantage. This is what nervousness is for - to give you energy. Remember this in your next big race - channel the nerves into your swim, and feel your body unleash the incredible power it has been storing up for the race. Your mind will always provide what your body needs - and one of these things is nervous energy.

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Belief - An Essential For Success

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The most potent weapon a swimmer can possess in their armory is a powerful, unquenchable belief in themselves. It can single handedly overcome a competitor with superior ability, technique and physical strength - and all because it originates from the subconscious mind, the control center of all human movement.

So often you see a fabulous swimmer with all the talent in the world, yet because they lack the belief in their own ability, they don't perform when it counts most. This is one of the tragic realities (and most common) in sport throughout the world. A swimmer (or athlete) without inner-belief will never achieve the greatness they deserve - it's as simple as that. It is an absolute 'must' for any success - but how do you get it?

Well, the fact is - it's different for everyone. Some swimmers build it gradually through slow and steady progress, whilst others find this does not help them at all! So what's a sure way to build belief? I'm going to 'let you in' on a method today - but first, it comes with a few warnings.

This method is not for everyone, and is possibly designed only for those who will truly do whatever it takes to gain 'the edge'. It is a method which is often done easily by people who already have some level of inner belief, but it can be very difficult for those who don't - and ironically it is those swimmers who need it most! So if you refuse to try this method because it's difficult (or even silly) then it will most often mean that you need to work on this area - your own level of belief in yourself.

Another warning before begin, is that this method is incredibly simple, so simple you will wonder how it can possibly make any difference to your swimming - but don't doubt it. Regular practice of this technique will bring a steady increase in your confidence, self-esteem, inner belief and your results, and I mean 'regular practice'!

OK, now this is a technique you can use alone (and it might be better to do it firstly when no-one else is at home, or they might think you're a bit crazy!), or it can be an exercise your whole squad can use together - but as this exercise has to be done in front of a mirror, it pretty much restricts the places you can use it anyway! Here we go:

1. Stand in front of a mirror, about 10 steps back from it.
2. Look at your reflection, and put a 'strong, serious and powerful' look on your face, this is important - absolutely no smiling allowed!
3. Stare at the reflection of your eyes. Never take your focus off your own eyes, not even for a moment, just look deeper and deeper into them.
4. Say to yourself in a loud, strong voice "I am power!".
5. Feel the power of what you have just said, letting it 'sink in' for a few seconds, maintaining focus on your eyes, and now take one step closer to the mirror.
6. Repeat it again, but with even more conviction - "I am POWER!".
7. Allow these words sink in, feel their power.
8. Step closer, never taking your focus off your eyes, and repeat it again.
9. Continue this until you are almost right up against the mirror.
10. Say it 2 more times from 'close range', staring right into your own eyes from six inches away, repeating the affirmation with power and conviction.
11. Close your eyes, take a deep breath in, and imagine your lungs filling with power, strength and confidence, feeling it pulsing right through your body.

12. As you exhale, breathe out all doubt and fear, letting them go forever.

13. Repeat this again, breathing in, and then breathing out.

OK, the exercise is finished - and wow, is this powerful if you do it properly! I have seen a group of martial arts students do this together, and it sent shivers up my spine just watching them. For some of them, it created some major transformation and feelings of control and strength, others felt calm and focused - everyone was different. But doing it once won't do it! You have to use this regularly if you want to get some results, just like your swimming. This method also works brilliantly if you use it at home before you go off to a meet.

There are always those who snigger at this technique and say it sounds 'stupid', but ONLY THE ONES WHO HAVE DONE IT can truly know how powerful it can be. It may well be one of the most powerful exercises you will ever do.

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Fear of Failure

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From [Craig Townsend](#)

Do you honestly believe, deep down, that you're worthy of being a winner? This question may not be as silly as it sounds! What you really think of yourself down at your deepest subconscious level will determine your results. If you don't honestly believe that you deserve the best results, something will always prevent you from fully realizing your potential.

Swimmers come along all the time who seem to appear out of nowhere, blow everyone out of the water for several months in the smaller meets (earning this incredible reputation along the way), but then when the pressure is really on during the big meet, they fall apart – because their self-esteem and inner belief do not match that of their results. Scott Volkens is the motivational coach for the Australian women's 4x200m freestyle relay team for next month's 2000 Sydney Olympics, and he seems to believe in the power of self-esteem as well. He recently handed each swimmer in his squad a poem called Man In The Mirror which was written by a prisoner on death row, which was found in his cell after his death. Part of this poem read: "When you look in the eyes of the man who is king and ask him to show you the way. If you're honest and strong and you've done everything, then the man in the mirror is OK." This poem illustrates how the prisoner 'felt OK' about himself when he looked in the mirror, and this is essential for you too.

It is very important for you to know how good you are - and also how good you can be. This is hugely important, so important I'm going to say it again. It is very important for you to know how good you are - and also how good you can be. This has nothing to do with being egotistical; these are not thoughts you flaunt in front of others, they are genuine feelings you keep hidden away to yourself.

So here are some highly important and revealing questions I want you to ask yourself right now. How good ARE you? Ask yourself this now, and then secretly give yourself the answer. Don't be modest; give yourself a truthful answer. OK, now, how good CAN YOU BE? Ask yourself this, and then give yourself the secret answer, that only you will know. The answers to these questions will reveal just how much faith you have in your own ability - and if you find that your faith in yourself is lacking (and don't worry, you would be in a very large Club!), then it may be highly important to work on your level of self-esteem if you wish to move forward. In next week's tip, I will show you a very powerful way to supercharge your belief in yourself, a technique I have never shared or mentioned before. Don't miss this one. You see, we don't get what we deserve, we get what we BELIEVE we deserve!

There's a huge difference between the two, and this is what makes or breaks the best of swimmers. What do YOU deserve? This is (and will always be) a very important question to you, as it will always have an affect upon your swimming results. What you think about yourself is more important than what others think of you was something a poet called Seneca once said, and this is so, so true. Never let anyone else's opinion of you be more important than your own - but make sure your own opinion is going to help you, not hinder you!

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Visualization is the Key to Your Success

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From [Craig Townsend](#)

Many people ask me "what's a really 'MAGIC' technique? What's the quickest, easiest and best technique to use in mental training?" - and this should probably be a difficult question to answer... but I have no hesitation in giving them this reply. Visualization.

Visualization is the closest thing to magic that we possess to turn average training times into unbelievable feats of human performance. Visualizing in your mind the exact way you want your swim to go is now essential for even the most elite swimmers and athletes, simply because it is a truly effective, easy way to 'program' your body to do exactly what you visualize in your mind.

At the Olympics next month, you will notice several swimmers (and many other athletes in other sports as well) seemingly staring into space in a fixed gaze, before they are about to begin competing - this is a tell-tale sign that they are visualizing their race/event. The truly professional swimmers and athletes don't just visualize at the time of a race, however; the very best take no chances with their preparation and thoroughly 'experience' the race in their mind before they even walk into the pool or arena. There is absolutely nothing in a big meet that you shouldn't include in your visualization - to perform well in a big meet, you have to 'experience' the whole thing in advance!

This means you must 'feel' the atmosphere of the big occasion, 'see' your competitors, the coaches, the pool, and your friends, 'smell' the water, 'hear' the crowd - I could go on and on, you have to immerse yourself into the entire meet if you want to be truly prepared for it. If you do not do this, you can find yourself becoming overwhelmed on the day by the big occasion. This is exactly what so many swimmers do - they train brilliantly all week and then get stressed out at the meets and do not perform at their best.

The only way around this is to experience the whole thing in advance - and this must be treated just as importantly as training itself! There is no escaping this cold, cruel fact. A swimmer's body is completely controlled by their mind, and in this day and age, if a swimmer decides to train ONLY their body, they're simply going to get left behind. In the weeks before an important meet visualize daily, and then, when you're right there on the day waiting for your race, look at the pool and 'see' yourself swimming the perfect race.

Right there in front of you, look at the pool and imagine every part of the race going perfectly. See no mistakes in your mind's 'race'; see only pure swimming perfection. For your body to swim perfectly, you must 'think' perfectly. Doing this at the pool is an additional part of the process which makes for the perfect preparation (though of course, you must also watch the quality of your thoughts, even visualization cannot help the mind that is filled with negative thoughts!). This technique can truly perform miracles, and it can make you stop and marvel at the enormous untapped power you possess within your own mind.

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Use Routines To Create Your Success Formula

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From [Craig Townsend](#)

Ian Thorpe was asked about his pre-Olympic preparation for the 2000 Games, and whether or not he would be doing anything different or unusual in his preparation. His response was that he would not change a thing - his approach for the Olympics would be the same as for any other meet.

His way of thinking was, why change an approach that has brought him so much success? Let's face it, once you find a 'formula for success', you never need to change it unless it stops bringing you the results. So it comes as no surprise to me that Thorpe will use his 'usual' preparation for the Olympics, because routines are a normal part of most successful swimmers' preparation.

However, the truly amazing thing about this (when you think about it) is that he prepares for other meets the SAME WAY as he prepares for the Olympics! He obviously has a built-in routine, or ritual, which he follows for ALL meets - regardless of their size or importance. He has established a comfortable preparation for every race he swims, which has proven to bring him results, and as this routine has brought him so much success, he is wise not to change it for the Olympics.

Routines (especially the ones that bring you great results) can often help to make you feel more comfortable before a big meet or just before a race - as they can help overcome some of the nerves which go with these events. Routines help to make races and meets feel 'familiar' - even if you are swimming at a strange pool and surrounded by people you have never met.

This is very important, because feeling comfortable is an important ingredient in your mental preparation, because if you feel tense from your surroundings, it can affect your results. When swimmers from all over the world converge on Sydney next month to compete in the Olympics, they will all bring their own particular, personal routines and rituals which make them feel familiar and comfortable with their 'strange' surroundings.

When I talk about routines, I mean both your training routine (in the weeks before a meet) and also your personal routine just before each race. This can become your own personal 'formula for success' which may bring you consistently strong results. It's important to find routines which suit you and feel comfortable, no-one can really tell you exactly how to do this.

However, a good tip may be to discuss it with your coach, or to try copying the routines of successful swimmers, and seeing which ones suit you best and bring you the consistent results you desire. As your routines becomes stronger and more 'entrenched, the more confidence you will feel during races. Then, as your routine brings you more PB's and success, your overall confidence and inner-belief will increase - which will bring you more success in the future! So what's a good mental routine, you ask? A regular session of visualization - picturing in your mind the perfect swim for the race you are about to swim. There are few mental techniques more powerful than this - but remember, you also need physical routines as well, and it's up to you to create them. So find yourself a formula for success, and then stick to it. This is another secret of success used by champions throughout the ages.

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Are You A Positive Or A Negative Perfectionist?

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From [Craig Townsend](#)

Are you a perfectionist? This could be good, or it could be bad - it all depends on what type of perfectionist you are - a positive or a negative one. Many champion swimmers are perfectionists, never being 100% satisfied until they have achieved what they set out to do.

These are swimmers who constantly encourage themselves to work harder and harder until they achieve their goal. These swimmers never criticize or put themselves down, preferring instead to inspire themselves to greater heights. This keeps them motivated and positive, because criticism almost always makes their performance worse, not better. These swimmers respond to positive reinforcement, motivating words, encouragement, inspiration and powerful thoughts. I call these positive perfectionists. This is the type of swimmer everyone should aspire to become.

However, if you happen to be a 'negative perfectionist', this is another story. Negative perfectionists are never, ever satisfied - even after swimming a fabulous time, because they always manage to find something wrong with the swim, even the smallest thing! So instead of focusing upon the fact that they swam a PB, instead they say that it should have been even better! Instead of congratulating themselves, they criticize themselves - and this is crazy.

There is no quicker way to drive yourself to frustration and failure than to constantly find fault with what you're doing! This way of thinking eventually becomes a huge drain on your energy and confidence, and takes away all the wonderful satisfaction you should be receiving after putting in a great swim. Negative perfectionists see 'congratulating themselves' as a sign of weakness or 'slacking off' - but it's actually an essential part of success. It's the payback you must always give yourself after you achieve a goal, because this is the very thing that gives you the [motivation](#)¹ to keep going - to even greater heights. Negative perfectionists always say they are 'never good enough' - and the sad fact is, this eventually turns out to be true.

They criticize themselves constantly for so many years that inevitably they become negative people - and negative people never achieve anything. To be successful in swimming, or even life, you have to be a positive person. Period. There can be no argument here - because many times history has shown that negative people do not achieve even close to that of positive people!

So the point I am making is this - sure, sometimes the swim could have been better, but celebrate it anyway, and then vow to do even better next time. If you can keep yourself motivated and inspired, you will go a lot further than those who are wallowing in despair - which is what criticism will always bring. Encourage yourself, congratulate yourself, boost yourself up, pat yourself on the back, tell yourself how wonderful you are - and then use this positive energy to push you on to even greater heights. This is the practice of champions - and let's face it, life is too short to go around criticizing yourself, there are always plenty of other people willing to do that for you anyway!

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Reverse Psychology - Pain Is Good! - Mind Training Tips for Swimmers

From [Craig Townsend](#)

Pain is often be more of a mental barrier than a physical one. Some time ago I wrote about how it's possible (through the mind) to actually delay the feelings of pain at the end of a tough race or training set - or even make it disappear completely! This is possible because your mind has the capacity to release morphine into the bloodstream, a chemical which is one of the most powerful painkillers known on this planet, and a chemical which is used daily in hospitals for accident victims.

There will, however, be many swimmers out there who still experience pain at the end of races, and so this tip is designed for you, to help you overcome pain by using a new mental attitude. To perform at your best, it's essential to 'make a friend' out of the pain. You see, the more you hate the pain, the more painful it will become, and the more it will slow you down! So here are a few different approaches you can try, just experiment with them and see which ones work best for you, because no two swimmers are the same.

If pain 'hits' you at the end of a race, one approach is to think to yourself "this is going to make me swim even faster, because the sooner I finish the race, the sooner I'll be over the pain". In this way, you are actually using the pain as motivation to swim faster, by turning it into an advantage instead of a major liability - and this works much better than 'hating' the pain.

Another approach (which has had some great results) is to see the pain as a 'process' instead of a 'place' - this means that instead of thinking that you are IN pain, think to yourself that you are MOVING THROUGH the pain. Move through the pain, instead of being in it - this makes a big difference mentally!

Sometimes your mind may even 'switch the pain off' altogether, if it's convinced that you have completely moved through it (it does this by releasing morphine into the system). This means that it's actually possible to move 'through and BEYOND' the pain, which is much better than being IN it!

Another comforting thought some swimmers use is to remember that all your race competitors are going through the pain as well - but you know that you will handle it better! Going through pain in one thing, but no-one wants to go through it alone! So remember that every other swimmer is probably experiencing it, and it will just be a matter of who handles it best (and makes sure it's you).

Last of all, pain is an emotional thing. Don't let it take you over emotionally - because once it does, it's got you. Remind yourself that it will only be a temporary feeling, not permanent, and that it can only dominate you if you allow it to. Don't allow it. Stay strong mentally, and you can dominate the pain, instead of the other way around.

When Someone Passes You, Don't Panic - Mind Training Tips for Swimmers

From [Craig Townsend](#)

Do you feel a tremor of desperation go through your mind when a swimmer passes you in a race? Relax! You never have to feel this again. Believe it or not, even when you feel like you are about to die from fatigue and pain during a race, you still have the capacity to find power and energy that you do not even know you possess!

This is because your mind has the amazing capacity to release power-laden adrenalin into your system, which is a bit like a fuel injection for a car. This huge energy-source is available to you during those times when you feel like you will not be able to swim another stroke, or when someone passes you and you're wondering if you will be able to keep up with them.

The first point is not to panic when someone passes you. Panicking will only make you try too hard, and you can lose your stroking rhythm this way. Simply relax and know you have this energy-source available to you to speed up and pass them when the time is right.

Now, the next thing to do is to get your mind to release that extra boost of adrenalin into your body. This is done in two steps (which you can later join into one, once you get really good at it). When someone passes you (and you need extra energy), the first thing to do is to imagine or visualize your body becoming energized with power. It doesn't matter whether you actually feel this power or not, just pretend you do. Feel this power coursing through your veins, and flowing through your body.

Next, imagine that you can feel this energy transferring into your strokes, which are becoming more and more powerful with each stroke, beginning to move you through the water faster and faster. That's the two-step plan for accessing your natural adrenalin - by firstly feeling your body energized with power, and then imagining that energy is injecting power and speed in your swim. This process commands to your subconscious mind to release adrenalin into your body, which will provide that extra energy you didn't know you had - and this will happen very quickly once you get the hang of it .

So when you need an extra boost of power, you'll need to fire up your imagination, because the secret is to 'feel' your body going faster, before it actually is! Your imagination has to be able to create a sensation that isn't even there yet! This provides the mental trigger which activates your body's adrenalin and gives you a boost of energy. This is a fact of human physiology, so don't doubt this. If you haven't read any of my earlier tips about the huge benefits of visualization (or mental rehearsal), just know this; it is one of the most effective methods to influence your swimming known on this planet.

Do not underestimate its ability to turn around your results. The key to being able to 'feel' energy (that isn't even there yet) lies in your imagination - and when you've mastered this, you'll have energy every time you need it. So how do you feel energy that isn't there yet? Practice it in training, until you have it mastered for the meets. Once you've mastered this, your competitors will begin to feel more uneasy when they're ahead of you than they are behind you! Soon you will begin to feel like you can turn around any race. Nothing will seem impossible anymore in the pool, because you will be capable of things you'd not imagined before.

Eventually you might even begin to see an overtaking competitor as a welcome challenge instead of a threat. These passing swimmers will force you to swim an even better time than you'd have normally done without them. Turn everything into a positive. If don't pass you, great! This means you're out in front, without a problem. And if they do pass you, even better! This will bring out the absolute best in you. Know that you will rise to the challenge, in times where the others would sink from view. One day you may even begin to feel a little sympathy for the poor souls who dare to overtake you, because you'll know they don't have a chance!

The key lies in your mind, and your imagination. Begin working with them today in training, and turn them into powerful allies for the rest of your swimming career.

Secret To Swim Success - Mind Training Tips for Swimmers

From [Craig Townsend](#)

Do you enjoy training and swimming meets? I hope so. Because here is a fact of human psychology which many do not realize - humans can ONLY truly succeed at things they enjoy. Why? Because your very own subconscious mind's purpose (in every life situation) is to move you AWAY from pain, and TOWARDS pleasure!

It's a natural human instinct we simply cannot escape - this is why, for instance, your reflexes instantaneously move your hand off a hot stove before it begins to burn, because your mind's job is to keep you out of harm. This also means that to succeed in swimming (and life) we must do one of these two things; we must enjoy what we do, or otherwise, we have to find a WAY to enjoy it.

So if you are not enjoying your swimming, it is essential to ask yourself why - and change 'whatever it takes' to get yourself back in the successful 'Happiness Club'. If you want to succeed, get happy! Unhappiness, time and time again, has proven to bring failure, because it simply affects every major area of a swimmer's life - their emotional balance, motivation, perseverance, their relationships with coaches and other swimmers, and every other aspect of their training.

Some major reasons for unhappiness I've come across with swimmers I've worked with included: boredom and lacking variety in their training, a personality clash with a coach or other swimmers in their squad, and being stressed out time-wise through other commitments such as work, school, family and social life.

These are all things which can arise in everyday life, however they are also things which can be fixed! There simply isn't a problem which can't be fixed completely or improved in some way - the key is to look for the answers. Personality clashes are a classic example. Successful people take responsibility for their own happiness, they don't rely on everyone else to be nice to them before they can enjoy themselves. Champions rise above these situations and decide that nothing is going to get in their way of what they want - they must either fix these personality clashes, or get away from them, so they can focus and swim in a more positive, enjoyable environment. This is not to say that these problems are not valid concerns - they are! And that is why they should be treated and fixed quickly, before you find your motivation beginning to become affected - this is what all swimmers should do when faced with a problem.

If you ever begin to feel that you're losing your motivation, ask yourself why. If it has to do with your training, or a personality clash, talk to your coach and discuss it with them, to see if her or she can help. If it is your busy schedule, sit down and write out a new one, and see if you can fit in a little more relaxation. Life is too short not to enjoy what you are doing, and once again, if you really wish to succeed, your enjoyment is an essential ingredient - a plain and simple fact.

Put your own personal happiness at the very top of your priority list - and never, ever let it drop below number 1. Your motivation must always be there before you can make any serious attempt at achieving any goal. This does not mean that you'll enjoy every waking second of your life (there will always be some areas which are not as enjoyable as others), but the main thing is to overall enjoy what you do. This applies to your life just as much as your swimming!

If you love your swimming, then you're in the driver's seat - and you can't go wrong. Don't change a thing! But if you don't, find out why, and fix it. Never let anyone, or anything, affect your motivation - because this is the very thing that gets you out of bed every morning!

Protect it, treasure it - because it's an essential part of who you really are.

Who Do You Swim For - Mind Training Tips for Swimmers

From [Craig Townsend](#)

Champion swimmers train every day and swim at meets because it is their OWN personal ambition. No one else's, just their own. Sure, it's also nice to win for other people, such as parents, coach or friends, but if these other people became the MAIN reason why they trained everyday, they simply would NOT succeed, it's as simple as that.

If these swimmers do achieve some results, it would only be through sacrificing something far more important, such as happiness in their own life. This is a major point, because regularly I see swimmers becoming disillusioned with their swimming because they feel that they are striving for goals which are not their own, but someone else's. Often these swimmers feel pressured to perform, and often feel 'guilty' at the very thought of changing their goals to something they might actually want (such as changing events, meets, or even having a break) - all because they feel emotionally responsible to keep someone else happy.

The bottom line is this - you cannot succeed unless you enjoy what you are doing. This is NOT to say that you have to enjoy every single moment (there'll always be some areas which may not be enjoyable!), but the overall reason why you get out of bed in the morning must be because you are happy with what you are doing. This is actually a major principle which applies to 'life' as well as swimming - you must either enjoy it, or find a way to enjoy it - if you wish to succeed. No one else's motivation will ever be enough to keep you going, you must have the motivation inside you already. All champions are self-motivated, driven people, they know what they want and they go after it - and they would never, ever bother trying to accomplish something that did not motivate them, not even if their best friend wanted them to do it. This is because they'd know that it would be a simple waste of their time and energy.

It's important to swim for yourself, and no-one else. Because this is only kind of motivation which will succeed, or be for your own benefit. Once again, it is always NICE to win for other people, but don't make them your focus - or it will steer you in the wrong direction. Always follow your heart and do what makes you happy, and you cannot go wrong.

Mental Toughness Makes Champions - Mind Training Tips for Swimmers

From [Craig Townsend](#)

Alex Popov and Kieren Perkins have several things in common; both are trying to win the Olympics for the 3rd time in a row, and both a true champions who have earned the title of being 'mentally tough'. Only a month ago I was reading how Popov was meant to be going through huge motivation problems trying to get himself up for a 3rd Olympic Games, and yet a few days ago he set a new world record to put the world on notice that he is not a spent force.

What makes these champions so good? Usually it is a whole bunch of small reasons rather than a couple of big ones - and some of these reasons you couldn't even put your finger on. But one of these mysterious 'intangible' qualities they both possess is mental toughness. Mental toughness means to have the ability to pull out your best when your back is to the wall, and when everyone else is counting you out - you are counting yourself in. Mental toughness is persistence.

To simply never, ever give up, no matter how many people say you are 'washed up'. Not long ago Kieren Perkins was considered a very outside chance of even making the Australian Olympic Team, with the names of Thorpe and Hackett making all the headlines - and yet, surprise surprise, he's there again. Why? Because even though others doubted his ability to do it again, he never did. He would definitely have gone through some rough times, however, when he would have wondered "am I going to make it?" but in the end he never, ever gave up on himself. He overcame the doubts and fears and pressed on anyway, proving many of the 'experts' (who had written him off) to be wrong, as only a champion can do. It's inspirational stuff that puts shivers down your spine when you think about it.

The same can be said of Popov, who apparently went through some motivation problems earlier, but what did he do? Give up? No, he came back and showed the world what he can do. That is mental toughness, and that is what makes a true champion. I am not saying that champions never doubt themselves. They do - but only at times. But they manage to come up with enough belief in themselves to ride through it, overcome it, and beat it once and for all.

So if ever your belief is wavering, don't worry. All champions waver at times, in a sport as demanding as swimming it is virtually impossible not to - but the fact is, you can ride through it, and beat it. It doesn't matter how many people write you off as long as you believe in yourself. When it comes down to it, your own opinion of yourself must ALWAYS be the most important. Do not ever let anyone else's opinion of you be more important than your own! That's what champions do, they simply will not take 'no' for an answer - they always manage to find a way to get 'yes'.

Always remember, "whatever you can conceive, and believe, you can achieve".

Create Your Dream Swim Race - Mind Training Tips for Swimmers

From [Craig Townsend](#)

I am sure you, like most swimmers, have experienced a time when you felt like you were 'in the zone', where every action flowed absolutely perfectly and effortlessly. These are times when you feel, even just for a few minutes, like you are the world champion. Well, those times when you felt invincible can propel you towards even greater success in the future!

You can do this by mentally constructing your own 'dream race'. This is something you can use and practice in training, so that when you reach the big meets, you will be ready to put your dream race into action. Here's how you do it.

- First of all you need a pen and paper, and then I want you to really think hard through the archives of your memory bank, because I want you to remember the time and the place that you did the 'best dive you've ever made'. Yes, you CAN remember if you try hard enough! Your best dive ever.....think for a moment. OK, once you've remembered, write down the word 'Dive' on the paper, followed by the location, date and the event where you had this fabulous dive. Now, I want you to think back over all the meets and training you've done in the past and remember the best 50m you ever swam in your life, in your favorite event (or you can even use an entire race, if you like). Then, write it down next to the word 'Race' (including the location and event you did this).
- Now, remember the best turn you've ever done (this might take some real brainwork to remember this one, but you can do it if you keep your mind focused on it). Once you remember your 'personal best turn', write down the location, date and event (naturally) next to the word 'Turns'. OK, we've nearly finished creating your dream race.
- Now, last of all, remember your most brilliantly powerful finish ever, think of one that really stands out - and write down the time and place of this next to the word 'Finish'. Your dream race is complete, and you are ready to use it.
- Now look at the paper and look at the best race segments you've ever swum - your best dive, your best laps (you use the 50m lap you wrote down for every single lap of the race), your best tumble turns, and your best-ever finish.
- OK, now close your eyes, and now join that race all together in your mind, like putting together a jigsaw puzzle of film and video clips. Put them all together as one race, and this is now the movie of you at your absolute best!

Mentally play this through your mind regularly, especially at training, and make this dream race your goal to achieve in training and the meets. Then, rewind and play it through your mind again, and again, and again until you know it backwards. When you can do this, you will soon notice your times coming down and the quality of your strokes improving. As time goes by and perform even better dives, laps, turns and finishes, add these to constantly update your dream race, taking out any old race segments which are no longer your best ever.

So if you haven't done created your dream race yet, go and do it right now. Use this as your 'benchmark', the peak of your swimming career that you aspire to achieve all over again. By remembering and using your dream race, it will bring you plenty more in the future!

Swimming Secret to Beat Fear - Mind Training Tips for Swimmers

Swimmers, Regain Your Confidence With This Swimming Secret

From [Craig Townsend](#)

Does your confidence desert you when you need it most? Do you worry about competitors who should be worried about YOU? Do doubt and fear plague you before big races? Well, I'm going to divulge a little secret to you today, no - actually a huge secret, that most of the great swimmers and champions would definitely NOT like their competitors to know about. You are not alone.

That's the secret - you are not alone. Everyone goes through these things. Even the great champions feel fear, even though they wouldn't want you to know it. Fear, worry and doubt are all part of the fabulous experience we call competitive swimming! These feelings are the great mountains that must be climbed before success may be yours - because swimmers are adventurers who put their reputations on the line every time they swim a meet.

There's no avoiding this, everyone will doubt themselves at times, so don't worry if this is happening to you. Just know that it's probably happening to the person next to you as well! If there were no fear or doubt, swimming races would be easy, and anyone could do it. But it's not.

Competitive swimming is not for the faint-hearted, it's a test for the true competitor to bring out their greatest qualities from within and defeat the fear. Of course, there will be other times when you will feel so confident, strong and powerful that you will feel that you are the master of the universe!

When you feel like this, you wonder why you ever doubted your own ability - but the fact is, we are all human, and we experience emotions which can change from day to day. Doubts and fear are normal, and we must accept this. This is NOT to say that you will allow the doubts to beat you. On the contrary, you will not let the doubts win - because if you are expecting them, then you have them half-beaten already. You see, it is not a 'time' or a 'competitor' you are trying to beat. The only thing you have to beat is your own fear - and the best way to do this is to face it head-on. Expect the fear. Expect it and then it will no longer take you by surprise at it has in the past - just don't let it win!

If you expect the fear, it takes away its control over you, and from then on, you will never allow it to bother you again. So when the fear turns up before a race (as expected), begin to talk to yourself powerfully. Not aloud, just in your mind. Remind yourself of how good you really are, include every fabulous thing that you've ever done from the past, and all the reasons why you are an imposing, powerful competitor. Then feel the power radiate through your body. I really mean this - just stop for a moment, close your eyes, and 'feel' the power.. because you know it's there.

You can actually feel it. This is the power that will help you crush all doubt and show the world what you can do. Then fill your mind with inspirational thoughts that will make you feel unbeatable and immortal. Think of all the people who have beaten the odds, and succeeded anyway. Know that there is nothing that can stop you except yourself, and you simply are not going to let this happen. Send your fear off to wherever it came, and know that it can not bother you anymore, because you will expect it.

Swimming in the Zone, Your Peak Emotional State Mind Training Tips for Swimmers

From [Craig Townsend](#)

You may have never noticed it before, but you are in a particular mood every time you swim at your best. All you need to do is find out what it is! Moods (or emotional states) are vital to your chances when swimming important meets. They are somewhat less important in training - as it's difficult to get as emotionally charged in training as you might in an important meet. Every swimmer possesses their own winning mood which will bring them with their own best possible performance. When you swim at this level, we call this mental state the zone - as mentioned in some of my earlier tips.

There are hundreds of different moods and emotional states, but I have narrowed them down to 4 main ones, which are important for swimming (or sport in general). They are:

- hyped & excited
- calm & focused
- nervousness
- anger (although this one is not as common for swimmers - it generally works better for athletics and boxers!)

It's important to try to find out what your own peak emotional state is, so you can try to 'get into' that mood before an important race. The way to do this is to create a Mood Chart, like the one below. This allows you to map out what your winning mood is over the course of 20-30 races.

All you do is simply write down how you feel emotionally before each and every race, and then 'grade' each swim afterwards on a scale of 1 to 10, as to how good the swim was. So (for example only) you might have a list of swims which look like this:

Date, Emotion Before Race, Swim, Best?

4th, Nervous, 6, no

5th, Hyped/Excited, 9, YES!

11th, Calm/Relaxed, 5, no

12th, Hyped/Excited, 8.5, YES!

18th, Angry, 3, no

19th, Calm/Relaxed, 7, no

25th, Hyped/Excited, 9, YES!

As the above example shows, this swimmer's three best performances were when they were hyped and excited, and their worst result came on the day that they were angry about something. Yet other swimmers might find that this is the exact opposite for them, everyone is different. This is valuable information worth knowing before you go into any race.

So, if the chart above shows that this swimmer is best when hyped and excited before a race, they might use motivational music from a walkman to help them get hyped-up and into their peak emotional state. As the chart also suggests that anger is their worst mood of all, they should probably avoid getting emotionally upset or angry before races - this could mean staying away from people who might irritate them before they go out for a race!

If a swimmer discovers that they are best when they are calm and relaxed before races, they could use relaxation techniques and/or music to help get them in their peak emotional state. For swimmers who swim best when they are angry (and there are some of them out there!) they can actually practice looking for reasons to get angry, such as pretending that everyone in the race thinks

that they are the worst swimmer on the block, etc. Let me point out once again that every single swimmer is different - you have to find out your own peak emotional state, and only you can do it.

By recording this information for about 20-30 races, it will reveal your personal moods which give you your best (and worst) performances. Once you know this, you will have an advantage over other swimmers - because most swimmers do not have any idea about this at all if you ask them, and a vast majority are hugely surprised by the results of the mood chart by the time it is completed! So begin 'mapping' your moods, because they are constantly changing, and you need to know which ones will bring you the best performances. I also make similar charts for some swimmers which also map out their sleeping patterns and meals before races, so they end up compiling data which tells them how much sleep, what particular foods, and what emotional states will bring them their best swims!

Try it, and see if you discover some information about yourself you didn't know. Knowledge is power, and power wins races.

Swimmers, Use Mental Training Daily - Mind Training Tips for Swimmers

Swimmers, Train Your Body and Your Mind For Great Swimming

From [Craig Townsend](#)

A Head Swim Coach asked if I could focus some tips on training for swim meets, as well as the events themselves, for some very valid reasons. He teaches his swimmers that if they maintain positive thoughts and attitudes during the training session, it does two things; firstly it greatly improves their enjoyment of each session, and secondly, it helps them to prepare for the actual meet, as it's much easier to be positive at a meet when you've practiced being that way everyday. He also believes that as so much time is put into training (as opposed to meets) that this time can surely be used for practicing new techniques such as mental training, and he is absolutely correct. So here are a few tips you might like to try in your daily training (but not necessarily all at once!).

- One method is that when you are on the block, to imagine that there is a huge crowd watching and that this is a huge race. This mentally prepares you for the big occasion, making it much easier for you when you are in that actual situation. Change the occasion each time, and you can even pretend it's an Olympics or Pan Pacs race, there's absolutely no limits to your imagination.
- Another method is to experiment with using [affirmations](#)¹ during training, repeating a positive statement such as "power and speed" (or anything of your choice) over and over again, to the perfect rhythm of your stroke rate. This does several things; it sends powerful messages to the subconscious mind, and also distracts the conscious mind (the primary reason behind bad performances) from being involved in the swim, which is what you want. I must emphasise the importance of experimenting with this technique, as it works brilliantly for some, whilst others prefer not to use it at all. The affirmation can even be a song or tune you sing to yourself (which many swimmers use already), as this can be a great relaxer for the mind and body, which promotes good performances. If you find an affirmation that works well and seems to give you a boost, try bringing it into your swims at meets.
- Another method is to practice 'positive reinforcement' by asking yourself each day before you train (or even race) "what do I love about swimming today?", and mentally go through a checklist of all the things you think are great today. For example:
 1. I feel great today.
 2. My friends are here at training.
 3. I love training in this pool.
 4. I really want to put in a good training session today.
 5. My coach is helpful and get on well with him/her.
 6. I'm practicing for a meet in 2 week's time.
 7. I've had a great day so far.

This promotes a positive thought pattern and positive emotional state, essential to strong performances. This is a great method which coaches can get their swimmers to use before each session begins. This method can even help to bring a swimmer out of a bad mood which may have come from an earlier experience that day.

- Another method was suggested some months ago by another coach, which was to: Each day (or week) challenge yourself to do 'the best turns (dives/kicks/etc) of my life today'. This focuses your mind on one particular aspect of the swim rather than 'everything at once', which helps improve that area of your stroke, and this works great for training (although it's not so effective for meets).
- Yet another method is to imagine that as you get towards the end of your sets, and you are feeling the pain beginning to build, imagine that your body is releasing 'energy' into your body which kills the pain and gives your body a huge boost of energy. In reality, this is what your body can actually do. Your body contains natural morphine which is designed to kill pain whenever we need it, which is released into the painful area by the subconscious mind. Practicing this technique daily can literally lead to training and racing almost pain-free.

Your attitude to training is a good indicator of how you will perform in the meets. Begin making mental training a part of your daily routine, and you will notice some major improvements.

Swimmers, Control The Un-controllable - Mind Training Tips for Swimmers

From [Craig Townsend](#)

I received an email from a coach in the States recently asking how to stop her swimmers from worrying and reacting to un-controllable in races, which are the things we simply have no control over in a race whatsoever. She gave examples of when her swimmers would worry about things such as the temperature of the water, thinking there were too many people in the warm-up pool, or not liking the lane they were assigned. She said their minds would get stuck on these small problems and they would put in a bad performance. This is where the mind can focus upon minor details, looking for an excuse to use in case they didn't swim well in the meet. The best way to overcome 'un-controllables' in a race is by knowing that "What You Focus Upon, Expands".

This means that if you constantly worry about something going wrong, it will actually programme your mind for it to happen! For instance, if you worry too much about not hitting the touchpad properly at the end of the race, sure enough, that is exactly what WILL happen - unless you can take your focus OFF that negative thought, and focus on something more positive (such as hitting that touchpad perfectly). What we focus upon, expands. It's that simple.

So what you must do in this situation is say to yourself "I'm not going to worry about that, because I refuse to let it affect me. I am only going to focus on what I want, not on what I don't want. This will keep my mind focused on the goal, not the obstacles". It is important to know that there will always be obstacles in the path of your goal. That's what makes goals worth achieving - otherwise they would be boring and not worth achieving. There will always be other competitors to compete against, but there may also be other variables - such as slow pools, tiredness, bad weeks in training, ill health and many other un-controllables, which there is no point worrying about.

You see, it is not the obstacles which are important, it is how you treat those obstacles which makes all the difference. So your choice becomes: do I choose to give these obstacles power by focusing upon them, or do I choose to blow them away by focusing on my goal? As soon as you take your focus off the 'negative', it won't bother you again. It's only when you gives these negative thoughts lots of attention that you have to really worry!

This brings us to the subject of tunnel vision. Tunnel vision means being able to focus upon your goal so completely that you cannot see any obstacles getting in your way. Try this exercise for a moment: Imagine that you are looking through a narrow tunnel, directly at your goal (try making a 'tunnel' with your hand and look through it at something on the other side of the room) and you'll notice that this 'goal' is all you can see, because the tunnel stops you from seeing anything else - right? So this means that the goal is all you can focus upon, because there's absolutely no distractions or un-controllables for you to see. This is tunnel vision, which is the best way to achieve a goal, and this is what most champions use.

Now, imagine that this tunnel is becoming wider and wider (open your hand out more and more until the whole room is in view), and suddenly you'll see there are lots more distractions going on to stop you focusing on your goal, and these are the obstacles that get in your way before races. I'm sure you can see that it's definitely better to see 'just the goal', than to try and focus on everything at once.

So the choice is obvious - if you use tunnel vision, you simply won't 'see' the distractions or un-controllables anymore, they'll disappear and you will not have to worry about them. Try this at your next meet and see what a difference it makes.

Relaxation for Swimmers - Mind Training Tips for Swimmers

From [Craig Townsend](#)

One of the popular questions I get asked by swimmers is "what's the best way to handle nerves?" The answer is, of course, is relaxation.

But before we talk about that, it's firstly important not to panic if you find nerves affecting you before a swimming race, it's perfectly normal and actually a very good sign that you are psyched up and ready to go. Every great swimmer, in fact, any athlete or performer, feels nervous every time they go out there, and very often if they don't feel nervous, they'll actually worry about not being psyched up enough to perform well!

Of course, extreme nervousness is a totally different matter, as this has often caused swimmers to feel sick or even vomit before races, and this is definitely something that needs to be overcome.

One easy way is through a simple but powerful relaxation technique, which takes between 5-10 minutes, depending on how much time you have. This technique works like magic, and becomes more effective each time you use it. One of it's best qualities is that it takes your mind completely off swimming during this short time, leaving you feeling completely refreshed and ready to go. Because it only goes for ten minutes, this exercise doesn't take away the 'necessary' nervous energy a swimmer requires to perform well, it simply takes the edge off any extreme nervousness they may be feeling. Here's how to do it.

Firstly (if you can) try and find a relatively quiet place where you won't be interrupted – this is not always easy at the pool, so if you have time, go outside or even go to your car to get some peace and quiet.

Sit down in a comfortable position (it's best not to lie down, or you might go to sleep) and close your eyes lightly. Then you take 2 slow, deep breaths, releasing tension with each outbreath. Then, with each breath you exhale, slowly count backwards from 20 down to zero.

When you reach zero, mentally imagine yourself being in a place we'll call your 'sanctuary'. This is a place you can invent in your mind (either real or imagined) that you can go to for total relaxation, a beautiful paradise where you can escape the world for a 10 minute holiday. This place could be anywhere - a rainforest, a beach, an island, or anywhere else you can think of that makes you feel relaxed.

You simply imagine yourself in this perfect, tranquil place for up to 10 minutes (no longer), being at total peace with the world, where there is no pressure, no time, and you do not have to do anything at all.

Make this place as realistic as possible, noticing the colours, sounds and feelings of your sanctuary. Soak up the feelings of tranquility, knowing there are no expectations upon you, and that you have all the time in the world (even though you are only going to be there for ten minutes).

When the ten minutes are up, it's time to come out of your sanctuary (you might need to set your watch-alarm to go off to remind you it's time to finish), and so you begin to slowly count up from one to ten, feeling the awareness of the 'normal' world coming back more and more with each number – and when you reach 10, you open your eyes, take a deep breath, and sit quietly for a moment before getting up.

By this time, you will generally feel much calmer, more relaxed, rejuvenated, and energised – a much better state-of mind to swim in!

Try this technique whenever you experience extreme nervousness, it's a fabulous way to overcome the fear and create new feelings of being clear, calm and in control.

An extra note which is very handy - a good way to ensure you are not interrupted by other people so you can do this exercise properly is to put headphones over your ears, so that other people will simply think you're listening to music, instead of doing a relaxation exercise. For those of you who are even keener, you might even wish to do this exercise to music from a 'relaxation' CD or audio tape, as these can often help you to visualise your sanctuary more easily. Experiment with relaxation – you'll find it helpful in more ways than you will ever know.

Swimmer's Mental Edge - Mind Training Tips for Swimmers

From [Craig Townsend](#)

Is it possible to beat a swimmer who is faster than you?

Yes! In fact, it happens all the time. Let me explain how this is possible. Many times I have worked with swimmers who have been technically better and faster than another competitor, yet they were consistently beaten by these competitors at meets. Even more frustrating, they quite often put in better training times than their competitors, only to find themselves battling to catch them in the meets.

What these swimmers lacked was the mental edge over these swimmers. This mental edge simply creates opportunities which may not otherwise be there for you in that race on that particular day. This mental edge often includes many different factors, one of which I will mention one today. This is a subject has won many races for swimmers who simply weren't as fast as their competitors, but they managed to score a psychological win. The subject is body language.

Every single moment you are at the pool, without even knowing it, you are unconsciously showing your competitors your level of self-confidence. Simple aspects in your body language often gives away valuable information to other swimmers, and so it is essential to only send out signals which say "I feel great, I'm relaxed, and I'm ready to go!". Your body language plainly shows your competitors whether you are feeling confident, relaxed and self-assured, or whether you are lacking in confidence and feeling nervous about the race to come.

When you demonstrate confidence to your competitors (whether you actually feel that way or not) it can affect them in two ways. Firstly it often makes them wonder where you got that sort of confidence from, which often triggers negative thoughts in their mind before the race. Secondly, it often forces them to examine themselves and question their own confidence, asking themselves such questions as "Am I as confident as they are?" As soon as they begin thinking these thoughts, they have handed you the mental edge for that race! This means that they will assume that you have the edge on them, and their mind will programme their body accordingly for that race.

This is a fabulous effect on your competitors when you have not even said a word to them! The funny part about this is that you may not actually be feeling confident at all, all you've done is just make them think that you feel confident! And the added payback is that when you begin to act confident, you very soon begin to feel that way anyway.

So what unconscious signals do you give out to other swimmers? Are you exuding confidence and relaxation, or stress and nerves? Here are some things to watch for in your body language when you are at a meet; firstly, always keep your head up, never allow your head to drop towards the ground, as this always gives the appearance of a person who doesn't feel confident enough to make eye contact.

Secondly, smile and laugh a lot, rather than having a tense look for the world to see. Remember, winners are grinners! This very often unsettles competitors, when they see how relaxed you appear! Additionally, smiling has also been scientifically shown to relax the body through a variety of relaxing chemicals it releases into your system.

Yet another aspect is to walk around confidently, as if you are already the champion of the pool, not as if the weight of the world is on your shoulders. If you do feel nervous, don't let anyone detect it from your behaviour, act relaxed and in control at all times, as this will not only fool your competitors, but quite often improve your own emotional state as well. If you want to feel relaxed, begin acting relaxed, and miraculously you may begin to experience feelings of tranquility beginning to wash over you.

Most importantly, never, ever show feelings of negativity, nervousness or any other 'vulnerability' to your competitors, until you are away from their view. Act positively no matter what, as if you don't have a worry in the world, and eventually word will get around that absolutely nothing ever seems to bother you!

They may start thinking of you as a machine, who is totally unaffected by setbacks - a bit like the Terminator in the Arnold Schwarzenegger movies, or the 'Iceman' in Top Gun. Eventually no-one will ever bother trying to unsettle or intimidate you before races again, in fact they may become quite psyched out by swimming against you. Absolutely no-one wants to swim against a machine!

So be aware of the subconscious signals your body language is giving out to other swimmers, they can be either a huge psychological weapon or a major disadvantage, the choice is yours. It has often been said, to become a champion, firstly begin acting like one. This saying may be even truer than it sounds. Many champions copied the mannerisms and behaviour of their idols when they were young, and this may well have been their key to their success. Think of a champion you admire, and begin copying their most impressive habits. You may be surprised at the results.

Swimmer's Pressure of Expectations - Mind Training Tips for Swimmers

From [Craig Townsend](#)

Have you ever felt the pressure of being expected to win?

This is something all good swimmers experience at some time in their careers, which can often bring on feelings of stress and anxiety, and this can affect your performance in the big meets. Whenever you experience these feelings, an important thing to know is that these thoughts very often become exaggerated in the mind, and become 'mental monsters' which they usually have no right to be!

A good way to deal with expectation is to 'downplay' the whole situation – this means to keep reducing it's importance until you begin to feel more relaxed about it. This is simply putting things into their proper perspective so that you can look at the situation more clearly.

A good way to do this is to ask yourself some questions. For instance, you might ask yourself "Am I swimming in front of a huge television audience of 100 million people this weekend?" and the answer is (usually!) NO.

Then you might ask yourself a few more questions: "Do I have multi-million dollar contracts that are riding on this meet?" NO! "Will anyone remember this race in 5 years time?" NO! "If I stopped and asked a person on the main street of New York next week if they knew who won this race, would they know who it was?" NO! "Do most of the world's population care whether I swim well or not?" NO! "Will the human race end if I don't win at this meet?" NO! "Do most people in this world even know I'm swimming this weekend?" NO, NO, NO, NO!

So just how important is this meet after all? The answer is: not really so important that you should bother staying awake at night worrying about it!

In fact, there are probably many other aspects of your life which you should rate with higher importance – such as enjoying your life, the importance of your family, your friends, work, school... and so on. This is putting things into their proper perspective.

If you're at the meet and find yourself not coping with the pressure, take some time out, and go outside and have a look at real life going on - people talking and having fun, kids playing, the peace and tranquility of nature... all these things will continue to go on regardless of how you perform in the pool. It doesn't matter how important it may all seem to your team mates, the coaches, the parents and the friends, the fact is... life will go on anyway.

Swimming is not a person's whole life, it's simply a part of their life. There are many other aspects to life which are just as important, if not more important.

Keep in mind that every person you see at the swim meets also has other more important aspects of their life than swimming, just like you. So the race is not life or death. It is simply... swimming.

Remember these things if the pressure gets to much for you. Put it into perspective. Go out there, relax, enjoy it, and you'll be fine.

Five Minutes Before Each Swimming Race - Mind Training Tips for Swimmers

From [Craig Townsend](#)

The most vital time for a competitive swimmer is in the five minutes before each race. This is the time that makes or breaks a swimmer – often from this time they will end up on the block either mentally prepared or beaten before they start. During this time the mind becomes ‘programmed’ for a particular result, from being bombarded by a host of positive or negative thoughts – and these determine the quality of the swim to come.

These thoughts can come in several different forms – some will be mental images (pictures) which float through the mind, physical feelings, and also a constant stream of inner dialogue (words) which are voicing how you feel about the race to come. It is crucial during this period that the mind is firmly directed to think positively about the approaching race. The conscious mind will always try to challenge the swimmer before a race, it will throw doubts, fears, worries and anxieties at them to test their mettle, but it’s their response to these thoughts which decides just how well they’ll go in that particular race.

Each time these negative thoughts must be completely erased or ‘squashed’, and replaced with something more positive. This is vital. Doubts, if not erased immediately, gather ‘fuel’ and become stronger and more intimidating, and they do not direct the body towards strong performances. Even worse, the mind knows exactly what thoughts to use to scare a swimmer before a race begins - they could be worries about their own ability, or intimidation and fear of other swimmers. This can make them very difficult to overcome if the swimmer is not careful.

The first step to overcoming negative thoughts is to notice them. Then you must erase them. Finally, you replace them. Notice them, erase them, and replace them. For instance, just before a race you might catch yourself thinking "I'm not good enough to win this race", as you are noticing the other swimmers in the marshalling area. As soon as you recognise that this is a negative thought, it must be erased mentally, the way you would delete something off your computer screen. This can be done effectively by inwardly saying to yourself ‘cancel that’ immediately after every single negative thought. This will eventually become an automatic ‘trigger’ for the mind to demolish that negative thought entirely. Next, follow this by mentally repeating a positive thought to yourself, something that makes you feel good just by thinking it - eg. "I'm getting better all the time".

Try this every time you feel challenged by doubt or fear, and eventually most of these thoughts will evaporate and disappear. Remember, it’s not just your thoughts that are important, but your reaction to them that counts. Once you’ve mastered your mind, you’ll have mastered your body.

Trying Too Hard - Mind Training Tips for Swimmers

From [Craig Townsend](#)

Has it ever seemed that the harder you try, the further away from your goal you become? This is often experienced by swimmers whose desire to achieve a major goal becomes so all-consuming that they have trouble thinking about anything else. This often creates the situation where (much to their frustration) the goal appears to be moving further away from them instead of getting closer.

This brings us to the subject of trying too hard in races, instead of just focusing on the race itself. I am not talking about going into races without trying, quite the opposite - we can get more from our mind and body if we just allow ourselves to do what it is we've been trained for, instead of over-trying. It is important to have an intention or goal when you race, such as achieving a certain time, but these thoughts must only occur before (and never during) the race.

Often when we obsess or focus too much on what we want, it actually drives our goal further away from us. The key is to relax, allow your body to do what it has been trained to do, and trust that this will be enough to succeed.

This also applies to a swimmer who may be being overly pressured by an outside influence, (such as a coach or parent) about achieving a particular time or goal. This creates extra tension in the mind and body of the swimmer, making the goal far more difficult to achieve. The key is to make the goal enjoyable so that the swimmer desires to achieve it without feeling too much pressure about time deadlines.

Susie O'Neill's coach Scott Volkens said this week that her attempt to break Mary T Meagher's 200m butterfly record would be fought as much in the mind as in the pool.

After twice coming close in the Pan Pacs in Sydney last August, Volkens said her best chance of breaking the record lies in keeping her mind off breaking the record, and not getting involved in the public and media hype about it.

He went on to say "if she thinks about the world record while she races, she won't break it. It's as simple as that. She needs to think about it while she trains but she can't afford to think of anything when she races except for racing. She has to be relaxed and rhythmical and attack the races" he said.

Volkens helped O'Neill overcome the media hype of possibly becoming most successful athlete in Commonwealth Games history in Kuala Lumpur by teaching her a simple visualisation technique - telling her to swim as if her lane was draped with black curtains along both sides of her lane. This allowed her to swim as if no-one was watching, and allowed her to swim her own race, not worrying about the other lanes.

This is a fabulous method to use when the 'spotlight' is on you and you are feeling the pressure of being the favourite. As mentioned in a previous tip, most swimmers are either 'underdogs' or 'frontrunners', meaning they prefer to either go out hard and lead the race all the way (a frontrunner), or otherwise come from behind to win (an underdog).

For those who have trouble being frontrunners, this technique could work very well, as it reduces some of the pressure associated with being in front. Try this whenever you are feeling the pressure of being in the spotlight - if it works for Susie O'Neill, it's definitely worth a try!

Overcoming Intimidation - Mind Training Tips for Swimmers

From [Craig Townsend](#)

Have you ever felt that a swimmer scares, intimidates or just bothers you? Do you ever feel that you just don't have what it takes to beat them? Well, join the club! Many swimmers experience this at some time in their career.

It can happen in many different forms too. Intimidation can be intentional (such as teasing, verbal abuse, and even bullying), or it may simply be the intimidated swimmer's own negative thoughts which have become mental monsters. Either way, these can definitely prevent a swimmer from performing at their best, and must be rectified before they seriously impact on a swimmer's career.

I worked with one State level swimmer who was the 'star' performer in her club, but unfortunately she attracted a lot of negative abuse from swimmers who were jealous and feeling left behind. This began to affect her times, and she eventually had to change clubs, as neither she nor her coach could seem to alleviate the problem with the other swimmers. She's now much happier at a new club and swimming better than ever.

This is not necessarily the best course of action for everyone, but it was for this particular girl. It is much better to change this situation before it reaches such a critical level, so here is another method which has worked for many swimmers who've come to see me about intimidation problems.

A National level 16 year old swimmer once came to see me because he had not beaten a particular competitor for 4 years. There didn't seem to be any deliberate intimidation coming from his competitor, it was just a situation which had developed over time.

Many times this swimmer would decide to himself "this time I'm going to beat him", and sure enough, he'd go out hard and be well in front, until his own lack of belief would sabotage his performance - causing him to make silly errors (which he'd never normally make), lose his rhythm, and sometimes he'd even stop swimming completely, to allow his competitor to win!

Of course, every loss only reinforced his belief that he 'wasn't good enough' and his confidence was disappearing rapidly.

We managed to reverse this situation in three weeks - he beat this swimmer twice in one day, through using a simple but little-known technique.

Firstly, I tried to get him to visualise (or imagine in his mind) beating this competitor, each day for 5-10 minutes. However, this didn't work because whenever he 'saw' this person in his mind, he would completely freeze up and couldn't think straight.

So I asked him what his favourite animal was. He looked at me as if I'd gone completely mad, but told me that a rabbit was his favourite animal. So I employed some imagery into his daily visualisation, and asked him to imagine daily 'seeing' this swimmer with cute big ears, long teeth and whiskers! Despite the fact that he thought I was utterly crazy, he did this each day, visualising swimming against this cute cuddly animal, and mentally he had no trouble winning the race because he knew that rabbits couldn't swim very well!

Three weeks later he walked into the pool area, saw his dreaded competitor, and just broke out into a huge smile. All he could think of was a rabbit, not an unbeatable swimmer! He had lost all fear and respect for this competitor, by reversing the mental 'programme' running through his mind. He went on to beat him twice that day, and hadn't lost to him for the following six months.

This method has worked many times, so give it a try. But remember, it needs to be done regularly.

Your mind is the most powerful computer in the world. You can use it any way you choose. Remember that you have the power to overcome any problem to achieve your dreams, by using this secret weapon inside you.

How a Champion Swimmer Thinks - Mind Training Tips for Swimmers

From [Craig Townsend](#)

What goes through a champion swimmer's mind before and during a race, compared to a regular swimmer? When two swimmers are at the same level of skill, talent and experience, this is what will separate the two at the end of the race.

Thought processes are regarded as so powerful nowadays that it is considered that one mind can influence another - e.g. if an excellent swimmer 'hangs around' with a champion for long enough, they will eventually take on that swimmer's habits, training methods, thought processes and behavior, which should eventually bring similar-type results! Great swimmers seem to possess an almost innate ability to handle pressure, control doubt and negative thoughts, and come through when the chips are down. Some of these skills are inborn; often, however, these skills are learned along the way.

These are the attributes most swimmers desire - those intangible qualities that make a true champion. Kieren Perkins was up against huge odds after a bad heat swim in the 1500m at the Atlanta Olympics. He struggled with major nagging doubts and incessant negative thoughts during the 24 hours before the final, so he opted to read a book constantly during this period to cleanse his mind of the nagging doubts. This was a clever piece of innovation, because reading the book prevented any negative thoughts to enter his mind during this crucial period, and kept his mind and body relatively loose and relaxed for the race.

We can learn from this type of strategy. Whenever you feel you are getting 'tied up in knots' from nervousness, providing a distraction can be a clever idea to divert your mind from feeling the pressure. This could include a wide range of possibilities depending on how much time you have - such as a reading a book, simply going outside and having a break from the race atmosphere, listening to some music with headphones (a popular choice), talking or laughing with friends, a computer game, or doing some relaxation exercises such as meditation or visualization.

Distracting yourself from nervousness can simply but effectively re-focus your mind upon something else, taking the focus off the future race and reducing stress (it's amazing how many people actually get nervous about being nervous!) Try this whenever you can feel the physical symptoms of nerves or negative thoughts beginning to bother you.

Perkins also provided an insight to his mental preparation for that Olympic final, and about his thoughts during the race itself. To quote the newspaper article, he said "I visualized exactly what was going to happen tonight" he said. "It's hard to explain, but when you are focused you almost have no thought. Sitting behind the blocks I was 100 per cent focused and I didn't have a single thing in my mind. I knew what I had to do and it was just a matter of letting my instincts take over".

The two techniques Kieren mentioned have been recently discussed in past tips - the enormous benefit of visualizing the perfect swim in your mind, and also getting into the mental state known as 'the zone' by clearing the mind of all thought and simply allowing the body to operate on pure instinct. These are the practices of champions, and they are powerful techniques which work. It's a good idea to master this first in training, in addition to the conscious training sets where you are concentrating on something specific.

One of the ways to becoming a champion is to copy their habits, and find out which ones work best for you. Begin watching and learning from the champions, they are living proof of what may work for you.

Self-esteem and Confidence - Mind Training Tips for Swimmers

From [Craig Townsend](#)

The opportunity of being in contact with so many people has shown to me that all over the world a large number of swimmers, even at the very elite level, are struggling with loss of confidence and lack of inner belief and self-esteem. This seems to be an ongoing problem for many swimmers, and so today I am going to resist the temptation to teach any techniques, and simply drive home a powerful truth which must become embedded in the minds of all potential swimmers of the future.

There seem to be swimmers all over the globe who are constantly questioning their own talent and ability, comparing themselves to others and pulling their own confidence down. There are some who wonder if their best swims have passed them by, others who doubt their own ability because they haven't swum a PB for a long period, and others disconcerted because they feel that younger swimmers are catching them up or passing them, and they don't know why.

A 15 year-old tells me that for 6 months he's been in a slump, not getting any better, practicing and practicing and yet often thinking he's actually getting worse. On top of that, his coach had left, the only person who made him feel like someone believed in him and his swimming. Another person, a swim parent from Utah, is concerned about her two daughters, both excellent swimmers, who get greatly disappointed when they do not achieve personal best times, and fears them burning themselves out. Yet another wonders if she is ever going to realize the dreams she set for herself years ago.

The important thing to know about 'slumps and plateaus' is that they are completely normal! Nobody can constantly swim their best times all the time, not even the greatest of champions. Because we only hear about the fabulous achievements of champions such as Ian Thorpe, Susie O'Neill, Lenny Krayzelburg etc, we come to assume that they are putting in these performances every day!

The fact is they, like you and every other swimmer, are human and have will often experience lapses in between the great swims. But what makes them true champions is how they cope with these plateaus, and then bounce back even stronger than before. Now that is what a champion is all about! A State level swimmer I am working with recently overcame a major slump which was caused by the death of a close relative. She achieved 2 PB's and qualified for the State finals. This is the stuff champions are made of. Occasional lapses are normal. Plateaus are natural. It's how you respond to them that matters most. Humans improve, then plateau, and then improve further....this is how improvement works.

This does not mean to say that we should be complacent when we have plateaued out for a while. We should always endeavor to move forward and look at new ways of improvement. Personally I have never found complacency to be a problem with swimmers, as any serious swimmer I have met has always had the attitude of further advancement. This is possibly because only serious swimmers seek out mental training anyway.

What if other swimmers don't appear to be experiencing the same problems? Then those swimmers are going through their own problems, which you probably don't even know about. Every great swimmer must overcome adversity to achieve greatness, it cannot be plain-sailing all the way, or everyone would be a great swimmer!

Your abilities are unique (as are those of every human being) and cannot truly be compared to other swimmers, so dispatch with this form of self-depreciation, and begin boosting yourself up. I also believe that many confidence problems could be alleviated by simply opening up the communication lines with the coach. Simply having a chat with them about the situation may produce some views or suggestions which can help the situation and ease a worried mind, because I believe that many swimmers bottle their feelings inside of them and tell no-one.

But the point today is that swimmers are human beings, not machines, so ups and downs are inevitable, but know this; the fact remains that most swimmers possess within them the ability to dig deep and bring out that special performance when it counts most. This includes you!

You have the innate ability right now to put aside slow training times, recent bad performances or even sickness and demonstrate to the world what you are truly capable of. This makes it absolutely essential for us not to tear down our confidence each time we experience a lapse, or do not perform up to our expectations. This period can simply be where our mind and body is becoming accustomed to the present level of swimming, before we prepare to move ahead and bring down the times even further.

You have within you the ability to bring out a great swim at any time, regardless of your recent performances. Why? Because within your mind at this moment lies the memory of every great swim you have ever performed in the past. Every single swim. Those past glories and experiences will remain with you forever, and you can bring them out once again, at any time. This means that once you have done it before, you can do it again!

Freakish achievements happen in sport all the time, and they may be just about to happen to you. So if you are one of the many swimmers who are bordering on desperation about your recent performances, know that you have the potential to change it. Believe in yourself, because the only limits we have are the ones that we impose upon ourselves. Free yourself of the chains that have been holding you back, and go for it!

Self-Talk - The Power of Pre-event Thought - Mind Training Tips for Swimmers

Positive Affirmations And Self-Talk

From [Craig Townsend](#)

What thoughts go through your mind before an important race? This question may be crucial to your results in the pool. It seems that the more science discovers about the human mind, the more important the power of thought becomes, especially in swimming. Believe it or not, every thought you think, and every word you say in the 5-10 minutes before a race can have a major effect upon your results.

Humans think around 60,000 thoughts a day, and the quality of these thoughts is becoming increasingly important in a sport where a hundredth of a second is an eternity. We already know many of the problems which are associated with a negative attitude, such as fear, intimidation, lack of belief, intimidation... and so on.

If you still struggle to believe the importance of the mind in swimming, think of this; all of your swimming experience (that is, every lap you have ever swum in your lifetime) is recorded in the archives of your memory bank, and this lies in your subconscious mind. The subconscious happens to be the control-center of all movement, and works just like a computer, and is being constantly programmed by the thoughts, words and statements you choose.

Your results in the pool (the printout) are determined by the quality of the thoughts (the data) which are programmed into your mind. What this all means is this: think negative thoughts before a race, and you will generally get a negative result. Likewise, program your mind positively, and get rid of the mental roadblocks which have been holding you back, and you will get a vastly improved result. Garbage in, garbage out, as they say. The question is: are you satisfied with the results you are getting, or could they improve (a lot)?

Simply by changing the thoughts you think before a race, may help you to change your printout (results) for the future. So how can we do this? Hopefully this answer may help a member of Swim Florida from Fort Myers, who tells me that she and her coach have decided she possesses an 'overactive mind', and wonders if I could help (a common affliction of swimmers).

One of the best ways to overcome negative thoughts before a race is to re-focus the mind onto something positive, by using an affirmation. This is an ancient technique, where you simply repeat a few words over and over again for 5-10 minutes before a race. This does two things; it focuses the mind onto the positive, and it prevents negative thoughts being programmed in before the race. An example of an affirmation could be 'power and speed', or 'perfect rhythm', but you can just as easily make up your own affirmations using your own words. Susie O'Neill did this (mentioned in her book 'Choose to Win') and the greatest boxer of all-time, Muhammad Ali, used "I am the greatest" to great effect.

If you make up your own affirmation, just ensure you keep them short, positive (no words such as 'lose'), and present-tense (e.g. 'I swim like lightning', not 'I will swim like lightning'). Some swimmers even sing a song as an affirmation, and this can also work well. Practice this technique, and see if it makes a difference. I have seen it make massive change and quantum leaps in swimmer's results.

Believe in Yourself and Your Abilities - Mind Training Tips for Swimmers

From [Craig Townsend](#)

Probably the biggest problem I have found facing most swimmers is a distinct lack of real belief in their own ability. I am not talking about external confidence (which is simply a brave face put on for competitors!). I mean real inner belief that you truly KNOW that can win, or swim the time you desire. This lack of real belief in oneself creates a mental approach of fear, which can cause a variety of problems before races, the most common ones being:

- a deep inner feeling of not being good enough
- extreme nervousness (which sometimes manifests as vomiting)
- negative thoughts of all types
- low energy
- worrying about small details which may never occur
- intimidation from other competitors
- unusual or silly mistakes during the race
- recurring problems
- not looking forward to meets/swims
- jealousy of other swimmers

Once swimmers gradually begin to believe in themselves, these symptoms often disappear completely or reduce substantially, allowing positive feelings of confidence, anticipation and even a general feeling of happiness to fill your mind and body before a race. This is a far better preparation for a strong performance.

Don't get me wrong, however, nervousness before a race is not a bad thing! It's a sign that you are psyched up and ready to go. (So don't get nervous if you're nervous!!) It's only extreme nervousness that most swimmers can do without before a race. So what is the best way I know to begin to create belief in yourself and your own ability?

Daily Visualization

Let me explain, this is all you have to do. Every day for 5 minutes (or even if just for a few minutes) vividly imagine in your mind the absolute perfect swim you wish to do at your next meet, as if it is really happening right at that very moment. This literally reprograms your subconscious mind for success (much like a computer), it's a form of self-hypnosis which is very safe, easy and it works brilliantly.

When you visualize a race in your mind, use all your senses - imagine seeing the swimmers, pool and surroundings in their respective colors, smell the chlorine of the pool, hear the sounds people cheering you, and most of all - feel the joy of victory when you win the race or swim that time you desired. If you do this every day for around 5 minutes, you will gradually notice a shift in your confidence levels before races, and your times will begin to steadily come down. I don't have the space to tell you how this works, except to say that this programs the area of your mind that is the control-center of all of your body's movements.

Now the only trick to it is this - it's only the truly dedicated swimmers who will do this every day. It very quickly sorts out the serious swimmers from the ones who just wish they were better, but are not willing to do anything about it. Are you willing to try this for 5 minutes a day? Try it, you'll discover a whole range of extra benefits from it as well.

There are many important aspects to visualization which you should know about (I could probably write 100 pages on this topic alone) so I will try to cover some of the important ones in future tips, plus special tips on how you can use visualization to:

- overcome extreme nervousness
- reduce / erase pain
- learn new skills more easily and quickly e.g. kicks/turns
- overcome major intimidation from a competitor
- increase your energy
- relax more easily
- increase speed / reduce times
- banish negativity, and sustain positivity
- recover from illness and injuries more quickly

Begin today, find a quiet place for 5 minutes and start your daily mental training routine. Be patient and the results will come. As many of our subscribers are head coaches from various countries and National associations, we have a wealth of tremendous knowledge out there who wish to share their expertise. Donald J. King, who works with Paul Bergen at Tualatin Hill Swim Club, in Beaverton, Oregon USA has kindly submitted a technique he has implemented with his swimmers. He plants a new goal in his swimmers minds each week at training, who make a commitment with their lane mate to make 'the best turns of their life today'. He changes their focus each week onto a different particular aspect of their swim. Thank you, Donald, for your tip.