

Using Mental imagery

So what is mental imagery?

In the Inner Golf Coach Audio program we look at how our mind assimilates information through our sensory inputs* or representation channels* and how we can use our understanding of this process to help recall memories or create images in our minds eye. Mental imagery* is the specific application of this technique and it involves golfers imagining themselves in a specific environment or situation, performing a specific activity.

The images should have you, the golfer, performing activities such as playing specific shots, closing out a game comfortably, playing the opening holes well, anything you wish to think about, however, you should always see yourself performing **well** and **successfully**. You should see yourself enjoying the moment and feeling satisfied with your performance. You should attempt to enter fully into the image with all the power of your senses and representation channels. See, hear, feel, touch, smell and perform as you would like to perform for real.

It's also worth noting that when you are in a fully relaxed state, you are particularly receptive to mental imagery, so using the relaxation and focus techniques mentioned earlier will definitely help with this process.

But what can Mental Imagery be used for?

Well it has many applications before, during and after a round:

You can use Mental Imagery to visualise success: Many golfers "see" themselves achieving their goals on a regular basis, performing skills at a high level and seeing the desired performance outcomes. Remember, your subconscious mind does not differentiate between what's imagined and what's real. So rehearse enough mentally, and your mind will believe.

You can use Mental Imagery to motivate yourself. Before or during a round or practice session, calling up images of your goals for that session, or of a past or future competition or competitor - can act as a motivator. It can remind you of your objectives, which can result in increased focus during your round or practice session.

You can use Mental Imagery to perfect skills. Mental imagery is often used to aid the learning and refinement of skills. The best golfers "see" and "feel" themselves performing perfect shots, routines and golfing skills on a regular basis.

You can use Mental Imagery to familiarise yourself - with all kinds of things, such as a course or hole layout, seeing how you will play each hole, a game plan - familiarise yourself with what you will do in a competition environment, refocusing plan - what is it - how do you get back into it when things go wrong. There are many applications where Mental imagery can help you become familiar with something.

You can use Mental Imagery to help you refocus. Mental imagery can be useful in helping you to re focus when the need arises. For example, if during your warm-up you're feeling sluggish, imagining a previous best round or previous quality drive can help get things back on track. You can also use imagery as a means of refocusing during the event if need be.

So how do you Apply Mental Imagery?

In describing how he employs mental images to enhance his performance, Jack Nicklaus once wrote:

"I never hit a shot even in practice without having a sharp in-focus picture of it in my head. It's like a colour movie. First, I "see" the ball where I want it to finish, nice and white and sitting up high on the bright green grass. Then the scene quickly changes, and I "see" the ball going there: its path, trajectory, and shape, even its behaviour on landing. Then there's a sort of fade-out, and the next scene shows me making the kind of swing that will turn the previous images into reality - only at the end of this short private Hollywood spectacular do I select a club and step up to the ball."

The world's greatest living golfer - advocating mental imagery.

However, having this skill on tap comes only through practice - it doesn't become second nature overnight. If you want to perfect and use mental imagery to your fullest advantage you can start by doing two things:

- 1. In every practice session**, before you play a shot, first imagine it happening as perfectly and precisely as possible. See, feel, and experience yourself moving through the shot in your mind as you would like it to actually happen.
- 2. In competitions**, before the round starts, mentally recall your game plan, shot making skills, focus skills, reactions, or feelings that you want to carry into the round.

To become highly proficient in the use of mental imagery, you have to use it every day, on your way to practice, during practice, after practice, and in the evenings before sleeping.

Another way of looking at this is Daydreaming. How many times a day does your mind wander to your next round of golf on Wednesday or at the weekend?

You are already using mental imagery when this happens - all I'm suggesting is that you become your own movie director and get a bit of cohesion and structure to your daydreams. And the idea of being your own movie director is not as far fetched as it may seem.

* These phrases and concepts are fully explained in the Inner Golf Coach Audio Program.