

## CONCENTRATION

Concentration is a relaxed state of being alert. One must be capable of shutting out distractions and focusing on the things that matter – particularly at “critical moments”. Bridge requires exceptional periods of concentration and the critical moments may not be as obvious as in most games, e.g. golf.

Concentration is a **skill** and hence –

- a. some individuals are naturally good at it and others are not;
- b. there is always room for improvement;
- c. improvement will only occur if the skill is practised regularly.

**Fatigue:** more of an effort to concentrate.

Rx physical and mental fitness

**Anxiety:** highly focused - can be positive

- attentional narrowing (inappropriate tunnel vision) is negative
- Rx anxiety management

### **A Training Programme to Improve Concentration Skills**

#### **Distractions:**

##### A. External Factors

noise/temperature  
verbal intimidation by opponents  
captain leaves the table

##### B. Internal Factors

thinking about a previous view  
annoyed at partner's cock-up  
worrying about team's reaction to – 1700  
anger at T.D.s ruling  
despair at team's performance  
ruminating about personal problems

N.B. Although T.D.s ruling is an external factor, it is the player's emotional reaction to the decision which forms the distraction.

**Key Principle:** It is the bridge player's reaction to a problem which determines whether concentration will be lost.

**Goal:** Minimise impact of distractions

Maximise chance of focusing on the bridge

Ideal for peak performance: effortless performance, automatically make the right play or bid.

## Personal Concentration Planner

What are the critical moments?  
Reading the opponent's system  
Taking the hand out of the board (until replacing it)  
First and last boards  
First trick

Evaluate your own attentional abilities  
How good are you at concentrating?  
When does your concentration have a tendency to break down?  
Are there specific times or days when you regularly find it hard to maintain focus?

**Goal:** to use the strategies to maximise concentration at the key times.

## Concentration Cues

**Verbal:** a single word silently repeated, e.g. "focus", "concentrate"  
**Visual:** focusing intently on something very specific in the environment e.g. your score card, the board, your watch, your cards  
**Physical:** doing an action, e.g. taking a deep breath, fanning cards in left hand

Can use a single cue or a combination  
Must be practised regularly and used consistently

Use a concentration cue to deal with distractions

## Performance Routines

Research has shown that one factor that distinguishes elite performers is the consistency with which they approach skill execution. Performance routines are a significant part of this consistency. Club players tend to vary their pre-performance behaviour and lack any systematic build-up.

Performance routines work because –

- a) blocks out internal and external distractions by providing something on which to focus
- b) relax, familiarity, confidence
- c) consistent pre-performance routines produces consistent performance

Routines must be carefully planned and then practised in every game.  
In bridge, pre-session routines are the most common but pre-board routines are also valuable, especially as dealer.

Preparation phase: check polarity of the board  
remove cards from board  
sort hand  
"concentrate"/deep breath/check partner is ready

Focusing phase: consider opening bid/overcall/response  
visualise successful auction

Playing phase: repeat cue word  
bid

### **Error Parking**

Useful for players who find it difficult to get bad results out of their mind and consequently lose concentration. The player creates an image in the mind which successfully removes the distraction and parks it somewhere else. The key to success is to find a mental image which has personal meaning,

e.g. see errors as cigarettes to be fiercely stamped out, with his foot  
or as documents to be put in a file and the drawer/window closed  
or as documents sent to the recycling bin

The skill of parking errors is particularly dependent on practice.  
Establish an automatic link between the parking image and performance cues.

### **Concentration Imagery Training**

- a. visualise successful performance in situations that are most distracting
- b. imagery of successful performance during simulated distractions, e.g. playing an audiotape of distracting sounds, such as crowd noise.

During imagery rehearsal, combine the images with positive self-talk, e.g. "I can concentrate really well" or "Distractions give me an advantage as I am mentally tough".

Practise several times a week for short periods of several minutes.