

# WINNING SPIRIT SWIMMING

## Bob Steele

### VISUALIZATION DRILLS FOR SUCCESS

*This program is presented to assist coaches in developing essential component of athletics; skill, fitness and motivation, the keys to success in sport. The coach must decide how to best help every "individual swimmer" and then encourage their development by providing impacting "tools". The coach must believe in visualization; provide a visualization assessment, and time to learn, practice, develop and use with feedback to improve those components. For help contact [fastswimmin1@gmail.com](mailto:fastswimmin1@gmail.com). Please read the credits at the end of the article. Make copies of the Assessment tool and Drills for each of your swimmers. Enjoy and good luck.*

*Yours for FAST swimmin'*

*Bob Steele*

#### RELAXING ON CUE

Relaxing on cue practice enables the swimmer to relax in about 5 minutes relying mainly on "centered breathing", inhaling and exhaling fully and mentally flow relaxation to any tension in the body.

1. Have the swimmers lie down with their eyes closed in a quiet, place. Relax for about 5 minutes, but stay awake!
2. Flow relaxation through the muscle groups by mentioning them in a "progressive relaxation" sequence. Move from the feet to the head, mentioning muscles/groups and with 10 seconds to relax that area.
3. Do centered breathing again and visualize each muscle group "turning off" like a string of light bulbs. Now work with a triggering cue as they breathe and relax. Visualize a relaxing color (green, blue...), scene (the beach, your room, the woods...), or word (loose, calm, warm, heavy...) that helps relax.
4. Use that word along with "centered breathing" prior to visualizing.
5. Perform this technique again. Practice twice daily for about four days recording responses in a diary.
6. Do this prior to swimming practice daily, standing or sitting. A relaxed person may have a higher pain tolerance which in training and racing may be quite helpful when one needs courage and toughness!

Following a 5 minute relaxation drill, have the swimmers close their eyes and visualize the following with verbal guidance by the coach. It is imperative to emphasize the importance of visualizing strokes, skills, environment, and races accurately. Don't socialize, laugh, or use incorrect swimming techniques or skills. Imitate great swimmers.

Following the Assessment the swimmers should use their best method OR experiment with three ways to determine which method is most effective for them. The effectiveness of each method will vary with the individual swimmer and they may find one method is better for skills, strategy, toughness, etc...

1. **OBJECTS:** See your correct strokes and feel the water as you move over the lanes, targets, lanemarkers in the pool. Feel flawless strokes as you see everything around while training or racing.
2. **PEOPLE:** See an outstanding swimmer perform. Relate the visualization to a your observation of a World, Olympic, State or Conference record holder. Visualize your face on their body. Useful in developing skills.
3. **YOURSELF:** See yourself performing the skill flawlessly, as if you were looking at yourself in a mirror or monitor or TV screen, seeing a replay of a race or practice.

#### ESTABLISH THE ENVIRONMENT

After taking three deep centered breaths, close the eyes and visualize the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and feelings as part of all visualizations in the pool environment, when the actual race or practice did or will occur. Use words to trigger an accurate visualization. Pause following each word to permit time to visualize that word. Involve all the senses in visualizations.

1. See: the pool, balcony, water, lanelines, lane markers, teammates, family...
2. Hear: your coaches, teammates, spectators, officials...
3. Feel: the air, water, temperature...
4. Smell: the air, chlorine, popcorn...
5. Taste: the water...

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## SEVEN EXERCISES TO PRACTICE

1. **LIFETIME BEST** – Immediately after the last relaxation establish the environment and go right into stepping onto the block, take your mark, beep... Now see yourself swim a lifetime best with the strokes, strategy, pace, and feelings you experienced in that race.

**PURPOSE:** Develop skill based upon a vivid past success!

**QUESTION:** “What is the last thing you saw”? Have the swimmers tell what they saw last. Acknowledge those that saw “celebrating” because an opportunity to celebrate is a reason to come and never miss a practice, learn skills and race hard. Have the swimmers sprint in from the pennants, practice touching the target, seeing a lifetime best and celebrating. Do 5 celebrations at the end of practice.

2. **FLAWLESS FIFTY** – Following a one minute relaxation, see; a championship start, entry, glide, pull-out, head pop, strong kick, long powerful strokes, turning target, fast feet, bouncing off the wall, streamline glide, pull-out, head pop, strong kick, long powerful strokes, breath control, passing pennants, reach for the touchpad with fingertips, touch the pad, stand up, see a lifetime best, turn to teammates and coaches and celebrate, jumping off the bottom, arms raised in celebration.

**PURPOSE:** Guidance through the race with trigger words for skills to be visualized. Eliminate negative thoughts; however, David Berkoff set a World Record with 15 negative critiquing thoughts during the race. Bad thoughts don't always give bad results.

3. **BACK-UP FIFTIES** – After one minute of relaxation and establish the environment. Perform FIVE flawless 50's on your own. If you make a mistake in any way, see or feel something wrong you must back up and start over again. Repeat this drill until you've done FIVE flawless fifties.

**PURPOSE:** To perfect visualization of skills or strategies and eliminate negatives.

4. **GOAL TIME FIFTIES** – Relax again for ONE minute. Perform a flawless 50 on PACE or on GOAL.

- a. Sit with back to pace clock or second hand.
- b. Start all swimmers with a “take you mark” on 58 and BEEP on 59 for start on “0”.
- c. Visualize a 50 and look at the clock upon touching to see your time. Three times and they're on pace.

**PURPOSE:** Reinforce a goal pace or time in mind and the exact, positive skills needed for achievement.

5. **PRE-RACE VISUALIZATION** – Practice prior to time trials or hard practice swims. Eventually use at starting blocks just prior to a race. Use in lesser meets prior to big races.

- a. Relax for five seconds with centered breathing.
- b. Visualize the important and sometimes faulty parts of your races being done FLAWLESSLY. Select 2 or 3 skills such as: streamline entry, bounce off the wall on turns, head still/no breath on fingertip touch, negative/split, out faster, change from high elbow to straight arm the last 10 meters....
- c. Complete in 10 seconds. Have swimmers rehearse with one foot on blocks at start of warm-up.

**PURPOSE:** A quick review of proper techniques or strategy required for success.

6. **PRE-RACE WITH NOISE** – Since effective visualization must be done immediately prior to a race, have swimmers perform PRE-RACE VISUALIZATION (#6) with the team cheering and yelling for the motivational situation swimmers would experience at the meet. It's fun just before a championship start at the beginning of warm-up.

- a. Have eight swimmers on the blocks as they would prior to starting, perform #6 with noise.

**PURPOSE:** A “quick” review of proper techniques in a pressure situation. Things they've been working on with the coach in practice; skills, strategy and maybe visualizing an opponent's face.

**7. KEY WORD or CUEING** – In an effort to get swimmers through the different part of their race when legs and arms are heavy, the stroke shortens, breathing is difficult, the competition makes a move and “the piano is ready to fall try to;

a. Develop a meaningful KEY WORD that cues; light legs and arms, long strokes, second wind, keeping a lead and all those things that mean success.

b. This word should focus on and be equated to a “winning goal” like: All-Star, Speeder, Hero, Blaze Orange, gold Medal or First Place or Time Standard. This word is only known to the swimmer. Do not share it with others. Some swimmers have a song they sing that revs them up or takes as long as their goal time. The song must finish AFTER they touch the pad.

c. Use the word daily whenever failing adaptation begins and the swimmer needs to dig deep for fortitude, courage and a RACING attitude. Two testimonials are a girl that made an Olympic Team in 3 events and a man that won 400 meter Free at USA Nationals. They felt it made a difference.

d. Use word before a race and/or a pressure point in the race. Don’t think about the symptoms in the race; think about the key word and make it fit your race strategy with the help of your coach.

**PURPOSE:** Maintain skills and race strategy under pressure.

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NAME \_\_\_\_\_

## HOW WELL DO YOU CREATE IMAGES – ASSESSMENT TOOL

Rate yourself by choosing a number from the scale below which best tells how clear your images are in your minds-eye in response to the statements. Coach explains by relating scoring to a clock on the wall.

4 = very clear/exact details – color-hands-numbers-field-wall-name...?

3 = clear/fine details noticed – hands – numbers – moving – wall...?

2 = unclear/blurred details – hands moving – color – wall...?

1 = real unclear/few details visualized – clock – numbers – wall...?

0 = no image/blank stare – can't even see a clock on the wall...?

Write the number of the rating chosen in the box to the right of the question. For example, if the image for items number 2 is clear with details, place a 3 in the box on line 2. Close your eyes and imagine the following statements as best you can. Open your eyes, rate the image in your mind's eye, and put the score in the box to the right of the statement. Take about 10 minutes.

- |                                                      | A   | B   | C   | D   | E               |
|------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----------------|
| 1. Focus your attention on an object around you.     | ___ |     |     |     |                 |
| 2. An object out of your past.                       | ___ |     |     |     |                 |
| 3. An object in the future                           |     | ___ |     |     |                 |
| 4. An unpleasant object.                             |     |     | ___ |     |                 |
| 5. An object you like very much.                     |     |     |     | ___ | ___<br>(1 – 5)  |
| 6. A person you know very well.                      | ___ |     |     |     |                 |
| 7. A person from your past.                          |     | ___ |     |     |                 |
| 8. A new person.                                     |     |     | ___ |     |                 |
| 9. Someone you dislike.                              |     |     |     | ___ |                 |
| 10. Someone whom you are especially fond.            |     |     |     | ___ | ___<br>(6 – 10) |
| 11. Your own general appearance or self-image.       | ___ |     |     |     |                 |
| 12. Picture yourself as you looked when you were 4.  |     | ___ |     |     |                 |
| 13. Picture yourself as you will look in the future. |     |     | ___ |     |                 |

14. Concentrate on an aspect of your body you dislike. \_\_\_\_\_

15. Concentrate on an aspect of your body you are proud of. \_\_\_\_\_

(11 – 15)

A	B	C	D	E	GRAND TOTAL
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## SCORING VISUALIZATION ASSESSMENT

There is a total score (the sum of your ratings on all fifteen items) and eight sub-scores.

1. First, add the three ratings in each column (A-E) and place on the line at the bottom of the column. These scores suggest how clear your “minds-eye” images are of OBJECTS (# 1-5), PEOPLE (# 6-10), or YOURSELF (# 11-15).
2. Raise hand (often if tied) where they scored highest in A-B or C. Visualization work should start at their strength and move toward seeing success at the championship meet site (FUTURE).
  - A. PRESENT time images; what’s happening now (most common).
  - B. PAST time images; what happened yesterday. (
  - C. FUTURE time images; what will happen tomorrow. (creative arts – daydreamers)
3. Raise hands where they scored highest.
  - D. topics you DISLIKE (about 10% should work on creating positive attitudes...)
  - E. topics you LIKE (continue to enjoy trying new things; skills, fitness, racing...)
4. Next, add the ratings for 1-5, 6–10, 11-15 and put these totals in the long boxes on the right side of the page. Use this score whenever visualizing. These scores suggest how clear your images are of;
  - F = OBJECTS (1-5) – (see everything around you; lanes, targets, clock, opponents...)
  - G = PEOPLE (6-10) – (see world class swimmer’s face on your body performing properly)
  - H = YOURSELF (11-15) – (see yourself swimming on a monitor, as if a coach)
5. Finally, add all fifteen ratings and place the total in the box in the lower right corner; this is your overall score. If this score is between;
  - 0 – 20 Your present capacity to create images is poor and you will need help to improve this capacity before using mental rehearsal techniques. Work on daily. (3%)
  - 21-40 Your present capacity to create images is pretty good and you will improve rapidly with practice. Do prior to every practice once you know the set/skill (50%)
  - 41-60 Your present capacity to create images is excellent and you can use that ability right now to help you train and swim faster. Athletes score higher because they do it regularly without thinking. (47%)

**If you see it in your minds-eye, you have a better chance of doing it.**

### CREDITS

This assessment tool and series of drills was created by Dr. Pete Sherrard, Professor of Educational Psychology at Southern Illinois University in 1980. Dr. Sherrard worked with our Men’s Swimming Team in team meetings before practices, during and following meets, and one on one in his office. He helped swimmers “be the best they could be” in swimming and in developing life-skills. These techniques have been taught to 1,000’s of swimmers in camps and coaches at clinics worldwide.

World Class swimmers that have repeated the Assessment on occasion and received the same score. The Assessment tool is useful for 11 and Overs and younger swimmers can benefit from learning and practicing some of the seven drills.

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