

Visualise to Improve Your Exam Preparation and Performance

Self-image Psychology

We behave according to the person we know ourselves to be – that is the ideas, attitudes, beliefs, habits and self-images we hold about ourselves. Much of these self-images are subconscious and we have a whole subconscious thinking process that works to maintain how we see our self. If we do better than we know our self to be, our subconscious will **correct for the mistake of doing well** by engaging us in limiting behaviour to bring us back to what is 'normal' for us. So our academic potential may be much higher, but we will operate from a belief level which is the most dominant images in our mind.

To improve academic performance we must deliberately condition our self-images to a higher performance level to engage our subconscious to work for us towards our 'new normal'. This is where visualisation is useful.

Airline pilots use simulators to mentally rehearse high-pressure problem scenarios so that they may perform effectively if that scenario is to occur. Likewise, students can mentally simulate (rehearse in the mind) situations in the exam room so they can perform under pressure.

Two thirds of our brain activity is the same, whether it is mentally rehearsed through visualisation or actually practiced in reality. Our brain does not know the difference because we don't see with our eyes, we see with our brain which interprets the situation we perceive. For a peak exam performance, students must do both visual and real practice.

The problem is students new to exams do not get enough real practice in the exam room to condition their ideal response – calm, relaxed, confident and so on. So visualisation is the only way they can condition a positive response ahead of time.

Visualisation must use forethought to create a mental movie of exactly the future scene in the exam room. Visualisation must use many senses: what you would see, hear, feel etc. For example: the pressure is on. You are sitting in the exam room in the side row beside a window. Your friends are sitting around you. The examiner calls to begin. You flip open the exam booklet and begin reading the questions. You smile to yourself and feel great because you can see that your preparation will pay off. You feel calm. You know that everything you need to score well in this exam is within you and you can recall it with ease....

Visualise Your Ideal Exam Performance

To visualise your ideal scene, spend some time writing an exam visualisation script. This is a 'story' of how you want to see yourself in the exam room, what you want to say to yourself (affirmations) and how you want to feel. When you have written your script, record yourself reading it so that you may listen to it repeatedly prior to exams. Through repetition, you programme your brain to create a new normal for you so that when you come to do the exam in reality, your conditioned response flows naturally.

Visualisation techniques are widely used in sports performance. They can be equally helpful in giving an exam performance – especially if you suffer from exam anxiety. Here are some guidelines for writing and recording your script.

Writing and Recording Your Scripts

Begin with a relaxation session to help slow brainwaves into the alpha range. This is a feeling of relaxed alertness which enables the brain to be receptive to incoming suggestions. For example, you might say:

Close your eyes and begin to breathe deeply...in through you're your nose and out through your mouth. With every out-breath imagine any tension in your body going out with it. I am going to count from 5 to 1 and as I do, you will feel yourself relaxing with every descending number. At number 1, you will be totally relaxed, yet alert to what I am saying.

[Insert Name] As I count now from 5, beginning to relax...4...breathing deeply...letting go, 3...begin to get a sense of your body, the position of your arms and hands, the position of your legs and feet: feel your weight in the chair... 2...continuing down... 1, totally relaxed as you quietly repeat to yourself: "relax...relax...relax..." Feel yourself letting go of any tension in your body. You are totally relaxed [Insert Name], yet totally alert.

Rest in this state for a moment – this is Alpha State.

Now I want to imagine yourself in your next exam....

Continue to create your future ideal scene with words, pictures and feelings as if you are there now. Through repetitive reading or listening of your script, you will surprise yourself at how your behaviour is modified when you come to sit your next exam. Go well.

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Personalised [Skype] Mental Rehearsal Coaching

If you would like one-on-one mental rehearsal coaching for any kind of anxiety-creating situation, please contact Patrick at patrick@passingexams.co.nz

If you would like a copy of Patrick Sherratt's book, *Passing Exams for Dummies*, you will find it on Amazon.

http://www.amazon.com/Passing-Exams-Dummies-Patrick-Sherratt/dp/1742169252/ref=cm_pdp_rev_itm_img_1

