



How can knowledge of sports psychology help a sportsperson to improve their performance?

Psychology of sport
Chapter 4

To answer the big question you will need to be able to complete the following tasks:

1. Assess the classification of skills (AO3).
2. Analyse the different types of guidance (AO3).
3. Assess the stages of learning (AO3).
4. Analyse the different forms of feedback and its role in information processing (AO3).
5. Analyse the role of goal setting in improving performance (AO3).
6. Discuss how mental preparation can help sportspeople (AO3).

The classification of skills

Assess the classification of skills (AO3).

Characteristics of a skilled performance

We can all recognise skilful performance but it is sometimes difficult to describe the characteristics that make it skilled.

Being skilful requires a performer to have some ability to develop these abilities (learned abilities) through training and practice. The performer will then become effective and efficient.

Effective performance could include the following traits: Accuracy, consistency and control with good decision making.

Efficient performance could show: good technique and apparently effortless fluency and aesthetic qualities - looks good.

Skill classification

Different skills place different demands on the performer and have different characteristics. Skills are often placed on different continuums in attempt to classify them.

Open – closed continuum



Open skills occur when performers have to adapt their skills to a changing or unpredictable environment. Examples of environmental or external influences are:

- Weather and terrain – a wet football pitch on a windy day
- Other people – a netballer reacting to their own and to the other team's players
- situation – a hostile crowd

To perform open skills you need to have good perception of these stimuli and quick decision making skills to adapt to the external environment.

Skills that are not affected by the environment are called **closed skills**. They are predictable where the performer repeats the action over and over again without outside influences, for example, a gymnastic vault.

Skills are not always completely open or closed they can be anywhere along the open – closed continuum.

Complexity continuum

Skills range according to how difficult they are to learn and perform.

Basic skills (simple skills) are simple and straightforward. They do not include complicated movements and have little decision making demands e.g. running.

Complex skills are more difficult. They include movements that require high levels of coordination and control. E.g. Vault in gymnastics. Complex skills often make mental demands such as making judgements and decision-making. Skills also range between basic and complex. They are on the complexity continuum between basic and complex skills.



Pace continuum

Self-paced skills: The performer decides on the timing and pacing of the skill – for example, when throwing the javelin in athletics. These are usually closed skills.

External paced skills: The timing and pacing of the skill are controlled by external factors such as the opponent. For example, receiving a serve in tennis. These tend to be open skills



Summary

- Effective performance could include the following traits: Accuracy, consistency and control with good decision making
- Skills can be classified on different continuums depending on their characteristics

For further discussion:

Place a variety of skills on the different continuums.

Give reasons why you have placed them where you have

Types of guidance

Analyse the different types of guidance (AO3).

When acquiring and improving skills, performers need guidance. There are three main types of guidance:

- Visual
- Verbal
- Manual/ mechanical

These can be used in different situations to support performers' different learning styles and may vary depending on the stage of learning of the performer.

Visual guidance

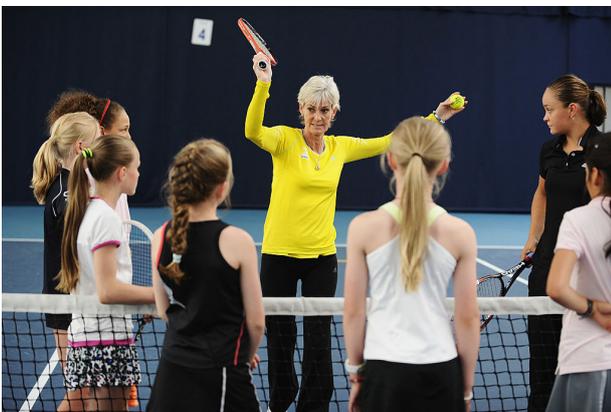
This is when a performer can see the skill being performed as a model to copy. These might come in different forms such as:

- Live demonstration
- Video example – a video of the skill being performed
- Video playback – a recording of the performer's own performance

Visual guidance can show the skill as a whole movement or broken down into parts. This type of guidance is particularly valuable for learners in the early stages of learning (cognitive), who have never seen or experienced the skill before.

Verbal guidance

This is when a performer is told how to improve a skill, For example:



- Technical/tactical points given by the coach
- Feedback from the coach
- Feedback from peers – from other performers

Verbal guidance may be given before, during or after practice and performance.

This type of feedback helps learners to progress through the stages of learning and is helpful in developing and refining skills for more advanced or experienced performers.

Manual/Mechanical guidance



Manual guidance is when a performer is physically guided or supported by the coach. For example, a coach supports a gymnast to do a backflip.

This type of guidance is particularly helpful when learning a new skill but can be used at any stage of learning.

Mechanical guidance is when equipment supports the learner whilst practicing. The coach would use mechanical guidance at the early stage of learning in order for the learner to practice the skill safely. It allows them to get a 'feel' for the movement – for example equipment to develop summersault in gymnastics.

Summary

- There are three types of guidance
- Different types can be used for learners at different stages of learning

Stages of learning

Assess the stages of learning (AO3).

There are generally thought to be three stages of learning that performers go through

- Cognitive (beginners)
- Associative (intermediate)
- Autonomous (advanced)

Cognitive stage

The performer is inconsistent and makes many mistakes. Demonstration and repetition is needed at this stage. Correct performance needs to be reinforced by positive feedback. The most appropriate practice would be the whole-part-whole method.

Associative

In this stage performers make fewer mistakes. More complex information can be processed. Part practice would support this stage.

Autonomous

At this stage the performer is consistent and effective and they demonstrate characteristics of skilled performers. They usually make correct decisions. They can process complex information and the coach can give detailed feedback to refine performance. Whole practice tends to be used at this stage.

Summary

- There are three stages of learning

For further discussion:

What are the three stages of learning?

Which type of guidance is most suitable for which stage of learning? Give reasons for your answers.

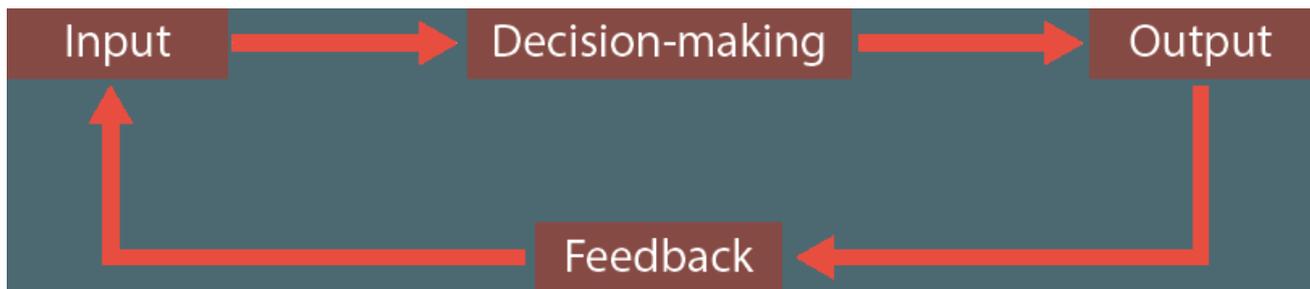
Feedback

Analyse the different forms of feedback and its role in information processing (AO3).

Feedback gives information to the performer on aspects of their performance. It is a vital part of information processing.

Information processing

The information processing model is one method that can be used to illustrate how learning takes place. The model contains four parts that are connected in a loop.



Input is the information that is received from the senses.

Decision-making interprets the input using its short and long-term memory.

Output is the action taken after a decision has been made.

Feedback will provide information to the performer on aspects of their performance.

Types of feedback

There are two types of feedback:

- intrinsic
- extrinsic

Intrinsic feedback is what is felt by the performer during a performance. For example, a gymnast during a vault.

Extrinsic feedback is provided by external sources during, or after, a performance. It includes what the performer can hear or see e.g. feedback from a coach; comments from team-mates; the actions of opponents.

Feedback is based on two areas of knowledge:

- knowledge of results
- knowledge of performance

Knowledge of results focuses on the outcome – for example, the score or time.

Knowledge of performance focuses on how well the athlete performed e.g. technical problems that affect a javelin thrower's distance.

Feedback needs to be **constructive** to help the performer to improve their skills. It should be immediate, specific and accurate.

Summary

- feedback is a vital aspect of information processing
- information processing has four main aspects

For further discussion:

Explain the term selective attention.

Where in the information processing model would you use selective attention?

Goal setting

Analyse the role of goal setting in improving performance (AO3).

Setting goals allows progress to be tracked and strategies to be used to achieve long and short-term goals.



To ensure goals have real meaning SMART targets are often used:

- **S**pecific – state exactly what will need to be done
- **M**easurable – ensure the goal can be measured
- **A**chievable/**A**greed – know it is possible/discuss the goal e.g. with a coach
- **R**ealistic/**R**ecorded – know it is practical/write it down
- **T**imed – state by when it will be achieved

Example of SMART targets for a 1500m runner

Goal	1500m runner	Your goals
S	I will improve my personal best	
M	It will be by 1 second	
A	I have discussed this with my coach and it is achievable	
R	My training and races will be recorded in my diary	
T	This will be achieved with 6 months	

Summary

- Setting goals can help improve performance
- Setting SMART targets is a way of ensuring goals are achieved

For further discussion:

Complete the right hand column in the table above to enter your SMART targets.

Mental preparation

Discuss how mental preparation can help sportspeople (AO3).

As well as being physically ready for action, it is important that athletes are also mentally prepared. Mental preparation will include controlling emotions and imagining success.

Imagery

Imagery (or visualisation) can help performers to picture things in their mind before a performance. For example, before taking a shot, a netballer might picture the ball hitting the back of the net.

Benefits of mental preparation

- Builds confidence
- Helps focus on task in hand
- Reduces anxiety
- Increase motivation
- Improve

Motivation

This is a combination of internal drives and external forces which drive performance. There are two main types of motivation

- Intrinsic – comes from inside the performer e.g. their drive to succeed, enjoyment
- Extrinsic – from sources outside the performer e.g. prize money

Although everyone is different it is generally thought that intrinsic motivation will usually be a better source of long term motivation.

Summary

- Preparing mentally should be taken as seriously as physical preparation
- Mental preparation has a variety of benefits

Acknowledgements

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