

Performance Imagery

It is of utmost importance that every imagery scene you invoke presents your most positive impression of a performance. In the following imagery script, you will be led through a successful performance scene. In this initial imagery exercise, you will recall a previous performance of your own that is drawn from a real-life experience. It should represent a performance that you regard as being one of your best. For example, it may have been satisfying because you were especially free and expressive.

The performance scene that you choose should be described below in detail. As before in the relaxation scene, note the location, time of day, and type of event (such as a recital or competition). Describe the scene in as much detail as possible. You will be imagining a short part of the performance, paying particular attention to its peak moments. It is not necessary to remember the precise details of the music, but rather to bring yourself back to a general awareness of the thought process, feelings, and senses that you experienced.

Description of Successful Performance Scene

Successful Performance Imagery Script

Lie down on the floor and relax, again letting the palms rest upward and bending your legs if necessary. Take a moment to note the rhythm of your breathing. Take two deep breaths on your own. Now take a breath in which you count to five on the inhale, retain the breath

for two counts, and then count to five on the exhale. Take a moment to scan your body for any muscular tension. Move from the top of your head all the way down to your toes, noticing where any tension remains and letting yourself melt into the floor. Feel your jaw relax, your brows smooth out, and your shoulders release all residues of tension. Feel your shoulders, back, arms, and legs relax.

Bring yourself back to your relaxation scene, seeing it as clearly as possible, as if you were really there again. Visualize the scene, notice the smells and sounds, and be aware of how your body and mind are affected by being present in your relaxation scene. Feel your breath becoming slower and heavier; feel the weight of your body sinking into the floor. Allow yourself to let go of any concerns or worries as you sink further into relaxation.

Now switch off the scene and take a moment to assess whether there is any tension in any of your muscles. Focus awareness on each arm, your face, shoulders, chest, abdomen, legs, and feet, and relax them if necessary. Take a long, slow, deep breath, drawing in the energy around you and then letting yourself fully relax on the exhale.

Now initiate the relaxation scene again. When this scene is clear, you will begin to make a transition from the relaxation scene into your successful performance scene. Keep with you the feeling of relaxation as you begin to place yourself into your chosen scene. Rather than feeling like an observer, you will participate in this visualization in a first-person way, experiencing the thrill of performance firsthand. Feel yourself going through the motions of your piece: hearing the music, seeing the stage and the audience in the hall, feeling and seeing your instrument if you are an instrumentalist, and being aware of how relaxed and confident you feel.

Now switch off the scene and begin to relax your muscles, just as we did earlier, by taking a moment to assess whether there is any tension in any of your muscles. Focus awareness on each arm, your face, shoulders, chest, abdomen, legs, and feet, and relax them if necessary. Continue to breathe deeply, slowly, and comfortably. Your hands and feet are becoming warm and relaxed, and your muscles are becoming loose and heavy.

Now repeat the relaxation scene again. As you switch off the scene for the last time, begin to relax your muscles, just as we did earlier, by taking a moment to assess whether there is any tension. Focus awareness again on each part of your body and do a scan from the top of your head all the way to your toes, letting the weight of your body sink into the floor or chair. Your body is free of tension, and you are at peace. Take a deep breath, wiggle your toes, and gently raise yourself off the floor, taking time to move slowly and gently.

Upcoming Performance Scene

The next step in using imagery should involve the visualization of an upcoming performance. Using the images we have already developed, we are going to transition from the relaxation scene and successful performance scene into a new event that you have yet to experience. You may want to use this time to begin imagining an event that is very important to you, such as a recital, audition, or competition that has required a great deal of preparation. Alternatively, if this type of imagery produces any fear or anxiety, you may wish to begin by imagining upcoming performances that are less significant, such as a studio class. Later, as the relaxation exercises become more effective and you begin to feel less anxiety during imaging, you may begin to imagine more critical performances.

Using the space below, describe the location, time of day, and circumstances of the event you will be imagining. Include as much information as possible about the surroundings, such as the size of the audience, the smell of the hall, the lighting, what the stage looks like, and any other details that will help you imagine it as clearly as possible.

Description of Upcoming Performance Scene

Upcoming Performance Imagery Script

This imagery exercise will involve three steps: the use of the relaxation scene, the successful performance scene, and the upcoming performance scene.

Today we will begin by choosing a new performance scene. Depending on your goals, the scene that you choose may involve an entire performance or the repetition of a few short parts of the piece. You might imagine only one measure, playing it with complete accuracy and technical ease, or you might imagine yourself beginning or ending the piece.

Lie on your back, close your eyes, and direct your attention to each muscle group, allowing it to become more relaxed. Let the relaxation flow through each part of your body, starting with the crown of your head, and scanning the rest of your body for any tension.

Take three deep breaths, feeling the full expansion of your lungs and repeating the following phrases to yourself: calm and relaxed; peaceful and relaxed; free of tension; deeply relaxed and comfortable. Begin to count from 10 to 1, noticing yourself becoming more relaxed as you say each number. If there are any areas you want to further relax, take a few moments to do so, focusing your awareness on that part of your body and noticing how warm, heavy, and relaxed it feels. As you use your deep breathing to increase the level of your relaxation, begin to count to five on the inhale, retain the breath for two counts, and then count to six on the exhale. Letting yourself take five long, deep breaths, increase the count on each subsequent breath, always allowing the exhale to be longer than the inhale.

Recall your relaxation scene. Put all of your senses into the scene; see the small details around you, feel the ground at your feet, be aware of the temperature, and hear the sounds that bring you gently back to this calming moment in time. Note your feelings during this experience; let yourself fully engage in that familiar sense of peace. If your mind wanders, gently bring yourself back to the scene.

Now begin to transition into the successful performance scene that you used last time. Be more aware of bodily sensations associated with the successful performance, such as ease and fluidness, a sense of confidence in your skills, and the thoughts or emotions that you believe contributed most to your success. Notice how relaxed and calm you are as you think about performing in front of people.

When you have finished going through the scene, review your muscle groups again to insure that you are still relaxed. Now it is time to begin to go through your upcoming performance scene. Gently bring yourself into the scene as you let each of

your senses imagine what is coming up: visualize the hall, the audience, including your friends and family, and hear the sound of your instrument or voice. Feel the excitement of being in front of this group of people who want to hear you, and be aware of how much you enjoy the act itself. Feel yourself perform with a keen awareness of the music as it unfolds. Be aware of the silence of your inner voices; you are not judging, but merely acting in the moment. It is a wonderful feeling to be able to demonstrate how deeply you care about this music. Be aware of relaxed arms and hands. You are not trying; there is a feeling of effortlessness. You may begin to feel excited as you think about the upcoming performance; taking a note to be aware of this feeling, let it subside as you bring yourself back to a calm and relaxed state. Continue to relax as you stay focused on the music. You have done all the preparation necessary and now you have a chance to share your music with others.

Now wiggle your toes and fingers to bring yourself back to reality. Take a moment to stay in the centered state. When you feel ready, move to your side and gently raise yourself to a sitting position.

Goal-Oriented Performance Imagery

Now that you have begun to feel comfortable using imagery to rehearse both past and future performances, you can begin to use it to intentionally address specific goals. If at this point, your images are not very clear or vivid, or if you feel that it is difficult to manipulate the images, you may choose to practice the above exercises until they begin to feel more comfortable. One way to assess yourself is to consider

whether you would rate your imagery clarity and controllability at a 7 or higher on a scale of 1-10, with 10 representing the highest degree of clarity and controllability. If so, then you are ready to move ahead. If your rating is a 6 or lower, it would be helpful to rehearse the previous exercises until the rating improves.

Consider a *musical or technical goal* that you have for either an entire recital or a particular piece of music. For example, you might want to approach one of your pieces without excessive tension, or you might feel that another piece needs more excitement and intensity. You can use imagery for correcting errors, enhancing technique, solidifying memory, increasing confidence, or improving your “on the spot” creativity. The new scene that you select should be one in which you would be able to achieve this goal.

As an example, consider technique enhancement as the intended outcome. In this case, the new scene would be one in which the technique that you want to improve is emphasized. A pianist, for example, might be playing a piece with parallel octaves that he wants to play with freedom and ease, so the scene would involve only this section of the piece, and he would imagine himself playing with a feeling of complete looseness in his arms. If you want to improve your attack at the beginning of a piece, then imagine the moment before starting the piece, preparing mentally, and then beginning with exactly the sound and motion that you are aiming for.

In the space below, write out your goal for this particular imagery exercise and then write out a description of all the elements that will go into a successful achievement of that goal. This exercise should be as detailed as the scenes above with regard to the smells, sights, and sounds of the environment, so if it helps to

write out performance details for the upcoming event, please take this opportunity to do so.

Description of Goal-Oriented Imagery Exercise

Goal:

Description of elements necessary to meet goal:

Goal-Oriented Imagery Script

Begin to initiate relaxation on your own, using the method or methods that seem to be most effective for achieving relaxation. You may choose to use deep breathing, a relaxation scene, a focus on the release of tension in certain muscles, or a combination of those three activities. When your body feels relaxed, take a long, deep breath before beginning to imagine your upcoming performance. Visualize yourself onstage, playing or singing confidently and successfully, communicating to the audience and focusing only on the music itself. Listen and watch yourself performing your intended goal successfully. Focus on a specific component or part of the piece, replaying it in your mind a few times until it seems like an automatic response. After you are finished practicing the completion of your goal, take another moment for relaxation. Taking a few deep breaths, gradually open your eyes. If possible, take a moment to rehearse the same goal with your instrument or voice.

End Result Imagery

In this final preparatory imagery exercise, you will be using imagery to imagine the successful end result of your performance. In this rehearsal, you will be perfecting your image of the last few minutes of your performance followed by a proud bow. Using imagery as preparation for performance is seen as the final goal of imagery training, in which imagery practice is transferred to the *in vivo* (live) environment.

The end result will involve playing the final part of your piece very well and then bowing for the audience.

Description of the End Result

Use adjectives to describe below how you would feel after a successful performance. In addition, describe what you want to achieve both musically and technically when you reach the final moments of your piece. If you are preparing for an entire recital, consider the last piece that you are playing on the program.

Descriptive Words (such as confident, focused, or relaxed):

Description of the Optimal Ending:

End Result Imagery Script

You will now imagine the end result of your performance. See yourself onstage in the recital hall, playing the last part of your piece. Notice the way your body reacts effortlessly to your every idea; notice the lighting in the room; be aware of the supportive presence of the audience. It has gone beautifully so far because you are “in the zone;” you have been concentrating, absorbed in the music, and every note has been played exactly as it was planned. You finish the piece beautifully; the whole audience has been absorbed in the music as well. Now use your descriptive words and your optimal ending to the piece to imagine the performance in even greater detail. Take a minute or two to visualize yourself and hear yourself in these final moments.

Now, come out of your deep concentration to thunderous applause. Standing up to bow, you look into the audience and see that everyone is cheering your performance, and you know it has gone well. You feel happy, proud, and confident. Your performance spoke to the audience, and you felt a connection with them. Your playing could not have gone better.