

ATHLETE'S MENTAL EDGE WORKBOOK

2.0

MENTAL GAME
STRATEGIES FOR
OVERCOMING HIGH
EXPECTATIONS



WORKBOOK 1



MENTAL EDGE WORKBOOK 1

Mental Game Strategies For Overcoming High Expectations



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SESSION 1 OBJECTIVE

You'll learn how to uncover harmful or strict expectations that undermine your confidence and instead, focus on manageable objectives.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

As you achieve greater success, your expectations for performance also elevate. Having high expectations can hurt your confidence when you fail to reach them. Having high expectations means you also feel more pressure to perform well.

For example, expectations such as, *"I must score 10 points every game,"* or, *"I shouldn't make any mistakes,"* cause you to worry about outcomes or results. Lastly, expectations can trigger frustration when you fail to achieve your high, strict expectations.

Key point: *Self-confidence and expectations are different concepts.*

Expectations are absolute needs or demands that you place on yourself about the quality of your performance or outcomes, such as, *"My performance should look or feel perfect all the time."* These unwritten standards about how you *think you SHOULD* perform are often not rational. The problem is that these expectations cause you to constantly judge how well you're performing or doing in a competition.

In contrast, self-confidence is how strongly you believe in your ability to execute a task. When you have confidence, you know you can perform, but you don't judge your performance like you do with expectations; you want high confidence without judging how well you are performing.

Confidence precedes your performance. For example, a quarterback might visualize a good pass in his mind and have a strong belief that he will hit his receiver. True confidence is void of self-judgments. You want to feel confident, but not judge how well you are doing. You'll learn more about how to have higher, stable confidence in Workbook 3.

TYPES OF EXPECTATIONS

1. Demands about your score, times, results, or outcome.
2. Demands about the quality of your performance (i.e. how good was the shot on net).
3. Demands about how well you are doing with your mental game.
4. What you think others expect of you including teammates, coaches, parents, and fans.

Let's start with an important mental game principle, or a "formula for success."

Key Point: *This formula is an important mental skill that you'll want to master first.*

YOUR MENTAL GAME FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

The plan is to flush out and discard your expectations, so you can perform free of pressure and judgment. Instead, you want to have (1) high, proactive self-confidence, and focus on (2) task-specific process goals.

Thus, focusing on small objectives during competition helps you perform with a present, process focus. Remember, you want to compete without the pressure and judgments that come with strict expectations.

"You want high confidence without judging how well you are performing."

THREE STEPS IN THE FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

1. Uncover strict expectations (shoulds, should nots, or musts) and commit to discarding your expectations, and instead...
2. Strive for high, stable confidence.
3. Focus on smaller objectives or process goals.

WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

Consider these questions to help you uncover expectations. Use the examples listed later in the workbook to help you answer these questions:

1. What expectations, such as, *"I should beat _____ today,"* do you place on your performance?
2. What demands do you maintain about your performance, such as, *"I **MUST** hit perfect shots today to win."*
3. What standards do you think you should achieve based on past experiences? For example, *"We should beat this team, we always do,"* or, *"I need to win big because I did against this opponent last time."*
4. What "standards" do you have for your game that cause you to feel upset or frustrated if you do not reach them?
5. What names do you call yourself or adopt from others? Such as, *"I'm a slow starter,"* or, *"I'm a streaky player."*
6. What past situations cause you to have generalizations about your current game? For instance, *"I can never perform well on hot days."*
7. What expectations do you feel from other people, such as coaches, teammates, or parents? For instance, *"My coach expects me to be the leading scorer."*



EXAMPLES OF COMMON EXPECTATIONS BY SPORT

Sports	Examples of Expectations
Golf	• I expect not to make any double bogeys. • I expect to keep the ball in play. • I expect not to three-putt. • I expect to hit perfect shots or not make any mistakes. • I expect to shoot a certain score.
Basketball	• I should score at least 10 points in the game. • I should make defensive stops. • I should make all of my free throws. • I expect to make every shot. • I can't make any mistakes, or I'll lose my starting position on the team.
Racing	• I expect my team to finish in the top three in each race. • I should run upfront every race. • I must finish in the top 5 to get a ride next year. • I must be perfect to make the car go faster. • I expect my pit crew to not screw up.
Baseball	• I should have at least 1 RBI per game. • I should make zero errors on defense. • I have to go 4 for 4 at the plate today. • All of my at-bats, pitches or throws should <i>feel</i> solid. • I expect to hit .350 or better.
Volleyball	• I should generate at least twenty kills per game. • I need to hit at least .500 each game. • All my swings, sets, or passes should <i>feel</i> solid. • To hit well, my arm swing should <i>feel</i> perfect. • My parents expect me to get a kill. • My teammates expect me to lead the team.
Hockey	• I expect to play perfectly. • I expect to not let in any weak goals. • I should always be the best player on the ice. • I have to play up to my potential to help the team win.

Skydiving	• I expect to achieve a certain point average or score. • I expect to do well in a certain formation. • I expect not to mess up with a certain formation. • I have to have a perfect exit to do well. • I can't have any mental errors.
Skating	• I expect to skate a clean program. • I can't fall to score well. • I have to impress the judges and smile. • I expect a certain number of revolutions in my spins. • I should hit every single one of my jumps.
Triathlon	• I should keep a certain pace. • I need to finish in the top 3. • I should be on the podium. • I have to finish ahead of my teammate. • I expect to have quick transitions.
Soccer	• I have to play perfect defense. • I must score a goal every game. • I must make every penalty kick. • I can't give up a takeaway when on the ball.
Football	• I expect to not throw any interceptions. • I can't have any fumbles. • I must make every field goal. • I have to run my route perfectly.
Tennis	• I can't make any silly errors. • I should not make any double faults. • I should make all my routines or easy shots. • I need to win in straight sets.
Mental Game	• I should always feel confident. • I should never get upset or frustrated. • I should have a good warm-up to perform well. • I should not be nervous before the game.

You can use the examples listed in the table to help you complete Exercise 1.

EXERCISE 1: WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

In the table on the following page, please write down your expectations for each category. **Here are the types of expectations you might have:**

1. **Scoring, Outcomes, or Results:** Expectations related to the outcome of a competition or period. *"I should score three goals per game."*
2. **The Quality of My Performance:** What you expect your performance should look and feel like. *"I should not make any stupid mistakes."*
3. **Mental Game:** Expectations about how you think you should behave during competition. *"I should always stay composed and not get upset."*
4. **What Others Expect of Me:** What you think others expect of you. *"Other people expect me to lead the team to victory."*

You can ask a coach, teammate, or parent to help you with this exercise. Your mental coach can also help you uncover expectations.

Continue to the table on the following page...



WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

Area	Expectations
Scoring, Outcomes or Results	1. 2. 3.
The Quality of My Performance	1. 2. 3.
My Mental Game	1. 2. 3.
What Others Expect of Me	1. 2. 3.
Other Expectations	1. 2. 3.

DISCARD EXPECTATIONS, FOCUS ON PROCESS GOALS

You want to let go of any expectations, good or bad. But how do you let go of expectations? You focus on what's important to your game.

Process goals help you focus on preparing and executing your skills. They also help you focus in the present moment or here and now, instead of thinking about future outcomes.

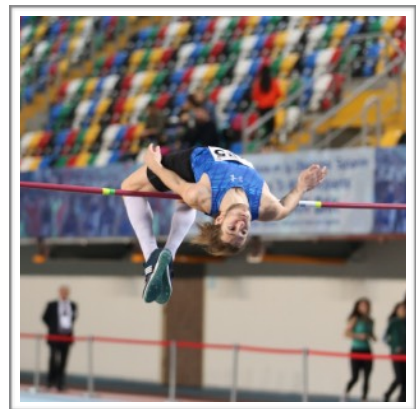
Process goals help you focus on your mental game and your physical performance, such as:

1. Focusing on executing a skill or task, such as a corner kick.
2. Focusing on commitment, confidence, composure, and trust.

WHAT ARE GOOD PROCESS GOALS OR OBJECTIVES?

1. They are simple and usually not technical or related to mechanics or form during competition.
2. They help you focus on executing your role successfully.
3. They help you focus on the here and now, and not on results.
4. They help you focus on what *you want to do* instead of avoiding failures or mistakes (i.e. *"Don't make a turnover."*).

Process goals are small objectives you can accomplish often, such as, see the ball early or focus on court awareness. They are not typical goals you set for the season, but rather objectives to help you focus on the right performance cues. Performance cues are anything you need to think about or feel to help you perform a task.



EXAMPLES OF PROCESS GOALS

On the following page are a few examples of process goals to help you get started with thinking about process goals for your sport.

First, break up your role or sport into parts of your game; this way you can easily define objectives for each. For example, in artistic gymnastics, you do vault, beam, floor, pommel horse, high bars, parallel bars and rings, or in baseball, athletes do batting, pitching, fielding and base running. Your objectives are specific to each task you are doing. Please review the examples on the following page.

Track & Field

- Commit to a race plan.
- Have good rhythm on my run.
- Relax and run freely.
- Focus on effortless speed.
- Run at a 5-minute-per mile pace.
- Use a pre-jump routine before the high jump.

Tennis

- Attack opponent's backhand.
- Let go of the last point before the next point.
- Visualize each serve.
- Stay aggressive when up in the match.
- Take ball early on groundstrokes.
- Use split step and move quickly to ball.

Soccer

- Focus on getting into space.
- Be in the moment, and let go of mistakes.
- Take opponents on 1v1.
- Shoot decisively when you have an open shot.
- Watch the ball when defending.

Basketball

- Focus on court awareness.
- Be decisive when shooting.
- Keep mind on the court when playing.
- Keep feet moving on defense.
- Get open for teammates.
- Communicate with teammates.

“Process goals are small objectives you can accomplish often, such as see the ball early or focus on court awareness.”

Mental Process Goals:

- Be in the moment.
- Trust your ability.
- Let go of mistakes quickly.
- Focus on seeing the ball early.
- Find tendencies of the other team.
- Be aggressive.
- Trust your skills.
- Commit to the call, play, or routine.

EXERCISE 2: FOCUS ON PROCESS GOALS, NOT EXPECTATIONS

Now it's your turn, please complete the table on the following page. Write examples of process goals—for each skill or area of your game—that can help you execute your skills in your sport. Think about what would help you perform better in your position if you focused more on a specific process goal.

Continue to the table on the following page...



FOCUS ON PROCESS GOALS, NOT EXPECTATIONS

Process Goals by Task
Task or area (i.e. offense, defense, transition, attacking, 2v1, man down, etc.): 1. 2. 3.
Task or area: 1. 2. 3.
Task or area: 1. 2. 3.
Task or area: 1. 2. 3.
Your Game Plan (or Coach's): 1. 2. 3.
Mental Game: 1. 2. 3.

SUMMARY

One way to perform with less pressure is to manage your strict expectations. You do this by focusing on (1) high confidence and (2) process goals. Take this important step now so you can improve confidence and stop judging your performance. This step alone will make a big difference in your mental game.

Keep in mind that you don't have to be perfect with "achieving" your process goals. They should help you put your attention on the important performance cues. Your process goals may change each day depending on what you choose to focus on. The idea is that you'll improve what you focus on.

Above all else, **keep it simple**. Set two process goals to focus on for each area of your game, such as good communication with teammates or having good footwork.



THIS WEEK'S ACTION PLANS:

Please apply the mental strategies you learned this week to practice and competition using the action plans below.

1. Awareness Exercise

Note the expectations you have for your performance and the ones you feel from others before the next competition. Make a note of your expectations and include them in your Workbook answers for Exercise 1.

2. Practice Plan

Work on integrating one or two process goals or objectives into your individual task routines in practice. Doing things like visualizing a plan, trusting in your abilities, or using your pre-performance routine in practice helps you focus on the process instead of worrying about outcomes.

3. Game-Time Application

Prior to competition, set two process goals for each area of your sport. Make it a priority to focus on your process goals more so than thinking about meeting others' or your expectations for scores, results or outcomes.

MENTAL GAME ASSESSMENT FOR SESSION 1

After your next competition, please answer a few questions about your mental game. It's best if you answer them on the same day as your competition. After you answer the questions below, please return your answers to your mental coach.

1. What are two things you did well today, in regard to your mental game and performance?

2. What are two things you would like to improve for next time?

3. What expectations, if any, did you notice going into today's competition?

4. What process goals did you focus on for today's competition?

5. How well did you let go of your expectations and instead, focus on your process goals?

6. What did you learn about replacing your expectations with process goals that will help you in the future?