



RELAXATION EXERCISES

Developing control over your concentration is the only way to know what you are really capable of. Only then will you perform much closer to your potential. To do this, one must be willing to spend time training your mind.

To help achieve this, there is a need to exercise basic relaxation techniques to get in the '**mood**' for mental rehearsal.

The benefit of relaxation is to aid mental rehearsal.

The benefit of mental rehearsal is to aid performance.

Another benefit of mental rehearsal is to aid match planning, to be able to note any physical changes that may occur during a match.

You must have an understanding of what is required to fire a good shot or string of shots.

To explain:

At some stage in your shooting career, you must have fired a really good shot or string of shots and the thought came that they really felt good. Everything looked good and you called all the shots and the sights were very clear, sharp and aligned.

That's the type of picture you need to run through your mind over and over.

If mental rehearsal is new to you, then you may find that the mind imagines in two modes.

The first mode will be where you see a picture or '**film**' of yourself doing the actions like sitting at the movies. The second is called in the 'true mode'. That is seeing sights, seeing recoil, calling the shot and seeing the result.

The second mode is the ultimate achievement, but can sometimes take time to develop. Like learning any new or different skill, it needs to be trained and learnt.

The '**minds eye**' needs to be familiar with what is required to fire a good shot and know what is expected in good results. Visualising the arm, grip, sights, target, recoil, follow through and good result.

During rehearsal you may find that you drift from one mode to the other. Do not be concerned as this will happen often until you become aware of what is happening and what is required. Just let it happen and it will drift back into the desired mode in due course. If you drift away to something other than shooting, simply think the word "**STOP**", then go back to your rehearsal.

All aspects of mental rehearsal must be performed in **'real time'**. This is so that you do not become rushed in a match.

During rehearsal, be aware of all the movements you will be making during a match. Loading your pistol, blackening sights, getting into position etc.

The better relaxed you are the greater the feedback you will get through your senses. You will be able to imagine that you feel the pistol in your hand, hear shots firing, see the recoil, hear the range commands and see the results.

Let's do a test!

"Close your eyes. You are walking down a path, you see a lemon tree. You stop and smell the lemon's scent. You pick a lemon and hold it in both hands. With your thumbs you press into the skin to break open the lemon, the juice squirts over the thumbs and spray reaches your face. You smell the sour lemon. It is so sour that your nose begins to turn up and you squint your eyes from the sour smell. You raise the lemon to your lips and lick the sour juice and your face turns up from the sour taste".

Open your eyes. Could you taste the lemon? There was no lemon or tree but you were able to remember what a sour lemon tastes and smells like.

Mental rehearsal, when done correctly, will give you this same result for your shooting and indeed any other part of life you want to adapt this to.

What the exercise does show is that the mind cannot tell the difference between what is real and what is not. It will however believe whatever you tell it to. It is somewhat like people being afraid of the dark. The more times you rehearse firing a perfect shot, the more it will become an automatic response.

To get the best 'value' from mental rehearsal, you need to be in a relaxed state, preferably after a relaxation session.

The emphasis here is that during the relaxation sessions, you stay awake and concentrate on what is happening. Falling asleep is defeating the purpose. After the relaxation exercise is repeated a few times, you may not need to go through the entire routine to get into a relaxed state. But again this may take time.

Another purpose of rehearsal could be to simulate a stressful situation. Picture this. You have just fired a string of good shots, you need one more shot to make a possible or clean the target or attain a perfect score. You tense up on the grip to make certain that it is a good shot and the pistol starts to shake slightly. You grip firmer and your shoulders get tense and start to rise. What to do?

In rehearsal mode you can prepare yourself for this situation by rehearsing what you will do if this situation occurs on the line.

The 'centering' section of this booklet will help in this situation.

This is **not** a 'quick fix' cure, but a technique when trained correctly, will give you an edge during a big competition when it counts the most.