

Focussing

What is Focussing?

Focussing is about placing your attention where it needs to be. There are a few simple tricks that can help you focus at critical moments and the details on this sheet should allow you to introduce them into your preparation.

Cue Words

Cue words are any words or phrases that trigger a response in you. They help you concentrate because they can focus you on the right thing at the right time; mnemonics, if you like. Some examples that might help you get started are listed below. You should try and use words that your coach uses in training so that they trigger the same thought patterns and physical responses you experience when you are doing a skill or a routine.



When waiting to compete: "**Relax**"; "**Focus**" (think about the next routine and forget the last).



Standing at the apparatus: "**Power**"; "**Strong**"; "**Angry Cat**"; "**Body Shape**"; "**Stretch**"; "**I can**"; "**I will**"; etc

Cue words are personal - your own. You need to work out what points are most critical to you, and what you need to focus on at those points. Use cue words in practice first, to build a connection between the word and the action; then you can begin to use them in competition.

Cue Actions

Like cue words, cue actions can help focus attention. Combining word-cues with action-cues often work better than only using words. Action-cues are difficult to do in an actual routine when you are concentrating on a particular skill. However, they are not irrelevant either. You can use action-cues before you start your routine to focus your mind on the apparatus and the competition. For a gymnast, some examples could be (nowhere near a comprehensive list):

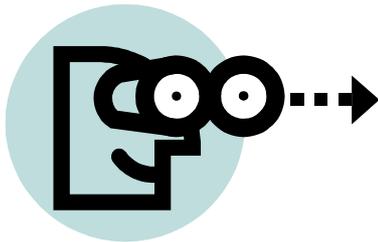
- Putting on and carefully adjusting your grips;
- Taking off your track suit top and folding it on your bag;
- Chalking-up;
- Standing at the apparatus, eyes closed, thinking through the routine; breathing deeply, shutting out the sounds around you, relaxing;
- Saluting the judges;
- First touch of the apparatus; etc.



Notice that these actions are while you are waiting and before you start your routine. They are a part of your preparation before you actually touch the apparatus or walk onto the floor or start your vault run. The trick to using them as cues is to use them as part of a mini-routine that you do every time before you do a routine in competition. You can practise them in training so that these actions are associated with 'just' doing a routine and you don't become anxious because you are at a competition or that there are judges present.

Visual Focussing

Visual focussing is a way of getting your mind to cut out all of the incidental things around you and getting your mind to concentrate on the apparatus on which you are about to perform. The exercise works like this:



- Start by looking around the venue, accepting what you see;
- Look at the six apparatus in order so that the one you are about to do is last;
- Look at the last five apparatus in order again so that the one you are about to do is last;
- Continue with this process until there is only one apparatus remaining, namely the one that you are about to do, let your focus rest on the apparatus for a few seconds;
- Relax.

With a few run-throughs, you can probably compress this into a smooth transfer of focus in a few seconds from the environment onto the apparatus, with your attention 'peaking' just as you are about to be called forward by the judges.

