Training for Excellence
Factsheet: Imagery

Imagery entails the mental representation of perceptual experiences and sensations, without having the actual experience. In other words, imagery revolves around imagining **specific objects, events or actions**.

Imagery can stimulate the same brain processes and learning pathways as actual practice. As such, it can provide a valuable addition to regular practice, especially when actual practice time is constrained by time or physical limitations.

Functions of Imagery

Imagery is a valuable tool that can help in practice and during performance.
More specifically – depending on the way you use imagery – it can help you to:
- Practice more efficiently
- Master a piece technically
- Improve the musical quality of a piece
- Improve your inner ear
- Improve your focus
- Prepare for performing under pressure
- Decrease anxiety or nerves before performances
- Prepare for unforeseen events
- Practice without the risk of overuse injuries
- Use time efficiently when you cannot use your instrument

Key lesson

Imagery is a skill that can be learned over time. At first you might find it challenging, but over time it will become easier and you will be able to produce clearer, more vivid images.

Content of Imagery

Depending of the different functions of imagery, different content can be imagined. Some examples of imagery content include:
- Imagine the music. Listen to a piece in your head. See the notes. Hear the different instruments in the orchestra.
- Imagine playing the music. Hear yourself playing the music. Feel how you play each note.
- Imagine bringing across the message, feeling, mood or emotion.
- Imagine how the audience experiences the music you play.
- Imagine your own experiences your feelings and emotions right before or during a performance.

Imagery is more effective when the images are more realistic. First, involve multiple senses (e.g. hearing, seeing, feeling, smelling, tasting). Second, use the PETTLEP framework:

Physicality. When possible, try to make imagery physical (e.g. wear same clothes as during performance, hold your instrument).

Environment. Do imagery in same location where you would practice or perform.

Task. Imagine the task you wish to practice (e.g. just playing the music or performing on stage).

Timing. Imagine playing a piece of music in 'real time' (rather than in slow motion).

Learning. Adjust imagery according to your own level of experience or expertise (keep it realistic).

Emotion. Invoke the same emotions as you would during actual performance (e.g. emotion in the song, nervousness during performance).

Perspective. Take on different perspectives (e.g. first or third person perspectives).

Creating Tomorrow

Imagery in practice

Guidelines for Imagery

We encourage you to try out the following principles during your daily practice for at least a couple of weeks.

1. **Try imagery for 10 minutes/day**
   It might be uncomfortable or weird in the beginning, but that will become better over time.

2. **Use different contents**
   Try out different contents of imagery, depending on the goal you want to achieve. Using scripts can be helpful in this process.
   - Imagine the music/playing the music (see Script 1).
   - Imagine bringing across the message (see Script 2).
   - Imagine your own experiences during performance (see Script 3).

3. **Develop your own scripts**
   As you become more confident in imagery, you can develop your own scripts to make it more relevant for your own experiences (e.g. specific scripts for auditions, orchestra performances, etc.).

4. **Try to make your imagery as realistic as possible**
   To this end, try to include multiple senses and use the PETTLEP framework (see first).

Tip #1
Learning imagery is easier when focused and comfortable. Try sitting in a comfy chair, hands on your knees, shoulders relaxed and eyes closed.

Tip #2
Imagery can be set up in the same way as deliberate practice. Define the aim of your imagery practice in advance and make your goals SMART.

Tip #3
Think about when to use imagery. Imagery might be useful to complement your practice during moments you can't play (e.g. when on a train, when you have physical aches).

Brief examples of imagery scripts

Script 1. Imagine playing the music
Take a deep breath and close your eyes. Now imagine yourself playing a certain piece. You can hear the music you play. You see yourself playing. You can feel the tension in your muscles and you feel your fingers playing the notes. Maybe you even smell your instrument. Notice how you play through both the easy and the difficult parts of the piece. Try to match your timing to how you would play the piece in the 'real world'.

Script 2. Imagine bringing across the message
Take a deep breath and close your eyes. Now imagine yourself playing a certain piece. Imagine what you want to bring across with the piece, which message, emotion or mood. For example, imagine you want to bring joy or express sadness. Imagine you feel this joy or sadness yourself. Imagine certain images to accompany these emotions (e.g. birds flying in the sky, tension of a dark forest). Continue to imagine yourself whilst playing the piece and bringing across the message, emotion, mood or image.

Script 3. Imagine your own experiences during performance
Take a deep breath and close your eyes. Now imagine yourself right before a performance. Imagine the room in which you are waiting, the clothes you are wearing. You feel that you are nervous and that you have sweaty palms. You take a deep breath and walk on stage. You see the audience and hear their applause. A sense of excitement goes through your body. You walk to your position and prepare yourself. You are fully focused. You play the first notes and are fully immersed in playing the music.