

Training for Excellence

Factsheet: Performing under Pressure

Pressure refers to those circumstances under which it is important to do well.

Under pressure, **stress** is the feeling we get when we subjectively perceive an **imbalance** between the demands of a situation and our own capacities.

Stress is a **normal reaction**; neither good nor bad, but **neutral**.

Performing under pressure can be learned. It revolves around managing stress, using stress positively, and learning to perform well despite stress. It is not about removing stress.

Some mental skills:

- Imagery
- Relaxation techniques
- Breathing techniques
- Routines

Some learning strategies:

- Adopt task-relevant (external) focus
- Clear goal-setting
- Use **what-if scenarios**
- **Train under pressure** (planned disruptions)

What-if scenarios

Anticipate and write down things that can go wrong in a certain situation (e.g., before or during an audition).

Then think how you can prevent this from impacting your performance AND how you can repair your functioning when it does.

Potential benefits:

- Feeling prepared
- Having concrete prevent strategies
- Having concrete repair strategies
- Use it to design practice (using SMART goals)
- Use it to design planned disruptions

Train under pressure

Performing under pressure can also be learned by practicing under pressure.

To this end, use **planned disruptions** (see below) that give you (a bit of) stress, and practice under these circumstances.

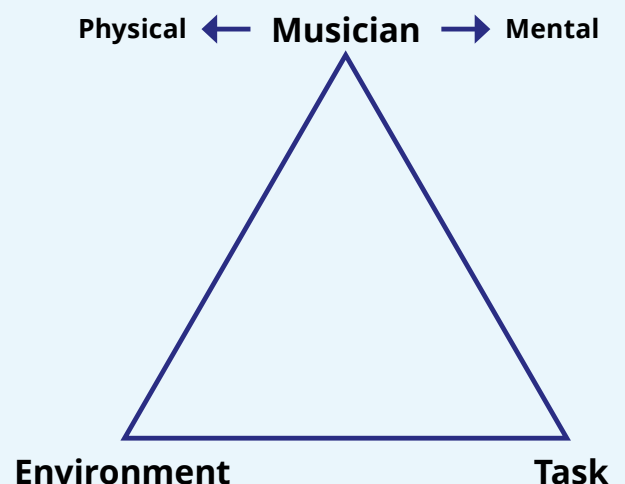
Potential benefits:

- Learn to direct attention under pressure
- Learn to perform well under pressure
- Test specific prevent or repair strategies
- Try use of mental skills
- Reflect on performance to identify future working points (SMART goals)
- Can also be done using imagery

Planned disruptions

The following model can be used to design your own planned disruptions.

- **Physical:** make practice challenging by influencing physical parameters, such as fatigue or heart rate.
- **Mental:** make practice mentally challenging, such as playing for an audience or attaching rewards to your performance.
- **Environment:** make practice challenging by performing in one environment that resembles the performance context or is challenging in itself, such as playing in the dark.
- **Task:** make practice challenging by making the task more difficult, such as standing on a wobble board.



Performing under Pressure in practice

Guidelines for learning to perform under pressure

We encourage you to try out the following principles during the upcoming weeks, in preparation for your next performance.

1. Use what-if scenarios

Anticipate what can go wrong during your audition (make a list). Then look at how to prevent and repair.

2. Create planned disruptions

Try out different planned disruptions to make your practice more challenging. Find out what works for you.

3. Practice under planned disruptions

Play your music under the challenging conditions created by planned disruptions.

4. Train your mental skills under planned disruptions

Test and train your mental skills and routines to deal with stress under the challenging conditions created by planned disruptions.

5. Self-regulate

Reflect on how you performed under planned disruptions, and use this information to set new goals and to work on specific points of improvement.

Tip #1

Imagery can also be used to practice under pressure and use what-if scenarios.

Tip #2

What-if scenarios can be used to design planned disruptions. Create a practice situation that resembles a specific negative scenario.

Tip #3

Incorporate lessons from previous workshops. Integrate what-if scenarios and planned disruptions in your deliberate practice. Try to control your focus of attention when performing under pressure.

The following template provides a concrete example of how to set up what-if scenarios

What if...?

Define

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____
- 7 _____
- 8 _____

Prevent

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____
- 7 _____
- 8 _____

Repair

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____
- 6 _____
- 7 _____
- 8 _____

