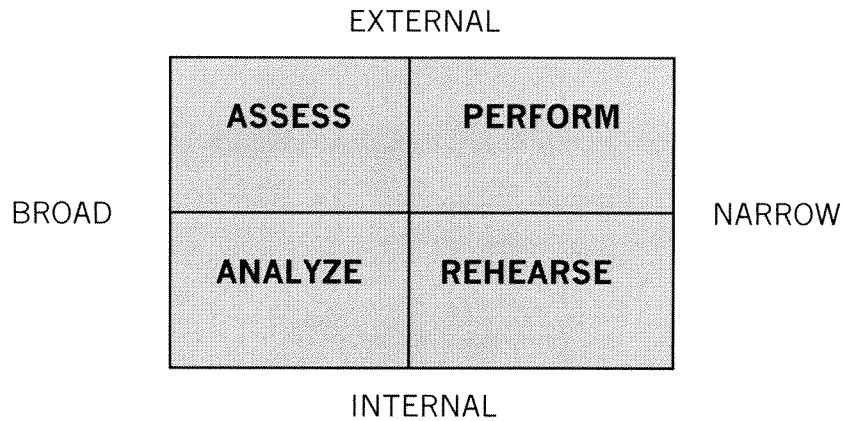


ATTENTION FOCUS

COACHES: Athletes can focus their attention in four basic ways as shown here. To help them avoid performance mistakes train them how to shift their focus to meet changing game demands. Review the model and principals which follow and use these ideas in your practices and games.



FOCUS PRINCIPLES

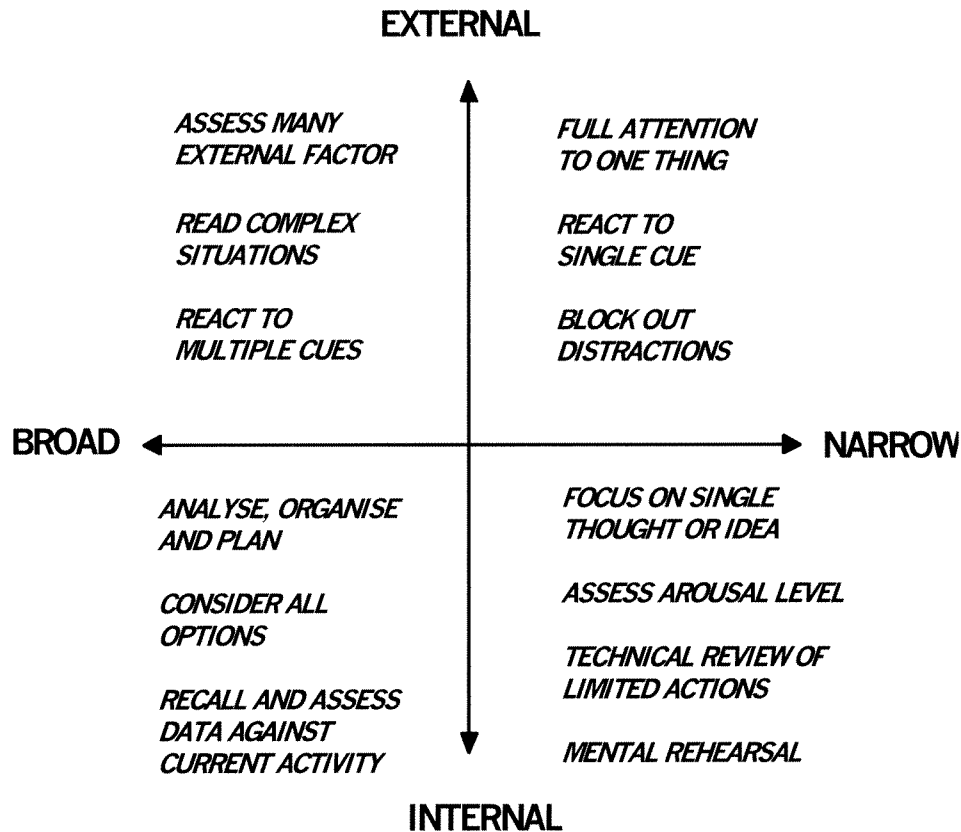
1. Players need to learn to use all four concentration styles to maximize performance and must be able to shift from one style to another to meet changing demands. This is a trainable skill.
2. Individuals generally have a dominant style. All players should know theirs. What is your dominant style?
3. **Moderately high arousal causes a person to revert to their dominant style.** This can be both a strength and a weakness.
4. Effective performance under stress depends on the *appropriateness* of the dominant style, and *the level of confidence* with the situation.
5. **High arousal causes involuntary narrowing and internalizing of attention.**
6. There is a strong relationship between arousal and concentration. Controlling one tends to provide some level of control over the other.



The information on the next few pages will help clarify the issue of attention focus and concentration and help reduce the number of mistakes you make. Once you understand the concept and are able to shift focus to meet changing game demands, you will play with more confidence with fewer performance errors.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

This chart shows some specific applications of each focus style. The key is to be able to shift from one style to another as the game situation changes.



From this model we can see that certain concentration styles tend to be more appropriate for specific sports. Basketball, for example, requires continual analysis of player movements and setting up scoring plays, for which the most appropriate attention style would be broad/external focus.

On the other hand, tennis is a more single item sport, requiring intense concentration on the ball. The style best suited for it would be narrow/external.

Where would softball fit in to this?

Attention demands in softball are constantly changing. Setting up for an at bat you need to consider a number of external factors, such as; who is on base? What is the score? What play is likely to be called, etc. That requires a Broad-external focus. At the plate, waiting for a pitch requires total concentration on the ball (Narrow-external). After the pitch, analysing the swing or at bat requires a different style (Narrow-internal)

Being in the wrong attention style can cause you to miss important cues and increase the chances of a performance mistake.

IMPROVING CONCENTRATION

This is a trainable skill. You can teach yourself how to focus more effectively, to concentrate better, with more intensity and for longer periods of time. Scot McFadden offers these two suggestions for sustaining concentration.

1. **Keep your eyes and mind on the game at all times. Looking into the stands breaks concentration. So does irrelevant conversation, anything that is not directed at winning the game.**

THIS REQUIRES REAL DISCIPLINE!!

2. **All thoughts you have during the game must be directed at either,**
 - a) **game strategy and what you must do to execute the key plays, or**
 - b) **positive thoughts, reflecting your attitude and confidence in your ability.**

Mark SMITH, Canadian hitting star and former Head Coach of our National Men's Team, cites this example of his concentration patterns at bat.

"ONCE I GET INTO THE BATTER'S BOX, I HAVE ONE THOUGHT IN MY MIND. THIS THOUGHT MAY VARY DEPENDING ON HOW MY HITTING MECHANICS ARE AT THAT TIME.

SOME GAMES MY ONE THOUGHT IS, "BE QUIET WITH MY HANDS", MEANING A SHORT COMPACT SWING. OTHER GAMES IT MIGHT BE, "KEEP MY WEIGHT BACK". MY THOUGHT MIGHT CHANGE FOR EACH AT BAT, DEPENDING ON WHO I'M FACING AND HOW WELL I'VE BEEN HITTING AT THE TIME".

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS SUBJECT AND A COMPLETE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE, REFER TO, "GOLD MEDAL HITTING - PART 3", OR, "GOLD MEDAL PERFORMANCE", BOTH BY DAVE PEARCE. (GOLD MEDAL SOFTBALL SERIES)

Also, for practice purposes, check out the exercises on "Attention Focus" and, "Developing Concentration" in the RMSL coaching hand outs.