

Positive Mental Imagery



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*Improve Your Golf Game
Easily & Quickly
With Mental Coaching*

First Tee Jitters by Joan A. King, C.Ht.

Do you feel confident hitting balls on the range, and then become anxious and lose your confidence on the first tee?

Likely you prepare for your shots differently in the two places, but expect the same results. On the wide-open range, most golfers are not concerned with the mental discipline for scoring. Then on the golf course, the score becomes the focus and the wonderful tempo and relaxed swing are left on the range.

Performance anxiety begins on the first tee when every shot counts. Anxiety about what might go wrong causes tight, tense muscles, which often produce off-line shots. To be confident on the first tee, you have to be thinking positively, be relaxed, and trust your swing. (see October 2000 newsletter, Trust)

Everyone participating in sports has anxiety at some time. The feeling of anxiety comes up because of a lack of confidence and the projection of what might happen.

The most important things you can do to relieve anxiety are to *stay in the moment* and *let go of the outcome* of your shot. Let go of outside distractions. For example, if you are concerned with others watching you, know that they are only concerned with their own games. Keep your swing thoughts simple. The less you have to deal with, the more centered and focused you will be.

***"You don't get to control any outcome,
only every choice you make along the way."*** --Stephen C. Paul

Monitor the self-talk chatter in your mind. The banter heard on the first tee is an indication of the doubts going on in golfers' minds. You have probably heard statements such as "I haven't played in a week." (so don't expect me to play well), or "My handicap just went up." (because I am playing terribly). This kind of negative self-talk will sabotage your golf game by raising your anxiety level. Instead, give yourself permission to play well by doing the best you can.

"When one person hesitates because he feels inferior, the other is busy making mistakes and becoming superior." --Henry C. Link

Begin to see the game (and yourself) the way you would like it to be. Slow down your mental merry-go-round by letting go of outside influences. Bring your focus inward by breathing deeply to create a feeling of relaxation in both your mind and body.

Adopt the attitude that the tee shot is easy since you use the club with the biggest clubhead and you can tee the ball up. Affirm that you believe in yourself and your ability and that you are really going to *enjoy* hitting the first shot of the day.

When you are over the ball you don't want to think too much about your golf swing. Thinking about technique causes anxiety because you are sending a message to your muscles about *how to* swing. Instead, focus on the smoothness and rhythm of your body and golf club moving in synchronization.

Repetition is a key to removing anxiety. When you do the same thing over and over it becomes a habit and you don't have to think about it anymore. Then, it becomes easy. Repeating the same pre-shot routine creates the same rhythm for each shot.

"Start by doing what's necessary, then do what's possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible." --Saint Francis of Assisi

If it is still winter where you live and you aren't able to go to the range or play golf, you can prepare your mind now for the upcoming summer season. You can relax by practicing deep breathing. When you are driving your car and stop at a red light, take a couple of deep breaths and see how lightly you can hold on to the steering wheel. Practice your timing (up and down at the same speed) and tempo (fast or slow) by swinging your club indoors in front of a mirror. Close your eyes, swing, and practice feeling your rhythm and tempo. Create a habitual swing so that when you go to the range you will have the confidence to hit balls with that swing. You can also practice your pre-shot routine indoors so your brain will know how you prepare to swing. It takes considerable practice to be able to trust your swing mechanics. Begin now to visualize and practice the swing you want to deliver.

Relieve tension by giving the club a quick, tight squeeze as you address the ball, then release it. Feel the tension leaving your upper body. When you are over the ball, take a deep breath at the same time you are waggling the club. As you do this, feel your rhythm in the large muscles in your legs and soles of your feet. This will prepare you for the start of the swing. Relaxed muscles can produce more clubhead speed, which results in more power and distance. Enjoy relaxing your body to feel your natural body rhythm and power.

Another thing to consider is your alignment and set-up. If you set up incorrectly, even a great swing won't produce a good shot. Every shot on the course is hit from a new position, which is very different from hitting from the same spot on the range without any regard to your target. Hit from different positions on the range to the same target to simulate on course conditions.

If you should miss your tee shot on the first tee, remind yourself that it is only one shot. It is not an indication of what the future shots will be like. Do what the pros do. Step to the side of the tee and swing your club until you regain your rhythm and confidence. You don't want to go to your next shot with the mental image and physical feel of an unproductive swing. Make sure that the swing you do want is ready to be enacted on your next shot.

The first tee jitters are caused by anxiety about what might happen. When a person experiences anxiety symptoms, he feels as if he doesn't have control of the situation and is afraid. On the first tee, anxiety is caused by negative thoughts of what might go wrong. Great golfers only think about what positive shots they want to produce. In life, and in golf, no one has control over the outcome of a situation. You can practice the golf swing for hours, but if you don't believe it will work, it probably won't because your brain is focused on the opposite result.

Positive thinking is one of the mental keys to being in the zone. Say positive messages to yourself to affirm:

1. Your belief in yourself and your ability.
2. Your belief that you can improve
3. Your last thought prior to hitting the golf ball is a good one.

***"Life is 10% of what happens to you,
and 90% of how you respond to it."*** -- Charles Swindoll

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You can download the previous PMI newsletter issues by logging on at <http://www.mastermindgolf.com>

If you need help with your mental game or have a question, email Joan at *Positive Mental Imagery*, info@mastermindgolf.com Please share with us how this website information has helped you improve your golf performance.

I am ecstatic! I have only been playing for four years and my scoring in one month has gone from 100 to 92. Thank you. Ginny Barrett, Trainer/Consultant

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