

COACHING FOR PERFORMANCE

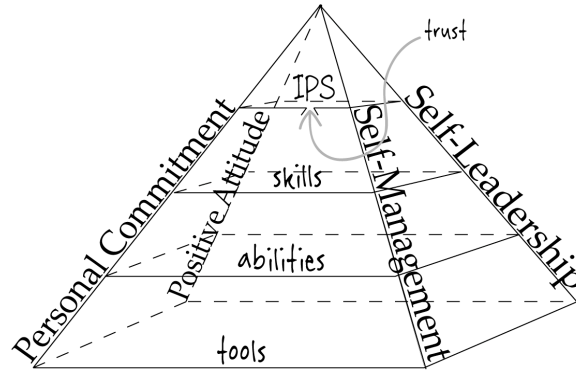
Helping Pianist Get Out What is in Them



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The Performance Psychology Model

Think of the Performance Psychology Model as a four-sided pyramid with each lower-layer providing the necessary foundation for each next-higher layer, and with each of the four vertical edges of the pyramid supporting all the layers from the bottom-up. Your Ideal Performance State is at the top of the pyramid with the vertical edges of the pyramid being the essential disciplines necessary for sustaining high performance (self-leadership, self-management, personal commitment, and positive mental attitude) and the layers which build upon each other (psychological tools, abilities and skills) leading to the psychological skill known as trust.



Trust: The Performance Goal

Your best performances occur when you are totally absorbed in and connected to the task at hand. In essence, you trust yourself and what you have trained. When you trust, you are *letting go* of conscious control over correctness and allowing natural, well-trained processes to execute the skill. However, this letting go process is not free from cognitive interference. Self-doubt, fear of mistakes, over-analysis of technique, and heightened anxiety are examples of cognitions that interrupt the automatic transfer of information necessary to execute your motor programs automatically.

My ability to trust what I have trained during performance is

Very Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great

Psychological Skills

Confidence

Confidence separates good performers from great performers. It is a belief or feeling of certainty that you will successfully perform at a desired level. Choosing to think and act confidently, choosing to believe in yourself, and choosing to proactively develop your confidence is a matter of your choice and your *will* to do so.

My confidence during performance is

Very Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great

Concentration

Concentration is the process of consciously directing your focus, resulting in your enhanced ability to “take in” relevant cues necessary for skill execution. The essence of optimal concentration during performance is learning to discern when you are distracted and then having the skill and presence of mind to refocus.

My focus during performance is

Very Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great

Composure

Composure is essentially the management of emotional energy. Just as positive emotion provides the energy that drives performance, negative emotion such as frustration, anger and fear can drain your energy. The capacity to mobilize positive emotional energy on demand is important for sustaining high level performance in any domain.

My emotional management during performance is

Very Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great

Psychological Abilities

Self-Coaching

Self-coaching is a purposeful inner dialogue where you give yourself what you need *mentally* and *emotionally* in order to stay confident and focused throughout a performance or a practice session. Being a good self-coach involves *positive emotional coaching* that keeps you focused and fighting.

My ability to coach myself in positive ways is?

Very Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great

Visualization

Visualization is the ability to effectively use all your senses to vividly create, simulate, or re-create various aspects of performance - in your minds eye. It can be used to enhance the "feel" of particular movements, or to increase your ability to process "performance cues" more quickly and effortlessly.

My ability to vividly create positive performance images is?

Very Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great

Goal Setting

Goal setting simply involves the process of determining what you want to accomplish and how to best proceed. The best performers start with their long-term goal that provides the vision, then break it down into specific smaller steps.

My ability to set and attain goals is?

Very Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great

Attention Control

Attention control involves focusing on relevant cues that assist you in preparation, performance and evaluation and not becoming preoccupied with the aspects of your environment or performance over which you have no control.

My ability to focus effectively is?

Very Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great

Differential Relaxation

Differential relaxation is the ability to detect and release muscle tension in *specific* areas of your body. Once you recognize the interference, you need the ability to "release" the excessive tension in order to return to your optimal state of tension/relaxation.

My ability to detect and release muscle tension on command is?

Very Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great

Centering

Centering is the ability to feel "grounded" and "calm," during a performance. It is a feeling that nothing can figuratively or literally "knock you off-balance." Being tense, fearful and self-conscious is the opposite of being centered.

My ability to access a centered state is?

Very Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great

Energy Management

The ability to create positive emotional energy on demand and to release negative emotional energy when necessary is at the core of effective energy management. Management of this emotional energy requires that you learn to “pump-it-up” when you are deflated and to “calm-it-down” when you are over-excited or nervous, each requiring different management strategies.

My ability to adapt my energy state to the demands of my situation is?

Very Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great

Preparation Routines

Event preparation is the ability to get, mentally, physically and emotionally ready to engage in and successfully execute a skilled performance. A preparation routine is the ability to execute a pre-planned structured sequence of thoughts and actions prior to a specific performance and they are necessary for creating the proper mindset for skilled performance.

My ability to execute an effective preparation routine is?

Very Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great

Essential Disciplines

Positive Mental Attitude

Sustaining a positive attitude requires that you effectively manage and regularly draw upon both your physical and emotional energy. While your *physical energy* provides the fundamental source of energy throughout the day and during performances (includes; rest, nutrition and exercise), it is your *emotional energy*, the “internal climate,” that drives high-level performance.

I would describe my attitude as?

Very Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great

Passionate Commitment

Commitment is the key to quality in any human endeavor. Commitment is a personal pledge to not just “get the job done,” but to do it with pride and perseverance. It is committed, caring musicians who generate and deliver signature performances on a consistent basis.

I would describe my level of commitment as?

Very Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great

Self-Leadership

Weather you are leading yourself or leading others you must first have a clear understanding of where you are going and why. This involves creating a vision of you as a performer that is aligned with a purpose and connected to your personal core values. Without this level of commitment to your future it easy to lose the focus and determination necessary to accomplish challenging goals.

I would describe my self-leadership as?

Very Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great

Self-Management

Self-leadership provides the vision, while self-management produces the behaviors and actions necessary to accomplish that vision. Self-management is doing what it takes to get where you want to go. This involves the daily and weekly management of the direction and intensity of your efforts.

I would describe my self-management as?

Very Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great

Psychological Tools

Independent Will

This is your ability to think and act, free from other influences. It is not the situation, your upbringing or your genetics that determine what you think or how you act. Your thoughts and actions are a function of your personal, independent will. Ultimately, you choose to believe in yourself, to do what is necessary and to act in the ways that enhance your ability to perform your best.

My ability to think and act independent of outside influences is?

Very Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great

Self-Awareness

Your ability to step aside and examine yourself, or your patterns of thinking and responding, is the psychological tool of self-awareness. Improvement in any aspects of your life or your performance is grounded in your ability to be self aware. Like physical habits, mental habits often unfold automatically and without conscious awareness. Having a keen self-awareness of what you are currently doing and what you would like to do is a necessary first step in developing a new habit or changing an old habit.

My awareness of my thought and behavior patterns is?

Very Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great

Imagination

How well you utilize your imagination will be a primary factor in how successful you become as a performer. Do not leave this tool in your tool box, use it often and well. Your imagination enables you to create feelings, pictures and thoughts outside your current reality. Whenever you think about a future event or recall a past performance, you are using your imagination.

My effective use of my imagination is?

Very Poor 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Great

Performance Psychology Activities - Piano

Activity 1: Best and Worst Performances

1. My Best Performance: Take a moment to reflect upon one of your greatest performances. Imagine as vividly as possible as many aspects of that event as possible. Where was it located, the time of day and any special thoughts and behaviors; sights, sounds, smells or other sensations you experienced. Revisit that experience and paint the picture in your mind. Answer the question, *"When I think of my very best performances, the psychological aspects that really stick out in my mind are . . ."* Then make a list the key characteristics you describe.

2. My Worst Performance: Take a moment to reflect upon your worst performance. Do the same things as before and vividly imagine as many aspects of that event as possible and paint the picture in your mind. Then answer the question, *"When I think of my worst performances, the psychological aspects that really stick out in my mind are . . ."* Make a list the key characteristics you describe.

3. Best and Worst Performance Comparison: Looking at the "best" and "worst" list side by side, reflect upon the differences between the two and write down your thoughts.

Activity 2: Performance Psychology Intake Form (PPI)

The Performance Psychology Intake form (Appendix A) is a self-assessment of many of the psychological skills addressed in this chapter. Take the time now to complete this assessment. As you work through each section you will find it helpful to mark those questions that are most meaningful to you. You may also choose to make notes in the margins in order to maximize your learning.

Activity 3: Performance Strengths and Struggles

Once you have completed the PPI assessment, review your responses and reflect upon the areas you are strongest and the ones you want to strengthen. Go back through the self-assessment and write down your top five strengths and struggles.

Activity 4: Keep a High-Performance Journal

Designate a separate notebook or journal as your high-performance journal and begin to make practice and performance entries using the format suggested in this chapter. It is recommended that you follow the format for at least ten days and two performances. Once you have had experience with this type of journal writing you may adjust it to better suit your personal style.

Activity 5: Write your Personal Performance Philosophy

Take time to reflect upon your personal philosophy of musical performance. What do you believe and value about your musical development and/or performance? Why are you striving for excellence and what do you believe is the best way to go about achieving your goals? Feel free to use additional space as needed

Activity 6: Describe a Great Attitude

Think about the last year of your life. During this year, have you had a "great attitude" concerning your musical development and performance? If your answer is yes, describe what it means to have a great attitude. If your answer is no, describe what is lacking in your attitude and what it needs in order to become "great." Feel free to use additional space as needed.

Activity 7: Create Your Visualization Script

It has been said that "all things are created twice." A mental creation precedes the physical creation. When practicing a musical piece you read the music and interpret how you are going to play it (mental creation) before you start to play (physical creation). One way you help you create more positive thoughts and vivid images of your self as a performer is through the use of Visualization Scripts. The format of your script is entirely up to you. Some guidelines for your mastery script are provided in Appendix B with an example.

Appendix A

Performance Psychology Intake Form - Piano

I. General Information

Please take time to answer the questions on the following pages. Some of the questions capture information about where you are today relative to your musical development and performance while others challenge you to think where you would like to be.

1. Why do you play the piano? _____
2. What are your key musical goals for this year or semester? _____

3. What mental skills would you like to improve? _____

4. How would you describe the experience of playing your best? _____

5. What are the barriers that keep you from playing your best more consistently? _____

6. Reflect upon the following statement and create an image of you at your best. Then use vivid language to describe the specific characteristics as to why it represents you at your best.

"When I am at my best I am like a _____."
Why this represents my best? _____

II. Mental Skills Descriptions

It is important that you read the following mental skill descriptions before proceeding to section three of this intake.

1. Self-Coaching

Self coaching is the ability to give yourself what you need *mentally and emotionally in order to stay confident and focused* during performance. Good self-coaches respond to errors or mistakes well, keep their focus in the present, and understand the importance of instilling and maintaining confidence and belief during performances.

2. Trust in Technique

Trusting a technical skill involves letting go of conscious control over accuracy and freeing yourself of any outcome expectation. Trust is a *specific performance skill* that must be practiced and refined in order to become more readily accessible during your performance.

3. Pre-performance Preparation

Preparing yourself prior to the performance of a specific piece involves a series of attention shifts. A pre-performance routine is a series of both mental and physical steps that are completed prior to each piece in a predetermined and well-practiced sequence with the goal of preparing your mind and body to execute your performance with confidence.

4. Acceptance of Outcomes

Accepting the things you cannot control (e.g., past events, current conditions, missed notes) is fundamental to performing consistently well. During most performances there are a number of "good" and "bad" things that happen and *Seeing things as they are* in a non-judgmental mindset, frees you to play with confidence and is the first step in playing "one phrase at a time."

5. *Focus Control during Performance*

Controlling your focus is the ability to create and maintain an effective focus for the specific task required. Focus during the execution of a musical piece requires that you maintain a quiet mind or soft focus - you will need to effectively focus and re-focus a number of times.

6. *Tempo Control and Patience*

Tempo control refers to your ability to work within a desired tempo or pace during your actual performance. The ability to create and maintain an optimal tempo during performance is necessary if you are to consistently perform at peak levels. Patience is required in order to facilitate rhythmic control throughout an entire performance.

7. *Process Orientation vs. Outcome Orientation*

There is no doubt that the actual performance is the bottom line. However, during performance, focusing on outcomes (missed notes, mistakes) often gets in the way of your ability to play at your peak level. Generally speaking, correct processes will lead to correct outcomes.

8. *Commitment to Playing Phrases (Passages, Musical Ideas)*

It is vital to have an unwavering commitment to the challenging technical passages during a performance. It is a deliberate plan with regards to technical management (tone production, voicing, physical positioning, tempo, inner listening, and other factors), that may influence the outcome. Without this type of commitment, you cannot have trust and let go as you perform the passages. Remember that the opposite of trust is doubt; commitment is the door to trust.

III. Performance Rating

After reviewing the mental skill descriptions, answer the following questions by rating yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 or 1% to 100%. Using the center of the wheel as 0 and the outer edge as 10 or 100%, record your level of *competence* in each area by drawing a line to create a new outer edge as in the small example to the right.

1. How would I rate my ability to talk to myself in a way that keeps me confident and helps me concentrate during the course of an entire recital? My rating from 1 to 10 is _____
2. What percentage of my musical passages do I trust and let go of during performance? 1% to 100% _____
3. When I apply a consistent and effective pre-performance routine, what percentage of musical passages is successfully executed during a typical performance? 1% to 100% _____
4. How would I rate my ability to accept outcomes (e.g., unexpected distractions, missed notes) during performance? 1 to 10 _____
5. How would I rate my ability to effectively focus my attention during performance? 1 to 10 _____
6. How would I rate my ability to consistently operate within a desired tempo (both between pieces and during pieces) during performance? 1 to 10 _____
7. How would I rate my ability to stay in the process during performance, focusing on what is within my control? 1 to 10 _____
8. What percentage of the challenging technical passages during a typical recital do I have an unwavering commitment to? 1% to 100% _____

IV. Developmental Area Descriptions

1. *Keeping Your Dream Alive*

Musical dreams do come true! As you grow older it becomes more difficult to find support for your dreams in a critical world that tends to be obsessed with fault finding and weakness. Keeping your dream alive involves reawakening and nurturing your childlike attitude toward musical excellence.

2. *Setting Specific Goals*

Dream goals or long-term goals provide you with inspiration and motivation for practice and performance; but short-term goals provide the specific training activities that lead to your goal attainment. The most effective performers set clear and specific daily goals for practice and performance.

3. *Balancing Your Goals*

Leading a balanced and multidimensional lifestyle enables you to “step outside” of musical endeavors and attend to other aspects of your life. Spending too much time in one goal area at the expense of other personal responsibilities will cause your wheel to wobble and spin out of control.

4. *Managing Time Effectively*

Having a daily and weekly plan allows for the most effective use of your time both inside and outside of music. Being a good time manager means that you identify specific daily activities that are connected to your larger vision.

5. *Engaging in Quality Practice*

Taking your performances to the next level requires that you engage in quality practice on a regular basis. Effective performers know exactly *what* they want to accomplish during each practice session and *how* each aspect of practice contributes to performance outcomes. Practicing with a purpose makes practice relevant to your performance.

6. *Maintaining Overall Fitness*

It is no secret that if you want to give yourself the best chance of being successful in today’s challenging environment, you must engage in a regular strength and flexibility program. Increasing your overall fitness level and your core strength is a necessary step to performing your best.

7. *Managing Energy*

The skillful management of energy is necessary for sustained excellence in music and in life. Bringing sufficient energy to what you do enables you to focus better for quality practice and performance. Engaging in demanding practices and performances requires that you must also engage in high quality rest and renewal activities.

8. *Embracing Strengths*

In order to excel musically, you will need to become an expert at applying and refining your strengths. Historically, the musical culture has been overly fixated with technical faults and weaknesses – to the exclusion of your performance strengths. What you do best will ultimately have a greater impact on your performances than your weaknesses. This is not to suggest that ignoring your weaknesses is the answer anymore than becoming fixated on them is, but understanding and embracing your strengths is necessary for you to sustain excellence in performance.

V. Development Rating

After reviewing the developmental area descriptions, answer the following questions by rating your self on a scale of 1 to 10. Record your level of *satisfaction* in each area by drawing a line to create a new outer edge as in the small example to the right.

1. How satisfied are you with your ability to keep your musical dream alive? 1 to 10 _____
2. How satisfied are you with your ability to regularly set and attain short term goals relative to your musical performance? 1 to 10 _____
3. How satisfied are you with your life balance? 1 to 10 _____
4. How satisfied are you with your ability to effectively manage your time in ways that enhance your musical development? 1 to 10 _____
5. How satisfied are you with your overall fitness and core strength? 1 to 10 _____
6. How satisfied are you with bringing sufficient energy to what you are doing? 1 to 10 _____
7. How satisfied are you with your embracing of your strengths? 1 to 10 _____
8. How satisfied are you with transferring your practice to your performance? 1 to 10 _____

Appendix B

Visualization Script Instructions - *Piano*

Visualization scripts are one way to create vivid “memories” of what it feels like to perform great. Having the sensations and images of playing great readily available to your memory prior to a to your performance will only help you play better. I recommend that you develop one solid visualization script using the format and example below to guide you. You may want to type this one on a separate piece of paper and keep it in your journal. In developing a this script, begin by imagining the perfect performance and describe in detail what it would be like. Record your feelings, thoughts and emotions. Draw upon past best performances to create the feeling of playing great.

Step 1: Location of your Performance

Describe where you are, the type of day, any special sounds or smells. It may be your favorite place to perform, the sight of your last great performance or the site of an upcoming one. Recall in detail the images that are present. Paint a picture with your words – be a vivid as you can!

“The sun is shining and this makes the cold a little more bearable. I’m dressed in layers so I’m keeping warm – my breath also keeps me warm and relaxed. I enter the church and it smells of aged wood and old carpet – the carpet is bright red. I walk into the performance space and it is totally empty. The light is bright and the wood on glistens in the light. I see the piano – it is a black Yamaha. I also see gold candelabras – the candles are not lit. All of the large wooden doors are closed – I am amazed by the silence and I embrace it!”

Step 2: Warm-up Routine

Describe how you are feeling and thinking during your on-site warm-up. How great it feels to be where you are and feeling ready to perform. Everything is going great in warm-up and you’re a feeling just the way you want to prior to your performance.

“My hands are warm and they are moving freely. I begin playing several scales and arpeggios – the blood is flowing freely in my arms and hands and I feel no tension. I am able to take deep breaths and to play the exercises musically. Feel myself breathing. After I feel warm and ready to play, I start playing the beginnings of each of my pieces – I play them slowly at first, very relaxed and deliberate. I then establish a performance tempo for each of them. I go and get a drink and prepare my self for the performance.”

Step 3: Starting Your Performance

Describe what it feels like to get off to a great start. What are the mental and physical elements needed for a great beginning to your performance. Draw upon past great starts and describe the feelings. How great it is to feel so confident and energized. Describe how great you execute your technique with composure and how your confidence is starting to build.

“I walk out and hear the people applaud – as I walk, I smile warmly but inside I am breathing and preparing myself to begin my first piece. As I sit down, I focus on my breath – I sing the opening melody in my head and I begin to play. I feel relaxed and I am enjoying the tone of the piano in this large space. The hall is silent to me – I do not hear people moving or children talking. I finish the Scarlatti Sonatas and I feel confident and relaxed.

I move into the Beethoven Sonata. I hear the opening chord in my head before I play it. The sound is warm and yet it projects to the back of the hall. As I move into the Allegro section, I feel the inner pulse and I move easily in to the 3rd's passage. I take a relaxed breath (a normal breath – not too deep) and I release the breath as I ascend into this passage. I feel relaxed and secure. In the second movement, I can hear the melody floating across the slower tempo. I can feel Beethoven’s tempo and his sense of lost in this movement. As I transition in to the 3rd movement, my body feels relaxed and yet has the strength to project the opening passage with clarity. I feel the joy and ease in this opening melody. I express that in my playing of it. I never lose the sense of pulse – It is constantly beating in my core.”

Step 4: Middle of Your Performance

Imagine a perfect performance. Everything is working, you are focused and relaxed. Nothing is bothering you. You are flowing and letting it go. It is a great feeling to be so positive about all aspects of your performance. You are connecting with your audience. It all seems so effortless and natural.

"I leave for intermission. I leave confident and full of joy. I sit in my dressing room and think of nothing for a few minutes – After I feel totally relaxed and ready to begin and start to think about the second half. I walk out confident to start my set of Nocturnes. I have nothing on my mind but desiring to make beautiful music (clear focus/clear mind). For each Nocturne, I hear the sound that I want to produce before I play each opening passage. I am expressive and enjoying the music that is coming out of me."

Step 5: Finishing Your Performance

Visualize a strong finish. You have all positive momentum and you are supremely confident. You are completely focused on the task at hand. Nothing is distracting you. You complete your performance with positive emotion and you feel great!

"I feel strong and ready to play this exciting piece. I feel the dance rhythms before I begin. As I start to play, I am aware of my l.h. As I finish the 1st movement, my arms feel strong but not tight – they feel relaxed enough to start playing the 2nd mov. I start the 2nd mov. I am amazed at the sound that is flowing out – it sounds like a musical whisper. The room is silent as I begin my 3rd mov. I have a controlled sense of 'rage' – an emotion that I feel the composer desires to communicate with this movement (feeling of effortlessly matching the composer's feelings). The climax builds gradually is very effective. I'm able to breathe, while letting go of some of the excitement, letting the intensity flow. I end with a soft, ringing sound. The last movement begins. The rhythm is clear and precise. I move effortlessly between the different sections and leaps. I am able to inhale and exhale with a shallow breath – even though I am breathing, I maintain intensity and control. As I flow into the exciting conclusion, I imagine warm fluid flowing through my arms – keeping me relaxed and my muscles loose. I nail the concluding the octave and the audience is excited with their applause. I walk off feeling confident and grateful for another opportunity to perform. I am smiling".