

“Rehearse” for Stressful Events



If you’ve ever mentally rehearsed a speech before you gave it, you may already have some idea of how advance playacting can help you prepare for stressful situations. (Athletes, musicians, salespeople, and actors do it all the time.) The idea is to imagine yourself feeling calm and confident in an otherwise stressful situation so you can relax more easily when the situation arises. Here’s how it’s done.

- Close your eyes and unwind, releasing every bit of muscular tension your body has accumulated.
- For a minute or two, concentrate on simply feeling relaxed.
- For the next minute or so, think of yourself actually doing whatever you’re practicing for rather than observing yourself doing it.
- Concentrate again on feelings of calmness.
- Visualize the event once again, and re-create as many details as possible. (What is the setting? What are you wearing? Who else is present?)

- Imagine yourself continuing to feel calm as you successfully handle the anticipated situation.
- Imagine a positive outcome—your boss congratulating you on a job well done, your spouse volunteering to pitch in around the house, and so forth.

Use this technique to prepare for any stressful situation—your performance review, a confrontation with your spouse, or other tense occasion. Practice twice a day for 5 minutes each time (preferably when you first wake up in the morning and when you’re ready to go to sleep at night). Imagining that you’re confident and successful increases the likelihood that you will be confident and successful in real life, because you’re creating new mental pictures of yourself. After practicing regularly for a few weeks to prepare for various events, you’ll be able to relax when the real situations occur.