



Imagery

as an Effective Cueing Technique

By the MERRITHEW™ team

Effective cueing has the ability to help your clients get the most out of every exercise. It can keep them focused and motivated, suggest corrections to improve muscle activation and movement quality, and improve the benefits they receive in a variety of ways. All cueing styles create effective communication, however, some work better than others. A seemingly awesome cue may be worthless if it doesn't resonate with the client. An excellent instructor will acknowledge what types of cues work best with each client and follow that direction.

While types of cueing can include tactile, visual and auditory cues, imagery seems to be the one getting the most positive recognition. It has the ability to improve the performance of a movement because the source is internal. If we look at an exercise like the STOTT PILATES® One Leg Circle, we can see how different types of cueing can be used.

Verbal cues can take on a variety of forms:

1. Joint or movement-related: for example, instructing a client to "Circle the leg."

2. Muscle contractions: speaking to how the muscle is involved in the movement, i.e. "Use the hip flexors *concentrically* as the leg moves toward the body and *eccentrically* as the leg moves away."

3. Imagery that can suggest the quality of movement and the feeling of what should be happening: for example, "Place a pencil on your foot and imagine drawing big circles on the ceiling."

4. Representative of what is happening in the body: for example, "Feel the head of the femur rotating within the hip socket."

Mindful cues that use related images address not only the mechanics of the movement, but the feeling of it as well. Keep in mind that the image used should relate to something familiar to the client so it will evoke a positive result. It has been said that the best types of cues can leave a physical and visual imprint on the participants' minds.

Imagery has been described as creating a shortcut in the learning process. A single image can take the place of many analytical cues; a picture paints a thousand words. These images can instantly improve the performance of a movement, thereby increasing the benefit. Imagery has even been shown to help people stick to an exercise routine, if they picture themselves participating, improving and reaching their desired goals.

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Practicing image-based cues is often necessary as this may be a new way of thinking for an instructor. Coming up with the words that will be most appropriate and effective can be a challenge. An interesting way to practice is to imagine teaching through one-way glass. The client can hear you, but not see you. Your cues must be thoughtful and clear, as well as imaginative and innovative.

Imagery has been well documented in the field of sports performance and more recently in rehabilitation. Studies have shown that experimental groups who used mental imagery along with physical practice showed significantly more improvement than lower imagery groups. This has further been linked to autonomic nervous system responses that correlate to mental rehearsal, thereby improving performance.

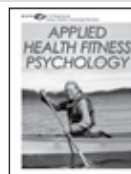
When you use imagery, you imagine yourself performing a task to perfection, which in physiology creates neural patterns in your brain. This is referred to as the psychoneuromuscular theory, which means that the imagery rehearsal duplicates the actual motor pattern. Another theory is the symbolic learning theory, which suggests that the benefit arises from the opportunity to practice the symbolic elements of a motor task.

No matter how you look at it, using imagery as a way to elicit positive responses from clients and groups is something that deserves a second look.



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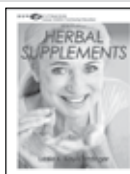
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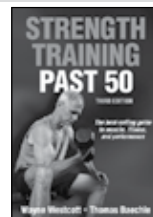
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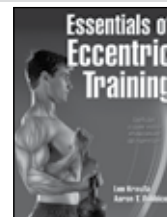
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