11.1 Psychological skills training

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 30 marks**

KEY WORDS psychological skills training • process goal • self-talk • imagery • pre-performance routine • progressive muscle relaxation

Objective

Build the skills to answer exam questions on **psychological skills training** (PST): goal setting, imagery, self-talk, relaxation and routines, and how to judge whether PST works.

You must be able to:

- outline psychological skills training and how needs are assessed
- describe SMART goals and outcome, performance and process goals
- outline self-talk, relaxation, psyching up and pre-performance routines
- explain imagery using PETTLEP and the functions of imagery
- explain when goals should be adjusted

1 Key knowledge and worked examples

■ Psychological skills training (PST)

PST is the systematic practice of mental skills to improve performance and well-being. Like physical skills, mental skills are **learned** and need **regular practice**. A programme starts with a **needs assessment** (interview, questionnaire, observation, performance profile), then education, skill learning, practice in training, and use in competition. It is judged by measuring performance and well-being **before and after**, ideally against a comparison group.

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Goal setting: goals direct attention, increase effort and persistence, and lead to new strategies. Use **SMART** goals: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic, **T**ime-bound.

type	focus	example
outcome	the result against others	win the final
performance	a personal standard	run a personal best
process	the actions during performance	drive the arms in the last 100 m

Process and performance goals are more **controllable** than outcome goals, so they cause less anxiety.

Self-talk: instructional ("elbow high") helps fine, technical skills; **motivational** ("come on, push!") helps effort and confidence. Negative self-talk can be changed with **thought stopping** and reframing.

Relaxation lowers arousal: **breathing** control (slow, deep breaths), **progressive muscle relaxation** (tense then relax each muscle group). **Psyching up** raises arousal (energizing music, cue words) when it is too low.

Concentration and routines: a **pre-performance routine** (a set sequence before a free throw or serve) controls arousal, blocks distractions and triggers the learned movement.

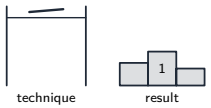
AHL – imagery: creating or recreating an experience in the mind using all senses. **PETTLEP** makes imagery effective: **P**hysical (same stance, clothing), **E**nvironment (the real venue), **T**ask, **T**iming (real time), **L**earning (update as skill improves), **E**motion (feel the real emotions), **P**erspective (internal or external view). **Functions** (Paivio): **cognitive specific** (a skill), **cognitive general** (tactics), **motivational specific** (achieving a goal), **motivational general-arousal** (controlling arousal), **motivational general-mastery** (confidence, coping).

AHL – goal adjustment: if a goal becomes impossible (injury, illness), athletes cope better when they **disengage** from it and **re-engage** with a new, achievable goal, rather than holding on.

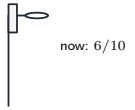
Answer shapes: name the technique → say how to do it → link to the athlete's problem.

2 Practice

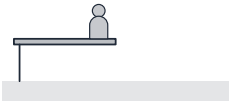
2.1 Distinguish between process goals and outcome goals, with an example of each. [2]



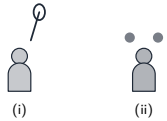
2.2 Rewrite the goal "I want to get better at free throws" as a SMART goal, and identify **two** parts of SMART it now meets. [3]



2.3 Outline how a diver could use PETTLEP to make imagery of a dive more effective. [3]



2.4 Identify the function of imagery (Paivio) in each case: **(i)** a tennis player images a perfect serve; **(ii)** a boxer images staying calm and confident when hit. [3]



3 Exam-style questions

3.1 A basketball player always bounces the ball three times, breathes out and says "smooth" before each free throw.

(a) Identify the type of self-talk she uses. [1]

(b) Explain **three** ways the routine could help her performance. [3]



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3.2 A swimmer's coach plans a 10-week psychological skills training programme.

Describe how the programme should be planned and how the coach could judge whether it worked. [5]



3.3 A marathon runner's goal was to qualify for the Olympics, but a stress fracture means she cannot race this season.

Explain how she should adjust her goals. [4]



3.4 A young golfer often hits poor shots under pressure.

Discuss how imagery and relaxation could be combined in a programme for this golfer. [6]



Solutions

Marking: **M1** a correct method, **A1** the correct answer, **B1** an independent mark.

Each answer shows the steps, then the **result**.

2.1

process goal: about the actions / technique during performance, e.g. “drive the knee up at take-off”; outcome goal: about the result compared with others, e.g. “win the gold medal”

2.2

e.g. “score 8 out of 10 free throws in practice by the end of March”; any two, explained: specific (free throws); measurable (8/10); time-bound (end of March); achievable / realistic for the player’s level

2.3

any three: physical: stand on the board in costume, in the take-off position; environment: image the real pool and venue; timing: image the dive at real speed; emotion: feel the real nerves and excitement; perspective: an internal (own eyes) view; learning: update the images as the dive improves

2.4

(i) cognitive specific: rehearsing one skill; (ii) motivational general-mastery: confidence and coping under pressure

3.1

(a) instructional self-talk

(b) any three: controls arousal (breathing out relaxes); blocks distractions such as the crowd / narrows attention; triggers the learned motor programme, so the movement is automatic; gives consistency and a sense of control, raising confidence

3.2

award up to [5]: needs assessment first: interview, questionnaire or performance profile to find her weaknesses; choose skills to match, e.g. relaxation for high anxiety; education then regular practice, first in training, then in competition; measure before and after: performance (times) and questionnaires (e.g. anxiety, confidence); compare with a control period or group, as times may improve anyway from physical training; ask the swimmer for feedback / check she actually practised

3.3

keeping a goal that is now unattainable leads to frustration, anxiety and lower well-being; she should disengage from the qualification goal; and re-engage with new, achievable goals, e.g. rehabilitation milestones, upper-body fitness, a later race; process goals within her control keep motivation and competence

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3.4

award up to [6]: relaxation (breathing, PMR) lowers somatic anxiety and muscle tension, which spoils fine control; imagery of successful shots (cognitive specific) strengthens the motor programme; PETTLEP: image in the real course, with real timing and the real pressure; motivational general-mastery imagery builds confidence for pressure moments; combine: relax first, then image, so images are clear and controlled; evaluation: imagery skill differs between people and needs regular practice; effects are greater for skilled performers; measure scores and anxiety before and after