

## Skill, Ability and Technique

When talking about the gaining and developing of skill in the sporting environment, it is important that you understand the different types of skill, and also the difference between skill and ability and how these two terms come into contact with technique.

### Skill

Skill is a word, which has a large number of meanings. In sport the word skill is mainly used as a concept rather than a word. We usually talk in terms of skill in a variety of sport, for example a volley in football, or as a sport itself as a skill.

“ In order to perform a particular skill in sport, we must learn the required technique. In order to learn the technique fully, we must have the necessary abilities.”

The use of the word skill in a sport is seen as a co-ordinated act, involving complex movements brought together in a consistent and smooth manner. Everyone has a different view of what a skilful movement is as the analysis of a skill is mainly based on individuals own perception of a skill. This means that an expert performer will have a different perception of the skill than that of a novice.

There are a number of key qualities needed in order for a performer to be skilful

1. Consistency
2. Accuracy
3. Control
4. Fluidity
5. And Intention

Skill is a combination of physical and mental qualities. For example: a badminton player needs a variety of techniques, a range of strokes. They also need to know what their opponent is doing now, and what she is likely to do next. They must decide which stroke to use and where to hit the shuttlecock. The skilful performer has the mental strength to do this even when under intense pressure.

3 Reason why learning skills can affect your performance

1. Improved technique gained from good quality practises.
2. Improved decision-making gained from evaluating your own and other performances
3. Improved mental strength gained from experience under pressure.

There are a number of different types of skill it is important to remember that

### *Perceptual skills*

Perceptual skills involve the interpretation of stimuli. Everyone may see the same information as someone else, but the brain might have a different perception of what everyone else sees.

### *Cognitive skills*

Cognitive skills are sometimes known as the intellectual skill and involve the thought process. The example of this would be judges adding up the score of someone's gymnastic routine or the calculating of teams goal difference in football.

### *Motor skills*

Motor skills involve the muscular system and can concern movement and muscular control, for example walking and running are motor skills as they involve movement and muscular control

### *Perceptual Motor skills*

A performance in a sport is an extremely complex process. It does not just involve one type of skill but seven different one collectively. The majority of skills are seen as perceptual motor skills as they mainly involve **thought, interpretation and movement**

“An organised co-ordinated activity in relation to an object or situation, which involves a whole chain of sensory, central and motor mechanisms” (Welford)

### Ability

“Excellence of performance-the successful integration of a hierarchy of abilities (all the abilities we have) appropriate to a given task under given conditions.  
(Professor GP Meredith)

To be able to learn and perform any type of skill, especially in a sport, you must have the abilities needed to perform that skill. Abilities are said to be inherited, meaning that you are born with them, and if developed at an early age could mean that they could be an expert at that skill when older.

“Motor abilities are innate inherited traits that determine an individuals co-ordination, balance, ability and speed of reactions” (R. Arnot and C. Gaines)

Abilities are often seen as the building blocks of sport, Without these basic building blocks or movement vocabulary, you will never be able to develop a skill fully

The specific examples of abilities in sport would be hand/eye co-ordination, flexibility speed etc. Without these abilities it would be impossible to learn skills such as a badminton smash without.

“Motor abilities are relatively enduring traits which are generally stable qualities or factors that help a person carry out a particular act” (E. Fleishman)

The difference between skill and ability is that a skill can be taught and changed and your ability is something that is inherited from your parents and in theory cannot be taught.

To structure practices to enhance your performance for agility is very difficult as you are born with your abilities. However an Australian sports psychologist has found ways of improving hand/eye co-

ordination by doing special eye exercises. These exercises are starting to be used more frequently in sports such as cricket to improve hand/eye co-ordination but they are not yet proven to work.

### Technique

Technique is a word commonly used next to the words skill and ability. Techniques is often confused with skill. There is a very strong relationship between the three.

Technique is something, which you need to have to complete a particular skill. It is often confused with skill. To perform a particular skill in any sport you will have to a required technique.

In order to perform a particular skill in a sport you must learn the required technique, and in order to learn the technique fully, we must have the necessary abilities. If you look at the definitions of skill and ability and you will see that a performer at an elite level must have been born with natural abilities and then develop those abilities into the specific techniques for them to perform the skills at the highest level possible.

Technique, apparently can be easily enhanced and improved. Your technique can be enhanced and improved by feedback from coaches telling you to change certain parts of your technique e.g. keeping your head over the ball whilst playing a forward defensive in cricket. This feedback can then be used to improve your technique and then you can go away and work on it in the next training sessions.

### Knapps's open and closed continuum

The words open and closed are used as a way of helping us to separate out skills into different groups in order to understand them better. Open and closed skills are based on the effect the environment has on the performance of the skill. In an analysis the environment can include such things as the weather in outside activities, the floor in gymnastics, your opponent in tennis, your own players in hockey etc.

It is always best to look at particular sports skills and decide how much the environment influences them and it is helpful to look at extremes at first. For example, try comparing a forward roll with heading for goal from a cross in a football match.

The environment has little influence on the performance of a forward roll in the gymnasium on a mat. The weather plays no part, there are no other players to worry about and the performer has complete control of the preparation and timing of the roll. It is said that this is a closed skill. It can be easily learned and performed in exactly the same conditions. The environments will usually play no role at all or only a very minor role for example there might be noise in the gym and the audience might affect the gymnast.

In contrast, heading for goal is completely dependent on the environment. The weather in the form of sun, wind or rain can affect the skill as will the position of defending players. The speed, direction and timing of the cross will affect how and when the player jumps to head the ball. Comments from the player's own team or spectators or other noise can affect the player's decision. The condition of the pitch, the player's footwear and level of fatigue will also affect the performance of the skill. With so many different factors in the environment affecting the skill we call this an open skill.

These two skills are at opposite ends of a line on which we can try to place all sports skills. (A continuum)

**Closed skills**  
Forward Roll

**Open skills**  
Header for goal

Of course most skills will be somewhere in between these two skills. Some sports will have examples of different types of skill. For example shooting from open play in basketball is an open skill but it is placed not quite so far along the line as heading for goal as obviously the weather and pitch conditions are not important. However a free shot is a closed skill.

## Styles Of teaching

### Mosston's spectrum of teaching styles

This spectrum describes ten distinctive teaching styles based on the degree that the teacher and/or students assume responsibility for what occurs in the lesson.

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|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>1. Command</b>           | All decisions are controlled by the teacher.                               |
| <b>2. Practice</b>          | Students execute teacher-prescribed movement tasks on their own.           |
| <b>3. Reciprocal</b>        | Partner helps in some teaching/coaching prescribed by the teacher.         |
| <b>4. Self-check</b>        | Teacher plans and students monitor their own performance against criteria. |
| <b>5. Inclusion</b>         | Planned by teacher, students monitor personal progress.                    |
| <b>6. Guided discovery</b>  | Teacher provides clues to solving movement problems.                       |
| <b>7. Problem-solving</b>   | Students find answers to problems set by the teacher.                      |
| <b>8. Individual</b>        | Teacher sets content, student plans programme.                             |
| <b>9. Learner-initiated</b> | Student plans programme, submits evaluation to teacher.                    |
| <b>10. Self-teaching</b>    | Student is teacher and learner, takes responsibility for own learning.     |

The first five teaching styles focus mainly on reproducing what is known. The last five styles focus on discovery learning. All styles, with the exception of the first two, are useful in developing personal and social learning outcomes through increasing your ownership of the learning process.

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