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What are the similarities and differences between skill, ability and technique?

The aim of this essay is to discover comparisons and contrasts between skill, ability and technique. To discuss the similarities and differences between skill, ability and technique we first need to understand what each of these words mean.

A simple equation is used to link skill, ability and technique from the start. This is

Skill = Ability + Technique

Skill: The word skill is often misused in everyday talk. We say 'that boy is skilled at football' or 'that was a bit of skill to get that piece of paper in the bin'. This refers to an action somebody has just performed or even perhaps a fluke shot. Real skill, to use a dictionary definition, is 'proficiency, facility, or dexterity that is acquired or developed through training or experience.' This shows that the athlete has trained and acquired the skill through practise and repetition of a set of movements. This may be where the phrase 'practise makes perfect' comes from. Another definition of the word skill, referring to an athlete is, skill is an athlete's ability to choose and perform the correct techniques at the right time in a successful and regular way; applying the minimum amount of effort. This shows again that the athlete has used training to acquire this skill.

There are four different types of skill, all of which need to be developed in order to produce the movement or series of movements required. These four skills are as follows: *Cognitive skills*- these are often known as intellectual skills and involve thought. The simple brain processes to get an end result, from simple processes eg adding up numbers, to more complex such as remembering a dance sequence.
Perceptual skills- these involve interpreting information. If you were to be shown the same information as another person then you may see it differently.

In this picture it may be an Eskimo, or a Native American.
Motor skills- This involves the skill involved to control muscles and muscle systems in order to move, for example walking or running.
Perceptual Motor Skills- performing well in sport requires all of the skills above to be used effectively and together to gain a satisfactory end result. (See below)

See → Interpret → Think → Move

Ability: Abilities are often innate in humans or developed at a very early age. Without ability acquiring skill would be impossible. Ability is seen as the building blocks of sport. The dictionary has two relevant definitions of ability these being. 1) The quality of being able to do something, especially the physical, mental, financial, or legal power to accomplish something. Or 2) A natural or acquired skill or talent. As we know people are not born with skill yet the ability to learn and use those skills is innate. The ability to be able to learn a technique effectively and be able to utilise this means a skill is easily acquired. Also someone may be born with the 'ability' to be

able to run fast, this may well be down to being born with fast-twitch muscle fibres, and also the ability to learn the correct running technique and muscle positions well.

Technique: This is the term used to describe how skill is acquired. The correct movements and mindsets are a part of technique. A technique in high-jumping is a slow becoming fast run up, twisting on your jumping foot and the pushing the hips to create an arched back. The dictionary defines technique as 'the systematic procedure by which a complex or scientific task is accomplished'. To be able to obtain a skill, the way of performing a task well, the correct technique is needed.

Now that basic definitions of skill, ability and technique are known the comparisons and contrasts can be found. There is a direct correlation between learning a technique with ability and developing it into a skill. The theory behind 'practise makes perfect' is that the more times a movement is repeated the more firmly it becomes lodged into that athletes mind. Ability is needed to understand the techniques behind a skill. If an athlete is being taught how to throw a shot putt then the ability to have the body framework, such as larger muscles, taller and stronger will help. The cranial ability to commit the specific movements involved to memory and be able to exhibit them at any given time, the technique, is certainly needed to achieve the skill. Circumstances of course dictate when a skill can be obtained, it is no use in teaching a 5-year-old child the same techniques at the same level as a professional athlete as the natural ability in being able to perform these tasks is not yet developed.

As we can see there is a clear similarity between skill and ability, this being the cranial ability people are born with and the cognitive skill people can obtain. Also the link between skill and technique, as perceptual motor skills come from learning a technique that may be general or specific. This could be walking as general and a safe and effective tackle in rugby. Both of these require the technique to be learnt by developed cognitive skills and the execution of these techniques as a skill using perceptual motor skills. This then means that the ability to perform these techniques as skills is needed, from having the required ranges of movement in the body to using natural cranial ability to learn them. All three are interlinked but none are the same although similar.