

Performance Cues Strategy

Cues are words or short phrases an athlete can think or say aloud while preparing to perform a skill or movement (Hagan et al., 2019). Cues can be used as a pre-performance routine to help an athlete trigger the appropriate mindset or action, as they can help with attention focusing, distraction elimination, anxiety management, and mental and physical preparation. Cues are used to help an athlete concentrate on only the information relevant to the task at hand – sometimes referred to as *locking in* - which can lead to improved performance and increased confidence (Hagan et al., 2019; Ikulayo & Semidara, 2011).

Cues are words or phrases thought or spoken immediately before performing a task (i.e., free throw, penalty shot, dive). They can be any task-relevant word or phrase the athlete chooses, most often they are instructional or motivational in nature (Latinjak et al., 2019). Below are some examples of cue words and phrases, and situations in which an athlete may use them. These can be helpful when guiding an athlete in the development of a cue. To be effective, cues must be paired with an action and practiced. If an athlete develops a cue word to help reduce anxiety prior to performing a free throw in a game, they should use the same cue word when practicing. Incorporating the cue in all situations is important as the more often it is used, the better the cue can help trigger the appropriate mindset and movement.

Cue Word	Situation
<i>“Up”</i>	Receiving a serve in volleyball
<i>“Fast”</i>	Racing to beat an opponent to the puck
<i>“Smooth”</i>	Entering the water on a dive
<i>“Light feet”</i>	Preparing to jump the first hurdle
<i>“Deep breath”</i>	Preparing to take a free throw

While pairing a cue word with an action of movement seems easy enough, it is important to make sure there is a purpose behind the cue. Use the [Cues for Athletes Worksheet](#) to help with cue development, it can be shared with athletes to walk them through the process. It asks athletes to think of a situation in a practice, game, or training session in which they feel anxious or struggle to focus. They will then develop an appropriate cue word or phrase, and then explain the purpose behind the cue (i.e., “before I take a penalty shot, I get anxious and start to overthink the movement. Having a cue word will help me manage my anxiety so I can stay focused on my shot”).