



PE.SP8 Relaxation and Stress Management Techniques in Sport

Total Marks

AQA 8582 · Calculators not allowed · about 30 minutes

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

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Answer the questions below. Questions worth 3 marks or more require full sentences. Spend about 30 minutes on the paper.

- 1** Which one of the following is an example of a somatic sign of performance anxiety in a footballer before a penalty kick?

- ☐ A) Repeating negative thoughts about missing
- ☐ B) A raised heart rate and sweating
- ☐ C) Worry about the crowd
- ☐ D) Thinking about previous mistakes

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

- 2** A gymnast reports having negative self-talk and worrying thoughts before a routine. State the type of stress this describes and give one brief example.

(Total for Question 2 is 1 mark)

- 3** Name one somatic relaxation technique a sprinter could use in the starting blocks to reduce muscle tension.

(Total for Question 3 is 1 mark)

- 4** Name one cognitive relaxation technique a penalty taker might use to reduce worrying thoughts before taking the kick.

(Total for Question 4 is 1 mark)

- 5** A basketball player uses progressive muscular relaxation before a free throw. State one immediate physical benefit the player might gain.

(Total for Question 5 is 1 mark)

- 6** Describe briefly two steps involved in performing controlled deep breathing to calm a gymnast before a floor routine.

(Total for Question 6 is 2 marks)

- 7** Describe what is meant by progressive muscular relaxation and give one short example of how a tennis player might use it before serving in a high pressure game.

(Total for Question 7 is 2 marks)

- 8** Explain why a penalty taker in football might use calming self-talk immediately before taking the kick, and give one example phrase they could use.

(Total for Question 8 is 3 marks)

- 9** Explain how controlled deep breathing can reduce somatic signs of anxiety for a high diver about to perform, and state one physical change that indicates it is working.

(Total for Question 9 is 3 marks)

- 10** State two somatic signs of stress a rugby player might show before a lineout throw in a crowded stadium.

(Total for Question 10 is 1 mark)

- 11** Describe two short steps of using mental rehearsal purely as a calming tool for a gymnast preparing for the vault, not using imagery for technique but to lower anxiety.

(Total for Question 11 is 2 marks)

- 12** Explain the difference between somatic and cognitive stress, giving one sporting example of each in the context of a cricket bowler about to bowl a crucial final over.

(Total for Question 12 is 3 marks)

- 13** Discuss how a competitive swimmer could use a combination of somatic and cognitive relaxation techniques to prepare for a high pressure national final. In your answer include specific techniques, how and when they would be used, and one limitation of relying on relaxation methods. Use the swimmer context throughout and finish with a brief overall judgement.

(Total for Question 13 is 6 marks)

Mark scheme · PE.SP8 Relaxation and Stress Management Techniques in Sport

Question 1

- **B1** B
- **Answer: B (a raised heart rate and sweating)**

Question 2

- **B1** cognitive stress, oe
- **Answer: Cognitive stress, for example worrying "I will fall".**

Question 3

- **B1** controlled deep breathing OR progressive muscular relaxation OR slow diaphragmatic breathing, oe
- **Answer: Controlled deep breathing**

Question 4

- **B1** calming self-talk OR positive cue words OR brief mental rehearsal used as a calming tool, oe
- **Answer: Calming self-talk**

Question 5

- **B1** reduced muscle tension OR decreased trembling/shaking OR feeling physically calmer, oe
- **Answer: Reduced muscle tension.**

Question 6

- **B1** inhale slowly through the nose, filling the diaphragm/abdomen, oe
- **B1** exhale slowly through the mouth, letting the shoulders and chest relax, oe
- **Answer: Inhale slowly through the nose, filling the diaphragm and abdomen; then exhale slowly through the mouth while letting the shoulders and chest relax.**

Question 7

- **B1** definition: tensing then relaxing muscle groups in sequence to reduce overall muscle tension, oe
- **B1** example: the player tenses then relaxes the shoulders and forearm before serving to reduce racket shake, oe
- **Answer: Progressive muscular relaxation is tensing then relaxing muscle groups in sequence to reduce overall tension. For example a tennis player might tense then relax the shoulder and forearm muscles before serving to reduce shaking and improve control.**

Question 8

- **B1** point: calming self-talk can replace negative thoughts with positive or neutral cues, oe
- **B1** development: this reduces cognitive stress so the player focuses on technique rather than worry, improving execution, oe
- **B1** example phrase: e.g. 'steady, focus on placement' or 'smooth and confident', oe
- **Answer: Calming self-talk replaces negative thoughts with positive or neutral cues, which reduces cognitive stress and helps the player focus on technique rather than worry. Example phrase: 'steady, focus on placement'.**

Question 9

- **B1** point: slow deep breaths activate the parasympathetic response, lowering arousal, oe
- **B1** development: this reduces heart rate and muscle tension so movements become steadier and safer, oe
- **B1** observable physical change: e.g. lower heart rate or reduced trembling, oe
- **Answer: Slow deep breaths activate the parasympathetic response, lowering arousal and reducing heart rate and muscle tension so the diver's movements become steadier. One physical change showing it works is a lower heart rate or reduced trembling.**

Question 10

- **B1** any two of: raised heart rate / sweating / trembling/shaking / muscle tension OR one combined response accepted as equivalent, oe
- **Answer: For example, raised heart rate and muscle tension.**

Question 11

- **B1** step 1: quietly imagine a calm, successful performance scene for a few seconds focusing on feelings of calm rather than technical detail, oe
- **B1** step 2: pair the calm image with slow breathing or a calming cue word to reinforce relaxation, oe
- **Answer: Step 1: quietly imagine a calm, successful performance scene for a few seconds, focusing on feelings of calm rather than technical details. Step 2: pair that calm image with slow breathing or a calming cue word to reinforce relaxation.**

Question 12

- **B1** definition of somatic: physical signs such as increased heart rate, sweating, muscle tension, oe
- **B1** definition of cognitive: mental signs such as worry, negative thoughts, loss of concentration, oe
- **B1** sporting examples: e.g. somatic = trembling arm/raised heart rate before bowling; cognitive = worrying 'what if I concede six' or loss of focus, oe
- **Answer: Somatic stress are physical signs such as increased heart rate, sweating or muscle tension. Cognitive stress are mental signs such as worry or negative thoughts. For a bowler, somatic might be a trembling arm or raised heart rate before the over, while cognitive might be worrying 'what if I concede six' which distracts from focusing on line and length.**

Question 13

- **Level 3** (5-6): A detailed and balanced discussion that applies both somatic and cognitive techniques to the swimmer, describing specific techniques, timing and practical use during a final, addresses a limitation and gives a clear overall judgement.
- **Level 2** (3-4): A reasonable discussion that names and explains at least two techniques with some application to the swimmer, and mentions either timing or a limitation, with a simple judgement.
- **Level 1** (1-2): Basic statements about one or two relaxation techniques with little or no application to the swimmer and no clear judgement.
- **Level 0** (0): No relevant content.
- **Indicative content:**
 - Somatic techniques such as controlled deep breathing and progressive muscular relaxation used in the call room or on the poolside warm up to lower heart rate and reduce muscle tension before stepping on the blocks.
 - Cognitive techniques such as calming self-talk and brief mental rehearsal used immediately before the start signal to replace negative thoughts and maintain focus on the race plan, for example saying 'smooth turnover' or briefly imagining calm breathing rather than picturing opponents.
 - Timing: somatic techniques used earlier in the preparation and warm up to settle the body, cognitive cues used in the final moments before the start to prevent worry and lock attention on task relevant cues.
 - Practical combination: pair a short breathing routine with a cue word on the poolside, then a one-line rehearsal of feeling calm on the blocks to carry composure into the swim.
 - Limitation: over-reliance on relaxation could lower arousal too much for a power-based start, or fail under sudden unexpected events; techniques need to be practised in training to be effective under pressure.
 - Judgement: conclude that a planned combination, practised in training and timed to match the swimmer's optimal arousal, is likely to improve performance, but must be adapted and practised so it does not reduce necessary intensity or fail under contest conditions.