

Becoming a Skilled Athlete: Using Feedback

by *Richard K. Stratton*

A major step in learning the skills necessary to compete effectively is learning how to use feedback. There are two primary types of feedback: sensory feedback and augmented feedback.

The primary form of **sensory feedback** is the information you get from your muscles and joints about how the movement feels while you are doing it. Augmented feedback is the information you get from your coach, videotape of you practicing or performing, and other sources such as stopwatches, tape measures, sweep clocks and such. You need to learn to use both types of feedback.

When you first learn to do a skill augmented feedback from your coach will be especially important to help you do the skill the correct way. Because you lack experience in doing the skill correctly it will be hard to effectively use your sensory feedback just yet. You should not ignore the sensory information but you should also understand that what you think you are feeling and what is actually happening as you do the movement may not exactly match. Also, you may have trouble converting your mental picture of what the skill looks like when done correctly to what you think it should feel like when done correctly. The augmented feedback given to you by your coach will help reduce this confusion or uncertainty.

As you become more competent at performing the skill you should focus more on using the sensory feedback and reduce your need for augmented feedback. Your ultimate goal is to greatly reduce the need for augmented feedback about how well you are doing the skill. In reality, very few athletes ever reach the point that they do not need some augmented feedback about skill performance. You might slip back into a bad habit without realizing it and the coach will point this out and help fix the problem. You will also still need some of the other forms of augmented feedback to tell you exactly what happened as a result of doing the movement, such as how fast you swam the 100M freestyle or how far you tossed the shot put.

Good athletes make use of every source of information they can get to make themselves better athletes.

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