



BREATH CONTROL, FOCUS AND DECISION-MAKING UNDER PRESSURE

Staying clear-minded, making safe decisions and remaining connected to the game

BREATH

FOCUS

DECIDE

Why was this guide prepared?

In Underwater Rugby, a single play can change within seconds. An athlete may need to assess the urge to breathe, physical contact, a teammate's position and the direction of the ball at the same time. Good performance therefore depends on more than swimming power or the ability to hold one's breath.

Breath control does not mean suppressing the body's signals. The real skill is noticing those signals early, preventing anxiety from taking over attention and avoiding delays in a safe decision. Focus is not an attempt to solve the entire pool at once; it is the ability to select the most useful piece of information in the present moment.

This guide was prepared to simplify thinking under pressure, build short mental routines and support safe decisions when breath discomfort rises.

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What does breath control mean?

Breath control does not mean feeling no discomfort underwater. As carbon dioxide rises, the urge to breathe is expected. Control means noticing that urge without panicking, respecting safety limits and preserving enough mental space to continue the task in front of you.

CONTROL

- Notices the signal early.
- Does not force the rhythm.
- Does not delay a safe ascent.
- Returns attention to the task.

NOT SUPPRESSION

- Does not deny the urge to breathe.
- Does not minimise warning signs.
- Does not cross limits for a record.

REGULATION

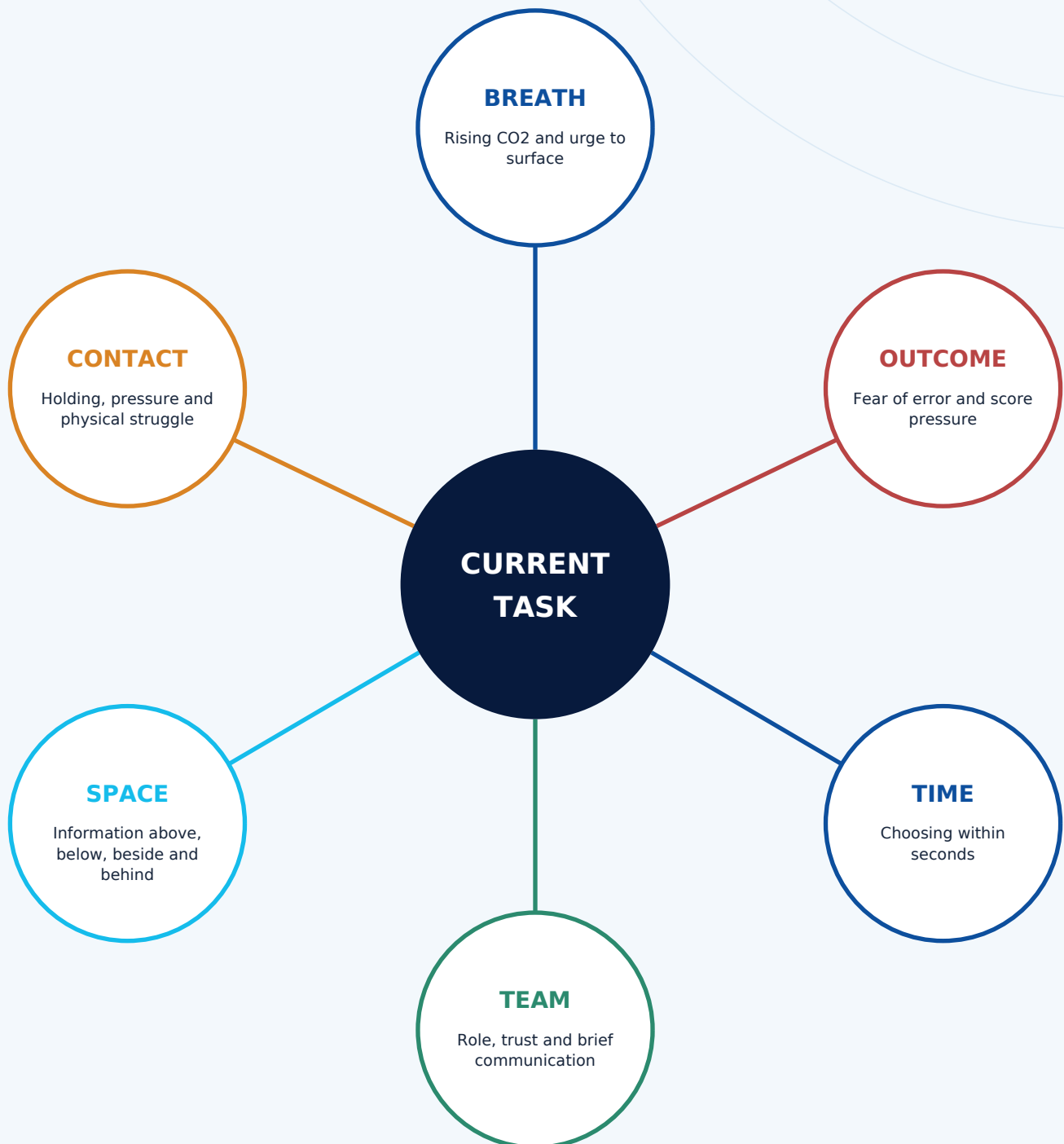
- Notices tension.
- Returns to one focus.
- Chooses pass or ascent.
- Recovers at the surface.

“Managing breath is not silencing the body; it is listening at the right time.”

The central skill is not simply tolerating more discomfort. It is learning to distinguish expected discomfort from a warning sign. Safe performance means deciding with the body's signals, not against them.

The attention map under pressure

Under pressure, attention may lock onto one detail or scatter completely. The first step is to identify which factor is making the decision difficult in that moment.



An experienced athlete does not try to solve every pressure at once. The useful question is: “Which piece of information matters most for the decision I must make now?”

The 60 seconds before entering

The aim is not to become completely calm. The aim is to organise body and mind well enough for the first play.

1

SCAN THE BODY

Any dizziness, unusual pain or marked shortness of breath?

2

DO NOT FORCE BREATH

Observe a few natural breaths; avoid excessive deep or rapid breathing.

3

CHOOSE ONE FOCUS

Set one target for the first shift: early pass, defensive line or safe ascent.

4

REMEMBER YOUR ROLE

What is the first task your team expects from you?

5

USE A SHORT CUE

"First play." "Stay with the team." "See, choose, act."

60-SECOND ROUTINE

10 sec body • 15 sec natural breath • 15 sec role • 10 sec one focus • 10 sec team contact

The focus funnel

Under pressure, the mind may expand toward every detail and then become trapped by irrelevant information. The focus funnel narrows attention step by step toward one actionable task.

THE WHOLE GAME

Score, opponent, team, tempo

THIS PLAY

Ball, defence, passing lane

THIS SECOND

The most important cue

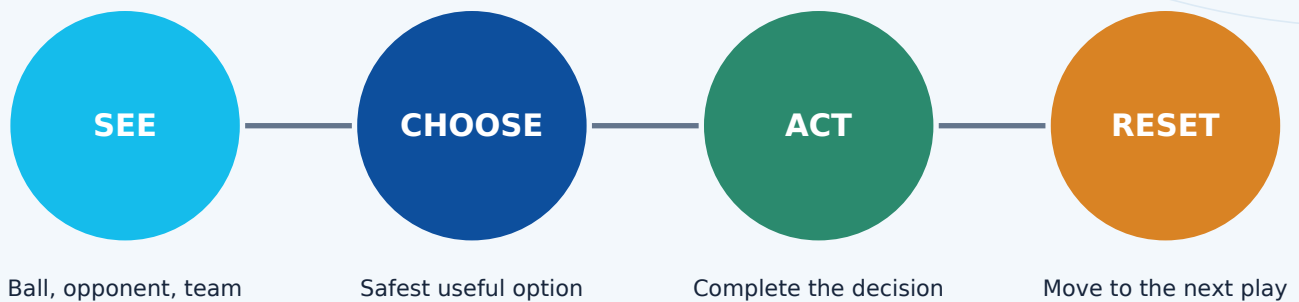
ONE ACTION

Pass, turn or surface

When attention drifts, do not attempt to solve the entire match again. Return to the end of the funnel: “What is my one action now?”

Decision-making under pressure

A short and repeatable sequence is more useful than a long internal debate when time is limited.



EXAMPLE 1 - BREATH PRESSURE

The play runs long. See: body signal and passing lane. Choose: safe ascent. Act: pass and surface. Reset: prepare for the next shift without labelling yourself as weak.

EXAMPLE 2 - BALL LOSS

The ball slips away. See: opponent's direction. Choose: defensive line. Act: return to the basket. Reset: review the error when play stops.

A good decision is not always the bravest-looking decision. It is safe, timely and useful to the team.

The urge to breathe and safety

Discomfort during breath-holding is expected, but not every symptom has the same meaning. Athletes must learn to distinguish expected effort signals from serious warning signs.

EXPECTED

Urge to breathe
Working muscles
Chest effort
Fatigue
Need to surface

TAKE SERIOUSLY

Darkening vision
Marked dizziness
Loss of coordination
Unusual pain
Confusion

STOP NOW

Fainting
Loss of consciousness
Seizure-like event
Severe breathlessness
New serious symptom

SAFETY RULE

- Breath-hold training should never be done alone.
- Hyperventilation is not a safe performance strategy.
- Do not interpret surfacing as weakness.
- Unusual symptoms require medical assessment.

Good decisions under pressure do not silence safety signals; they use them at the right time.

Common mental traps

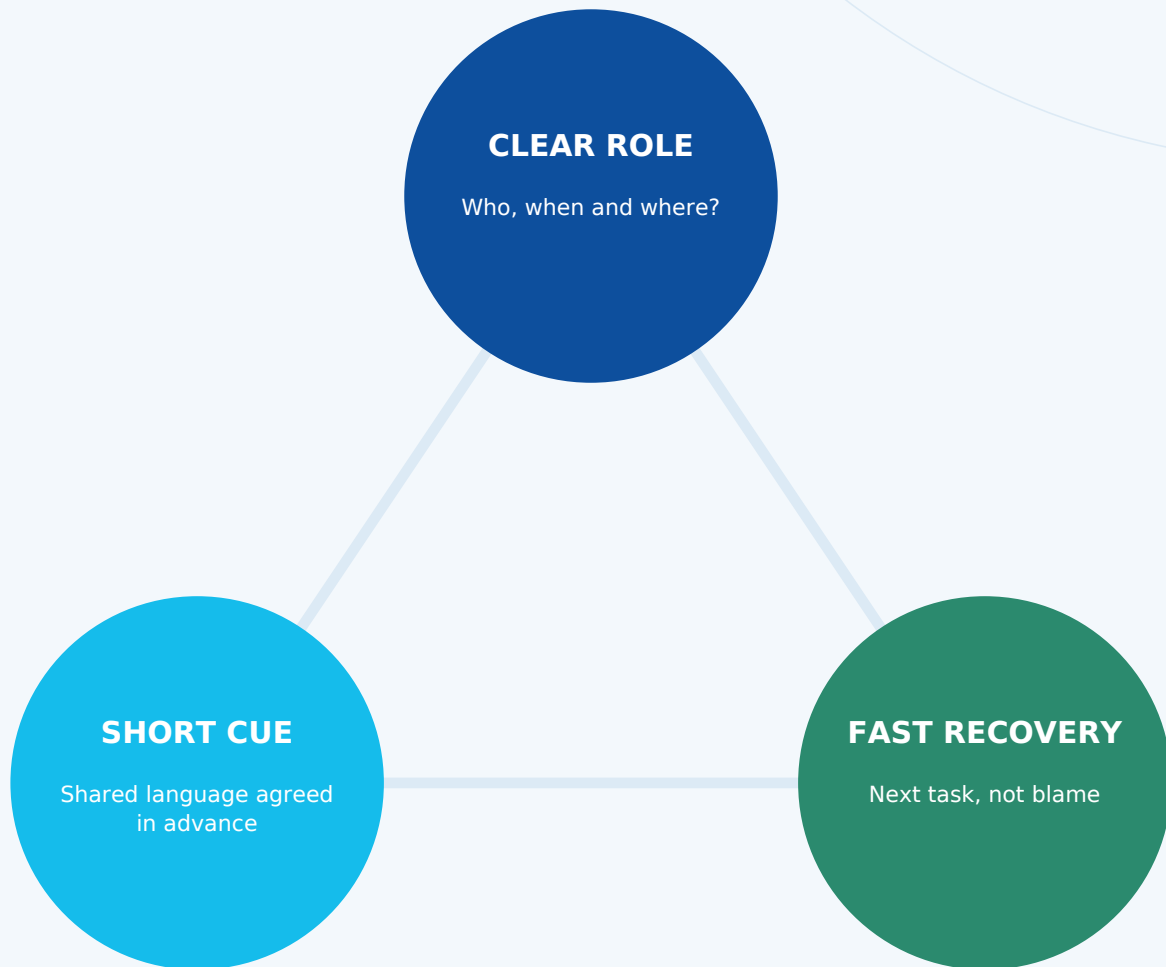
WHAT THE MIND SAYS	A MORE USEFUL RESPONSE
<i>"I must control my breathing completely."</i>	The aim is not total control, but early awareness and a safe choice.
<i>"Surfacing means letting the team down."</i>	A timely ascent allows you to return ready for the next shift.
<i>"I must track the entire pool."</i>	Choose the most important cue for the current decision.
<i>"I must correct an error immediately."</i>	Reorganise first; rushed compensation can create another error.
<i>"I cannot focus while anxious."</i>	You can return to one task even when anxiety is present.
<i>"The strongest athlete stays down longest."</i>	The best athlete makes safe, team-oriented decisions.

BRIEF REMINDER

Before asking whether a thought is true, ask whether it is useful in this moment.

Brief team communication

Long explanations do not work well under pressure. Shared short cues help athletes return attention to the task.



WHAT SHOULD TEAM LANGUAGE SOUND LIKE?

"Stay down longer."

→ "Make your safe ascent on time."

"Why did you miss it?"

→ "On the next play, keep one focus on the ball."

"You lost the ball."

→ "Return to the defensive line now."

Seven-day practice plan

Mental skills do not suddenly appear on match day; they become automatic through brief, regular practice.

DAY 1

Natural breath

Observe breathing for one minute without changing it.

DAY 2

One focus

Choose one mental target during training.

DAY 3

Focus funnel

Practise moving from the whole game to one action.

DAY 4

Decision sequence

Use See - Choose - Act - Reset.

DAY 5

Body signal

Differentiate discomfort from warning signs.

DAY 6

Team language

Give one teammate brief task-focused feedback.

DAY 7

Review

What worked, where did attention drift, and what comes next?

NOTE: These exercises are not designed to push breath-hold duration. They develop safe awareness and decision-making.

Final note

In Underwater Rugby, breathing, focus and decision-making are not separate skills. As breath discomfort rises, attention narrows; when attention narrows, decisions can become rushed or delayed. The athlete's aim is therefore not to eliminate all discomfort, but to select the right information while discomfort is present.

Sometimes the correct choice is to continue carrying the ball, sometimes to pass, and sometimes to surface. Mental strength does not lie in crossing a safety limit. It lies in recognising that limit in the middle of competition and still choosing what serves the team.

Ask yourself: "What is the most important information I can see right now, and what is the one correct action I can take?" These two questions often reconnect the mind with the game.

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This guide is for general information and does not replace individual medical assessment or treatment.