

# **Using Anchors in Freediving**

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Freediving pushes people to the boundaries of their physical and psychological limits. The journey under water is as much a journey of exploration of the blue waters as of the freediver's inner-self. Anchors are stimuli responses<sup>1</sup> that can act as short cuts improving the freediver's performance as well as giving them more control over their dive. People use anchors all the time although they are not necessarily aware of doing so. Anchors that are created and triggered deliberately are great allies in creating the best, safest in most satisfying freediving experiences.

This article uses anchoring as described by Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) teachings.<sup>2</sup>

It explains what anchors are, how they are created in accordance with NLP methodology and how they can benefit in freediving.

<sup>1</sup> *The Experimental Psychology and Psychopathology of Animals*. "The Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine 1904 Ivan Pavlov". Nobelmedia

<sup>2</sup> NLP Practitioner Manual 2014, Ignite Inspiration Ltd, pp. 46-52, approved by American Board of NLP and Hypnosis

## What are anchors?

So, what are anchors? Positive anchors are stimuli responses that serve as triggers to a desired emotional and mental state.

Once anchors are created they can be used repeatedly to attain the pre-programmed state. Although with over-use their effectiveness lessens and they have to be recharged to once again trigger the highest desired effect.

Who has not heard of Pavlov, his dogs and that bell? Who cannot remember a time they heard a specific song at random, maybe on the radio, and it took them back to a special person or situation in their lives? Tastes, smells, pictures and touch are similar triggers.

There are many anchors all around us in everyday time. Those work automatically and you might not be aware of the triggers. For example, sitting in a restaurant, the fresh bread basket arrives and the smell of freshly baked pastry throws you back to a Sunday morning breakfast with your family or loved ones.

There are obviously also negative anchors that we unwillingly pick up along the way, however, for the purpose of this article we are focusing on use and application of purposefully placed positive anchors for freediving.

The techniques described here can not only be used to create positive anchors but also to neutralise bad habits and/or undesired states the freediver might have previously had.

## Where does the concept of anchoring come from?

The concept of anchoring is rooted in behaviorism made famous by Ivan Pavlov's experiments with dogs. The technique of intentionally creating such stimuli responses was made famous by Ivan Pavlov, who earned the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Psychology in 1904 for it.<sup>3</sup> Nowadays it is more commonly used as a fast and effective technique within the scope of Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) practices.<sup>4</sup>

## Who would benefit from using anchors in freediving?

Everyone. Anchors for Freediving are useful for anyone who is interested in the sport whatever their level. Whether beginner, advanced or professional freediver, everyone has strengths as well as weaknesses that they wish to overcome. For example, a beginner might battle more with fear and panic, whereas an advanced diver may wish to work on deepening their state of relaxation and increasing their inner body awareness. Either way everyone will experience undesired and un-useful states within themselves and the technique of anchoring can be effective in assisting the freediver to overcome those issues.

## What kind of anchors are most useful for freediving?

There is no strict rule. What kind of anchors are most useful depends on the individual freediver, their needs and their goals.

Generically, however, it can be said that imagining pictures and situations (visual), sound (auditory) and touch (kinaesthetic) are most often used anchors. Smell (olfactory) and taste (gustatory) anchors are also possible however less applicable for most people.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Experimental Psychology and Psychopathology of Animals*. "[The Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine 1904 Ivan Pavlov](#)". Nobelmedia

<sup>4</sup> NLP Practitioner Manual 2014, Ignite Inspiration Ltd, pp. 46-52, approved by American Board of NLP and Hypnosis

## When to use anchors in freediving?

Anchors can be used to enhance an already existing state. For example increase your relaxation or focus. They can also be used to change away from an undesirable state; anxiety, negative thoughts or fear that otherwise might disrupt your dive. Anchors can also be used to enhance your overall feeling of enjoyment and satisfaction during a dive.

## What are the most common challenges freedivers experience and how can anchors assist in relieving them?

Freediving is both a physical and psychological challenge. The better you get, the more you push to and beyond your perceived limits testing new boundaries. It is a process of self-exploration as much as it is a physical training. One of the first things a novice freediver learns is that 'push through your limits' attitude, as promoted in many other sports disciplines, does not work in freediving because it causes more stress responses and thus increases stress levels and heart rate. The key to freediving is to stay focused yet relaxed, calm and centered. It is a collaboration between body, spirit and mind rather than a competition thereof.

With practice and experience the freediver improves in their relaxation and focus and learns to better manage and improve the physical and mental challenges associated with freediving. Here are some examples of the most common challenges freedivers experience and how anchors may assist in relieving them.

In statics, for example, as CO<sub>2</sub> levels rise the freediver will often unconsciously do one of the following. They may either tense their neck, back, lift their arms or start moving their body around to release tension. An anchor, either applied by the freediver themselves or their coach can bring the freediver back to a more resourceful balanced and relaxed state.

All freedivers also know that there will come a point during their dive when their relaxation will give way to negative mind talk. If left unchecked that mind talk will greatly disrupt their performance. An anchor can help interrupt the flow of negative mind talk and thereby assist the freediver get back to centre.

From beginner to professional freediver, fear will inevitably sneak in and if left unchecked can not only disrupt the dive but also more extremely lead the freediver to knee-jerk reactions that may put their well-being in danger. Anchors are very effective to neutralise or re-direct fear as long as they are applied before fear got out of control.

In open water it is especially important to stay relaxed at depth to prevent lung squeeze and ascent-induced blackouts for example.

- Anchors can be tailored to target not general relaxation but also specific weaknesses during a freedive.
- Anchors can also help the freediver to correct and improve their form, such as fin kick, streamline, arm- and leg-stroke.
- In the same way, anchors can also assist to better perform in competitions to prepare the athlete more effectively and ease pre-competitions nerves.

Equally, humans are not machines. There are simply some days when it is easier to relax and focus than others. Some days the diver may go through their preparation flawlessly and yet struggle to even reach their average form. On such a 'bad day' the freediver may notice that they are off centre, maybe notice that their technique is not too clean but not be able to put their finger on it.

Other days they may not notice what's wrong at all, their thoughts stuck in life problems or other matters not relating to freediving. Anchors can help here in different ways. The freediver may want to use a preparation anchor that helps them leave their 'outside life' aside and therefore better focus on their dive. Or they may want to use a relaxation anchor or an anchor that reminds them to correct weaknesses in their technique. This is the beauty of anchors. They are very versatile and can be created and applied in a unique way to fit the freediver's needs.

## Where to use anchors in freediving?

Anchors are useful in many areas of freediving preparation and execution. Here are some examples of the most common applications during preparation and also during the actual freedive.

## Examples of Anchors for Freediving Preparation

- Self-Empowerment
- Pre-competition jitters
- Breathe-up

### Self-Empowerment Anchor:

Preparation for a freedive begins before the breathe-up or even the time we take to focus and set the goal for the outcome we desire for our dive. It likely begins when we are on the way to the competition, class or place of recreational diving or sometimes even before then. We start gathering our thoughts and quieting our hearts. Maybe we assess our frame of mind, levels of fitness, health and life-style choices we have made recently that may influence the outcome of our dive. A self-empowerment anchor helps the freediver to feel more confident, more focused, in control and calm. It can be seen as a confidence booster that can be (re-)applied also during warm-up or to ease pre-competition nerves.

### Anchor to ease Pre-competition nerves:

It is natural to be nervous before a competition. Some people find it easy to switch this anxiety off and enter a state of beneficial relaxation and calm more easily than others. Anchoring can really help to ease such anxiety because an anchor can be programmed to trigger positive emotions that overpower and silence the physical and mental symptoms of anxiety before anxiety overpowers you.

### Breathe-Up Anchor:

A breathe-up anchor is useful to increase the levels of relaxation and focus as well as to assist the freediver in switching off distracting mind talk. The same anchor may also be (re-)applied during the actual dive to stabilise the desired state of calm and relaxation.

## Examples of Anchors during Freediving:

- Statics
- Dynamics (all disciplines of dynamics)
- Creating an anchor during a freedive

### Statics:

An anchor can be triggered by the Freediver during a Static when contractions become too unpleasant or when they are starting to lose relaxation and start finding themselves busy with negative mind chatter for example. Triggering an anchor then will help the diver refocus and regain a more balanced and a productive state of mind.

## Dynamics:

Triggering an anchor during a dynamics discipline can assist the freediver with releasing physical and psychological tensions that build up during the dive. It also may serve to improve focus and correct technical mistakes such as fin-kick technique or other form related issues. An anchor will also assist the freediver to adjust your body awareness and internal gage.

## Creating an anchor during a freedive:

It is also possible to create an anchor whilst on a freedive in the moment. Every freediver experiences special moments, sparkling, proud, satisfying moments during freedives. Some dives are naturally better than others but then there are some dives that just stick with you and create most wonderful memories. The kind of stories told when someone asks 'what is your favourite freediving experience'.

Whilst in the moment of experiencing such a memorable occurrence under water, the freediver may opt to use the anchoring technique to create a specific stimulus response for the future. That new anchor when triggered in the future will propel the freediver back to the experience as if it was happening right now and thus make that memory that much more intense and pleasurable.

## How is an anchor created?<sup>5</sup>

### Theory:

Anchors are stimuli responses that trigger a desired state. Anchoring can assist in accessing past states (emotions, knowledge, memories) and linking those states to the present and the future. This works because any time a person is in an intense associated state, if at the peak of that experience, a specific stimulus is applied, then the two will be linked neurologically. If the person then triggers the set stimulus at any future date, they will automatically also be experiencing the previously set state (emotions, knowledge, memories) that was neurologically set before.

### Process:

#### 4 Steps to anchoring

1. Have the person recall a past vivid experience. It is imperative that they truly connect to the memory and that it is alive within them.

Apply the anchor and keep applying for 10-15sec. Provide a specific stimulus when the person is at the peak of experiencing that memory. Observe non-verbal clues such as skin tonus, changes in breathing etc. to know when person reached peak of experience and apply anchor.

2. After applying the stimulus bring the person out of the memory, snap them back to now and distract them a little.

3. Set off the anchor to test the neurological link is established. Repeat 4 steps using related similar memories to intensify the neurological connection and thus making the anchor stronger.

## 5 Keys to anchoring

- 1.The intensity of the experience recalled.
- 2.The timing of the anchor (stimulus) applied.
- 3.The uniqueness of the anchor.
- 4.The replication of the anchor (stimulus).
- 5.Number of time. One can stack an anchor with a number of emotional states to make it more powerful when triggered.

## Best states to anchor

The best states to anchor are naturally occurring states, for example feeling powerful, successful, happy, loved. The next best states are past, vivid highly emotional states, for example remembering a specific time when you were totally [desired state] and reliving it. The least desirable states are constructed ones. You only use this when the person is lacking a reference point to that which they want to achieve. So, for example someone who has been practicing the techniques of freediving but has yet to experience the feeling of it all coming together and being in the flow. In that case you would let them imagine what it would feel like, look like and sound like to be in the flow and anchor the peak of that state. What kind of emotion/knowledge/memory you want to evoke when creating an anchor depends entirely the needs of the person the anchor is for. Before establishing an anchor, decide on the desired outcome you want and when it is most likely that you will fire the anchor.

## Examples of physical places to establish anchors

When choosing a place to create an anchor it is imperative to decide on a place that you can access again easily. It should also be a place that is easily accessible yet unique. Anchors are man-made neurological links. They work well and yet they can also be neutralised when overused. For example, a handshake is a bad stimulus trigger as we shake hands and touch things with our palms many a times throughout the day. That anchor would be blown out almost immediately. The best anchoring places for Freediving are the wrist bone, any of the knuckles, elbow or a specific seam on the freediver's neoprene suit. This not only makes these places quite unusual and appropriate but also easily to find again. For an anchor only works if it is triggered exactly in the same space. This is why the seam of a t-shirt would not work because it is too loose fitting but the bone of your wrist would definitively work. Anchors can also be songs, pictures and more, however to the purpose of freediving touch-triggered anchors are most useful because easily applied above as well as under water.

When/if an anchor gets over used and loses its power, just repeat steps 1-4 and recharge it.

Although in principle anchors can be applied by oneself, it is much more effective to do them with a buddy, who has been taught how to create anchors by a professional.

## Are there any negative possible side effects to using anchors?

There are no known possible negative side effects to using anchors. The technique of creating anchors as described here in this article is best done with the assistance of, or if trained by, an NLP professional. However it can also be accomplished by the lay person following the above prescribed method. Although a person can create an anchor themselves, it is most effective when done with the assistance of a buddy trained in how to apply the technique. It is recommended to do it with a trained buddy because it is hard to apply the anchor at the peak of the experience one is deeply associated with that very moment oneself. Also, an untrained buddy may not know how to read non-verbal clues and thus miss the moment of peak experience to anchor most effectively. Saying that, it is definitively possible to anchor oneself or with an untrained friend. Even if done by the lay person alone, the worse that can happen is that the anchor is too weak to trigger a strong

neurological response. This can be remedied by practicing the technique. When relying on an anchor to assist you in freediving, always make sure to test the anchor before. Anchors will deteriorate with increase use because they are man-made stimuli links. In that case they simply need to be re-charged following above mentioned steps.

## **Conclusion:**

Using anchors allows the freediver to influence and enhance their overall physical and psychological performance. Anchors boost the freediver's mental inner game, allowing them to discover new depth of knowledge about themselves. The freediver's personal goal may be to push the boundaries and borders of their own experience, allow themselves to surrender to 'the flow' and thus being more in tune with their environment, or they may want to correct technical short comings and thus better their overall performance and know-how under water. Either way, using anchors will make the freediver more successful and broaden their sense of freedom and satisfaction under water. Anchors are allies in creating the best, safest and most satisfying freediving experiences that leave the freediver coming back for more.

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