

## Stages of skill acquisition - Key Messages

- Learners progress through three stages of skill learning. Some learners may not reach the final stage.
- The cognitive stage is the beginning stage where the individual is working out **what** needs to be done to perform the skill
- The associative stage is where the individual practices the skills and begins to understand **how** to apply them.
- The autonomous stage is where the movement comes easily and individuals can **focus on other things** - the environment in which the skills are occurring.

The ability of individuals to experience, learn and refine motor skills greatly affects their ability to perform any physical activity. This section explores the processes that individuals undertake when learning a new skill and how these processes can be adapted to help individuals learn these skills more easily and quickly.

### Cognitive

The cognitive stage of skill acquisition is the early identification and understanding of the skill to be learned. Individuals focus on what to do, that is most of the learner's activities during this stage will be in the mind - watching, thinking, analysing, reasoning, judging and visualising, rather than lots of practice. During this stage the learner develops an in-depth understanding of the skill to be acquired.

### Associative

The associative stage of skill acquisition really focuses on the idea of practice with the learner learning how to do it. Practice at this stage increases the learner's ability to perform the skill or task. They may not necessarily perform the skill well but have an understanding of how to do it. Most learners stay in this stage for a long period of time, with most not progressing to the next stage.

### Autonomous

The autonomous stage of skill acquisition revolves around executing a skill automatically without having to stop and think about what to do next or how to do it. It is an advanced level of performance where the individual can perform the skill fluently and instinctively and where outside influences do not affect the outcome. It may take individuals a long time to achieve this stage with many never reaching it. This may be due to the training demands, the complexity of the task or a lack of motivation.

For further understanding of skill development and the stages of skill acquisition click the following links.

[www.brianmac.co.uk/tech.htm#lp](http://www.brianmac.co.uk/tech.htm#lp) (external website)

[www.stagesofskillacquisition.blogspot.com/2008/06/cognitive-stage-of-skill-acquisition.html](http://www.stagesofskillacquisition.blogspot.com/2008/06/cognitive-stage-of-skill-acquisition.html) (external website)

