



[www.DamienHowellPT.com](http://www.DamienHowellPT.com)

804-594-0403

## Enhancing the Running Experience

As runners we are passionate about our sport and spend a great deal of time running. Each of us may have different aspects of running experience upon which we wish to focus. For some it is to run a personal best time for a given distance. For some it is to experience the social interaction of running with others. For some it is the opportunity to get away on a solitary run in order to meditate on important questions. For some it is to experience the beauty outdoors. For some it is to improve our body composition and health status. Whatever our motive the question remains how can we improve our running experience? What are the processes we use during the running experience in order to learn or become wise? For some, experiences that happen during running may be one of the most influential experiences of their life. What are the circumstances that make an experience significant?

My belief is we have influential experiences if we are in the right place at the right time, ready or receptive to take advantage of experiences, have heightened senses in order to be able to observe the subtleties of experiences, have a system in place to gather data from experiences in order to observe patterns, have enough exposures to particular experiences to be able to observe patterns, look at data from experiences with different perspective, and take time to reflect and analyze our experiences.

### Examples

In 1979 I was in the right place at the right time to run my personal best marathon time. The Mardi Marathon in New Orleans had to change the race course the week before the race; because the New Orleans Police Force was on strike. The race was changed to run a point to point course across Lake Ponchartrain Bridge. The course was flat and there was a 35 mile per hour tail wind for the first 24 miles. Unfortunately, I was not ready to take advantage of the experience as I had just finished serious bout of flu.

Vineyards employ professional wine tasters to help with production of wine. These professionals have practiced the sensory experience of taste in order to distinguish subtle differences in various wines. The art of running well involves subtle kinesthetic cues to help to distinguish subtle difference in running speeds and efforts. As the professional wine taster uses the sensation of taste as the primary sensation, he also uses the visual and olfactory sensations in order to develop and enhance his abilities. Likewise as a runner uses the primary sensation of kinesthetic awareness he also should seek to use visual, olfactory, and taste sensations in order to develop and enhance his abilities to run well or to improve his body composition and health status. Like the wine taster who seeks

feedback and evaluates his decisions the runner should seek feedback (time trials, slow motion video analysis of running form) and evaluate his kinesthetic observations.

A runners log is an excellent method to gather data from experiences in order to be able to observe patterns. In addition to typical data of miles run, time spent running, a variety of information can be recorded including subtle sensory observations, life experiences outside of the running activity, reflective questions/answers, and thoughts. The challenge is to record enough detail so that patterns can be developed and analyzed but not so much detail that things get muddled.

The more runs you experience the more likely you are to be able to observe patterns. A personal example is that when I reviewed my training log I observed after 9 connective marathons I develop upper respiratory infection the week after completing a marathon. Closer inspection of the data I realized that I would continue training the week after a marathon. Apparently, my susceptibility of catching an infection the week after a marathon is particularly high. Now I cut my training way back, wash my hands a lot, and try to stay away from crowds the week after a marathon.

Examining data from a different perspective often gives new meaning, or enlightens subtle observations. Often I am amazed how different things are when I switch direction on one of my regular running routes from clockwise to counterclockwise. When I reach the points in the course where I typically “hit the wall”, I am in the initial phases of a run when I run opposite direction. It gives me the impression that I have energy and increased fitness level. For some starting a race in the back of the pack is quite enlightening. Running in costume presents a unique perspective. The marathon that I ran at night was quite memorable. Ask others to look at your data in your log to get their perspective.

Time should be taken to analyze data gathered in a running log for it to have meaning. Before or after a significant race or at the beginning or end of a year or a training phase is a good time to look back at data. This is a good time to ask, am I collecting the most appropriate data?

We spend a great deal of time running. Use the time wisely. Reflect on how you can enhance your running experience – be in the right place at the right time, be ready or receptive to take advantage of experiences, look to observe the subtleties of experiences, have a system in place to gather data from experiences in order to observe patterns, seek enough exposures to particular experiences to be able to observe patterns, look at data from experiences with different perspectives, and take time to reflect and analyze experiences. Boost your running experiences.