



You've heard it a thousand times.

"Just relax and get a good pitch to hit."

But at the higher levels, it's not the easiest thing to do. Relaxation is a skill that has components:

- Physical (muscular tension and body awareness)
- Emotional (quiet and calmness)
- Visual (field awareness and efficient search habits)

The first player to relax typically has an advantage over their opponent. No matter what sport you play, your eyes will set the tone for the rest of your muscles. Great athletes know that body control and muscular relaxation start with the "how" and "what" the eyes are paying attention to—both during the action (ball flight for hitters) and before the action (the start of a pitcher's delivery).

From a visual perspective, the never-ending challenge to "slow the game down" starts with how the eyes process the outside world. If the first part of the action, which is visual, is inconsistent or closed (compared to the open focus concept of seeing much more without looking), the body and the brain are deprived of the crucial cues to act. NFL quarterback Tom Brady sees the opposing defense different than others. Barry Bonds' visual search strategy of pretending he's catching rather than hitting is yet another example of how the eyes of the elite take in the intel needed for the body to react.

Most hitting coaches would agree that there are several factors why hitters miss pitches at every level. Timing, mechanics and guessing wrong well were all responses I received from the dozens of coaches and players I asked during spring training this year. But the most popular response?

"Not seeing the ball well enough," which was the clear front-runner.

Here are some quick facts related to "seeing it well." Last year, MLB hitters swung-and-missed 77,167 times. The total number of swings at pitches outside the strike zone was 127,023, and the number of strikeouts with less than two outs and a runner on third base was 2,001.

Facing the best pitchers on the planet each night is a challenge, and we all know hitting is failure-based, but giving hitters slightly more information before they are forced to estimate "time to collision" is the end game for all of the best hitting coaches in the industry.

Profiling Your Hitters

- Wanderer
- Backsider
- Deer in headlight
- Head/bill of the cap
- Head banger
- Window watcher
- Blinker
- Dip and dots
- Early Snapchats

The traits above describe the common visual problems hitters have right as pitchers release the ball. So now, it's contest time. Sit with your coaches and hitters and see if they can explain these traits. Send your answers to tony.abbatine@frozenropes.com and the first to send in a correct response wins a full explanation and matching drills to get your hitters back on track!

In the meantime, try these industry-best strategies that will help control your "windows" and subsequently the rest of your muscles during in-game performances. Like a computer that needs a reboot, these ocular resets will help clear the picture and let the eyes and brain reconnect.

- **Bug Out** — Make your eyes as big and wide as possible, as if you saw a 10-foot monster.
- **Squeeze To Please** — Close your eyes for one second, and then re-open slowly.
- **Shrek** — Gaze far, far away to stretch out the eyes.
- **Count Your Blinks** — Slowly blink and feel your eyes get washed and touched by your eyelids.
- **Heartbeats** — Listen to yourself breathe and feel the inhale and exhale of your heart through your eyes.
- **Space Ride** — Look around and see and feel the space that surrounds you. Focusing on space, as we all know, has a calming impact on the eyes and the brain.

Next-level visual processing always comes first with the best performers. If you truly believe that, then give your players the visual tools to compete at their best.

