

Lesson 2: Delivery Under Pressure

EBCS Level 2 CPD – Advanced Technical Coaching

Learning Objectives (for the coach)

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- Recognise how stress and pressure affect delivery mechanics.
- Coach players to maintain technical stability under competitive pressure.
- Use breathing, pre-shot routines, and mental skills to manage stress.
- Design drills that simulate match-like pressure in a controlled setting.
- Provide feedback that balances technical correction with psychological support.

Background (why this matters)

Competitive pressure changes the way players perform. Stress can cause:

- Shortened backswings or rushed tempo.
- Early release or over-gripping the bowl.
- Overthinking mechanics rather than trusting routine.

The role of the coach is to help players:

- Recognise how pressure manifests physically and mentally.
- Develop robust pre-shot routines that anchor focus.
- Use breathing and rhythm to maintain consistency.
- Transfer technical skills from practice to competition.

Practical Activities

Session Options:

Option 1 — 90-minute CPD Workshop:

- 1) Introduction to stress responses (10 min)
- 2) Baseline delivery test (15 min)
- 3) Pressure-simulation drills (30 min)
- 4) Routine-building workshop (20 min)
- 5) Reflection and review (15 min)

Option 2 — 70-minute On-Rink Player Session:

- 1) Baseline test under normal conditions (10 min)
- 2) Introduce mild pressure (scoring, time, observation) (15 min)
- 3) Apply coping strategies: breathing, routines (20 min)
- 4) Match-play pressure drill (15 min)
- 5) Review and homework (10 min)

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Baseline Diagnostics:

- Compare delivery under normal vs mild pressure (e.g., timed bowls, audience watching).
- Note changes in tempo, release, accuracy, and confidence.

Pressure Drills:

- Countdown Challenge: Deliver 4 bowls in 2 minutes while keeping accuracy.
- Score-for-Precision: Assign points for bowls landing within target zones.
- Simulated Match End: Create a realistic head and ask the player to play key shots under observation.
- Breathing Drill: Player takes 3 deep breaths, visualises the shot, then delivers.
- Pre-shot Routine Practice: Define a personal 3–5 step routine and rehearse consistently.

Questioning Prompts

- 'What changed in your delivery when the pressure increased?'
- 'How did your body feel when under time constraint or being watched?'
- 'What helped you refocus between shots?'
- 'Which part of your pre-shot routine was most reliable?'
- 'What cue will you take into competition to steady yourself?'

Coach Notes (ethics, inclusivity, safety)

- Keep pressure challenges constructive, not punitive.
- Tailor stress levels to player ability (avoid overwhelming newer or anxious players).
- Ensure breathing and mental drills are explained in simple, supportive language.
- Encourage players to share coping strategies in group sessions for inclusivity.
- Monitor physical safety: pressure should not cause rushed or unsafe movements.

Reflection (self + peer)

Coach self-reflection:

- How did I introduce pressure without causing loss of confidence?
- Did I provide tools (breathing, routine, cues) to help manage it?
- Which drills worked best for simulating match pressure?
- How did players respond emotionally as well as technically?

Peer feedback:

- 'I noticed you introduced pressure by... (specific). This helped when... (evidence). Next time you could... (suggestion).'



Player homework:

- Define and rehearse a personal pre-shot routine.
- Practice under mild self-imposed pressure (e.g., target score, timer).
- Record what coping strategies worked best in each session.

Outcomes (what you should achieve)

- Understand how stress affects delivery mechanics and consistency.
- Coach players to remain technically stable under pressure.
- Teach and reinforce effective pre-shot routines and breathing techniques.
- Design sessions that progressively simulate competition pressure.
- Provide balanced feedback that builds confidence while correcting faults.



Appendix A:

Baseline & Diagnostics: Normal vs Mild Pressure Delivery Test

Objective:

To compare a player's delivery consistency under normal practice conditions with their delivery when mild pressure is introduced. This highlights whether technique changes under stress and helps identify resilience gaps.

Setup:

1. Normal Condition:

- Player delivers a set of 4–6 bowls at a chosen length and hand with no external stress.
- Record accuracy against a target (e.g., within a 1m circle around the jack or through a line gate).

2. Pressure Condition:

- Repeat the same test but add a mild pressure factor, such as:
 - **Time Constraint:** Player must deliver within 10 seconds of stepping on the mat.
 - **Audience:** Teammates watch silently, or another coach observes closely.
 - **Consequence:** Small competitive element (e.g., "You need 3 in the circle to win").

Method:

1. Run the **normal baseline test** first to establish comfort-zone performance.
2. Run the **pressure test** immediately afterwards with the same target.
3. Compare performance (success rates, grouping, consistency).
4. Observe not only outcomes but also body language — did rhythm change? Was the step rushed? Did the player hesitate?

Coaching Points:

- Explain that this is diagnostic, not a competition — pressure is simulated for learning.
- Ask reflective questions after each condition:
 - *"How did that feel different?"*
 - *"Did you notice your tempo or focus change?"*



Berkshire Bowls Coaching Scheme



- Emphasise that nerves are natural; the test is about recognising changes and learning coping strategies.

Progression:

- Increase difficulty by tightening target zone or increasing pressure (shorter time, more audience, scoring challenges).
- Vary pressure type: noise distractions, “match scenario” scoring, or peer competition.
- Teach coping tools (breathing, pre-shot routine) and repeat test to see improvement.

Outcome:

- Provides baseline data on how well a player maintains technique under pressure.
- Identifies whether errors are due to *skill gaps* (present in both conditions) or *psychological pressure* (only appear under stress).
- Helps coach plan both technical correction and mental resilience training.

✅ This test pairs beautifully with the **Line Gate Test** and **Length Grouping Test** — those show technical baseline, while this one shows *mental/pressure baseline*.

Baseline & Diagnostics: Noting Changes in Tempo, Release, Accuracy & Confidence

Objective:

To develop a rounded baseline picture by observing not just results (where the bowl finishes), but the *quality of the delivery process* under different conditions.

Setup:

- Can be combined with any baseline test (Line Gate, Length Grouping, Pressure Comparison).
- Coach prepares an **observation sheet** with four key areas:
 1. **Tempo** – pace and rhythm of backswing/forward swing.
 2. **Release** – smooth/late/early, bounce or clean roll.
 3. **Accuracy** – line and length relative to target.
 4. **Confidence** – body language, routine, hesitation, self-belief.

Method:

1. Player delivers 4–6 bowls under chosen conditions (normal baseline, or mild pressure).
2. Coach observes and notes behaviour in each category for every bowl:

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- **Tempo:** Was the rhythm steady or rushed/hesitant?
- **Release:** Was the bowl rolled cleanly or bumped/wobbled?
- **Accuracy:** Did it meet the target criteria (gate, circle, or jack proximity)?
- **Confidence:** Did the player look composed, or show frustration, doubt, or over-focus?

3. Repeat across conditions (normal vs pressure) for comparison.

Coaching Points:

- Feedback should cover both **technical** (tempo, release, accuracy) and **psychological** (confidence) elements.
- Encourage self-reflection: ask the player what felt different in tempo, release, or confidence.
- Distinguish between *mechanical faults* (always present) and *pressure-related breakdowns* (appear only when stressed).

Progression:

- Track over multiple sessions to spot trends (is tempo stabilising? Does confidence improve?).
- Pair with corrective drills (e.g., Four-count Tempo if rhythm falters, Landing-spot Drill if accuracy slips).
- Use confidence-building strategies (positive reinforcement, simple goals, pre-shot routine) alongside technical fixes.

Outcome:

- Provides a **holistic baseline** of both technical delivery and psychological readiness.
- Helps coach prioritise corrections: is it technique, consistency, or mindset that needs work first?
- Encourages players to connect “how it felt” with “what happened,” deepening learning.

✓ This diagnostic isn't a drill in itself but a **layer you add to every baseline test** — it transforms raw results into a more useful coaching picture

Pressure Drill: Countdown Challenge (Timed Accuracy Test)

Objective:

To develop a player's ability to maintain accuracy and rhythm under **time pressure**, simulating competitive stress where decisions and execution must happen quickly.



Setup:

1. Place a jack at a standard length (short, medium, or long).
2. Define a **scoring zone** (e.g., within 1 metre of the jack, or passing over a landing spot).
3. Set a timer for **2 minutes**.

Method:

1. Player must deliver **4 bowls within 2 minutes**.
2. Each bowl must still aim for accuracy (not just speed).
3. Score each bowl that lands in the success zone.
4. At the end of 2 minutes, record both the **number of bowls delivered** and the **number of accurate bowls**.

Coaching Points:

- Emphasise *quality under speed*: rushing is not the aim, but efficiency with routine.
- Encourage players to use a **shortened pre-shot routine** that keeps them calm and efficient.
- Watch for changes in **tempo, release, and confidence** when under the clock.
- Use questioning: *"What did you change to cope with the time limit?"*

Progression:

- Reduce time allowed (e.g., 90 seconds for 4 bowls).
- Increase target difficulty (smaller circle, narrower landing spot).
- Add competition: two players side by side with identical targets, the highest score wins.
- Build into a match scenario: *"You have 2 minutes to save the end with 4 bowls."*

Outcome:

- Improves composure and efficiency under time stress.
- Encourages consistent pre-shot routine even when hurried.
- Builds confidence in handling pressure situations during matches.
- Provides measurable performance data: how accuracy drops (or holds) under time constraints.



Pressure Drill: Score-for-Precision (Target Zone Scoring Game)

Objective:

To sharpen accuracy and consistency by rewarding bowls that finish within progressively smaller target zones. The scoring system adds pressure by making every bowl count.

Setup:

1. Place a jack at a chosen length (short, medium, or long).
2. Mark **concentric scoring zones** around the jack:
 - Inner circle (e.g., within 30 cm) = **5 points**
 - Middle circle (30–60 cm) = **3 points**
 - Outer circle (60 cm–1 m) = **1 point**
 - Outside 1 m = **0 points**
(Circles can be chalked, roped, or imagined with a clear explanation.)
3. Each player has 4 bowls per round.

Method:

1. Player delivers their 4 bowls, aiming for the jack.
2. After all 4 are played, score each bowl based on the zone it lands in.
3. Record total score out of a possible 20.
4. Repeat for multiple rounds, tracking improvement or comparing players.

Coaching Points:

- Emphasise quality over power — the aim is to “collect points,” not just reach the jack.
- Encourage a consistent pre-shot routine, even when chasing higher scores.
- Watch for adjustments — do players correct after a poor bowl or repeat mistakes?
- Use questioning: *“What helped you score higher on that round?”*

Progression:

- Shrink circle sizes for advanced players.
- Vary jack length each round to test adaptability.
- Add competition between players (e.g., first to 50 points).
- Introduce pressure by saying: *“Last bowl must score 5 points to win the round.”*



Outcome:

- Builds focus and consistency under light competitive pressure.
- Reinforces weight and line control with measurable results.
- Adds motivation and fun while retaining strong learning value.
- Provides an easy way to track improvement across sessions.

✓ This drill pairs beautifully with the **Countdown Challenge**: one tests speed under pressure, the other tests *accuracy under pressure*.

Pressure Drill: Simulated Match End (Game-Realistic Scenario)

Objective:

To test and develop a player's ability to perform key shots under match-like pressure, making decisions and executing with observers watching.

Setup:

1. Build a **realistic head** on the rink using jacks and bowls (yours or spare ones).
 - Example: Player is *1 down with 2 bowls left*, opponent has a bowl just in front of the jack and another behind.
2. Brief the player on the **match situation**: scoreline, number of bowls left, tactical objective.
3. Set observers (coach, teammates, or group) to watch silently, simulating audience pressure.

Method:

1. Explain the scenario clearly: *"You are 1 down, 2 bowls remaining. Your task is to save or win the end."*
2. Ask the player to state what shot they intend to play (draw, trail, rest, etc.).
3. Player delivers their bowl while observers watch.
4. Discuss the outcome: Did the shot selection and execution match the objective?
5. Repeat with new heads and varying tactical challenges (e.g., protecting a lead, chasing multiple shots, or playing a controlled drive).

Coaching Points:

- Encourage the player to follow a **decision process**:
 - Assess the head.



- Consider options.
- Choose and commit to the shot.
- Reinforce calm pre-shot routine — simulate the mental discipline needed in real games.
- Ask reflective questions afterwards:
 - *“What made you choose that option?”*
 - *“How did the pressure of being observed affect your delivery?”*

Progression:

- Increase complexity of heads (more bowls, tighter margins, jack in ditch, etc.).
- Add scoring pressure: *“You must win 2 shots to win the game.”*
- Make it competitive: two players alternate as if in a real end, with observers providing crowd-like tension.
- Add time pressure: limited seconds to choose and deliver.

Outcome:

- Bridges the gap between technical practice and match play.
- Builds confidence in decision-making under pressure.
- Highlights whether corrections hold up in real-game conditions.
- Provides a safe environment to learn from mistakes before actual competition.

✓ With this, you now have a **tiered set of Pressure Drills**:

- **Countdown Challenge** → Time pressure.
- **Score-for-Precision** → Accuracy pressure.
- **Three-in-a-row** → Consistency pressure.
- **Simulated Match End** → Tactical/mental match pressure.

Pressure Drill: Breathing Drill (Routine Reset for Focus & Calm)

Objective:

To help players control nerves, lower tension, and focus attention before delivering a bowl. This develops consistency in pressured situations and builds a reliable pre-shot routine.

Setup:

- No special equipment required — just the mat, jack, and bowls.



- Works best before high-pressure deliveries (e.g., final bowl in a challenge, simulated match end).

Method:

1. Player stands behind the mat holding the bowl.
2. Take **three slow, deep breaths**:
 - Inhale deeply through the nose.
 - Exhale slowly through the mouth, feeling your shoulders relax.
 - Repeat three times.
3. After the breathing, the player **visualises the intended shot** (line, length, and finish).
4. Step onto the mat and deliver the bowl in rhythm, carrying the calm focus into the action.

Coaching Points:

- Stress the importance of **slow, controlled breathing** — not rushed or shallow.
- Encourage vivid but simple visualisation: imagine the bowl rolling smoothly over the chosen line to its target.
- Watch body language: shoulders and grip should look relaxed before delivery.
- Ask reflective questions: *“How did your body feel after the breaths?”* or *“Did the bowl feel more controlled?”*

Progression:

- Start in practice with no pressure, then apply it during pressure drills (e.g., Three-in-a-row, Countdown Challenge).
- Use it before every bowl in a simulated match end.
- Advanced: shorten to a single deep breath + quick visualisation, to use naturally in competitive play.

Outcome:

- Reduces muscle tension and “rushed” deliveries caused by nerves.
- Improves mental focus and shot commitment.
- Provides a repeatable pre-shot routine that players can rely on in competition.
- Builds resilience by making composure part of normal practice.



✓ This drill works as a “mental skills anchor” and fits neatly at the start of your **Pressure Drills section**, teaching players how to *reset and focus* before the physical drills.

Pressure Drill: Pre-shot Routine Practice (Define & Rehearse a Routine)

Objective:

To create and rehearse a consistent **3–5 step pre-shot routine** that helps the player stay calm, focused, and confident under pressure. A stable routine reduces nerves, anchors rhythm, and promotes consistent performance in matches.

Setup:

- Works on any rink, at any length.
- No special equipment required beyond a jack and bowls.
- Coach and player agree on a simple, personal pre-shot routine to be repeated before every delivery.

Method:

1. **Define the Routine** – Player chooses 3–5 steps that feel natural and helpful. Examples:
 - Take 1–2 deep breaths.
 - Visualise the line and weight of the shot.
 - Step onto the mat, aligning feet.
 - Bounce or roll the bowl in the hand once (if it helps focus).
 - Fix eyes on the landing spot.
 - Deliver smoothly.
2. **Rehearse the Routine** – Player practises delivering bowls with the same sequence before every shot.
3. **Repetition & Consistency** – Run 4–6 ends (or 20 bowls) where the focus is not on the outcome, but on following the routine correctly every time.

Coaching Points:

- Stress that the routine must be **personal**: it should calm the player and prepare them, not feel forced.
- Keep it **simple and short** (3–5 steps). Longer routines can break down under real match pressure.



Berkshire Bowls Coaching Scheme



- Encourage discipline: every bowl, whether in practice or game, starts with the same process.
- Reinforce positive body language — standing tall, confident grip, clear focus.
- Ask reflective questions: *“Did following your routine help you feel more prepared?”*

Progression:

- Start in normal practice.
- Add pressure layers: use the routine in Countdown Challenge, Score-for-Precision, or Simulated Match End drills.
- Test consistency: coach interrupts with distractions, then asks the player to restart their routine before delivering.
- Advanced: encourage routine use during competition and record if it improves consistency.

Outcome:

- Builds confidence and focus under pressure.
- Prevents rushing or freezing before delivery.
- Creates a sense of control, even in high-stakes match moments.
- Establishes a lifelong performance habit — elite bowlers often credit pre-shot routines as a cornerstone of success.

✓ Now your **Pressure Drills** set includes:

- Breathing Drill
- Pre-shot Routine Practice
- Countdown Challenge
- Score-for-Precision
- Three-in-a-row Challenge
- Simulated Match End



Appendix B – Glossary of Coaching Terms

MAE – Mean Absolute Error: Average distance bowls finish from the target (ignores whether short or long).

KR – Knowledge of Results: Feedback about outcome (e.g., 'That bowl finished 0.5m past the jack').

KP – Knowledge of Performance: Feedback about technique/process (e.g., 'Your step was too short').

Pre-shot Routine: A consistent series of actions/thoughts before delivery that anchors focus and reduces anxiety.

Breathing Drill: Controlled breathing technique to reduce tension and steady delivery rhythm.

Simulated Pressure Drill: Practice designed to mimic competitive stress (e.g., timed shots, scoring challenges).

