

# Slatom Vision

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Photography by Lynn Novakofski

**W**here and what you are looking at while skiing can make a huge impact on how you ski. I grew up being told to watch that right-hand gate ball go by my leg while entering the course. Look 50 feet up course of the buoy you are headed at so that you can take as much angle as possible. Whatever you do, don't look at or watch the buoy your coming into or you will look down and fall down. More recently you hear about looking down course while finishing a turn and to look at the back of the boat while in your lean. From these comments, you can start to understand that vision *IS* an important aspect of your skiing even if you are not making it part of your training routine. I have tried many different visual keys throughout the years, and the

my position (stand tall with hips forward and handle low). I keep my vision locked on the pre gate until it reaches my desired distance away from me. Not only can I see the fast approaching pre gate, but also in my peripheral vision I can see my upper chest in a proud position, my shoulders are rolled back, and my arms are straight and low. You can "see" much more than just what you are looking at if you pay attention. Now that my starting location has come, I let my vision be the bigger picture. It's like you had a camera and you were zoomed in on the pre gate right up until you start your edge out. The moment you commit to your edge out, you zoom out and see the boat and upcoming course. I am looking down course between the boat and buoy 2 while I make

you will be able to take in. At first, this will feel nearly impossible. Over time, you will begin to see much more.

As I close in on the apex of my turn for the gates I slowly take my eyes from looking at buoy 2 down course and I move just my eyeballs to look out in front of the boat at buoy 1. Just because I move my eyes does not mean that my head has to move. As you train your vision, you will learn to separate your head and eye movement. Yes, at the apex of my gate, I shift my vision to buoy 1 out in front of the boat. I believe that by doing this, I have the longest time to focus on the buoy I am going at. The longer I can see this buoy, the more chance I have to make the best approach and turn possible. Also, if I focus my vision on buoy 1 at this point, I can see the gates in my peripheral and can be sure that I will make them. It is important to note that most skiers have their vision locked on the actual gates from the moment they start their edge out. This cuts off a lot of the outward pre-turn direction and does not set you up for a good approach to buoy 1. So as I connect the power triangle while turning in for the gates, my vision is locked on buoy 1. As I start to accelerate toward the gates, the boat blocks my vision on buoy 1. Don't be distracted by this. Use your X-ray vision to see through the boat to where buoy 1 is. In a quick moment, you will again be able to see buoy 1 as you close in on the wake crossing. Stay locked on buoy 1 as you edge change. Here I can see buoy 1 out in front of me and in my peripheral vision I can see that my chest is proud, my shoulders are level, and my left hip is high and connected to the handle all the way through the edge change. After the edge change, my vision remains locked on buoy 1. As I feel my ski cast out wider than my body, I can see the pylon, the

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following is what I have settled on. It might not be the absolute optimal vision, but it is what I have been most consistent and comfortable using.

After a deep-water start, I get myself to my starting position (one foot outside of the left wake) as soon as possible. I take a big picture look at the lake. Seeing the entire lake. There is something about the level horizon line of lakes that I find to be both calming and centering. By taking a moment to center my vision, I find that I can take in a lot more vision than when I tunnel vision the course. As the boat approaches the pre gates, I am focused on maintaining

my edge out. In my peripheral vision, I can see my right hip up to the handle and my ski tip out in front of me. At the edge change out for my gates, my vision shifts slightly out to buoy 2 down course. This helps me to keep moving out while in the pre turn, setting up a smoother, more consistent turn in. I can see the boat in the peripheral of my right eye. I can see a line being drawn from the pylon, through the handle, through my right shoulder, and I can see my ski out beside me with my left peripheral. I see all of this with my main vision focus being that I am looking down course at 2 buoy. The more you hone in on your vision, the more

rope, the handle and my inside shoulder make a perfect line even though my vision is locked on buoy 1. Although I cannot see my outside (right) shoulder, I know that it too is in the line I just talked about. I keep my vision locked on buoy 1 until the moment that I am sure that I will make it. On easier passes, my apex comes up course of the buoy so my vision will roll from buoy 1 to buoy 2 before I actually get to buoy 1. As the line gets shorter, my apex comes later, even after the buoy goes by me. There is no exact place when your vision should switch to the following buoy out in front of the boat because you always come into buoys at different placements. All I can tell you is that I keep my vision locked on the buoy I am going at until I "know" I am going to be able to turn it without hitting it. At or very near the apex, my eyes look for the following buoy out in front of the boat. At the apex of buoy 1, I look for buoy 2. It will be out in front of the boat. I can see my outside hand and right hip connecting to the handle in my peripheral vision. I have my X-ray vision ready to see

through the boat when it impedes my vision of buoy 2. And so begins the above described process.

**Here are some thoughts to ponder:**

- 1.** Training your vision should be an everyday part of your skiing. Your vision provides balance. Falling is a lack of balance. Thus, if you have better vision, you will fall less.
- 2.** Just because your eyes move does not mean that your head has to move. With training, you can teach your head to remain facing down course while your eyes look for the next buoy across the lake.
- 3.** Your actual focus point is not all that you see. You can see a lot of things in your peripheral vision that can help your skiing. For instance, you do not have to stare at the gates to know that you will go through them.
- 4.** Good vision helps to set up great pre turns that will help to make the finish of your turns more consistent.

- 5.** When I am skiing well, I can see everything. When I am skiing poorly, I see very little. It's what I call the strobe effect. Seeing only quick pictures not the entire picture. Train your vision and you will see much more.
- 6.** A good way to train your vision is to work on it while sitting on your couch or favorite chair. Close your eyes and visualize yourself skiing the course. Notice all the things I mentioned above.
- 7.** What works for me may not work for everyone. Use this as a guide but make amendments for your own preferences.
- 8.** Vision, vision, vision...don't forget to train your vision.

*Chris Rossi is a professional slalom skier and coach who is sponsored by Radar Skis, Tige Boats and Performance Ski & Surf. For more discussion on this and many other water ski-related topics, visit [proskicoach.com](http://proskicoach.com) or come ski with Chris at SkiTek in Orlando, Fla.*

