

# BOB'S LIVING GOLF BOOK

Bob Jones  
(The Recreational Golfer)

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Cover: 12th hole, Angeles National GC, Sunland, CA

## INTRODUCTION

Good golf is easy. Though no one intends to play golf badly, they do because of bad habits. This book is about building good habits that enable recreational golfers to play good golf.

There is a lot of material in this book, much of it is either things you have never heard before, or new ways of looking at old things. You won't take it all in during one reading. Browse through the book and pick out what interests you most. If you keep coming back, you will always see something you didn't see before, or understand old things in a new way.

However, no book, no video, and no teacher can inform you exactly how to play good golf. All that can be done is to point you the right direction. From there, you alone determine how to translate what you see and hear into hitting good shots. But I would direct you to two books that will get you farther along the path to good golf than any others I know. They are, *Swing the Clubhead*, by Ernest Jones, and *Understanding the Golf Swing*, by Manuel de la Torre. Jones's book is an original work of genius but it is somewhat dated in its presentation. De la Torre's book is a modern conception of Jones's teachings, doubly valid because de la Torre was a long-time student of Jones's. Both of their teachings have been confirmed in modern research on external focus by Gabriele Wulf at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. I urge you read both books. I would make an update of my own to all this work: think *clubface*, not *clubhead*.

What you do with your body can change and slip away over time. Technique requires clear understanding of what you are doing and continual maintenance. What the club has to do never changes. If you understand this and give your swing over to the club, you will always swing correctly, and never lose that swing.

To obviate the confusion left-handed golfers face when reading instruction books, I refer when necessary to the

leading side (the side of the body closer to the target) and the trailing side (the side farther away from the target).

Key points are indicated by the red finger: 

Videos are indicated by the blue movie camera: 

Play well, and have fun.

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## THE NUTSHELL

The foundation of good golf is a good swing. After that, chipping and approach putting are the most important strokes for a recreational golfer.

More importantly, only if your mind is relaxed can you pick the right shot and be at ease as you make your stroke. This point cannot be overemphasized. More poor shots are caused by mental rather than technical lapses.

Remember most of all that recreational golf is a social game. People will not remember the score you shot, but they will remember how you made them feel. By that do you measure your success as a golfer.

Your hands must face the same way when you strike the ball as they did when you formed your grip. Since rotation of the forearms governs the rotation of the hands, the orientation of your forearms when you put your hands on the club determine whether that can occur.

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## SWING

*"Good scores are only made possible by good play up to the green."* – Percy Boomer

The words below describe the fundamentals of a working golf swing—a swing that hits the ball straight with adequate distance. These are instructions for building a golf *swing*—something that swings. If you think the objective is to wind up and give the ball a good smack, you will fail.

### STATICS (Setup)

In this section I describe the setup for a full swing in the order you would apply. See the short game and putting sections for ideas on how to set up for those shots.

**Your Mind (part 1).** When you have selected the shot and the club, it is time to stop thinking. Give your mind something else to do by saying to yourself, "One, half, half, half...", in a relaxing way, and letting that feeling continue. This mini-meditation should take only a few seconds and will banish stray thoughts for the time it takes to make your stroke. You can feel calmness set in. At that point, let your mind ride on that calm feeling as you begin your setup routine.

**Grip.** Stand up and let your arms hang naturally. Look down and notice which direction the back of each hand faces. These directions indicate the natural conformation of your forearms. Since the orientation of your hands is controlled by the conformation of your forearms, if that conformation is not respected with you take hold of the club, the forearms will rotate back to their natural position sometime during the swing, taking your hands and thus the clubface with them.

With the sole of the club resting on the ground and your left arm hanging down, swing the arm over to place the left hand on the handle without rotating the forearm. Do the same for the right hand. You now have a grip that fits your personal physical conformation. Form your grip this way before every shot and look at it to be sure it is right. Placing your hands on the club by feel alone causes errors.

The location of your hands on the grip is important, too. Move your hands up and down the handle until you find the precise spot where the club feels light and balanced. Placing your hands too high on the grip makes the club feel heavy and hard to control. Placing your hands too close to the shaft makes the club feel stiff and unresponsive.

Hold the handle kindly, and a little more firmly with your leading hand, mainly in its last three fingers, than with your trailing hand. Monitor your grip pressure throughout the round. It can tighten up without you noticing it.

**Aim.** For the ball to go where you want it to go, you have to be aimed at your target. You can't hit the ball north if you're facing northeast.

Stand behind the ball and hold out the clubshaft horizontally, so it covers the ball and points at the target. Find a spot on the ground underneath the shaft about three to four inches in front of the ball. Keeping your eye on that spot, walk up beside the ball and put the club down behind the ball so the grooves on the clubface are perpendicular to the line from the spot to the ball. Step into your stance at a right angle to the grooves, left foot first, then right foot.

Your perception of being aimed correctly needs constant attention. Check your aim every time you go to the range, and as well when you warm up before a round, by aiming at some target, with a club or an alignment stick laid on the ground behind you. Aim yourself, step into your stance, and pull the stick against your heels with the golf club you are holding. Step away for a down-the-line look that should show

the stick pointing to the left the target and parallel to the ball-target line.

Check your aim when you're playing by turning your head to look at your target. The contour of your nose can be seen as it partially blocks the vision of the trailing eye, making a curved frame. The target will always be seen in the same spot in relation to that frame when your aim is correct.

A teaching pro once told me that a large percentage of his lessons to correct a swing flaw turn into a lesson in aiming. When you are not aimed properly, the unconscious mind knows this and tries to compensate, but the attempt is rarely successful. Get it right to begin with.

**Stance and Posture.** After you have aimed the club and set your feet to get the ball into position, stand up straight and square up your shoulders. Bend over from your hips by moving them straight backwards—do not squat down. Do not let your abdomen collapse by slumping your lower back as you bend. Make sure the weight distribution on the soles of your feet does not change. Let your head bend forward comfortably. Your knees will be bent slightly, but your calves should remain vertical. The line across the shoulders should be parallel to the ball-target line. That line, more than how your feet are oriented, determines your swing path.

Let arms should hang at full extension. which is the shape they have when they hang down naturally at your sides. It does not mean to stretch them out so they are absolutely straight.

**Ball Position.** Ball position plays a major role in achieving ball-ground contact. Play all shots hits off the ground with the ball the same spot. Find that spot by swinging an iron and making a divot. Without moving your feet, bend over and place a ball on the ground where the divot starts (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** The ball is placed in your stance behind the spot where your divot starts.

The ball placed even a quarter-inch out of position can make a difference. Playing the ball off your left heel for all shots is a professional method that should be avoided by recreational golfers.

To place the ball the right distance away from you, make a few swings without a ball in front of you. Pay attention to where the clubhead flashes over the ground as it passes before you during your throughswing. That is where the ball should go. If you ever feel as if you are reaching for the ball, it is too far away. It's unlikely that you will set up with the ball too close to you.

Sometimes you have to alter the ball position forward or back to play a special shot. Make an adjustment of only an inch at most. More than that and you will have to adjust your swing to get to the ball, which adds uncertainty to the stroke.

To tee the ball with irons, tee it in the same place as you do when the ball is on the ground, and only just high enough to give yourself a good lie. With hybrids and fairway woods, tee the ball up about a half-inch, and one ball forward of center.

As a general rule with the driver, tee the ball forward of center with the top of the clubhead even with the equator of the ball. It will take some experimentation to find the optimum combination of these two positions for your swing, and if a significant deviation from either one of them gives

you the best results, go with it.

As the round progresses there can be a tendency to place the ball both more forward and farther away from you, whether it is teed up or on the ground, because it feels like you're setting up for a more powerful strike. All you're doing is getting yourself out of position.

Your body changes from day to day in how relaxed it is and in how limber it is, both of which can change where the club finds the ground. Thus, ball position needs to be refigured during your warm-up before you play. Any difference you might find will be small, but important.

**Placing the Clubhead.** Touch the sole of the clubhead lightly to the top of the grass, still feeling the weight of the club in your hands. When you take the club away, it will come away smoothly. If the clubhead is resting with all of its weight on the ground, you feel the weight of the club for the first time as you take it away, which creates tension if your hands react by clamping down on the handle. I do not recommend hovering the club off the ground. That, too, can put tension in your hands which affects the takeaway and thus the entire swing.

When your setup is complete, you should feel great confidence that the shot you are about to hit will be a good one. Practice your setup daily at home with the object of achieving that feeling.

## DYNAMICS (Swing)

**Takeaway.** Start the swing by swinging the toe of the club back calmly and smoothly. Feel your arms swinging straight across your torso, parallel to the ball-target line. The clubpath will arc inwards as the torso turns. Do not rush. The need for clubhead speed does not come until later in the swing.

**Backswing.** Your arms continue to feel like they are swinging across your torso. Because your torso is turning, they will no longer be swinging parallel to the ball-target line, but it might feel as if they are. The left arm stays at full extension, like it was at address, all the way to the end of the backswing. Don't worry about hinging your wrists. Retaining the critical angle (below) will provide all the hinging you need. Do not rush the backswing. That disrupts both your tempo and your rhythm.

Just as you would take a hammer back only so far to hit a nail, end the backswing at a place just before the feeling of connection between the clubface and the ball disappears. A bit of experimentation will show you what I mean. Complete your backswing by bringing the left shoulder to your chin. This detail is important.

**Reversing Direction.** There is no one way to start the forward swing. In whatever way you want to start it, the sequence of lower body, torso, and arms is best.

At the top of the backswing there is a second angle, this one made by the leading forearm and the clubshaft. Releasing that angle too soon is a major swing flaw. All it takes to prevent that from happening is to hold onto that angle for a split second after you start swinging the club down. That locks in that angle to release by itself at the appropriate moment. Do not try to help it release or hold onto it deliberately too long.

You have heard about weight shift. Yes, your weight does transfer from the right side to the left side, but that is something that happens by itself. You don't have to consciously attend to it.

**Through the ball.** The arms continue to feel as if they were swinging parallel to the ball-target line. By having retained the forearm-shaft angle, you have set up its natural, in-time release because of the momentum the club builds up as you

swing back toward the ball. The most important technical fundamental of ball striking can now occur: *the hands lead the clubhead through the ball* (Figure 2). Every good golfer always does this. No poor golfer ever does it. Applying this technique along with retaining the critical angle is what produces good golf shots time after time. Resist any temptation at this point to add a little hit or steerage with your trailing hand. That will throw the clubhead ahead of your hands and ruin the shot.

**Finish.** The finish is not whatever is left over when the swing ends, but is one of the most important positions of the swing (Figure 3). Many swing problems can be solved merely by swinging to an ideal finish position, which is with your belt buckle facing the target, up on your right toe, hands beside your head with the clubhead near your right shoulder, relaxed, and in perfect balance.



Figure 2. The hands lead the clubhead, but only slightly, through impact.  
(Brooks Koepka)



**Figure 3.** An ideal finish position. It takes doing things right to get here. (Author)

## FIVE SWING DETAILS

**The Critical Angle.** There is an angle made at address by the clubshaft and arms in the setup, as seen from a down-the-line point of view (Figure 4).

At address you set the clubhead down behind the ball in you want to be its impact position. The ball is centered on the clubface, which is square to the target. The goal of the swing is to strike the ball with the clubface in this same orientation. In addition to having the right grip for you, maintaining this critical angle helps that happen.

Losing the critical angle means it straightens, raising the heel of the sole of the clubhead and depressing the toe. The wrists and hands will have become too involved along the way, taking the clubface out of its address orientation with little chance of it returning there by impact. A good shot is unlikely to ensue.



**Figure 4.** Ernie Els showing you the critical angle made by your arms and the clubshaft that must be preserved during the swing.

**The Suspension Point.** [Paul Runyan](#) spoke of a suspension point for the swing, which he identified as the knob at the base of the neck (C7 vertebra). What he had to say about it is so important I am going to quote it in full.

*"I regard the suspension point as being the axis of the golf swing. The arms swinging in the shoulders revolve around it. While even good players find it difficult to maintain the suspension point in a perfectly constant position as they swing on full shots, I do feel that any shifting of it should be minimal. Some shifting may be necessary to allow free swinging, but too much sideways or upward or downward movement can thwart consistently solid contact with the ball."*<sup>1</sup>

Avoid movement forward or backward, too.

**Arms.** With your arms at full extension at address, your elbows feel connected. Retain that feeling throughout the swing.

You hear a lot about the importance of forearm rotation. All arm rotation in the golf swing should occur in the shoulder joint, never in the forearms. If you rotate your forearms at some point in your swing, you rotate the clubface out of square. Now you have to rotate the clubface back to square by the moment of impact. That's a timing problem you do not want to have.

**Rhythm and Tempo.** Rhythm and tempo are the foundation of the golf swing. Rhythm is the relative duration of different parts of the swing. Tempo refers to the overall duration of the swing. Lots of instruction books and YouTube videos get this backwards.

*Rhythm.* Swing back calmly and start the forward swing at the same speed you took the club back. Gravity, turning, and the unassisted release of the clubshaft will increase the speed of your clubhead up to and through the ball. That is your rhythm.

*Tempo.* Swing only as fast as you can to consistently hit the ball on the center of the clubface. That is your personal tempo. Once you have found it, don't change it. If your tempo speeds up in a desire to hit the ball farther, your swing will break down. Often a swing problem can be solved merely by slowing it down a bit so you hit the ball on the center of the clubface more often.

Changing your tempo should not change your rhythm, much like a song, regardless of being played fast or slow, still has the same internal rhythms.

A word on the driver. This club is designed to hit the ball a certain distance, just like every other club. Oh, yes, once in a while you launch one, but don't let that give you the wrong idea. Those are the rare moments when a perfect swing aligned with perfect impact geometry. Swing the driver with the same rhythm and tempo you use for your irons, in order to hit the ball on the center of the clubface. That's how you get all the distance you are routinely capable of.

**Your Mind (part 2).** Practice the principles I presented until they become second nature so you don't have to think on the course, just perform. It is best to practice your swing by making slow motion swings without hitting balls. Slow motion swings allow your mistakes and successes to be obvious where you might not notice them if you had swung at a normal

speed. From time to time do hit balls to make sure you're on the right track. But hitting balls too often when you're learning swing principles can get to you focusing on the results instead of the process.

**How the Pros Do It.** This video of Ernie Els, Fred Couples, and Vijay Singh [demonstrates these principles](#) clearly.



## MENTAL GAME

Relaxation is a mental attribute that leads to a physical one. Relax your mind first by getting that moving. Think, "One, half of that, half, half..." After three or four "halfs" let the words go and let the feeling continue. You should feel your body relaxing as you do this.

Concentration is keeping your mind moving, which keeps it in the present. The past, good or bad, gets left behind and the future never arises.

You cannot expect the principles of relaxation and concentration to work on the golf course if you do not use them any other time. They need to be part of your everyday life so you can apply them on the golf course without your having to think about them.

Your mind and body need to be in the same place at all times. It does no good to stand over the ball with your mind several hundred yards down the fairway. Both mind and body need to be attending to what is in front of you, the ball, and you swinging at it. Do that right and the fairway or green will be taken care of.

If you feel yourself getting frustrated, defeated, lost, etc., correct yourself right away by standing up straight and looking straight ahead. Do the relaxation meditation and move on.

Hit only shots you know will succeed. Sometimes that might cost you an extra stroke, but the heroic effort that you don't quite believe in can cost you two or more extra when it fails.

Many people think tension shows up first in the hands and radiates through the body from there. They are wrong. The first sign of tension shows up in the shoulders. It is keeping the shoulders relaxed throughout the swing that keeps everything else relaxed.

The only thing that should be on your mind the moment before you take the club away is the feeling of joy over what you are about to do.

You might have heard that golf is not a game of perfect. Actually, it is. Do you step up to the ball and expect to hit a mediocre shot, or worse? You should expect to hit the shot your skills allow. The trap is that while we should expect to hit a perfect shot, we get disappointed when we don't.

You should have no sense of uncertainty as you are about to swing the club away. But if it doesn't work out, no emoting because the ball went somewhere else. No wondering if your game is falling apart because you hit one bad shot. And so on. None of that.

All you can do is to pick a shot you believe in, hit it, see where it ends up, and start thinking about the next shot. Period. Hit the ball, and move on.

**Don't Do These Things.** By avoiding these mental errors, you will become a better player.

- trying too hard
- hitting while upset
- being intimidated by the situation
- losing your focus temporarily
- trying a shot you have never practiced
- trying to get too much out of the situation
- not seeing the situation fully

- pick the wrong club
- play the wrong shot (around the green)



## CHIPPING, PITCHING, SAND

*“The secret of golf is turning three strokes into two.”*

-Bobby Jones

From close in, get the ball on the green with one shot. Getting the ball near to the pin is a secondary goal.

**Standards.** Once you get your handicap down to 12, your swing is good enough. Start working in earnest on your short game. Get lessons to learn how to hit the three basic short game shots, mastering them one at a time, in this order.

- Greenside chipping. It is the easiest shot in golf to get good at. Make up and down an expectation.
- Pitching from 50-100 yards. Hitting the green in one shot from this range is a must.
- Sand. Learn at first how to get out of a fairway bunker, then out of a greenside bunker. They have different techniques, and the fairway bunker shot is the easiest one to learn.

**Preliminary.** Short game swings are not abbreviated versions of the full swing. The pitching and chipping strokes are each their own animal. Two things are common to both of them, though: light grip pressure, slower tempo.

These are finesse shots. You are not banging the ball. You are caressing it. This is where the short game begins: light grip pressure, slower tempo.

### Basic Chipping

Go through this process when you chip:

*Preliminaries:*

- Read the green. Plan a chip shot as if it were an approach putt, because the ball will roll across the green the same way.
- Aim the shot carefully. There's no reason to get the

distance right but end up three feet to one side because you didn't pay attention to this detail.

- Visualize a greenside chip in its entirety, all the way to the hole from where the ball is now.

- You sink chip shots by letting the ball run up to the hole, instead of flying it up there, but don't be obsessive about making the ball start running as soon as possible as you are frequently advised. Go to the practice green and toss a few balls underhanded, from about six inches above the ground, to a hole in a way that makes sense to you if you want the ball to go in. That is what the ball should do when you chip.

*Setup:*

- Place the ball in the center of your stance. Put your weight slightly forward, and lean the clubshaft slightly forward. Use a gentle grip pressure. Grip down next to the metal for control.
- Aim the clubface at your target.
- Relax your grip pressure.
- Relax your mind. This is an easy shot.

*The stroke:*

Your chipping stroke should have these characteristics:

- Let your wrists break slightly by themselves when the club goes back, but do not overdo it.
- Your hips can turn. The lower body should not be frozen in place.
- Swinging forward, the shaft and the trailing thigh feel like they are moving together.
- The hips turn. They do not slide.
- The trailing knee breaks forward through the shot. The trailing heel comes off the ground.
- The trailing hand slides the sole of the club across the grass, just like it does when you make your practice strokes.
- The leading wrist straightens at impact and stays straight through to the finish of the stroke. The clubhead stays low through the ball and the clubface ends up facing at the sky.
- Throughout the stroke, maintain a light grip pressure.

Many mishits are caused by holding the handle too tightly.

- Make your stroke the same length every time. Distance is governed by the club you use.

**Chipping Strategy** Plan your chip as you would an approach putt going all the way to the hole. Do not think only of the landing spot. Make sure your chip arrives. That's the only way you can sink it. Always leave the flagstick in when you chip.

If the hole is near a slope, chip to a place that ensures the ball will not run down the slope and away from the hole. Sometimes that means not aiming at the hole. On the other hand, it is sometimes wise chip to leave the ball in a spot that leaves you with an uphill putt to the hole. These two rules seem contradictory, but if you play the shot correctly, they're not.

## Special Chips.

### *Chipping out of greenside rough*

You can encounter three basic lies when chipping out of greenside rough:

(1) In rare instances a ball can be perched on top of the grass. Hit this chip with an 8-iron, using your putting stroke to brush the top of the grass as you hit the ball. Do not disturb the grass in any way beforehand lest the ball fall down into it.

(2) When the ball is sits partway down into greenside rough, poke your finger into the rough near the ball, all the way to the ground to determine where the bottom of the ball is in relation to the ground so you don't fluff the ball or blade it. Chip with a sand wedge, using your normal greenside chipping stroke. Be sure to follow through.

(3) The ball can be resting all the way down on the ground. Using a lob wedge, take the club back sharply upward and swing down steeply with a wristy stroke, in an attempt to thump the ground underneath the ball with the sole of the club. You can't really do this, but when the sole hits the

ground just behind the ball, it will slide underneath the ball and pop it out. This shot takes a lot of practice.

### *Chipping off hardpan*

If you have a tight lie, use a wedge with four degrees of bounce if you have to hit the ball over something. Put the ball back in your stance and make a standard stroke, but be looking an inch or so in front of the ball instead of at the ball. This will prevent you from blading the ball. Use your putter if there is no obstacle between the ball and the hole.

### *Chipping to a green above or below your feet, level lie*

The ball won't always be on the same level as the green. If the ball is below the level of the green, use one more-lofted club for every three feet of elevation difference. i.e., a 56° wedge in place of a 52° wedge. The reason for doing this is that the ball will hit the green at a more horizontal angle and run more than usual. Do the opposite for a ball lying above the level of the green—one less-lofted club for every three feet of elevation difference, because the ball will hit the green at a steeper angle and run less than usual.

### *Chipping with ball on an uphill or downhill slope*

If the ball is on a slope that runs directly uphill, pick a less-lofted club than you would normally use for the distance to be covered. Stand perpendicular to the horizon and chip directly into the slope. Do not swing with the slope lest the ball pop straight up in the air. Chipping down a slope requires you place the ball outside of your uphill foot. Put more weight on the downhill foot and lean slightly in that direction. Use your most-lofted club. Pick up the clubhead and chop down gently on the back of the ball. There will be no follow-through with the clubhead. Both of these strokes take practice learn how the ball will behave once struck.

### *Chipping Out From Under a Tree*

Have you ever found the ball under a tree and the only way out is to chip under low-hanging branches? This seems like an impossible shot. Every club in your bag is too lofted to keep the ball down and under the branches. Every club except one—your putter. With only about 4° of loft, a firm putting stroke will keep the ball low and get it back in the fairway. Remember, it's a firm stroke, somewhat like you might make in hitting a 50-foot putt. It is not a whack. If you try it that way, you are likely to mishit the ball and end up still under the tree.

### *Ball in a little depression*

With this lie, you can't make a level swing at the ball without blading it. Play the ball back in your stance, swing a bit vertically to get the leading edge of the club underneath the ball, and hit the ball a little harder to get it out of the hole with enough momentum to get it to the hole. There won't be much of a follow-through. Because you hit down on the ball, it will have more spin than usual, so allow for the ball not to run as far as you would expect it to.

### *The Azinger Flop*

If the ball is just a few yards off the green and the pin is very close by, take out your most lofted wedge. With a very light grip pressure, swing lightly, short backswing, and through the ball as if you want the ball to run up the clubface. The ball will pop up in the air, land, and stop. There must be a cushion of grass beneath the ball for this shot to work. It is not meant for a tight lie. I saw Paul Azinger demonstrate this shot on TV some years ago.

**The Pitching Stroke:** The pitch is not like a full swing but shorter. It is a different stroke. Swing the club back with quiet hands. Feel like there is no wrist break at all. Actually there will be some, but it should feel as if there is none. Let your

lower body rotate as you swing back, but feel as if your upper body is tilting toward the target. This is not a reverse pivot. It merely keeps the upper body in the same place. Swing with the arms back through the ball and end with a full follow through. This is an all-arms stroke. The hands play no role other than holding the club.

Swing through the ball by sliding the sole of the club along the ground as you do when you take a practice swing. There is no need to hit down on the ball and take a huge divot in the effort to impart backspin.

If you want the ball to run when it lands, set the clubface square behind the ball. To spin the ball so it checks up, open the clubface slightly and swing the same way.

**Pitching strategy.** In pitching, the most important thing is to get the ball on the green with that one shot. *The next shot after a pitch must be a putt.* Do not aim at the pin unless you are skilled at this shot. Do not aim in a direction that gets you in trouble if you mishit the shot. Inspect your lie carefully. Make sure you can pitch easily off it.

You must know your distances to pitch effectively. See: Calibrating your short game.

Sometimes a pitch is the wrong shot to play. If you have a wide-open look at the pin from no more than about 60 yards, take out a 7-iron and hit a chip-and-run, a much safer and easier shot to hit. Just make the intervening ground is clear enough to get the ball on the green.

## Special Pitches.

### *The Nothing Pitch*

Hit this pitch from about 30-50 yards when you have to stop the ball dead. Use a 56-degree wedge. The ball has to be sitting up on a cushion of grass. Hold the club loosely, so loose it's almost falling out of your hands. Take a slow backswing, and a slow downswing. Do not let the club accelerate through the ball. It will, but feel like it doesn't. Don't hit the ball—try to

slide the club underneath it. The result is a ball that floats up in the air, just falls out of the sky, lands, and sits. This shot is really a bigger version of the Azinger Flop.

### *Pitching Off a Tight Lie*

Play the ball one ball-width back of center. Put eighty percent of your weight on the foot closest to the hole. Grip down halfway so you have a finer control of the club. Point the shaft at your belt buckle.

Hit the ball more with your body turn than with your arm swing, and definitely not with your hands. Your wrists can be loose, but not floppy; they must not be rigid. Do not aim for the back of the ball. Instead, aim for the ground the ball is sitting on. That is what you are trying to hit, and hit it with the sole of the club. Keep the clubhead low to the ground on the follow-through. When your stroke is finished, the clubshaft should be pointing at the hole, and the clubface should be facing the sky.

## **Calibrate your short game.**

### *Chipping*

Select your chipping clubs. You should have more than one. You can get by with three, say an 8-iron, pitching wedge, and a sand wedge, but you could use any and every club from a 7-iron to a lob wedge. Pick a club and, using a standard chipping stroke, hit ten balls with that. Do not chip to a hole or a target. Do not look up after the shot to see where the ball ended up because you will try to hit the next ball a certain distance. This needs to be a blind test. After you have hit ten balls, there should be a reasonably tight cluster. Step off the distance to the center of the cluster. Ignore the ones you might have chunked or bladed. That distance is the calibrated chipping distance for that club. Write it down. Calibrate the each club in your chipping set the same way. [Here is a fuller description.](#)

To use these calibrations, step off the distance halfway to

the hole and double it to find your chipping club. We intuitively discern when we are halfway between two points, so there is no need to walk all the way to the hole.

### *Pitching*

Create three partial swings, a short one, a half swing, and a 3/4 one. Practice them so you can duplicate each length consistently. Select your pitching clubs. Anything from a 9-iron to a lob wedge is eligible. Take one club and hit some balls to a target using the short swing. Adjust your distance to the target so your shots go exactly that far, then measure how far away the target is. Do the same with that club using the half swing and the 3/4 swing. Now you have three guaranteed pitching distances for that club. Repeat the exercise with your other pitching clubs. I recommend that you have at least three. More is better.

These are the distances you fly the ball. In play, you have to take release into account. Say you have a pitch that you know goes 65 yards and you laser the pin and find that it is 65 yards away. Whatever you do, don't hit that pitch! It will land and release about four yards. Hit your 60-yard pitch instead.

Few courses have yardage markers inside 100 yards, so a rangefinder is a must. Every now and then check a few club and distance combinations to make sure your pattern is holding up. [Here is a fuller description.](#)

Once you have gone through these two exercises, get a 3x5 card and write down the chipping distances, by club, on one side, and the pitching distances, by club and swing, on the other side. This card goes into your bag for reference when you play.

### **Chip or Pitch?**

When your ball lies at a distance that seems too close for a pitch and too far away for a chip, decide this way.

(1) If there is anything that would prevent a rolling ball from getting on the green, you have to hit the ball over that obstacle. A pitch in that situation is automatic.

(2) Assuming there's a clear path to the green, check the lie. If the lie is tight, chip with a low-lofted club.

(3) If you have a good lie and good ground to play across, measure the distance from the ball to the edge of the green and from the edge of the green to the pin. If the ball-to-edge distance is *less than* the edge-to-pin distance, chip. Otherwise, pitch.

## Sand

### *Fairway Bunkers*

From a fairway bunker, take a wider stance than usual. Make sure you choose a club that has enough loft to get the ball over the lip of the bunker. Swing back and through only with your arms and shoulders. Keep your lower body movement to a minimum (but not frozen), especially your feet. Hit the ball first and nip it off the surface of the sand, disturbing only a few grains after the ball has been struck. This is not a power shot. Clean contact is the sole priority.

### *Greenside Bunkers*

Get the ball out of a greenside bunker by sliding the club underneath the ball. Open up the clubface and slide the sole through the sand, primarily with the trailing hand. As much as I beat the drum about having the handle lead the clubhead, this is one shot where you *do* want the clubhead to lead the handle through the ball. Make this more of a body swing than a hands and arms swing.

### *Fairway Bunkers*

From a fairway bunker, take a wider stance than usual. Make sure you choose a club that has enough loft to get the ball over the lip of the bunker. Swing back and through only with your arms and shoulders. Keep your lower body movement to

a minimum (but not frozen), especially your feet. Hit the ball first and nip it off the surface of the sand, disturbing only a few grains after the ball has been struck. This is not a power shot. Clean contact is the sole priority.

#### *40-Yard Bunker Shot*

The 40-yard bunker shot, a shot that pros think is really difficult, actually isn't. Play it like a fairway bunker shot, with an 8-iron and a partial swing, and again, hit the ball first and nip it off the surface of the sand.

#### *Sandy Lie In the Fairway*

You might find your ball resting on a bed of sand that is not in a bunker. If this is in the fairway, play it like a fairway bunker shot. If it is around the green, even though the sand seems to be packed hard, play a regular bunker shot. It might look like you can chip the ball, but if you try that shot you will get a lot of spin and the ball will check up the moment it lands.

**On-course pitching practice.** Learn how to pitch at the range, but learn how to use that skill by practicing pitching on the course. Play a round from tees that are too long for you. Or play from your regular tees and lay up way back with your second shot. You will end up hitting pitches into most holes.

## Chipping, Pitching, Sand

## PUTTING

*“Drive for show and putt for dough.”* – Everybody

Use a putter that lets you be in control of the stroke. Your putter should stay out of the way of the stroke. Its weight, its balance, its feel through the stroke, all of these are things you shouldn't notice when you swing the club. You should like the way it looks, too.

Look at **every** putt from behind before you hit it. Even the very shortest ones.

Look for how the green slopes around the hole. If you can't tell, stand behind the ball on a direct line to the hole. Take one step to the left, get behind the ball again, and take one step to the right. From one side the ground will look flat. From the other side it will seem like the ground is sloping down toward that side, and thus the break will be to that side.

Read uphill or downhill putts looking uphill. Looking downhill flattens contours.

On a sunny day, read putts looking into the sun. The sun at your back washes out contours.

Imagine how far away to the side of the hole a straight putt would miss. Aim your putt to a point that far away on the opposite side of the hole.

Draw an imaginary line from that aiming point back to the ball. Look for a mark on the green about three inches in front of the ball. The job is to roll the ball directly over that mark.

Position the ball forward of the center of your stance. Find the position you like and keep it there forever.

Square up the putterface to your alignment mark with the putter in front of the ball and held in your upper hand. Gently put your lower hand on the handle and lift the putter over the ball to place it behind the ball.

Never let the score you will make if the putt goes in or misses enter your mind.

Hold the putter lightly, especially in your trailing hand.

Arch your wrists upward slightly. This makes it easier to keep the putter going back in a straight line, of special advantage on putts up to about 15 feet.

Address the ball so the sole barely grazes the grass and the club's weight is in your hands. This makes it easy to swing the club back without having to lift it.

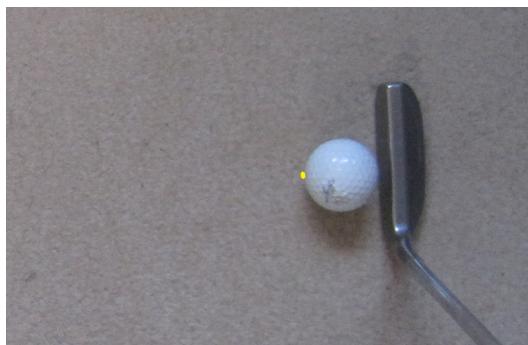
Do a quick meditation to calm your mind, then immediately begin the stroke by making a mental forward press the fits in with the rhythm and tempo of the actual stroke.

The rhythm and tempo of a putt is the same as for a swing. It should take the same time to stroke a putt as it does to hit your 7-iron.

Swing the putter with your hands, arms, and shoulders working as one unit. Your wrists do not break (but they are not rigid).

The only distance generator of the putt is the length of the backswing. No extra hit is added by the hands.

Take the "hit" out of your stroke by imagining the ball is transparent to the putter such that it will go right through the ball to strike it first on the side closest to the hole (Figure 4). At the time you would brace for that little hit, it has already occurred. (And if you think you don't brace for the hit, think again. You do.)



**4. To take the "hit" out of your stroke, think that the first contact your putter will make with the ball will be at the yellow dot.**

Even when putting, your hands must lead the clubhead. Not by much, but they must lead.

Hit the putt with enough speed for the ball to hold its line into the hole. Putts that sneak up on the hole and often fall off line in the last moment.

When you putt uphill, gravity is pushing back against the ball. Hit the ball hard enough to push back against the push back.

When you putt down a slope, hit the ball to go 90% of the way to the hole and let gravity take the ball the rest of the way.

To hit long putts close to the hole, do this. Stand halfway to the hole and about three steps to the left side of the line to the hole (to the right side if you play left-handed). Get into your putting stance and look back at the ball while you make

practice strokes. Where the clubhead intersects an imaginary line from you to the ball, that is the length of swing that will hit the ball the length of the putt. [See this blog post](#) for a fuller explanation.

Your strategy with long approach putts is to cozy it up to the hole to give luck a chance.

It doesn't really make a difference if the flagstick is in or out. The ball won't be knocked away unless it approaches the flagstick like a freight train.

Opening your stance on downhill putts and long putts can give you a better feel for how hard to hit the ball.

You should rarely aim outside the hole on short putts. You rarely need to start a three-foot putt outside the hole, if you hit it hard enough.

Before hitting a breaking putt, draw an imaginary line from your ball to the hole. Do not let the ball cross that line before it gets to the hole.

The difference between a putt that stopped six inches short and one that went a foot past is that the second putt had a chance to go in.

Good putters make the ball approach the hole at the same speed regardless of the length of the putt.

Watch good putters stand over a 6-foot putt. You can tell they know it's going in. Become one of those putters.

Breaking putts are easy, once you know the secret. [It's here.](#)

You may use any putting grip you want as long as its placement prevents your forearms from rotating during the stroke.

Swagger counts. Walk onto the green feeling like you own it. It helps to have practiced enough to back this up, though.

Before you step up to your putt, be completely convinced that the speed and line you have chosen are correct.

We play in Nature, not on polished courts. Once the ball has been struck there is an element of luck for it going in the hole that you have no control over. All you can do is make a good stroke and hope that is enough.

Instead of swinging the putter head, swing the shaft. The arms and shoulders rock, the wrists do not break, but swinging the *shaft* is the important thing.

**Reading a Gentle Break.** Sometimes you have a makeable putt that you think must break, but you can't really tell if it goes left or right. There are three ways you can read the green to find out.

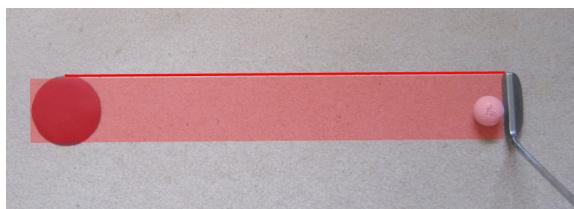
1. Back up. Way up. Get about 30 feet from the hole. From that distance, breaks get revealed that would be unnoticeable from right behind the ball, especially when there is no local slope, but the entire green is tilted one way or the other.
2. When you look at the putt from the side, which you should do routinely to check on uphill or downhill slopes, also look to see if the green is sloping toward you or away from you. A green sloping toward you will of course break in that direction, and vice versa.
3. Stand up behind the ball, take a sidestep to the left, and have a look. Now get back behind the ball, take a sidestep to the right, and look again. From one side you will see the green looking the same as it does from behind the ball, but from the

other side it will seem like you are looking into a slope. So if you see that slope when you step to the right, for example, you know that the putt will break left to right. If you see the slope when you step to the left, the putt breaks right to left.

[This video tip](#) shows you how it works.

**Sinking Short Putts.** Sinking short putts is more a matter of confidence than of technique. Learning to visualize a short putt in this way makes you a lot more comfortable as you address them, and that means more of them will go in.

Many books tell you to imagine a straight line from the ball to the hole and putt along that line. That is too delicate of an image. Something easier would work better. Putt instead long a band (Figure 4), as wide as the putter, going to the hole. Line up the toe of the putter with the corresponding edge of the hole, so that if the putter could magically slide across the green to the hole, the toe would graze that edge of the hole.



**Figure 4.**  
Lining up the  
tip of the putter  
with the edge  
of the hole.

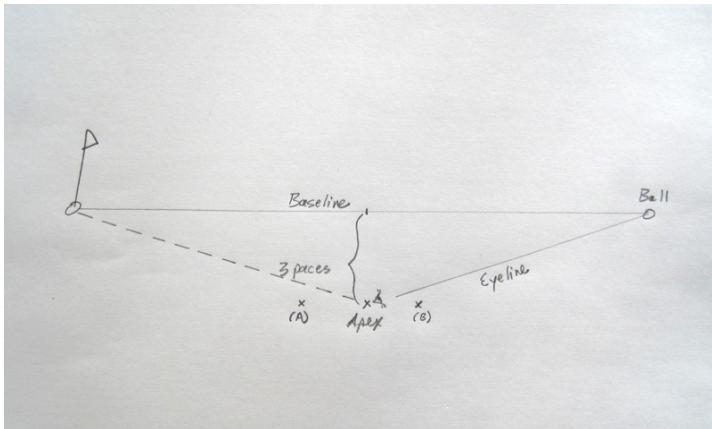
In the photo, the thin red line lines up of the toe of the putter with the outside edge of the hole, and the transparent red band is what the putterface stays square to—a much easier image to believe in that a tiny line going from the ball to the hole.

As for lining up the toe of the putter with the outside edge of the hole, it might seem like this would not be exact. But if you try this out, and the putterface is not square to the hole, you will see clearly that the toe is not "pointing" to the edge.

With practice, you can use this technique on breaking putts, too, by learning how much to line up the tip of the putterface outside (R to L break) or inside (L to R break) of the hole.

**Triangulated Approach Putting.** From a given distance, if the only distance generator is the length of the stroke, there is only one length of stroke that will get the ball to the hole. Triangulated Approach Putting is how to find that length. It depends on keeping internal factors constant: hitting the ball off the sweet spot consistently, always swinging with the same tempo, and having the sole distance generator for the putt be the length of the stroke.

With your ball, not a marker, on the green, walk to a spot (the apex) halfway from the ball and the hole, and nine feet (three steps) away at a right angle to the left of the ball-hole line (the baseline). See Figure 5. After a bit of practice, you'll be able to walk directly to this spot. Take a stance that faces the baseline. Turn your head to look at the ball. Take practice strokes while looking back at the ball. When the putter touches an imaginary line directly from the ball to your eye (the eyeline), make that stroke a few more times and notice the particular physical sensation you have when you have reached that length of this stroke. It might be how your arms brush against your torso. It might be a stretching feeling in a particular place on the side of your torso or your back. Once you've found this sensation, and it should take only three or four strokes to find it, walk up to the ball, set the putter down, and make a few refresher strokes that recreate the



**Figure 5.** The basic setup for Triangulated Approach Putting. The Apex is a point halfway between the ball and the hole and three paces beside the ball-target line (the Baseline). The Eyeline is used to fix the length of the putting stroke. The location of the Apex varies with the speed of the green, slope of the green, and the putter itself. (F4)

sensation you found, then stroke the putt with the same feeling.

If the putt goes uphill overall, or the greens are slower, make the apex closer to the baseline. If the putt is going downhill, or if the greens are faster than the ones you practice on, place the apex at a spot farther away from the baseline. Place the apex closer to the baseline if you are leaving putts short, or farther away if they are all too long. If you change putters, you will need to relocate the distance the basic apex is from the baseline.

Read the putt to find your line before you begin the TAP procedure. That is so you can set up to the putt, align the putter and your stance, take refresher strokes and hit the putt without delay while the sensation of the stroke is still fresh with you.

This method works best for putts of about 20 feet and longer.



## PLAYING THE GAME

*“If I were given your physical game, and we had a match, I would beat you 99 times out 100 times because I know how to play the game better than you do.”*

– Raymond Floyd

The key to low scoring is having skills that allow you to expect to get down in three from inside 150 yards.

### Basic Playing Principles.

- Play from the right set of tees.
- Get the ball in the fairway. Club down if you have to.
- Get the ball on the green from under 100 yards in one shot.
- Get the ball in the hole from 4 feet or less.
- If the shot into the green requires a longer club than you can reliably hit straight, lay up.
- Play all shots at the green or hole to pass the hole. Arrive.
- Realize that some holes are too hard for you. Play them for an easy bogey instead of a hard par.
- When you’re in trouble, get the ball back into play and move on from there.
- Lighten up. Put more importance on having fun with your companions and enjoying the day than you do shooting a low score.

And here are five things to avoid:

- Skipping a pre-round warmup.
- Not having a plan for the hole.
- Not getting out of trouble safely.
- Not observing before you pick your shot.
- Playing shots you can’t really hit.

**Pre-Shot Process.** Before you hit any shot from off the green, go through the process described below, in this order.

1. Check the ball to make sure it's yours.
2. Assess the variables.
  - What kind of lie do you have?
  - Is the lie level or is it tilted in some way?
  - Where is the flagstick?
  - What hazards are nearby it?
  - Where is the safest place to aim for?
  - Is there an elevation difference to the green?
  - In which direction does the green slope?
  - Is there any wind?
  - What obstacles intervene?
  - How are you hitting the ball today?
  - How far away is your target?
3. Visualize your shot.
4. Set up. Look at your grip to be sure it is right. Aim your shot. Step into your stance correctly. Check your posture. Check your ball position.

**The Practice Swing.** Make one swing all the way to the finish and without stopping make a second swing to the finish. One motion, two swings. This gives you a feeling of relaxed rhythm that is so important in making your best swings possible. Then step right up to the ball and hit it with that second swing feeling fresh in your mind.

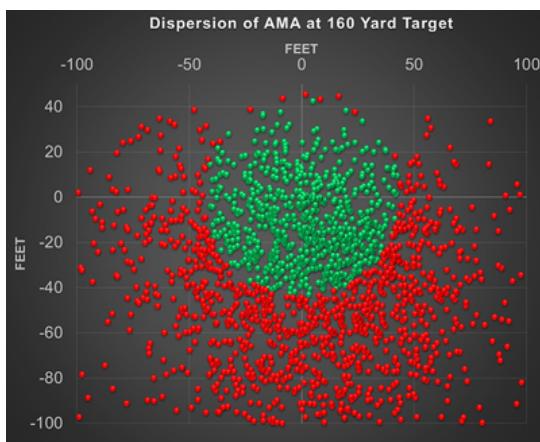
**Distance.** Distance is good. The farther you hit the ball, the better. Distance gives you more choices about how to play a hole. It gives you more reward from the same effort. Realize that some golfers are long hitters and others are not. This is just who people are. All you can do is get the distance you are capable of.

Swing speed is generated in one part by swinging with relaxed arms. Relaxed arms move faster. Let them hang

loosely in the shoulder socket and swing freely from there, especially during the forward swing. The second generator of speed is the hip turn to lead the forward swing (See Part A, Transition).

**Arrive.** Long shots into the green or short shots around the green need to pass the hole.

To have your best chance at a par, your shot into the green has to get there. It has to arrive. We will always have problems with hitting the ball to the right or left, but we should *never* have a problem with being short. For shots you fly into the green, play the ball to end up past the pin. If you play for going past the pin, mishits will still land on the green. You'll avoid trouble which is usually in front of the green. You'll make up for a tendency to underclub. Over 80 percent of approach shots finish short of the center of the green,<sup>1</sup> and over one-third of approach shots never get as far as the green (Figure 5). This is the most important illustration in the book. Study it carefully.



**Figure 5.**  
Dispersion of  
approach shots  
from 160 yards  
by average male  
amateurs. Most of  
the shots fail to  
arrive.

<sup>1</sup> AMA means average male amateur. I assume an AFA chart would be similar. Source:

<https://blog.trackmangolf.com/performance-of-the-average-male-amateur/>

Vivien Saunders had this to say about arriving:

*... there is just as much space beyond the flag as in front of it. When you watch players approach the green from the side it seems ridiculous that they're constantly short. In order to improve, try to pass the flag on every single shot you play. Keep a note on your scorecard. Give yourself a point every time your shot to the green finishes on the green beyond the flag. Professionals find this scoring zone far more often than club golfers. Many club golfers soon discover that they never, ever pass the flag.<sup>2</sup>*

To arrive, you have to be holding enough club. If you hit your 6-iron 150 yards at the range, you probably hit it 145 yards much more often when you play. So if you're in the fairway between 145 and 150, take out the 5 and grip down. Don't worry, there's plenty of room beyond the pin. If you have the funny feeling that you have to hit one of your best shots to get the ball to the green, you don't have enough club in your hands. Here's Bobby Jones on that point:

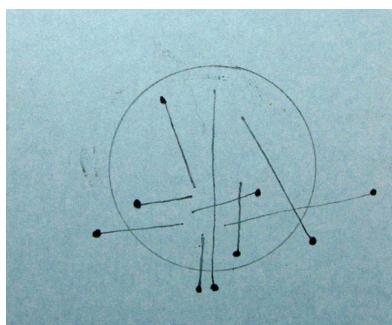
*With no wind to consider, I play a straight and simple shot using a club a little more than adequate to get the distance, rather than taking a full crack with the club just strong enough.<sup>3</sup>*

Afraid that you might fly the green? Years ago, PGA pro Bob Madsen had a blog that was full of insights into how to play the game. He told this story about arriving:

*A few years ago after my pro watched me get beat in the club championship finals for a fifth time, he said, "I noticed you coming up short a lot today." I replied that with all the trouble over the greens I didn't want to go long. His counter to that logic has stuck with me ever since: "Why don't you go long a few times before being afraid of it?" It makes sense. In most instances you truly have to flush it to go long or even reach the back of the green. And be honest, you—and I—don't flush it very often.*

The concept of arriving applies not only to iron play. It applies to every shot you make at the hole. Pitches have to finish past the hole, too, and chips and putts need to have enough speed to finish past the hole if they don't go in. Of course there are certain greens, because of their severe back-to-front slope, and you probably know which ones they are on the courses you play, where the *last* thing you want to do is be past the hole. There are exceptions to every rule.

A picture is truly worth a thousand words. Draw a big circle in the center of a  $3 \times 5$  card. As you play into each green, put a dot where the ball ends up, and draw a line from the ball to the approximate location of the pin (Figure 6). After nine holes, draw another chart on the other side of the same card (eighteen holes on one chart makes too much clutter). The results will show you clearly where your shots into the green end up.



**Figure 6. Arrival Chart:** for nine holes of play, shows that four shots were short of the pin, four were about even with it, and one was past it.

**When You're in Trouble.** Get out. Just get out. Think about the green afterward. The shortest distance to the lowest score is not always a straight line. When you're really stuck, use up one shot to get out of trouble and into a place where you have a clear shot at the green. Hit a heroic shot only if you have *practiced* that shot and you *know* you can pull it off in this situation. In the first place, avoid trouble by playing away from it. That's why it's called trouble!

**Working the Golf Ball.** Only the rare golfer hits the ball absolutely straight. Your stock shot, which either fades or draws, even a little bit, should be used ninety-five percent of the time. The other five percent of the time, keep it simple by the placement of the trailing thumb.

To fade, take your grip with the thumb of the lower hand pressing firmly against the hand, but without pressing against it. This stiffens your wrist, which causes you to be late squaring the clubface, leaving the clubface open to create a fade.

To draw, do the opposite. Create a small gap between the thumb and the hand. This loosens the forearm, allowing it to turn over slightly, which promotes a closed clubface at impact. Do not wrap the thumb around the handle. Just to move it a bit farther away from the hand than usual.

**Play From the Right Set of Tees.** Add together the distance of your average drive (carry plus roll) and your average 7-iron (carry only). Multiply the sum by 16. That's the longest course you should be playing. You'll make more pars and have more fun.

**Going For the Green.** There is a zone from which you can put at least half your shots on the green. That might be from 100 to 125 yards. From distances where the percentage drops to one quarter or less, play an advancement shot—one that will not reach the green, but get you next to it. A major key to lower scores is to extend the fifty percent zone outward. Get at least to the point where once the ball gets to the 150-yard marker you are confident you can get down in three.

**Life Is Short. Go For It.** Make your practice worthwhile by practicing shots you normally avoid. Then try that shot out whenever you can on the course. You grow as a golfer by playing a full-sized game.

**Special Shots.** Sometimes you'll need to hit something other than a standard shot. It could be one that curves, or has a different trajectory, or has more or less spin. Hit these different shots by changing your setup and using your normal swing. The setup adjustments you need to make—opening or closing the clubface, moving the ball position—do not be too big to achieve the desired effect. Special shots should not be played on the course unless you have practiced them and you have learned to hit them with confidence.

**Wind.** By understanding a few basic concepts, playing golf in the wind should not be difficult. A headwind, contrary to popular thinking, does not knock down the ball. The underspin against a headwind lifts the ball up and makes it fall down short. Swing easier with a less-lofted club because speed and loft equal spin. In a crosswind, use a less-lofted club and hit toward the wind, letting the wind carry the ball back toward the target. In a light tailwind, use the club you would normally use, but with an easier stroke. A strong tailwind will knock the ball down, so hit the ball easier with a more-lofted club to get the ball up in the air.

### Special Lies.

The ball will go in a slice direction:

- from a downhill lie (use one less club), or
- from a lie with the ball below your feet.

The ball will go in a hook direction:

- from an uphill lie (use one more club), or
- from a lie with the ball above your feet.

Adjustment your aim accordingly in all four cases.

When in the rough, position the ball one ball-width back in your stance to get a steeper angle coming into the ball so the club has less grass to go through before impact. Use the same club you would use from the fairway. Aim a bit to the left of your target to compensate for the club still travelling a bit from the inside at impact. Left-handed golfers should aim a

bit to the right.

**Have a Plan.** On a course you play often, you should know exactly how to play each hole. Don't just play one shot after another. On par 4s and 5s know which club to tee off with on every hole and where to hit your tee shot so you have the best look at the green for your approach. From the fairway, know where it's safe to miss the green and where it's not.

Golf is a 'next shot' game. Always have your next shot in mind when you're planning the one at hand. Hit the shot to a place that will make the next shot as easy and productive as possible.

## Basic Playing Principles.

### *Strategy*

Have a *green-to-tee* plan for the hole

Get the ball in the fairway. Club down if you have to.

Realize that some holes are too hard for you. Play them for an easy bogey instead of a hard par.

When you're in trouble, get the ball back into play and move on from there.

### *Planning your shot*

Choose a shot you know will have a good outcome.

Your lie defines your shot choices. Look carefully.

Avoid the bold play when it's not necessary

Go green-hunting instead of pin-hunting

Play to your average shot instead of your best one

If the shot into the green requires a longer club than you can reliably hit straight, lay up.

Play only shots you know you can hit

### *General*

Before you take the club away, draw an imaginary line straight through the ball to the target. Tell your unconscious

mind to send the clubhead along that path through impact.  
Every stroke, drive to putt.

Use as light a grip pressure as you can, around the green.  
Every shot into the green, or from on the green to the hole,  
should be hit hard enough to pass the hole.  
Make sure your mind is calm before you start your stroke.  
Straight is better than far.

**When to Leave Your Driver in the Bag.** Ask yourself these four questions. At the first No, leave the driver in the bag.

1. Is your expected score on this hole a par?
2. Think of the longest club you feel confident about hitting into a green. Will your average drive get you to at least the distance from which you can hit that club?
3. Do you need to hit a driver to have a 7-iron or less into the green?
4. Think of the trouble off the tee. If you hit into it with a driver, can you still make one stroke over your expected score with average play?

**How to Warm Up.** The pre-round warmup is for more than getting loose. It has a definite purpose.

Start on the practice green. Chip a ball or two with each of your chipping clubs just to get reacquainted with them. Practice a few 20-foot putts to learn the speed of the green. Run through the four-ball approach putting drill H11c a few times to get your sense of distance working. Practice a few 2-foot putts to see the ball going into the hole.

Now, take a brisk walk for a few minutes to literally warm up, and head to the range. Get loose and limber before you start hitting balls. Figure out a routine for this and follow it.

On the practice tee, start by practicing your aim. Hit a few pitches to locate the ground in your swing. Review your setup, then hit a few balls to find your ball position for the day. Next, make a few swings with a short iron to find your rhythm and tempo. This is the most critical part of your

warm-up. Use it to remind yourself that the tempo you play effectively with is slower than the tempo that "feels good".

Hit balls now, one or two with each club. Hit maybe three drivers, tops, and put that club back in the bag.

Practice special shots you know you'll have to hit during the round. If there's a corner off the third tee you can cut, practice hitting that shot a few times, along with any other unique shots that will help you take advantage of this particular course.

If there are about ten balls remaining, hit some pitches of distances you expect to have on the particular course you are playing. Create the swing feeling with these short clubs that you want to take with you to the first tee. You're ready. Now go have fun.

What if the course you're about to play doesn't have a driving range? Bring a few plastic Wiffle-style balls and hit them off a tee (to prevent digging divots). They go only about 60 feet, so you should be able to find a spot where you can hit them and find your swing.

**How to Play Par 3s.** Always tee up the ball, by just enough to give yourself a good lie. Determine the yardage to the pin and add seven yards. Say the distance to a pin is 148 yards. Your 150-yard club will be short. Take one more club, especially if trouble awaits in front of the green. Always tee up the ball, by just enough to get the ball off the ground (Figure 10). Never pass up the chance to give yourself a perfect lie.

Consider laying up on a long par 3, chipping on, and taking two putts. This prevents you from taking a 5. As an extreme example, one day, facing a long carry over water with wind against me, I chipped down to the red tee and hit on from there. Two putts later I was a happy golfer.

The night before you play, spend some time writing elegant, artistic 2s to put on your scorecard the next day. If you respect the 2, you will be rewarded. I'm not kidding about this.

**How to Play Par 4s.** These are the hardest holes. Get the ball in the fairway. Club down if you must. Play into the green with no more club than you can hit straight. Longer than that, lay up and pitch on. You can bogey half the par 4s and still break 80.

**How to Play Par 5s.** Par-5 holes are long, but remember that you have three shots to get there. Figure out how long a shot you want to hit into the green. Subtract that distance from the hole's yardage and divide the remainder into two easy shots. A driver is not always required.

**How to Finally Break 100, 90, or 80.** If you are close to one of these threshold scores but never seem to break through, do this: move up one set of tees. Play a shorter course. Take distance out of the picture. Stay there until you break that score consistently. While you are doing so, pay careful attention to why you can break that score from up here but not from back there, then work on the difference.

**Skills that Break 90 or 100 Consistently.** There isn't much difference between golfers in either category. At this level you are still learning how to hit the ball. Practice so you can make decent contact—no topping, chunking, shanking, etc—and you know where the ball is likely to go. It is likely that you have a wicked slice. Get some lessons to fix that.

Both sets of golfers need to do these four things:

- (1) Play from the right set of tees (see above).
- (2) Avoid hitting shots with the expectation of results you cannot achieve.
- (3) Double bogeys are OK. It's the triples and quads that are hurting you.
- (4) Leave your driver at home unless you can hit nine of 14 fairways with it.

Breaking 100: Nine bogeys + nine doubles = 99.

Breaking 90: Four pars + eleven bogeys + three doubles = 89.

**Skills That Break 80 Consistently.** You have a reliable swing or you wouldn't be thinking about this. You don't have to be long off the tee. The average driving distance for male 5-10 handicappers is 230 yards.<sup>6</sup> Short game and putting are now more important. If you miss a green, the up and down has to be an expectation. Spend more time practicing those shots than you do your swing. Expand your short game repertoire in general. On every shot, think through where you want the ball to go and how you want to get it there. Club selection and shot selection are crucial. On some holes, play for an easy bogey instead of a hard par. You know which holes those are.

You should be taking no more than 38 strokes to get the ball from the tee up to the green. That leaves 41 shots to get the ball in the hole from on or around the green.

Par three of the par 5s, two the par 3s, and four the par 4s = 79. Bogeys the rest of the way. You're likely to have a double bogey (those are hard to avoid even at this level) so find another par somewhere. A birdie won't hurt, either.

**Wannna Play at Scratch?** This is how, from a scratch player:  
“(1) Hit 75% of the fairways. Your drives don't have to super long, but long enough so you have a reasonable second shot into the green.

“(2) Hit 60% of the greens or more in regulation to close enough for a routine two-putt. Hitting it stiff is an accident.

“(3) Get up and down at least half of the time—from the sand, from tough, grassy lies, or easy chips. You should have a legitimate chance to save par *every* time.

“(4) Putts per GIR must be less than 2.0 Three putts are a big no-no.

“There is no one thing that will make you scratch; it is the totality of your golfing skills. Making routine pars hole after

hole is a must. Birdies for amateurs are not all that common in reality.”

Not everyone can be a scratch golfer. No matter how much you practice, eventually your talent runs out.

Scratch is not the same as par. You must shoot the course rating. If par is 72 and the scorecard says 70.1/121 from the tees you're playing from, the scratch score is 70.

### **And Then There Are the Really Good Guys... (from a very good player)**

“I've spent a lot of time in the scratch/plus range and have played with a few tour players. Here is a semi-comprehensive list of what they do way, way better than me: hit it farther, hit it straighter, have ridiculous, ridiculous short games, miss better, hit more good shots more often with fewer blowouts.

“They're constantly traveling and playing different (and brutal) courses each week. Turf conditions change and they don't care. Thousands of people are watching in person and millions on television and they don't care. I'd guess I'm better than something like 996 out of 1000 golfers, and if I played four rounds at a major championship venue I'd be lucky to finish 30 shots out of the lead, and more likely to finish 40-45 behind. They're basically playing a different sport.”

### **... and Gals. (from another very good player)**

“I've played with several LPGA pros, and years ago, used to play with a young college girl named \_\_\_\_\_ before she turned pro. Her coach is the only pro I've ever taken lessons from. The last time, I was an honest 1-handicap, and got my head handed to me in a basket by three tour pros. I could out drive them, but so what? Inside 180 yards they were deadly. And forget trying to make up any strokes on the greens. I shot one of my best rounds in probably two months, 3 under, and it wasn't even close. One of the best rounds I've ever had the privilege to play.”

**Elevated Tees.** When hitting from an elevated tee on a par-3 hole, take more club, not less as you are commonly advised, and punch the ball toward the green with your pitching stroke. For example, if you would swing a 7-iron, punch a 5-iron instead. The reason is that if the ball descends from high above the green at an angle and it's falling to the right or left, the higher above its landing area it starts down from, the more time it has to keep going off to that side before it hits the ground, meaning it will land farther from the hole, or even miss the green. A low punch from an elevated tee starts down from a lower elevation and has less time to wander off course. That is likely to be a straighter shot, too.

**Laying Up.** Lay up to avoid hitting into hazards ahead of you that you cannot comfortably hit over, either in the fairway or around the green. A layup is not just a shorter shot, though. Take the opportunity to put the ball on the side of the fairway that gives you the best approach to the pin.

**A Man's Gotta Know His Limitations.** Figure out the maximum distance you can achieve reliably in two straight shots, one from the tee plus one from the fairway, and build your game around those distances. If the hole is longer than that, and we're talking about long par-3 and par-4 holes, play to your maximum reliable distance and chip on to have a par putt and get a bogey at most. On holes you are likely to bogey anyway, this approach will put fewer double bogeys on your card, and maybe a few more pars.

**If Your Swing Stops Working.** If you have several bad swings in a row, and you don't know why, while you're playing is the wrong time to attempt a detailed diagnosis. First, slow down your swing a bit. It might be that you have started swinging too fast, out-swinging your technique. Many times, that's all you will need to do. If that doesn't fix it, check your grip. It might be drifting. That's OK? Check ball position. If you're

hitting the ball well but it always goes right or always goes left, check your aim. Or you might have [a pet swing flaw](#) that is haunting you. Most of the time there is nothing wrong with your swing. It will be your address, grip, ball position, aim, or your tempo that need getting back to normal.

**Where to Hit the Ball.** From the tee, hit the ball to the spot on the fairway that gives you the best angle into the green for your second shot, while avoiding hazards. From the fairway, aim for no closer to the pin than halfway to it from the center of the green. If you have to hit over trouble, which will normally be in front of the green, take one more club to be sure you hit over it. Bad things happen when you hit over water when you don't have to. Bad things.

**Course Management In a Nutshell.** Ask and answer this question before every shot. From where you are right now, what is your full plan for getting the ball in the hole? What is the *full sequence* of strokes from here that is most likely to get the ball into the hole in as few strokes as possible, *figuring it from the hole backwards*.

**When You're Between Clubs.** When the distance to the pin is between the yardages of two clubs, take the longer club, grip down one inch, and make your normal swing. Don't try to hit the ball harder, because you don't have to, and for sure don't ease up, because that's like hitting the shorter club.

**Don't Just Stand There, Putt!** Reality check. What you see in your first look at a putt is almost always what's there. If you can't tell which way the putt will break, see Putting: Reading a Gentle Break (3). Step up and hit the putt—step into your stance, align the putter, take one more look, and go. All of that shouldn't take more than 30 seconds. And you will putt better, believe me.

**Four Practice Rounds.** Play each of these four rounds some time. They will teach you about becoming a better *player*.

1. Play to hit every green in one stroke over regulation.
2. Play to keep the ball in the fairway or on the green no matter what it takes.
3. Play to use one more club than usual every time you hit a full shot into the green.
4. Play for the center of the green—regardless of where the pin is.

**Have a Safety Shot.** There will come a time when your swing stops working in the middle of the round. You can't find a fairway to save your life. Develop a safety shot to get safely off the tee for the next few holes. A punch with a fairway wood or hybrid works well. Slow down the swing, shorten the backswing and take the hit out of the swing. Concentrate on making good contact.

**Rules.** The rules of golf make the game a fair and equitable test of skill. The official rule book, however, is complicated and arcane. If you play by these [Rules of Recreational Golf](#), you will play an honest game and have a good time. Only if you compete in tournaments do you need to get deep into the rules.

**Don't Play Faster, Play Efficiently.** A foursome with an open course ahead should play eighteen holes in less than four hours by playing efficiently.

*The seconds saved by everyone doing these little things on every hole or before every shot add up to a significant number of minutes saved over eighteen holes.*

- Take clubhead covers off and leave them off. Fiddling with them takes time. Clubheads won't get damaged if they're left uncovered during the round.
- Know where everything in your bag is so you can get what you need without delay.

- Play from the right set of tees.
- When someone is teeing off and it's your turn next, stand beside the tee box, ball, tee, and club in hand, ready to go, rather than way over there by your cart, empty-handed.
- Don't wait for the group ahead of you to clear if you really can't hit into them. On the tee, consider letting shorter hitters tee off first (if they can leave their egos at home).
- When someone is hitting and you're next, start preparing so you can hit when it's your turn. Don't wait until the other player hits and their ball has landed before you even start to get ready. **This is probably the best way to save time in recreational golf.**
- You get one, and only one, practice swing.
- Step up to the ball and hit it. Standing frozen over the ball for the longest time, or taking endless waggles or looks at the target, does not help you in any way.
- Recreational golf is a social game, but chat when you are walking, and not when you should be getting ready for your shot.
- Proceed to your own ball as soon as possible. Don't wait until someone else has hit if you are not in their way.
- Always check the ball you're about to hit to be sure it's yours.
- After you play your shot, clean your club and put it back in the bag only if you are waiting for someone else to hit. Otherwise, start walking right away. Carry your club, and put it away when you get to your ball. If you're riding in a cart, get in the cart with your club and go.
- If you have hit the ball five times and it's not on the green, pick up your ball and drop it on the green when you get there. If you have hit the ball eight times and it is still not in the hole, pick it up and cease play on that hole.
- When looking for a ball that might have gone into high grass, remember that the ball is always 20 yards farther back from where you think it is.
- If someone else's ball might be lost, play your ball first,

then go help them look.

- When you get to the green, put your bag or cart on the side of the green nearest to the next tee.
- As you get on the green, mark your ball and read your putt now so you putt right away when it is your turn. Don't spend too much time reading the green. Your first impression is most likely correct.
- If you use an alignment line on the ball, don't spend forever tweaking the line, especially if the putt is a long one for which distance is much more important than line.
- Leave the pin in the hole. The research that says you will make fewer putts this way is wrong.
- After your approach putt, putt out if it's a tap-in.
- Falling behind the group ahead of you? To catch up, the first two players to hole out should go to the next tee and tee off, leaving the other two to putt out and look after the pin for each other (if necessary).
- If a faster group is coming up behind you, let them play through in this manner: Your group tees off, then waits for the following group. That group tees off. Stay at the tee box until that group has hit their second shots. Then your group may start down the fairway.

It all comes down to this. Paying your green fee does not give you the privilege of holding up the groups behind you by playing at any pace you choose. By giving back a bit of what you think you might be entitled to, everyone benefits from the overall goodwill that gets created.

If you are behind slowpokes who will not let you play through, call the clubhouse and report the situation. Hopefully that will get results. In this age of quick tempers and guns, DO NOT CONFRONT.

**Good Manners.** Good manners are based on showing respect for other people, not calling attention to yourself, and not being a nuisance. If you don't do the first one well, take up bowling. People who find the second one hard to do should

get into show business. As for the third one, play golf with friends who are forgiving.

- Do not make noise or move around when someone near you is making their stroke.
- If a ball you hit is headed toward players in front of you, yell, “Fore!”
- Make sure greenskeepers ahead of you are aware that you are about to hit.
- Check the ball before you hit it to make sure it’s yours.
- Leave your cell phone *turned off*. Give your attention to the people you’re playing with.
- Say, “Good shot” if someone hits a good shot, otherwise say nothing. Needling is juvenile.
- Be aware of where everyone else’s ball is so you don’t accidentally get in the way of their shot.
- Watch the other players’ shots because they can’t always see where the ball went.
- Replace your divots in the fairway.
- Repair two ball marks on the green, yours and one other, by pushing the edges of the gouge toward the center.
- Lay the flagstick on the green. Do not drop it.
- Do not step on the line of another player’s putt.
- On the green, do not leave a ball near the hole when others are playing up to it, and do not chip or putt until a ball near the hole has been marked.
- In general, do not keep asking for advice, for yardages, what club someone used, and so forth. The other players in your group are not your caddy.
- *Never* give unsolicited advice.

**Physical Maintenance During the Round.** Four hours or more is a long time to be engaged in an outdoor athletic activity. You have to take care of yourself to be as strong at the finish as you were at the start. Dehydration degrades physical skills. Bring water with you and drink a few ounces on every tee. Fill up your water container at the turn if you

have to. Eat while you play. Trail mix with nuts and candied fruit is a good choice. Have a handful every few holes. Eat a breakfast burrito at the turn. Stretch every four holes or so to stay limber during the round. You can stiffen up without knowing it. Stretch again after the round to warm down and not get stiff.

**The First Shots of the Day.** The first shot of the day should not be made difficult. Take a slightly slower swing with a slightly shorter backswing. Likewise, the first shot off the fairway can make you uneasy because of the ground. Take one more club and put a gentle swing on the ball.

**Visualization.** Visualization invests you with the ability to find the right shot. Ask the course to speak to you. Look in the direction you want to hit the ball, without analyzing, and a particular shot will present itself back toward you as well as a feeling of how to hit it. These feelings emerge on their own when your mind is calm and focused. Once you have felt the shot, do not bring it into your conscious mind to analyze it or evaluate it. Stick with your feeling, set up, and play the shot without hesitation.

Make it a habit to visualize every shot you hit, even at the practice range, or on or around the practice green.

**Talk To Yourself.** Describe to yourself out loud the shot you are about to hit. Maybe in not so loud a voice that everyone hears it, but out loud so you can hear yourself. For example: "I have a 6-iron. The pin is on the right, but it's behind a bunker, so I'm going to play for the center of the green and take my two putts." This is what touring pros do with their caddy. It makes a difference by helping to focus your mind on exactly what you want to do.

**Let It Go.** Perhaps the most important mental task when playing golf is to stay in the present. Let go of the shot you

just hit, good or bad. Let go of the hole you just played, good or bad. Let go of how you played the front nine, good or bad. As well, don't get ahead of yourself.

**Pressure.** There is no pressure when you know what you are doing. Get the ball around the course by hitting shots you know can hit successfully over and over. When you practice, practice succeeding. That removes pressure from golf. Just remember, there are things in life that can truly create pressure on a person. Recreational golf is not one of them.

**Talking To Yourself In a Positive Way.** Always use positive words. Never say anything to yourself, out loud or in your head, that you wouldn't say to a playing partner. Say something positive or say nothing at all.

Do not comment on the shot you just hit. Put it out of your mind on the walk to the ball for the next shot. There's a time to enjoy your good shots and to get upset by your bad ones, but that time is not when you're out there playing. This doesn't mean to not enjoy yourself. Enjoy the company of the people you are playing with.

**Relaxation.** Relaxation is a mental activity. The mind leads the body. Only when the mind is relaxed can the body be relaxed. Many people, including golf instructors, think that to be relaxed is to be in a lifeless state from which no activity can emerge. That is only one kind of relaxation, which is body-oriented.

There is another kind of relaxation, which begins in the mind and is transmitted to the body. This is an active relaxation which energizes the body while keeping it free of tension, enabling it to move with power and precision.

To relax your mind, stand with good, straight posture and get your mind moving as you address the ball. This should take only a few seconds. You will feel your body softening, the tension releasing. This is relaxation by rule of mind.

**How Not to Drive Yourself Nuts.** Get an idea, check that it's a good one, and hit the ball with no excess demands. Then,

- After you hit this shot, good or bad, let it go . Don't think about the next one until after you've arrived at the ball. Spend the interval schmoozing with your buddies. When you get to your ball, go back to step 1.
- Add up your score when the last putt is down on the final green. Before then it's not important.

**Aim Your Swing.** You aim yourself when you set up to the ball. This is how you aim your swing, which is a different task. To hit accurate golf shots, meaning the ball goes in the direction you intend, imagine a short line going away from the ball toward the target in the direction you want the ball to go. Do this just before you take the club away.

When I'm swinging, I see that line the entire time, not fixating on it, but continuing to let it guide my swing via the workings of my unconscious mind.

I'm no expert on how the mind works, but it seems to me that by giving your unconscious mind a last-second order to swing the club through the ball along the line you imagined, that mind takes over to make it happen.

**Avoiding Bad Shots.** Your bad shots are not always caused by a physical error. They can be caused by a mental lapse that leads to a physical error.

The most common mental lapse is to think about hitting the ball a long way. This makes you swing too fast or hit with the trailing hand, neither of which work out that often.

Another common mental lapse is picking a shot you do not have confidence in. Pick a shot you are confident about, then make your stroke with that feeling.

These ideas might make you take two shots when you wanted to take only one, but they prevent you from taking

three.

### Habits to Adopt.

1. Your lie defines your shot choices. Look carefully.
2. Choose a shot you know will have a good outcome.
3. Check your grip visually before every shot.
4. Aim yourself carefully.
5. Make sure your mind is calm before you start your stroke.
6. Swing the club so it, not you, does the work it was designed to do.
7. Every shot into the green, or from on the green to the hole, should be hit hard enough to pass the hole.
8. Use as light a grip pressure as you can, especially in the short game.
9. Swing with a tempo that keeps everything under control.
10. Before you take the club away, draw an imaginary line straight through the ball to the target. Tell your unconscious mind to send the clubhead along that path through impact. Every stroke, drive to putt.
11. Always take two practice strokes before any short game shot.
12. Look at every putt from behind, even the shortest ones.

## PRACTICE AND IMPROVEMENT

*“The more I practice, the luckier I get”*

-Gary Player

If you are satisfied by breaking 90, work on your short game and putting. If you want to break 80, work on your swing until you have a 12 handicap. Then work on your short game and putting.

**Repeat Ability.** A number of years ago I read the most honest piece on golf improvement I have ever found. It was written by Bob Madsen, Director of Golf Instruction at the Singing Hills Golf Resort at Sycuan, El Cajon, CA. Bob gave me [permission to reprint](#) it on my blog. In summary, Madsen wrote about “repeat ability,” Which is being able to do something repeatedly. It is not isolated success, but consistent success that counts.

*Here is the recipe. Find something you know you can do and do lots and lots of it. Then, go for a LITTLE, tiny bit more. If you want more repeat ability so you can dazzle your friends and really leave the golf course refreshed, practice succeeding. Succeed over and over and over again.*

*You’ve got to work your way up. You’ve got to earn consistency. It is well worth the effort.*

If you want to know what “lots and lots of it” means, this story about Bob Kurland, a basketball player from the mid-1940s and one of the first big men in the game, will tell you.

*But scoring did not come naturally for Kurland. “He worked hard to become good,” [coach Hank] Iba once said. “I can remember one specific afternoon when he must have tried 600 hooks with his left hand. The first 100*

*didn't hit either the rim or the backboard. The next 100 didn't go in. After that he started to connect."*<sup>4</sup>

**Your Scoring Potential.** Go to the course at a time when you can go off as a single. Play a practice round where any poorly-hit shot can be repeated, but only once. If your mulligan is more like it, this is a shot you can hit; you just need to learn how to hit it the first time. If the mulligan is just as bad, this to a shot you need to work on. Play on, putting the mulligan in play regardless, and keep your score with mulligans. Then add on the number of mulligans. The difference shows you how many strokes you could lose if you could learn to hit that second shot first. Don't be surprised if the benefitted score is 10% lower than your usual average score, which is a big difference.

**The Center of the Clubface.** Your scores are directly related to how often you hit the ball on the center of the clubface, with every club, every shot, even down to putting. [This drill](#) from PGA Tour pro Daniel Berger shows you how to find the center. It's probably the best drill I have ever read in a golf magazine.

**Hitting the Ball Straight.** Straight means the ball does not curve. The clubface has to be square to the club path at impact. The ball will go straight if the clubface is square to the clubpath.

**Hitting the Ball Accurately.** An accurate shot is one that goes in its intended direction. Correct your clubpath and your aim. You can't hit the ball north if you are aimed to the northeast.

**Patching Holes.** Identify the shot that gives you the most trouble and get a lesson to learn how to hit it. Then find another one and repeat. After a round is over make a note of

the shots you hit poorly that day. Practice those shots and correct any errors so you have them under control for the next time you play.

**Random Practice.** If you want to practice as you play, always a good idea, do not hit ball after ball of the same shot in practice. A better approach is to switch to something entirely different after you have made a few shots with one club or of a particular type. Give your mind a new problem to solve. When you've solved it, move on to a third thing, then back to the first one and so on. This is called [random practice](#). It is more in line with how our brain interacts with the world, and is closer to how golf is played—each new shot is different, and you get only one chance at it.

**Hitting a Plateau.** If you have reached a point where you aren't getting any better, you have reached the limits of what you know can do for you. You can't keep doing the same things and expect to get better. You need a new conception of what is possible in golf. Any good teaching pro can take you there. In addition, play with better players so you can see what they do that you do not. Then find out how they do it.

**Have a Playing Lesson.** After you have basic skills under control, that is, the ball goes where you intend most of the time, you get better by learning shots, especially in the short game. During the lesson, go out on the course, set up a shot you're having particular trouble with, and say to the pro, "What shot should I hit from here, and how do I hit it?" You can cover five or six different shots in a one-hour lesson. They will be the most valuable lessons you ever had.

**WhAt to Practice, How to Practice.** The range is where we learn how to get better. Try to find a full-service facility, one that has a practice green that allows chipping, and a bunker to practice sand play. Once a week for ninety minutes suffices.

### Aim

The first thing to do at the range is practice aim. Aim the shot, get into your setup, and drag an alignment stick or another club against your heels (not your toes). Step away from the ball and take a look downrange. The stick/club should be aimed to the left of and parallel to the ball-target line (to the right of...if you play left-handed). If it isn't, try again until you get it right. Check your aim this way against several different and widely-spaced targets until you get it right the first time, for a few times in a row. Now you can start hitting balls. It won't hurt to check your aim periodically as you go through your bucket.

### Swing Practice

Many golfers chase results on the practice tee instead of practicing the shot-making principles lead to the desired result. This is called end-gaining. In other words, the end-gainer does what he thinks he should do to get a *result*. If that doesn't work, he tries something else, and then something else again, taking himself farther and farther away from what truly works. That insidious habit prevents you from playing your best golf. The way *not* to get good is to get your bucket and hit ball after ball and hope you get lucky on occasion.

Hitting lots of golf balls by itself does not build your swing. The right way to build a swing is to learn the right swing principles and practice *them* over and over, and hitting a ball, when you're sure you're ready, to check on your progress. Then regardless of the outcome, go back to practicing the principles. Isolate them. If you have a pet swing flaw (which every golfer does), find out what it is, and spend lots of time on the correction. Practice them one at a time, over and over. When you're ready, move on to the next one. This how you build your swing. The shot just indicates how you're coming along. You don't need that bucket of 90 balls to have a

productive practice session if you practice like this. Thirty will do the trick. You can even practice your skills at home, and you should. You don't always have to hit golf balls if you know what you're doing.

 [See the video.](#)

Special note on the driver: You have to keep your mind under control when you practice with this club. Hit a few wedges to 80 yards, then hit one driver with a swing that has the same feeling of lightness and ease. Hit a few more wedges, the one driver, and so on. What you should be learning here is to let the club do the work.

When you are working on your swing, hit balls off a tee. Any ball you hit will be the result of pure swing. When the ball is on the ground, that extra factor interferes with your thoughts on the swing mechanics you are working on. Tee the ball just high enough to get the ground out of your way.

Unless you spend hours at the range every week, you're going to mishit the ball more often than not. Practice at least enough so your mishits are still playable.

*c. Putting Practice*

Practice getting the long ones close and the short ones in. Your goal is to eliminate three-putt greens. There is no point in trying to sink 12-footers because we will seldom make many of those anyway.

To practice the short ones, pick a flat, level piece of ground. Putt a ball at a hole from two feet away. Putt the next ball from one ball-width farther away. Keep backing away from the hole one ball-width at a time. By the time you are eight feet away, you will have hit about 40 putts and they will have all gone in the hole. Go through your pre-putt routine before every putt.

This approach putting drill will get you good in a hurry. Find a hole on the practice green that has a flat, level approach of about 50 feet. Drop four balls on the green at 15, 25, 35, and 45 feet. Stagger their placement so you can putt

any one of them without another one that is closer being in the way. Putt them in this order: 25, 45, 15, and 35. The sole object is to get them *all* tap-in close to the hole, which means eighteen inches or less. Keep repeating the drill until you have done that. Then, begin again in this order: 35, 15, 45, 25. You have to figure out each putt on its own. If you like, you can do the whole thing again 20, 30, 40, and 50 feet. Staggering the distances like this prevents you from getting into a distance groove where each putt is successively longer or shorter by the same amount.

🎥 [See the video.](#)

Good putters hit the ball so it approaches the hole at the same speed regardless of the length of the putt. A ball rolling too slowly might not get to the hole. A ball rolling too fast effectively makes the hole smaller. More importantly, a consistent rolling speed is key to picking the right line.

🎥 [See the video.](#)

#### *d. Chipping*

Practice chipping from one spot with four balls to four holes at different distances until you get up and down four times in a row. Then chip from four spots, again with four balls, to one hole to get up and down each time. As with putting practice, chip from distances you know you can get up and down from, and gradually work outwards. If you miss an up and down, move on. No do-overs! Golf is a confidence game. Getting up and down every time in practice is what builds confidence. Succeeding 75% of the time does not.

Once you have learned to do that well, move to another level by practicing sinking the chip. Here, you can hit from one spot to one hole with many balls. Set up each shot just like you would if you were playing. Do not move to another spot until you have sunk four. Start with short chips so you don't get discouraged. This is a difficult drill.

*e. Pitching*

Hit a few pitches to rehearse the stroke, and to reinforce making good contact and having the ball go where you are aimed. Then practice pitches from distances you commonly face on the courses you play. You want the ball to go straight at your target and land right in front of it. Hit five shots at that particular distance. Then try another distance, at least twenty yards separated from the one you just worked on.

*f. Sand*

**Greenside:** Draw a line in the sand about six feet long with the toe of your sand wedge. Take your stance so the line is about two inches ahead of center. Swing so your wedge strikes the sand on the line. Take a little step forward and do it again, all the way down the line. When you have this drill mastered, draw another line and put golf balls down two inches in front of the line. Proceed as before.

**Fairway:** Hit a few balls with a 7-iron. Repeat with clubs going up to your most lofted hybrid iron, which is likely be 24 degrees.

*g. Allocating your practice time.* Measure the attention given to each phase by balls hit, not by time spent. For example, if your full swing practice is built around skill-building, it might take a half hour, at least, to hit 30 balls. You can hit thirty 4-7 foot putts in well under 10 minutes.

See how this plays works in a [professional practice plan](#), written by PGA pro Neil Wilkins. You can adapt it to your own needs. Do it twice a week, and watch your scores go down.

If you can't get to the range too often, [Better Recreational Golf](#) has many drills and a practice plan that can be done at home. I encourage you to look into them.

**The 120 Swings Drill.** This drill takes about 15 minutes. It teaches you to do your best swing more often. Swing a club

120 times in this way, in this order:

- 20 normal swings
- 20 swings with the left hand only
- 20 normal swings
- 20 swings with the right hand only
- 20 swings with the feet together, heels touching
- 20 normal swings

Set up anew after every swing. Strive to make all the swings in a particular section the same. Resist the urge to experiment by adding something extra here or there. The only way you'll build a repetitive swing is, well, to practice the same swing over and over. If you do this exercise at the range, hit a ball with every tenth swing to keep up your interest. No more often than that, though. This is a swinging exercise, not a ball-hitting exercise.

**All You Need Is a Decent Shot.** Make hitting decent, playable shots, your primary goal when you go through your bucket. There is no topping, chunking, shanking, or whiffing, and you know where the ball is going to go. You don't have to hit *great* shots like the ones that pop out every now and then. When you strive for the perfect shot you end up end-gaining and you might as well quit right now. Just take it easy and hit one decent shot after another, in which your expectations are contained. You play golf with your average shots, not with your best ones.

**A 5-minute Session at Home.** Practice slow-motion swings. Feel the movement of the club and your body's response to it. Make some pitching and chipping strokes, emphasizing brushing the ground with the sole of the club. Stroke a few short putts. Hit a few putts to a backstop with a 40-foot stroke to practice meeting the ball on the sweet spot with this longer stroke. All of this takes just five minutes, but that's enough if you do it every day.

**Learn How to Hit Your Driver.** Learn how to hit your driver by first learning how to hit your 7-iron. Flawlessly. Straight. Center of the clubface. So often it gets boring. There's no sense in you hitting a driver if you can't hit a 7-iron. Then hit your driver with that same swing. You do not need to swing the driver hard to hit the ball a long distance. Distance is built into the design of the club.

People say you should be hitting up with your driver. True, but saying it that way is misleading. Better to say the driver should be travelling upwards when it meets the ball. Because the ball is teed up, and forward of center, it will naturally be travelling upward at that moment with your usual swing. If you try to hit up, you will force the attempt and ruin the shot. The clubhead only needs to be moving upward at an angle of about 3 degrees. If you draw that out with a protractor, you will see that's a tiny angle. Let your setup take care of it.

**Repeat a Golf Lesson.** Few people get something right after just one lesson. Do you think the coach of a Tour player mentions something only once and the player gets it? No, ma'am! They work on it lesson after lesson until it's right. So should you. Repeat a lesson and keep practicing until you do get it right.

**Learning a New Short Game Shot.** There are three parts to learning a new short game shot, and they need to be learned in this order:

- Shot behavior. Whatever you want the ball to do, you can make it do that time after time. Just being able to hit the shot is not something you should have to worry about.
- Right direction. Now we're learning how to control the shot and controlling direction is the easiest one. Line up the shot. Some short shots require an open clubface or altered ball position. Aim in these cases must be learned by trial and error.
- Right distance. If the ball is supposed to go 45 feet, for

example, learn to hit it 45 feet. Or any other distance you want it to go.

Do not use a new shot on the course before you have mastered all three parts. Once you have learned the shot, practice it regularly. If you neglect it, it will gradually fail to perform.

**What Every Good Golfer Can Do.** Every good golfer can do these things with her or his golf swing:

- ✿ [Hit an intentional fade](#)
- ✿ [Hit an intentional draw](#)
- ✿ [Hit with the ball below your feet](#)
- ✿ [Hit with the ball above your feet](#)
- ✿ [Hit from an uphill lie](#)
- ✿ [Hit from a downhill lie](#)
- ✿ [Hit the ball higher or lower than normal](#)

Hit the ball the same distance with three different clubs

Hit each club three different distances

**Slow-Motion Swings.** Slow practice is how musicians learn a new piece of music. Slow practice is how you learn new habits of movement by putting errorless performance into your unconscious mind.

If you practice to maintain your swing technique, or perhaps to integrate a new feature into your swing, you can't do a good job of that by swinging at your normal speed. Everything happens too fast for you to monitor what you're doing. So slow it down. Way down. Take three seconds to swing from start to finish.

The unconscious mind is non-judgmental. It accepts whatever you put into it. If you slow down enough that you can do only right things, that is what you are programming your unconscious mind to do. Eventually your mind will "get it" and all you have to do from there is perform. Even though you have practiced at a slow tempo, speeding up to your normal tempo will not be a problem when correct movements

have been established.

Slow practice is the key to rapid technical progress. Read this [more technical article](#) on brain function and slow practice to see that what I'm saying is true.

**Building a Game.** To have a basic game, get good at these shots:

- Fairway-finding shot from the tee.
- Advancement shot from the fairway of about 190 yards.
- Shot into the green from 150 yards.
- 70-yard pitch.
- Getting out of a greenside bunker.
- 30-foot chip.
- 40-foot approach putt.
- 4-foot putt.

**Play With Your Own Swing.** If you are hitting the ball well, leave your swing alone. Resist the urge to try something new to get a bit more out of it. Doing that usually sends you backwards. If you are not hitting the ball well, get an exact description of the ball flight of your poor shots, then get a lesson and tell that to the pro.

**Making a Swing Change.** When you do change something in your swing, hopefully after a lesson, you will feel a new sensation. Use it to help you learn what to do, but once you are getting it, let go of the sensation. It needs to become something you do without having to think about it. If you hang onto it for too long, you will chase the sensation at the expense of the technique and go too far. It usually takes only a little bit of doing something different to make a big difference in the result. Like Harvey Penick said, "If I ask you to take an aspirin, don't take the whole bottle."

Most of the time, though, you don't have to make a swing change. All you need to do is learn to do your best swing more often.

**The Path To Low Scores.** I've alluded to this in several other places, but let me say it directly: the higher your average score, the more time you need to spend on your swing, not on putting and short game. You don't get pars and birdies, or even bogeys, by wasting strokes getting the ball up to the green. Get lessons to find out what swing principles lead you to good ball-striking, and practice those principles.

The fundamental scoring skill of golf is being able to hit the ball straight on command with your irons. Tiger Woods once said that his irons were his offensive weapons. The authors of *The Search for the Perfect Golf Swing* said their study showed that they key to winning professional golf tournaments were shots between 130 and 220 yards. For recreational golfers a more appropriate range might be 110 to 170 yards. Being a good iron player permits you to get the ball on or next to the green in the regulation number of strokes, which is the first step to lower scoring.

Once your score from tee to green is 39 or less (handicap about 12), start developing your short game. Getting down in three from inside 100 yards is imperative. Knowing your pitching distances can turn a 20-foot putt into a 5-foot putt on occasion. Changing your up-and-down rate when you miss the green from one in five to two in five can save you three strokes. Cutting down three-putt greens to one by getting good at approach putting saves a few more.

**Learning to Think.** When you hit a good shot that doesn't work out, that is, it was the wrong shot to have hit, and not the right shot hit poorly, remember the situation, what you did, and what you think you should have done instead. Write them down if you have to. Try not to make the same mistake twice. This is how you improve as a *player*. Everybody talks about getting better at shotmaking to lower your score, but no one ever mentions that you can lower your score if you learn to be a better player. Hitting the right shot is as important as

hitting a good shot.

**Every Swing Is a Practice Swing.** Playing good golf is a matter of learning what the right technique is, and then making that technique a habit—something you never have to think about. Every time you swing a golf club, whether or not you are swinging at a ball, is a chance to build good habits. Every time you swing the club with the correct execution of a technical point in mind, you have taken one step closer to having that point permanently installed in your swing. This means that every swing must have a purpose.

Even when you're swinging a club at dandelions with one hand you can practice. Swing it gently back and forth in front of you making sure you bring it through on line with a square clubface. Even that little bit helps more than you think it might. Every time you move a club move it correctly.

**Get Good One Shot At a Time.** Take this advice from Lee Elder:

*"The best way to learn golf is to choose one department of the game and get good at it before branching out. It can be any part—I suggest pitching with a sand wedge—but don't try to swallow the whole game at once. If you try to learn driving, sand play, fairway woods, and putting at the same time, the game will eat you up. You'll get frustrated and might quit. Build up confidence in that one area and let it spread out to the other parts."<sup>5</sup>*

If you are an established golfer and want to improve, I would suggest swing, chipping, putting, and pitching, in that order. Beginners should learn the game from the hole on out: putting, chipping, pitching, and swing.

## GAME SUPPORT

**What's In Your Bag?** This fourteen-club set has consistent gaps in loft from the driver through to the lob wedge: driver ( $11.5^\circ$ ), fairway woods ( $16.5^\circ$  and  $20.5^\circ$ ), 4i/h, 5i/h, 6-9i, PGSL wedges, and putter. It will meet the demands of any golf course.

Each club you have in your bag needs to earn its way in, however. Carry four wedges only if you know what to do with each one and the collection of lofts and bounce angles make sense (see your pro for more details on this point). At a minimum carry a pitching wedge and a sand wedge. At the other end, other than your driver, *there is no use carrying a long club that you can't get into the air from off the ground*. If you can hit that club well off the tee, fine, but ask yourself if you tee off with that club often enough for it to warrant a place in your bag.

Because you can only carry fourteen clubs is no reason to *own* only fourteen clubs. Adjust your bag to the course you are about to play. For example, put in the hybrid iron or fairway wood that will reach the long par 3 on the course you will be playing that day. A left-handed 9-iron is handy for tree-lined fairways or for chipping when the ball lies close beside a deep bunker. You might try carrying two putters—one for approach putts and one for the shorter putts.

After you have filled your bag, you might want to keep some records so you can fine-tune the set. When you get home, write down each club you used and what you used it for. After a while you will see there will be clubs you use a lot, and clubs you hardly ever use. The latter you might consider just taking out of the bag. When it comes to substituting one club for the other, the new club, to be worth the swap, has to save

you more strokes than you will lose by taking out the other club.

Try this seven-club set sometime. Designed by loft, a few times: 11.5°, 18°, 24°, 34°, 44°, 54°, putter. Many golfers find they can score just as well with just this set, and have more fun to boot because they have to be creative a lot. Even more radical would be to carry four clubs (driver, hybrid, 7-iron, wedge) and a putter: Try it!

Let's talk about shaft flex on your irons. This does make a difference. If you buy a set of clubs, of course you will have them fitted to you. The correct flex determines how well the clubs will work with you. If the flex is too stiff, you will have to work too hard to swing them. If the flex is too loose, you will have difficulty controlling them.

A big question is whether you should play cavity backs or blades. Cavity backs are more forgiving of mishits, either toward the toe or heel. Blades let you get by with a heel hit, but not a toe hit. Poorer contact will provide a better result with cavity backs, but your good contact will be better with blades. If you know your distances, and can hit them consistently, you are much better off playing with blades. Even higher handicappers can play blades if you look at it this way: play with hybrids from 2-5, and blades from 6-PW. Anybody should be able to do that.

The ball. First off, there's no such thing as a distance ball that gets you a lot more distance. Five yards maybe. Buy the ball that performs the way you want it to around the green. Carry a permanent marker in your bag to mark your ball with (Rule 6.3a). If you hit your ball in the weeds, having a mark on the ball makes it easier to find. Not to mention, if you hit an unmarked [Brandname] 3 into the weeds and find one without a mark, you can't verify it is the [Brandname] 3 you just hit. It must then be considered to be a lost ball, and penalties apply (Rule 18.2a). If you ever hit a provisional ball, mark it differently from the first one you hit so you can tell them apart.

**Taking Care of Your Clubs.** The grips on your clubs should always be clean. Before you play wash them with warm, soapy water to restore the tacky feel. And while you're at it, clean the clubfaces. Put new grips on your clubs every year. It's cheap and it pays off.

During a round, pour a few drops of water on the grip of clubs you are using frequently and rub them in with a towel. This will restore the tacky feeling they lose from so much contact with your hands.

**Statistics.** *Easy way:* Keep one statistic as you play: hole by hole, the number of strokes it took to get the ball on the green. Hale Irwin once said, "The shortest route to improvement is to get on the green in fewer strokes," and he's right. How you get the ball on the green doesn't really matter. GIRs are way oversold.

*Medium way:* Keep these three stats, hole by hole, as you play: (1) the number of full swings. (2) the number of short swings (pitches, chips, sand, etc.), and (3) the length of each putt. Record penalty strokes and recovery shots but do not include them in these counts. These three numbers, and their interactions, will give you a full description of your game. Use the length-of-putt data to get compute the average number of putts by starting distance, and the average leave by each distance. Keep an arrival chart, too.

*Hard way:* If you have a good memory, when you get home, write down all the strokes you took, and a description (where from, how far, what club, unusual lie, etc., and result) of the shot. Note whether a bad shot was a technical error, or a mental one (for which see p. 32). For mental errors, write down what you should have done differently. After a few rounds you will have a clear description of your strengths and weaknesses.

**How Far Do You Hit Your Irons?** Irons are the scoring clubs. Thus, you need to know how far, really, you carry each one. Here's an easy way to figure out your iron distances. Sign up for a session with a launch monitor and find the distances you hit a 9-, 7-, and 5-iron. Interpolate for the rest of your irons. Take these distances to the course and start adjusting for hitting the golf balls you normally use instead of the range balls you hit for the monitor. After a few rounds you will know.

If your calibrated iron distances over time don't seem to be quite right, they are probably too long. If you think you hit a particular club 145 yards but it never goes that far, try assigning four *fewer* yards to it club and see what happens.

**How Long Is Your Step?** Nobody's step equals one yard. Find out exactly how long your step is by going to a baseball diamond that has 90-foot basepaths. Walk around the bases using your normal stride counting your steps. Divide 120 by the number of steps to give you the length of your step in yards.

**Take Care of Yourself.** You don't have to be super strong to play golf, but flexibility is quite important. [Do these exercises](#) on a daily basis. They don't take too long. They are especially important if you are a senior golfer.

You do need to have a strong core, to prevent injury. [These exercises](#), also to be done daily, give you that.

Walk as much as you can every day. All those steps add up. You might want to develop a walking routine to keep your lower body from getting tired from being on your feet and walking for four hours or more. It takes energy if you are going to be an eighteen-hole golfer.

**Avoiding Low Back Pain.** Excess stress placed on the lower back because of mechanical flaws in the swing causes low back pain (LBP) in recreational golfers. [See this article](#) for

ideas on how to make your swing back-friendlier.

Do these [five strengthening exercises](#) and these [five flexibility exercises](#) regularly. Before the round, warm up properly. Maintain your flexibility during the round and after.

This [comprehensive but somewhat technical article](#) from the medical literature explains in detail the relation between golf and LBP. It would serve you well to read it.

**Film Your Swing.** During a time when you are swinging well, film your swing for reference. Get two cameras, one for a down-the-line view and the other for a face-on view, so you can film your swing from two different vantage points at the same time. Center the DTL camera between the ball and your toes at about chest-high. The FO camera should be centered on your body and also chest-high. At a time when your swing stops performing, you can film that swing and compare it to the good swing to see where you have fallen off.

## SUMMARY

The marriage of rhythm and tempo is the foundation of the golf swing. If this part isn't right, nothing else matters.

In the forward swing, the handle must get back to the ball before the clubhead does and continue leading through impact.

Adopting a consistent setup will improve your shot-making as much as any swing change will.

Always check the placement of your hands on the club visually before every shot.

The ball goes where you aim it. Be meticulous about aim.

For the ball to be hit the same way with the same swing, it must always be in the same place in your stance.

Retaining the critical angle is a key to good ball-striking.

The backswing should be only so long that you still have a sense of connection between the clubface and the ball.

Do all of your thinking and preparing and swing thoughting before you step up to the ball. Once you address the ball the only thing you do is execute.

Your best swing is produced by being relaxed, not forcing anything, and leaving tension out of it.

When chipping or pitching, think of the sole of the club sliding along the grass underneath the ball, not so much of hitting down on the ball.

By calibrating your chipping and pitching game, there is no guessing. You know just what to do to hit the ball a certain distance.

Before you putt, always, always, always take a look from behind the ball, especially with short putts.

For any putt over eight feet, distance is more important than direction.

An easy way to lower your score is to make sure that shots into the green end up even with the hole or past it.

## Summary

Improvement comes from finding something you know you can do and doing lots and lots of it. Then go for a little, tiny bit more.

The higher your average score, the more time you need to spend on your swing, not on putting and short game.

If you are good at these three things, hitting the ball straight, chipping, and approach putting, you will shoot low scores.

You don't need to play faster. Play more efficiently.

## BOB'S TWEETS

(from a Twitter account that never went anywhere)

### Swing

Put the club behind the ball on the open side of square. This gives you a little more help in getting the ball in the air.

Your stance and posture should make you feel like you are about to make an athletic swing through the ball.

An easy way to get more distance is to relax your grip a bit. Holding too tightly retards the momentum that should naturally build up.

If your backswing is too long, errors can creep in. Cut it down and see what you get.

You can hit decent 7-irons all day, but put that swing on a fairway wood and you'll learn the truth of it.

A consistent grip, consistent aim, and consistent ball position make you a better ball-striker overnight.

If you swing slowly enough to keep your swing under control, you'll hit the center of the clubface, sending the ball straight, and it will go far.

Many teachers promote forearm rotation in the forward swing, but that creates a serious timing problem. Learn to swing without it.

Your hands must be ahead of the clubhead at impact. If the ball is too far forward in your stance, you might not be able to do this.

If your ball-striking suddenly turns sour, check rhythm and tempo, and ball position. Often one of these is the only problem.

To get your car to 60 mph, you don't ease up to 30 and then stomp on the gas pedal. You don't do that with your golf swing, either.

A lesson in grip pressure: hold a pen tightly and write your name. Now relax your grip on the pen and try again.

Your golf swing must be a reflex action, lacking conscious thought. For this, an uncomplicated swing is best.

There is considerable latitude in the form of the backswing, much less in the downswing.

Your arms and shoulders cannot be too relaxed when you swing, especially with your driver.

Someone asked me how I swing so easy and hit the ball so far. I said, That's the answer. What's your question?.

The Basis of a Good Golf Swing. Part 1: Swing easy, like you don't care how far the ball goes.

The Basis of a Good Golf Swing. Part 2: Through impact, the hands pass the ball before the clubhead does.

Swing at your normal speed, but only so fast that you follow it in your mind as if it were a slow motion movie. That way, you never rush.

Keep your knees flexed throughout the swing. Coming out of your flex at impact feels powerful, but that only leads to mishits.

If you swing too fast, your swing can "disappear" from your mind. Slow down your swing so that never happens.

If you are unsure of yourself standing over the ball, correct your posture. Good posture automatically creates a confident frame of mind.

A swinging motion creates force, rhythm, and timing. A "hitting" motion makes these things more difficult to achieve.

The golf swing is not the sum of many parts. It is one whole movement.

Putting unnecessary force in your swing creates tension. Tension creates resistance. Resistance, ... you know.

Pretend, especially with your drive, that the ball is physically transparent and the clubhead will pass through it as if nothing were there.

At the end of the backswing, the angle in your leading wrist should be the same as it was at address.

The golf swing is based on achieving the proper finish, not on hitting the ball.

There is no need to power the club through the ball. Let the natural clubhead speed you have accumulated be enough.

Count Yogi thought the swing should be "boneless, muscleless, effortless." Good advice.

Build a swing that hits the ball straight and you will get all the distance you are capable of as well. Trying to build a swing that hits the ball a long way will get you neither the distance you seek nor accuracy.

### **Short Game**

The prime rule of the short game: get the ball on the green with one shot. Down in three max, never down in four.

Hit the ball. Trying to be too finessey is how you flub it.

The best greenside chips are hit when you keep the clubhead as low to the ground as you can on the follow-through.

If you're mishitting chip shots, it might be that your grip pressure is too tight.

Chipping is the easiest shot in the game. Why not get good at it?

Think of a pitch shot as tossing the ball onto the green for two putts. That makes the shot a lot easier to execute.

Some people say to putt from the fringe because your worst putt is better than your best chip. If so, your chipping needs work.

Chipping is about getting up and down. So practice like that. One ball, one chip, putt out. Repeat.

The short game from 25 yards and in is the most important part.

At a certain point, your talent runs out and your swing stops improving. However, your short game and putting can keep improving for as long as you play the game.

## Putting

Putt the ball hard enough to hold its line all the way to the hole, not merely hard enough to get it to the hole. Those two are different.

I find that opening my stance on downhill putts gives me a better feel for how hard to hit the ball with this delicate stroke.

Read short putts from thirty feet behind the ball. You'll see subtle breaks not visible from only a few feet behind it.

Don't give away the hole on short putts. You rarely see a three-foot putt that starts off outside the hole, if you hit it hard enough.

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When hitting a breaking putt, draw a line from your ball to the hole. Do not let the ball cross that line before it gets to the hole.

Do short putts make you nervous? Try looking at the hole.

The difference between a putt that stops six inches short and goes two feet past is that the second putt has a chance to go in.

Do not over-read short putts unless they are distinctly sidehill. Aim for the edge of the hole at most.

Good putters make the ball approach the hole at the same speed regardless of the length of the putt.

Look at every putt from behind before you hit it, even the very shortest ones.

Watch good putters stand over a 6-foot putt. You can tell they know it's going in. Become one of those putters.

Practice sidehill putts. Learn what you have to do to get them close enough for luck to take over.

It is hard to take a putter away calmly if it is resting on the ground. Hold the club so the sole touches the ground, but barely.

You may use any putting grip you want as long as its placement prevents your forearms from rotating during the stroke.

Swagger counts. Walk onto the green creating the impression that you own it. It helps if you can back this up, though.

Take the "hit" out of your stroke by pretending the ball is transparent to the putter and it will make first contact with the ball on the inside of the front edge.

To get long uphill putts to the hole, pretend the hill is pushing back and you have to add a little extra to push back against the pushback.

## Mental Game

Golf is 100% mental and 100% physical, at the same time.

To subdue jitters on the first tee, think of how smoothly you can swing the club, not how far you can hit the ball.

The score you shoot is less important than having fun with the people you played with.

Never give up. There's always a plan you can make to get the ball in the hole quickly, and a great shot is only one swing away.

Instead of getting around in as few strokes as you can, try to get around with the fewest (none!) holes where you lose your concentration.

If you are not over the ball with a completely positive mind about the shot you are about to hit, back off and start over.

Have you noticed how many good shots you hit when you forgot to think about the outcome or the technique?

You know that the state of your mind is the key to realizing your technique, but how much work do you put into training it?

After a good drive, swing slower on the next tee than you did on the last tee. This prevents you from swinging too fast.

Most bad swings are caused by a mental error, not a physical one. The most common is trying to hit the ball far instead of straight.

After you have decided what you are about to do, and are positive about it, stop thinking. Set up and hit the ball without delay. Do not allow time for negative thoughts to start creeping in.

When getting ready for your shot, make all your movements slow to

prevent you from rushing your swing.

Be in love with the shot you are about to hit. Feel the good result before you step up to the ball, then go make it happen.

However the shot turns out, put it out of your mind and immediately put your mind on the next one.

No thought of the outcome of a shot should enter your mind while you are hitting it.

You do not have to hit perfect shots to have a good score. You do need perfect concentration, though.

Once you have learned how to swing the club effectively, repeating that swing is more a matter of letting it happen than trying to make it happen.

It is better to make a mistake having been positive about what you wanted to do than to have been tentative or negative about it.

### Playing the Game

When you are choosing your shot, first, eliminate all the trouble. Understand where the ball cannot go.

Golf is a "next shot" game. Play the shot that will make the next one as easy as possible.

Maintain your tempo by turning your body in the forward swing at the same pace you turned it in the backswing.

Stop laying up to "your distance". Closer is always better.

Think: What part of my game can take advantage of what the course is presenting to me? IOW, from where I am, I can't do that, but I can do this.

Be realistic about which shots you're not good enough to try. There is always another shot you can choose.

Spinning the ball is important around the green, but not too useful for the recreational player from the tee or fairway.

Controlling direction is vital in golf. Hit the ball where you're aiming, or hit it all over the place. Take your pick.

Ever notice how you play more cautiously than you practice? That's OK from the tee and fairway, but stay aggressive around the green.

If a low score is your goal, play away from the pin unless it you have a wide open look at it. But then life is short. You will have more fun and make more birdies, if you shoot straight for the pin every time.

Tee off with the longest club you can expect to hit the fairway half the time with. If that's not your driver, get a lesson.

"You drive for show and putt for dough, but if you can't drive, you won't be putting for very much dough.". Lee Trevino

By playing without delay, in taking your club out of the bag, addressing the ball, and hitting the shot without delay, you play better. You really do.

Take hazards into account when you aim your shot, but don't let them scare you into taking yourself out of the hole.

While the short game and putting are important, good scores are only made possible by good play up to the green.

Distance with your irons is important, not in how far you hit them, but in hitting them the precise distance required to get pin-high.

Hit your irons 85% of maximum effort and your driver 75%.

## Bob's Living Golf Book - April 2023

Slow down your golf swing and learn to live with the extra distance you get.

How to break 100: On a 6,100-yard course, hit nothing longer than 160 yards off the tee and 130 yards off the fairway. Really.

How to break 90: Use only the longest club that will get the ball in the fairway. Get the ball on the green with one short shot, not two.

How to break 80: hit the ball straight consistently, be a good chipper and approach putter, and avoid the blow-up hole. A bogey is still a good score.

If you own a rangefinder, you will find it to be more helpful inside 100 yards than from farther out in the fairway.

The sky is not the limit with your driver. Try to hit it the same distance every time, just like you do with each of your irons.

Learn to hit the same shot with at least two different clubs. That lets you adapt your shotmaking to course conditions and your intuition.

Sometime, play a round with one club. Not one club and a putter, one club. All the creating you have to do is lots of fun.

Between clubs? Pick the longer club, grip down one inch, and take your normal swing.

Try allowing an extra stroke on long par 3s and 4s. Then re-figure your plan for the hole based on that extra stroke.

Get out of trouble gracefully. You'll hit a better shot, and it will soothe your mind.

Three keys to good scoring: hit fairways, get your first short shot on the green, sink everything from three feet in.

Pick the club from the fairway based on the average distance it goes, not the best distance. We don't flush it very often.

Do not swap your driver for a 3-wood when facing a tight tee shot. The 3-wood is no more accurate and you lose a lot of distance.

Unless there is big trouble on the side of the green where the pin is, take dead aim. Rely on your short game to save you if you miss.

Be realistic about which shots you aren't good enough to try. Then do not try them.

Play safe if you have to, but not so safe that you have to work to make a bogey.

Different courses demand different skills. Play different courses to develop a well-rounded game.

This is important: count every stroke, hole out on every green, and play like there's a rules official standing beside you.

Instead of aiming for a spot on the ground, aim for a spot in the sky through which the ball will fall to the right spot on the ground.

Play off bogey, not par. It is much more encouraging to say you are five under than thirteen over.

Any time you feel the shot you are about to hit has to be perfect, you've chosen the wrong shot.

From wherever you are, there is a great shot you can hit. Pause a few moments to let the course tell you what it is.

How to break 100, 90, or 80: play from the forward tees. Figure out why you can do it from here and not from back there and work on the difference.

Bogeys are good scores unless your regular game is in the 70s. It's

the doubles that hurt you, to say nothing of the triples.

Around the green, amateurs take out a club and figure out the shot. Professionals do the opposite.

A mediocre ball-striker can make up for it with a sharp short game. A good ball-striker can shoot the same score with less work.

47 strokes to get the ball on the green and 32 to get it in the hole is a 79. That doesn't sound very hard, does it?

Which club to pick? Ben Hogan said to pick the club that would carry the green and then choose one club less than that.

The surest way to correct a swing that is going south is to slow it down, especially through the ball.

Keep your tempo under control by feeling that your forward swing is made at the same pace as your backswing.

Driving, chipping, and putting are not to be taken lightly, but your iron play determines your score.

Never hit over water unless you have no choice. Bad things happen when you challenge a water hazard needlessly.

How to score: Hit fairways. Aim for the center of the green.

## Practice

Almost every time I go to the range, the tees are full of golfers, but I can spend 45 minutes on the practice green by myself. Go figure.

To improve, you don't always need a better swing. You only need to learn how to use your best swing more often.

Use one ball on the practice green. Having to stand up after every shot keeps your back from getting sore.

Practice one shot type (pitch, chip, swing, etc.) until you have command of it. Then move on to another, and so on until you are solid from tee to hole.

Whenever you go to the range, spend a few moments practicing the shots that gave you problems the last time you played. Plug that hole in your game.

The feel of the golf swing is much easier to learn by swinging with your eyes closed.

"Every day you miss practicing will take you one day longer to get good". - Ben Hogan

Have a plan for swing improvement at the range and stick to it. Do not get caught up in correcting errant shots.

When you hit a few good shots in a row at the range and you know how you did it, switch to something else lest you overthink things.

Find the glaring weakness in your game and get a lesson that fixes it. Then move on to the next weakness.

If you aren't hitting well on the range, try correcting tempo and ball position before you do something with your swing.

If you have hit a scoring plateau, more practice just repeats what you already know. Get lessons to learn how to play a new game.

Range balls are only good for practicing how to hit the ball straight. Do not use them to determine how far you hit a particular club...

... but if you're aiming at the 150-yard marker and you *never* hit the ball that far, consider that what you think is your 150-yard club, isn't.

"Isn't it remarkable that somebody who is particularly good at

something practices it and never stops." - Gardner Dickinson

They say that from off the green, your worst putt is better than your best chip. The only people who say that are bad at chipping.

Learn what is right and practice that rather than trying to correct what you guess might be wrong.

You will be better off by taking lessons and then spending your practice time learning how to hit the ball straight instead of far.

The higher your scores, the more work you need on your swing. The lower your score, the more work you need around the green. Averaging 85 is the transition point.

Practice a little bit every day. Put your hands a club for just a few minutes.

Work hard on having a constant grip, constant aim, and a constant ball position. Paying careful attention to these three things set you up for success.

Why practice putting? Much of putting is confidence. The more you practice, the more experience you have hitting putts, and thus the more confidence.

If you are hitting one bad shot after another, stop. Just stop and do something else, rather than continue and groove your errors.

Spend more time practicing irons than the driver. Although he had to find fairways, Johnny Miller didn't shoot a 63 at Oakmont because of his driving.

## Miscellaneous

Your score is directly related to the number of times you hit the ball with the center of the clubface.

If you're buying new irons and can't decide between several sets, go to the practice green and buy the one that feels best for chipping.

Life is short. Focus on doing what you want to do with it. Become good at both brushing aside obstacles and getting to the point.

The plainest, most unadorned golf course is a better place to be than the most beautiful bowling alley.

The only stats you need to keep is how many strokes it takes you to get the ball on the green, and how many to get down from around the green.

Make friends with *all* of your clubs. Practice with every one so feel like something good is going to happen whenever you pull it out of the bag.

Learn to recognize golf tips in magazines that are really personal mannerisms of the particular pro being featured, and disregard them.

Make a video of your swing during a period when you are playing well. When things aren't going too well make another video and compare the two.

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