25 Golf Lessons that will improve your game

Improve your Golf Game immediately with these fully illustrated, easy to follow Golf Lessons.

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Lesson 1: Keep It Simple

Six Habits That Will Help Your Handicap

Sometimes the simplest advice pays the greatest dividends. That's been our experience during many years. Usually people come to our website hoping for a magic tip, or to be enlightened on the intricacies of grip, stance, and posture—when all they really need are some good golf habits!

So here it is: Our list of the six top ways to lower your scores and your handicap.

1. Move Up
Having trouble achieving a mental breakthrough? Try playing from the forward tees, in order to alter your comfort zone and lower your scores. Playing a shorter course will instill a "go-for-par" or birdie mindset that will stick with you when you return to your accustomed tees. If you can't score any better from the forward tees, consider it a message that you need extra work on your short game!

2. Do it Daily
Ben Hogan once said he hated to miss a day of practice because this meant it was one more day before he could get better. While you may not be able to keep this regimen, you should keep in mind that you get out what you put into the game. Time pressed? No problem. Just taking a club out in the backyard and swinging for 15 minutes will aid the cause.

3. When You Play Golf, Play Golf
If you're going to take the time to play, do it seriously and focus on each shot. Never make a careless swing during a serious round! Of course, this doesn't mean you can't have fun—it just means you should turn up the focus a notch. Use the driving range for working on technical skills, and the golf course for focusing on the real target: lowering your score.

4. Get Better Gear
I'm not saying you should spend thousands of dollars on equipment. But if you're using an older set that isn't fitted properly, you may be needlessly holding yourself back. Many recent technical advances such as perimeter weighting to produce a larger sweet spot and larger club head volumes—will make a difference in the consistency and distance of your shots. Why not take advantage of them? For example you can get a custom fitted set at Pinemeadow Golf or GigaGolf for about $150-$300 only.

5. Don't Shortchange Your Short Game
Chipping and putting account for more than half the strokes in a typical golfer's game. Consequently, you should devote most of your practice to your short game. I like to use a
football analogy here: It's great to be able to advance to the two-yard line, but it won't mean a thing if you can't make it into the end zone!

6. Write it Down!
It's easier to improve if you can document your hits and misses. Where do you hit good shots, and where do you hit poor ones? Did you hit right, left, or on top? How many putts of less than five feet do you miss? Keep a journal and consult it periodically to unearth patterns and discover areas that need work.

Good luck and have fun!

Lesson 2: Why You Should Waggle

How to Develop the Perfect Pre-Shot Routine

Most good golfers have a pre-shot routine—rituals that include everything from the way they approach the ball to how they waggle.

These routines serve a good purpose. When you approach your shots the same way each time, you train your subconscious to be less affected by outside influences (pressure, wind, spectators, jibes from your foursome, etc.). Fewer variables in the moments leading up to your swing will mean fewer variables during your swing.

How should you develop your personal pre-shot routine? Here are some guidelines.

1. Do what works for you
Things such as how you arrive at your grip and stance, looking at the target, wagging the club, and taking practice swings are personal preferences. The exact details are less important than doing the same thing each time. Many pros even time themselves from start to finish to get within seconds on each swing—and you might want to do the same. A good routine shouldn't take a lot of time. Quickly but methodically go through the checklist, think positive, and hit the ball. Your ritual should give you a positive feeling about the shot. Once you've completed the routine you must trust it, be target oriented, and let it go. You don't want to get stuck in the middle of your backswing, wondering if your grip is right or how deep the water is!

2. Get lined up
Try this in practice: Put a club on the ground next to the ball and aim it toward the target. Next, take a look at the club from behind and make sure it's positioned just right. Put another club parallel to it near where your feet would be. For your shot to go straight, this "foot line" should face slightly left of the target. Also, ensure that your knees, hips, and shoulders are in the same line. Practice this a few times, and then do it without the clubs on the ground. Alignment is one of the simplest mistakes to correct—and poor
alignment can be one of the most destructive, because you must compensate for it in your swing.

3. See it happen
Good players talk about "feeling" a good shot before it occurs. You can develop this feeling by creating a positive image of the ball's flight before you hit it. This "visualization" helps keep negative thoughts at bay. Stand behind the ball, and imagine the ball going straight toward the target and landing on the green softly. Or picture a great shot from the past that mimics the one you are about to make. For beginners, a realistic goal might be just to "see" the ball getting up in the air. As studies have shown, you'll tend to achieve the result you envision. The mind has enormous control over the body, so use your mind to see what you want—not what you don't want! Be target-oriented rather than trouble-oriented.

4. Reflect on your successes
When you hit a good shot, soak it in! Watch the ball's flight and how it lands and rolls. Hold your finish and try to mentally reinforce what the swing felt like. Giving yourself this positive feedback will make it much easier to recall these images and feelings during your pre-shot routine. When poor shots occur (as they do for all of us), don't spend too much time thinking about them. Devote your mental energy to producing good shots!

Lesson 3: Plain and Simple Putting

Five Steps to Develop the Perfect Putt

Putting is often called a game within a game, because many of the skills you need to be a good putter are different from those required for the rest of the game. What's more, studies show that putting accounts for 43% of the shots among better players. You'd be hard-pressed to find a great golfer who wasn't a good putter!

Given these facts, it makes sense for time-pressed golfers to invest time in their putting. Yet in my experience, most students ask for tips on everything but putting.

If you're serious about lowering your scores, try following these five simple steps to putting perfection.

1. Position
Position yourself so your eyes are over the intended line of the putt (ball line). To do this, hold your putter loosely and directly under your eyes as you address the putt and let gravity take it straight down. Now, make sure that when you look down at the putter, that it covers the ball. If not, move forward or back until it does. Ball position should be slightly forward (toward the left foot). Hands should also be forward. Align the putter shaft with the left forearm. This position promotes a good roll as the ball leaves the putter face.

2. Grip
Your hands should work as a unit and not be spread apart. The farther apart your hands are, the more likely you are to use your wrist which is not desired. (The putting stroke originates in the shoulders and arms.) Use a normal grip, with three fingers of each
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hand on the club and the others just along for the ride. Use relatively light (5 on a scale of 1-10) grip pressure in order to promote feel.

3. Aim
Find a target and imagine a straight line through the center of your putter. Don't get too caught up in the line that your feet make, but do be sure the putter face is square to the target. This is also the line your stroke should follow. Don't tilt your head, or you'll distort the perspective.

4. Stroke
Your putting stroke should be dominated by the shoulders and arms and involve as little wrist movement as possible. Minimize body movement, and try not to shift weight or turn the hips. (In other words, forget much of what you've learned about the body's role in a full swing!)

5. Acceleration
Successful putters have a backswing and follow-through of equal length. This promotes acceleration and aids distance control. One of the most common faults I see is a player taking the club way back and then stopping at the ball on the down stroke, anticipating the hit. Remember to stroke through the ball, not at it!

Lesson 4: Driving Like Crazy!

Mastering the Second Most Important Club in Your Bag

It's been said that the driver is the second most important club in your bag--next to your putter. A good drive sets the tone for the rest of the hole. Will you be scrambling just to get back on the fairway, hoping for pars and bogeys--or will you be aggressively going for the green and for birdies?

By squeezing a few extra yards out of those drives, the subsequent iron shot will be that much easier, as will your chips, putts, and so on [additional reading here: http://learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/Swing.html ]

1. Body Coil
Tiger Woods, Fred Couples, and other greats generate tremendous power by coiling the upper body with a big shoulder turn. The hips, however, don't turn nearly as much. This creates tension and torque, not unlike a rubber band being stretched before it's let go. How do you accomplish it? Try to keep the right leg and knee solid as you take the club away and fully rotate your shoulders. On the downswing, unwind and rotate through the ball with your hips. Make sure your navel is facing the target at the end of the swing to ensure a full turn.
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2. Developing a "Lag"
Successful drivers all have a "lag" in their swing. On the downswing, the wrists must release their energy at some point. When this happens is key. The closer to impact with the ball, the more stored power there will be. Many golfers deliver this source of power near the top of the swing or early on the way down, and end up swinging with just arms at contact. This is commonly called "casting"--the opposite of lag. One drill to improve this is to cock your wrists at the top of the backswing so that there's a right angle between your arm and club. Pull the club down in slow motion, while doing your best to retain this angle. Try to incorporate this into your full swings, and remember to release those wrists through the ball!

3. Swinging with the Whole Body
Some of the biggest muscles in your body [click this link for more relevant info: http://learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/Fitness.html] are the upper legs and trunk, and you should use them to put power in your swing. On the downswing, your legs should begin the drive and the trunk begins the turn. Also, the bigger muscles have much less chance to twitch under pressure than do the smaller ones. This is why good swingers seem to move effortlessly--the small muscles are being led by the larger ones. I call this "swinging with the whole body." Try it!

4. Left Arm Straight at the Top
Make sure your left arm is kept relatively straight on the backswing to ensure a wide swing arc. Keep some distance between the hands at the top of the swing and your shoulders and head. This produces more club head speed without swinging any harder. Davis Love III and Vijay Singh are great examples of this. Watch them, and internalize what you see!

Lesson 5: Learning to Love the Wind

Four Tips for Playing Golf in a Gale

When the wind blows, some players' games get blown away with it. Don't let this happen to you. Instead, practice the techniques here, and do what the very best golfers do: Use these adverse conditions to your advantage. In other words, learn to love the wind!

1. Playing in a Crosswind
Crosswinds are the most difficult situation to play in. These winds will magnify any spin on the ball, and greatly reduce distance. If you slice or hook the ball, a crosswind will magnify the effect. Therefore, it's important to use these winds to your advantage. If you want the ball to land softly, such as on a green, try to curve the shot into the crosswind. If you want more distance, or to have the ball roll when it lands, "ride" the wind by curving it in the same direction as the crosswind. In general: play the ball low.

2. The Knockdown Shot
The "knockdown" shot can be used in many situations, but is especially useful in the wind. The key points are to not swing at full
speed, and to keep the hands in front of the ball. This hand position should be there at address and through impact. Many knockdown shots finish with the forward swing low and only half completed, with the wrists not fully released and definitely not cupped as in a normal shot. The main goal here is to keep the ball low and under control.

3. Playing in a Headwind
This is where the knockdown shot really comes in handy. Play the ball back in the stance (toward the right foot). Select more club to decrease trajectory. It’s important not to swing as hard as on a regular swing (about 80% of normal). Remember what Greg Norman said on his way to winning the 1996 British Open: “Swing with ease into the breeze.” This helps in two ways: It keeps the ball from having as much spin, and it won't fly as high, where it's especially susceptible to wind.

4. Playing in a Tailwind
Playing with a tailwind is great for your ego. Use less club and count on the ball flying and rolling longer. The wind also makes your shots travel straighter, even when miss hit. If distance and carry are the goal, play the ball forward in the stance and hit it higher. Playing the ball back in the stance (as in the other wind situations) will make it a little easier to control—but remember to plan for the longer roll.

The most important thing in any windy situation is to hit the ball solidly. A well-struck ball will be much less affected than a miss hit shot with sidespin. Spins in the wind get exaggerated, so watch out!!

Lesson 6: Finding the Fairway

Ways to Help You Land on the Short Grass

How often have you birdied or even been able to par a hole after finding trouble off the tee? Hitting the fairway consistently is vital to playing well. However, it's no easy task, especially in a pressure situation such as a tournament. The following are a few ideas to help you drive your ball in the fairway more often.

Visualize the Shot

Creating a positive visual image [click here for more related reading: http://www.learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/Mental.html] is critical in any sport but it's even more important in golf—a very mental game. The next time you're in the tee box, stand behind the ball and pick a target. Be very specific about your target rather than just aiming out there somewhere. As you stand behind the ball, picture yourself addressing the ball with the proper posture and alignment. Now, focus in on the desired ball flight. See the ball launching off the clubface—high in the air and heading right toward the target. Draw back on a positive drive from another day in the same situation. Finally, step into the address position and let it happen. Remember, “seeing” what you want gives you a much greater ratio of success.

Swing within Yourself

Many good drivers will tell you they have a "bread and butter" shot and an all-out shot. When the fairway is wide and the situation allows, it's fine to grip it and rip it. But when you really
need to be in the fairway, go to a swing you can trust. Use the swing that gives you the highest percentage of accuracy. This swing is usually an 80% swing speed accompanied by good rhythm and tempo. In addition, reducing the hip turn on the backswing is helpful. Remember, the key with this type of shot is to get the ball on line and rolling. Tiger Woods used this tee shot often during the U.S. and British Opens this year. When executed correctly, your ball will fly low, straight, and roll a lot—almost knuckle down the fairway.

**Stay Balanced**
As I’ve mentioned in other lessons, balance is critical in achieving consistent results with the driver and all other parts of the game. After you’ve swung, you should be able to stand tall with your body fully turned toward the target for a few seconds without losing your footing. If you’re at all shaky, it's time for some work. A good drill is to make a slow and complete practice swing. This slower motion will help to train your muscles and makes it easier to keep your balance. Eventually, you'll be able to increase your practice swing speed while retaining the balance at the end of the follow-through.

**Use the Right Tools**
This is the hard part and can take some time if you're just randomly trying clubs. This is where club fitting can really speed up the process of improving your game. No two golf swings are alike. The best club for you might be the worst for someone else. Having the perfect fit is very important [get details here: http://www.learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/PMGolf.html ] in helping you find the fairway.

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**Lesson 7: Unlock the Power of the Right Side**

Many Players are Afraid of the Right Side. Don't Be!

Students often tell me that they have "too much right-side emphasis" in their swings. Usually, they've been told this by well-meaning teachers.

I'm here to say that in most instances, the right side is getting a bad rap. In reality, it's the biggest asset most golfers have! Among right-handed players, it provides most of the power.

You really can't have too much right side in your swing--but you can use it improperly. To illustrate the power your right side possesses, try pushing as hard as you can against a fixed object about three feet off the ground (such as a golf cart) . Make sure the right elbow is close to your side in front of your right hip. Now try the same thing with the left arm pushing into the cart with the back of your wrist, as in a golf swing. No power there! The reason? The right hand is taking advantage of the full body: trunk, legs, and torso. In contrast, the left arm is pulling away from the body, making it difficult to generate power. Like a boxer throwing a punch, you're using a full body rotation with your right side--not just the arm.

1. **Drop at the Top**
What gets golfers into trouble with the right side is often called "coming over the top." This means that the downswing is being initiated by the upper body, particularly the right shoulder and arm. To correct this, think of your hands and arms lightly dropping for a few inches from the top of the backswing. This puts the right elbow where it should be--close and connected to the right hip as you start to turn (see photo). (Don't try to keep the elbow close on the
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backswing, however, as this will create a very flat and narrow swing.)

2. Get Your Train on Track
The other problem is when the right hand becomes overactive and dominates the left. This causes a breakdown of the left arm, and a "cupping" of the wrists. Here’s how to fix this: Think of the right as the locomotive, and the left as the train tracks. The left channels power down the proper path toward the target. To get a feel for this, swing with the left arm only. As you come through, ensure that the left shoulder turns naturally, and away from the chin. If this doesn't happen, you'll likely see lots of shots go to the right.

Lesson 8: Sand Man!

How to Turn Bunker Play into a Day at the Beach

Face it: Everyone has to dig themselves out of the sand sooner or later. Fortunately, there are simple, reliable techniques for blasting out of bunkers. And good sand play doesn't just involve technique—equipment is also crucial, so I've covered the essential aspects of a good sand wedge here, too.

Read on for everything you need to know to enjoy your next day at the beach.

1. My Favorite Tips

- Use swing speed to alter distance. Practice until you can gauge distance by your personal swing speeds.
- Make the clubface enter behind the ball at a steep angle to hit shorter, and a shallower angle to hit longer. A steeper angle allows the club head to get under the ball and lift it.
- Take 2-3 inches of sand with each shot (see photo). Less sand will spin the ball more, but is risky. Practice by drawing a line in the sand behind the ball and hit that spot.
- Establish firm footing by digging the feet in slightly.
- Use an open stance (left foot spread to the left) to restrict backswing length and steepen the swing.
- Open the clubface slightly to offset the open stance. Open it more if you want a higher, softer shot.
- Keep your wrists firm through impact and don't release your hands until well after impact.
- Visualize a steep, "U-shaped" swing.

2. Beach Clubs
It's important to understand sand wedge design and how it can work for you. A well-designed wedge [click this link for more info: http://www.learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/GGolf.html] has three important characteristics:

- "Bounce" describes the rounded sole of the club head. Sand wedges have this to allow the club to glide, skid, or bounce rather than dig into the sand.
- "Loft" (angle of the clubface) is crucial for getting the ball in the air, over the edges of bunkers, and to ensure that it
lands softly. Sand wedges generally have a loft of 56-60 degrees (by comparison, a pitching wedge is 48-52 degrees).

- "Toe-heel camber" is what gives sand wedges an oval-shaped look on the bottom of the face, to prevent the toe or heel from catching. (Think of the club "splashing" through the sand rather than digging.)

Remember, you're making things unnecessarily difficult if you're using a pitching wedge [get details here: http://www.learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/PMGolf.html] to get out of the sand!

3. Make it Happen in the Mind's Eye
Tension can ruin your sand shot faster than anything else. When tension occurs, the swing is inhibited and so is the chance for a good shot. Try to visualize a good shot. Stay muscually light and mentally positive. Gary Player, one of the worlds' best bunker players, once said, "If I am one of the greats, it's for one simple reason: no bunker shot has ever scared me and none ever will. Approach every bunker shot with the feeling you are going to hole it."

Lesson 9: Rough Treatment

Our Six Best Tips for Hitting from the Rough and Other Tough Lies

I don't care how good a golfer you are--at some point you'll be stuck in a bad lie. It happens to all of us! Getting the ball out of the rough can be quite a challenge--especially if you don't have a strategy. Here are some tips to help bail you out of a bad situation, and just maybe have some fun doing it!

1. Stand Closer at Address
Standing slightly closer to the ball will create a more upright swing plane, which means the club will encounter less grass on the downswing.

2. Open the Clubface
Opening the clubface (clockwise at address) helps in two ways: First, it gives the shot more loft, which helps it get airborne. Second, the rough often grabs the clubface and pulls it left, so opening it helps keep the shot on line.

3. Move Your Stance Forward
When using the short irons, moving forward over the ball will promote a steeper swing and help "punch" the ball out without catching too much grass.

4. Adjust Your Distance
Rough tends to take backspin off the ball and create a "flier" that goes farther and takes longer to stop. Adjust your target to allow for the added roll.

5. Use a Steeper Approach
On the downswing you should feel as though you are hitting "down and through" with a sharper swing. Don't be afraid to move some grass and take a divot. This is one time to be aggressive!

6. Adjust Your Grip
I normally recommend light grip pressure. However, when hitting in the rough, the left hand
Lesson 10: Good Counsel for Off-Camber Shots

Our Best Tips for Hitting Out of a Sidehill Lie

In an ideal world, we wouldn't hit balls into embarrassing lies in the first place. But the fact is, we do it, no matter how good or well-practiced we are. And consequently, it pays to know how to get out of these situations!

One of the most difficult is the sidehill lie, where the ball is above or below your feet. Here are some tips that will improve your chances of a successful escape.

**Ball Above the Feet**

In this situation, the most common mistake is hitting behind the ball and making it go too far left. To fix these problems you should:

1. Choke down on the club. The amount depends on the severity of the slope.

2. Aim to the right and open the clubface slightly (turn it clockwise). (The ball tends to go left from this type of lie because the slope pulls it that way.)

3. Reduce knee flex. It's less likely that you will hit the ball "fat" or behind this way.

**Ball Below the Feet**

In this situation, the most common mistake is hitting the ball too far right and topping it. To fix these problems, you should:

1. Grip near the end of the shaft to help avoid hitting it "thin" or on top.

2. Aim slightly left. (The ball tends to go right from this type of lie.)

3. Use more knee flex. This helps avoid hitting the ball "thin" or on top.

Lesson 11: Learning to Love Winter

How to Be at Your Best in the Rain and the Cold

A strong mental attitude is critical when nature's forces are trying to knock you off your game. Try putting these countermeasures in place and you may just learn to love winter!

**Rain**

Keeping clubs and grips dry is critical when it starts to come down. Once grips get wet, your performance (and desire) will decrease dramatically. Professionals have caddies to take care of this. The rest of us need to take the time to place a cover or towel over the opening of the bag. If you have an umbrella, hang a couple of dry
towels on the spokes. This way you'll always be able to dry off the grips and your hands, no matter how wet everything else gets. If you wear a glove, remove it after each shot and keep it in a dry place—under the umbrella is a good spot. Invest in some high-quality rain gear. There are many new, high-tech fabrics that really work, keeping you dry without causing you to sweat or get soaked from the inside out.

Also, remember that the ball won't travel as far in the rain and the ground will be wet, decreasing roll. This seems obvious, but I'm amazed to see how many players fail to use enough club [additional info at http://learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/break80.html] in wet conditions.

Cold
When the air is cold, the ball won't travel as far, so you should choose more club here as well. Good chipping and putting can make up for other mistakes in cold conditions, but you must have good feel, and this means keeping your hands warm. When U.S. pros play in icy weather at the Dunhill cup in Scotland, they're prepared with warm gloves to put on between shots and hand warmers in their pockets. Make sure you have a way to keep your hands warm before you tee off!

Also, choose a softer compression golf ball. This will help you keep a sense of feel around the greens and elsewhere.

Wind is also a major factor in winter. For tips on how to hit when it starts to blow, see our previous lesson on the topic. And have fun out there!

Lesson 12: Don't be Afraid of Fairway Woods

Our Five Best Tips to Help You Hit Them with Confidence

Are you having trouble getting the ball up in the air with your long irons? If so, hit your fairway woods [get details here: http://www.learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/PMGolf.html]. Golfers tend to shy away from them just because they're longer. Don't let the added shaft length scare you! In fact, there's an upside to fairway woods. They have larger heads and wider sole plates than long irons, making them much more forgiving. It's very smart to put fairway woods in your bag. Here are a few thoughts to take with you to the range.

1. Make a Full Turn

As your body ages, flexibility diminishes. (Don't feel bad, it happens to everyone.) So does your ability to make a full turn. If you're serious about improving, you must stay flexible. Fairway woods require a full turn of the torso and upper body without overturning the hips, to maximize distance. There are many good stretches you can do to slow down the aging process and increase flexibility! Try sitting down and resting a wood behind your neck with your hands holding the club lightly above your shoulders. Now, slowly stretch and rotate from side-to-side, turning your shoulders as close to 90 degrees as possible in relation to your hips. (For more good stretches and exercises visit the ‘Fitness’ Section at LearnAboutGolf.com.)
2. Take a Proper Stance
Longer clubs will change your swing plane, usually making it flatter as you stand farther away from the ball. So when hitting longer clubs, particularly woods, there are several things you must focus on. Make sure you retain good posture. At address, flex your knees and feel as though your behind is sticking out. A good drill for this is to have someone hold a club along your spine. Bend forward by tilting your pelvis, and keep your back flat, not arched. This also allows your hands and arms to fall naturally from the shoulders without reaching too much for the ball. A good visual thought is to keep the spine perpendicular to the shaft at address.

3. Watch Your Ball Position
Normally your shorter irons are played from the middle area of the stance. With fairway woods, it's a different story. Move your stance so the ball is off of the left heel (right heel for left-handed players). This allows for a greater sweeping motion as you swing through. Having the ball too far back in the stance will make your approach too steep and cause you to take a divot. If you make a deep divot with a wood, generally it's because your swing is too steep.

4. "Sweep" the Ball
The proper swing arc with woods is long, wide and smooth—contrary to a short iron's arc. When hitting woods, you should feel like you are sweeping the ball from the turf and extending through the ball. The backswing should also be deeper and the follow-through extended, meaning that the swing arc is wider. One of the best tips to encourage this movement is to imagine striking through a ball a few inches in front of the one you are hitting. Eventually, you'll learn to hit through it—not at it!

5. Do the Waggle
A low ball flight is often caused by a closed clubface. Although this gives your shot plenty of roll, it will also hamper your ability to get the ball airborne as well as affect distance control. Often, this closed-clubface problem starts with the takeaway. Practice the waggle drill in which you fan the clubface open during the first foot or two of the backswing. This puts your hands in a good position at the top of the swing and ensures a proper wrist cock.

Lesson 13: Know Your Faults and How to Fix Them

Follow our Practice Guidelines and You'll Get Great Results

When you get the urge to get your game in shape, make a plan and stick to it. As with golf, and anything else in life, a little planning goes a long way toward success.

Work on One Drill
If you’re swaying for instance, only work on that. A common mistake many of us make is that we lose our focus. If you hit a bad shot because you lifted your head too soon, don't change your practice thoughts. Remain focused on how to avoid swaying. Otherwise, you'll go around in circles and never accomplishing anything! Continue working on one swing thought until you’ve perfected It [additional reading here: http://learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/Swing.html] -- then move on to
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another area such as lifting the head too soon.

**Practice Like You’re Playing**
If you're at the range hitting balls, don't smash them recklessly. Practice each shot with a purpose. Remember, your time on the range should be constructive. The more real you can make it, the more valuable it becomes when you're on the course. This doesn't mean you always have to be ultra-serious. Just approach each shot as though there is a goal. This creates muscle memory and is the way all good players approach practice!

**Breakdown Your Game**
It is important to break down your game before every practice session. Golf can be broken down into four main areas: ball striking, short game, mental game [click here for more related reading: http://www.learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/Mental.html ], and course management. How do you rate your game in each of these areas? When you know, devote the majority of your practice time to the weaker areas. This will benefit you in the long run. What follows is a list of points to work on when you're practicing golf's essentials.

- **Ball Striking**
  Most golfers spend their time working in this area. The fact of the matter is that ball striking tends to be a more important area for beginners than accomplished players. You should practice this-- but not only this!

- **Short game**
  The short game is comprised of chipping, pitching, and putting. This is the one area where you'll be able to shave a few strokes, if you devote enough time to it. If you don't agree, just add up the strokes in an average round. Often, you'll find that more than half are spent here.

- **Mental Game**
  In no other sport is the mental game more important. In golf, it's just you against the course. Therefore, it's critical to learn how to deal with emotions and create positive images. Whether you're shooting your best score or your worst, emotions can affect any round. Anger can be good if you channel it into positive action. Unfortunately, most people are affected negatively by it and lose concentration. How do you hold up under pressure? Find a way to approach each shot the same. This will help you to be more consistent. This is what sports psychology is all about.

- **Course Management**
  Jack Nicklaus was never known for his ball-striking ability but was able to win as a result of his golf course management. Playing smart means that you know the limitations of your game, and you are able manage them. Play to your strengths not your weaknesses! Do you know when to go for a green and when to lay up? Understanding this facet of your game is important.

**Practice a Pre-Shot Routine**
The more consistent your routine is before you hit a shot, the more steady your play will be. Take some time to develop a checklist or routine and keep it simple! In a short time, it will become habit-- steering you toward better all-around golf.

**Lesson 14: 5 Ways to 10 More Yards**

Learn How You Can Have a Power Game
How would you like to reach each par 5 on your home course in just two shots? What if you could hit a 5-iron [click this link for more info: http://www.learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/GGolf.html] instead of a 3-iron into a long par 4? Odds are, your game would improve. Here is a list of what I consider the five essentials to focus on if you want to hit the ball farther.

1. **Widen Your Swing Arc**
   Tiger Woods and Davis Love are good models of long hitters with wide take-aways and big arcs. To achieve this, extend your arms as much as possible on the backswing. If you can keep your arc wide, you'll be able to create good clubhead speed without swinging any harder.

2. **Lighten Your Grip Pressure**
   You don't have to swing hard to hit the ball a long way. In fact, this is often counterproductive and causes muscle tension, ultimately leading to less club head speed. After relaxing your upper body, the next key in attaining additional power is proper grip pressure. Think of your grip pressure as about a 7 on a scale from 1 to 10. Maintain this pressure throughout the swing to create good club head speed and still maintain control. If you have access to a club head speed analyzer, put your swing on it. While using it, note the differences in your club head speed when applying tight- and relaxed-grip pressure. You'll quickly discover that the less tension you have in your body and grip pressure, the more your club head speed increases.

3. **Make a Big Shoulder Turn**
   Jim McLean, one of the PGA's best teachers, calls shoulder turn the "X" factor. He took scientific measurements of many long hitters and found that they all have a greater shoulder than hip turn. This means that a big hip turn can actually diminish your ability to create power and club head speed, because there is less torque created. Keep the lower body (the foundation) steady while the shoulder gets behind the ball, and you'll be in good shape.

4. **Tuck Your Elbow**
   The best way to feel the proper position is to keep the right elbow tucked against your side on the downswing (left elbow for left-handed players). By doing this, you'll avoid the common error of swinging across the ball, which diminishes power. Also, when the right elbow stays in, it delays the hit with your hands--an essential in creating power and a properly timed release. When you do the tuck correctly, the right arm (for right-handed players) is straight and your hands are not behind the ball.

5. **Keep Your Knees Firm and Flexed**
   Think of your legs as the foundation of your swing. If your foundation is shaky and moving around too much, you'll have a power leak and less ability to coil properly. Keep a firm feeling with the right knee at the top of the backswing (left knee for left-handed players) and a feeling of your weight staying on the inside of the foot. If the knee and weight move outside the foot, a sway can occur, resulting in numerous mechanical problems. The left knee should stay fairly quiet as well and not move laterally too much so that you maintain some width between the knees. A tip we published earlier suggested that you imagine keeping a basketball between your knees.
Lesson 15: Learning to Manage Your Game

Our Tips to Help You Play Smart

After you’ve learned the fundamentals of the golf swing, the next challenge to improving your game is proper course and game management. If you watch enough Tour events on television, you’ll hear announcers talk about the importance of course and game management. All players on Tour hit the ball well. They all have solid, all-around games. Yet, only a certain percentage of them ever win. Until a Tour player learns to perfect the management of the game, the player seldom wins. For years, Jack Nicklaus was considered the best at this. Course management is best defined as playing smart golf. It’s about understanding your game inside and out, your limitations, when to gamble on a shot, and when to back off. The two most important areas you can manage on the course are your judgment and emotions. To play your best, try implementing the following strategies the next time you golf.

Develop a Routine

Indecision, doubt, and hesitancy lead to poor golf swings. Believe in yourself and play with confidence [click here for more: http://www.learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/Mental.html]! Learn to accept that you’ll hit bad shots and swing without that fear and pressure. Ben Hogan (photo above) often said that 90% of hitting a golf ball occurs before the swing. Take a positive approach and visualize what you want rather than what you don’t want. Approach each shot as an opportunity for a great result, rather than bring bad past experiences and fear to the shot. You’ll find that having the same pre-shot routine and approach every time, both mentally and physically, helps you when you’re angry, nervous, or feeling other strong emotions.

Control Your Emotions

Some sports reward you for getting angry or emotionally pumped up and excited. In golf, such strong emotions can hurt you unless they’re properly channeled. Try to stay even-keeled, having the same approach to each shot whether you’ve just birdied or triple boogied. It’s OK to celebrate a great shot or be angry with a poor one, momentarily. But, by the time you address your next shot, you should have the same feeling you had on the first tee.

Choose the Right Club

Before you get up there and swing away, determine the correct distance to the hole. These days, most courses have yardage markers--make sure you take advantage of them and pay close attention to detail. In other words, is the yardage marker’s distance measured to the front or center of the green, and where is the flag in relation to that distance? This can easily be a difference of two or three clubs. Firm course conditions also affect how far you should plan for the ball to carry. In time, paying close attention helps you determine how far, on average, your shots carry. Remember to factor in trouble. Determine if there is more trouble short of the green or over it, and favor more or less club accordingly. Doing this helps to minimize your score even when you miss-hit the ball. Furthermore, several other factors can influence your ball’s flight and carry. Remember to take wind, rain, rough, and your lie into account and adjust accordingly.

Take Advantage of Tee Boxes

The only time you can change your ball’s placement is when you tee it up. Take advantage of it! Always favor the same side as the trouble to get the best angle and the best percentage for avoiding it. This way, you face away from the trouble rather than into it.
LearnAboutGolf.com: 25 Lessons that will improve your game

Weigh the Risk and Reward
If you've hit a poor shot, sometimes you have to accept your "medicine" and chip out of the rough and back to the fairway. Ask yourself, what could happen if you miss the shot you are attempting? If you hit those trees you are trying to slip the ball around, will it cost you just one shot or could it add several to your scorecard?

Swing With Ease
Don't try too hard to get extra distance. Forcing your swing is counterproductive because it causes a loss of balance and control. This is a mistake most amateurs make when faced with a long or difficult shot. If you can stand tall with good balance after your swing, you've probably done a good job of swinging "within" yourself. If not, choose an extra club and tone it down so that your balance is solid.

Lesson 16: Learn to Putt Consistently

Seven Drills to Help You Accomplish This

A one-foot putt is just as important as a 300-yard drive. It's also interesting to think that you can hit every green in regulation and not score well--if your putts aren't dropping. Putting is perhaps the most important ingredient to scoring well. On the PGA Tour, everyone hits the ball virtually the same, but it is the player who putts the best each week who wins the tournament. Here is a list of drills to help you sink a few more putts and, in the process, shave a few strokes off your score. Good luck!

Use the Flagstick
Most golfers have trouble keeping their putter on the proper line during the stroke. Try using a flagstick to help define the path of your putting stroke. Simply lay a flagstick flat on the putting surface and line it up with the hole. Now, set the heel of your putter against the flagstick. This works as a guide when you stroke the putt. Next, pay close attention to the putter, and maintain smooth contact with the flag on both the forward and backstrokes. By doing this, you'll be able to see exactly where your stroke goes off line and correct it.

Start with a Roll
Putting a perfect, true roll on the ball starts with ball position. The mistake many players make is that they play the ball too far back in the stance. This causes a descending stroke and can make the ball bounce initially--rather than roll. To get the ball rolling smoothly, play the ball further up in the stance--off the inside of your front foot. You'll also notice that the proper position is under the left eye (right eye for left-handed players).

Close an Eye
Lifting the head not only hurts the full swing, but the putting stroke as well. Close the left eye (right eye for left-handed players), take a few practice strokes, then address the ball. Doing this makes it tough to see the hole--but you shouldn't need to. Just focus on the ball with only the right eye (left eye for left-handed players) until you see the putter contact it. Using this drill trains you to keep the head and body still throughout the stroke.
LearnAboutGolf.com: 25 Lessons that will improve your game

**Force a Bigger Follow-Through**
Under pressure, short putts cause tension in a golfer's stroke. To maintain a good stroke, accelerate through the putt. Often times, the backstroke becomes too big, causing deceleration on the forward stroke. To cure this, place a second ball about six inches behind the ball you are going to hit. Then, on the backstroke, try not to strike the second ball. By restricting the backstroke, you'll force a bigger, more accelerated follow-through.

**Don't Break Your Wrists**
Stick a tee into the end of your putter grip. As you take your stroke, make sure that the tee stays even or slightly ahead of the putter head [click the link to get some more details: http://www.learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/PMGolf.html ] throughout the stroke. If the head passes the tee, chances are you've broken your wrists and opened the door for inconsistency. On long putts, this is more difficult to do as they can require some wrist break. Therefore, use this drill for shorter, mid-range putts.

**Surround the Hole**
Find a hole on the practice green that has some slope to it. Place several balls around the hole, approximately two feet away. Now go around the circle, concentrating on making each putt and noticing how each putt breaks a little differently depending on its position. Challenge yourself to make each putt before graduating to moving the balls to three feet away. If you miss one, start again. Remember, the more times you see yourself knock in these four-footers in practice, the stronger your confidence will become.

**Putt to a Quarter**
Place a quarter on the putting green and practice putting to it. By using a smaller target, you will refine your ability to aim for and find the center of the cup. This is also a good drill for developing the feel of speed on longer putts.

Putting is extremely important to lowering your scores. The next time you work on your game, devote as much time to putting as you do hitting balls. You'll be happy with the results.

Golf course and game management entails developing some consistent habits, being aware, and using common sense. Give these tips a try for a period of time, and watch those scores come down!

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**Lesson 17: Learn to Eliminate Your Slice**

**Our Six Ways to Help You**

Playing golf with a slice, an uncontrollable shot that curves left to right, is something many golfers think they have to live with and accept. This is not true—even if you’ve been a chronic slicer for years. In fact with a little time, dedication, and effort, you can learn to stop hitting stray, bending shots. Once you do, you'll start hitting the ball more consistently, have added distance, and achieve better control. Before long, the game will be more enjoyable. The following is a list of quick fixes to help you hit straighter, more consistent shots.

1. Think "Topspin" and "Thumbs Up"
Watching tennis can help your golf game. All good tennis players apply topspin to their shots by releasing or turning over their racket when they hit the ball. In golf, the move is similar only it's made with a club in your hand. Allowing for the release of the hands is critical to maximizing your potential and reducing slices. The next time you're practicing, take a club and swing it. As you pass the impact position, think of the right hand reaching out in front on the follow through with your thumbs pointing upward. This shows that the wrists rolled properly and that the club was released.

2. Strengthen Your Grip
Chronic slicers have trouble getting their hands rotated through impact. Start by gripping the club in the fingers rather than the palm of your hand. At address, make sure you are able to see two or three knuckles of the left hand. This “strengthening” of the grip allows the hands to work actively.

3. Pull the Rope
Most slicers cut across the ball on the downswing--they take the club back to the outside on the backswing and cross their plane (imaginary line) to the inside on the downswing. This is what produces a slice. To understand the correct swing path or downswing motion, picture a rope attached to a tree above you. Now, imagine yourself pulling that rope straight down.
Take that thought with you to the driving range and try to pull your club straight down when starting the downswing. This also forces the right elbow to stay close to your side--a key to not crossing the line. Doing this gives you the correct inside path and a better ability to swing out toward the target.

4. Start Back to the Inside
Imagine the line of your swing on the ground as it goes back and through toward the target. Place a range basket, or something else you don't want to break, on the ground a couple of feet behind the ball and slightly inside the intended target line. Using this drill forces you to swing from the inside out toward the target--the proper way!

5. Shoulders Right to Hit Left
Most players aim farther and farther to the left to accommodate their slice. This only makes matters worse by opening the shoulders. Your swing plane tends to follow your shoulders. If they are open, your odds of cutting across the ball increase. Try just the opposite. Aim the shoulders as far to the right as possible at address. This forces the swing to stay on the proper path.

6. Swing around Your Spine
The best way to eliminate the typical slice, one that is caused by a reverse pivot or sway motion, is to swing around your spine and finish around and to the left. Use “x-ray vision,” meaning to picture your spine staying in a near-perpendicular angle to the ground at all times during the swing. Now, just swing around the center of it!
These tips work best if they're combined with each other. For instance, achieving the proper swing path won't stop you from hitting to the right if you don't use your hands properly as well. Practice each strategy separately in the beginning and then combine them. You'll soon be saying goodbye to your slice--forever!
Lesson 18: Playing from Various Bunker Lies

How Footwork Can Help You Get out of the Sand

When attempting a bunker shot, most amateurs know to twist their feet into the sand. This is a good idea, but how you should do this varies depending on the lie. Ignoring different types of lies and ball positions in the sand sets you up for poor balance, slipping, and an inability to control ball flight—not to mention higher scores! Consistently practice these footwork basics and watch your sand play become more predictable.

Ball Below Feet: Use Less Lower Body

This is perhaps the toughest position, because there is a tendency to fall forward during the swing and change your spine angle. Dig your heels into the slope here and try to feel as though the weight is on the balls of your feet. You’ll need a little more knee flex, as well, to keep you from topping the ball. Try to maintain the same amount of flex throughout the swing. Remember less is better when it comes to using leg and lower-body action—especially on this difficult shot!

Downhill Lies: Set Your Weight

Gravity forces most of your weight on the downhill or lower leg. Make sure to set your weight on the inside of the forward foot for more stability. I also recommend that you turn out your toe slightly to help absorb the extra weight transfer caused by gravity. Normally, you would open your stance considerably in the sand. But, on these shots, you have to be careful. If you open the stance, your right leg is in the way of your swing. To avoid this, pull your back foot away a few inches.

Uphill Lies: Brace Yourself

With gravity working to keep your weight on the downhill leg, it's important to brace it firmly into the sand. Angle your leg into the slope so that the weight is on the inside of the downhill leg and so that when you swing, the weight will be easier to shift forward.

Ball Above Feet: Adjust Your Aim

The first adjustment to make is to dig your toes in deeper than your heels. This helps keep you level and makes it easier to stay balanced. Keep the legs flexed. Aiming a bit to the right and using a slightly open stance is also recommended—as uphill lies tend to promote a hook or pulled shot.

Buried Lie: Use the Right Twist

The deeper you submerge your feet into the sand, the deeper the club enters the sand. So if the ball is only slightly buried, you needn't twist in too deep. For a severely buried lie, it helps you get under the ball if you twist in to the approximate depth of the buried lie. For this type of shot, you'll need to pick up the club steeply and hit down and through on a sharp U-like swing plane.

Obviously, the best advice is to stay out of these tough lies but we all know that's easier said than done. Besides, this game wouldn't be any fun if it weren't challenging?
Lesson 19: Learning to Properly Release the Club

Several Tips to Help You Unlock Golf's Critical Move

Many of the players I've taught over the years have shared common problems--the inability to generate power and slicing the ball. In most instances, both of these problems stem from having a poor or improper release. This lesson lists ways to help you release, or turn the club over. Whether you are getting older and want to gain a few extra yards or are just beginning and want to ingrain proper habits, put these tips to work for better all-around ball striking.

Try a Split Grip
Perhaps the best drill to emphasize proper hand release is to grip the club so that you have a few inches of space between your hands. Next, make a few swings with the club going only half way back and through. Doing this drill helps exaggerate the feeling of the right hand crossing over the left. When you do this properly, you'll see the toe of the club is facing upward both at hip height on the backswing and at hip height on the follow-through.

Don't Hold On
"Holding on" means that instead of being relaxed through impact there is a tendency to grip too tightly and hold on--not releasing the full potential of the swing. When you anticipate the hit rather than swinging through the ball, there is inevitably a tendency to tighten and hold on too much. The most fluid way to swing is as though you aren't hitting the ball at all, but rather are swinging through it.

Improve Your Posture
Ben Hogan once said, "Ninety percent of a golf shot--good or bad--occurs before the swing." Start by standing very erect with your back flat. Flex the knees and push your behind out so that your knees are roughly above the balls of the feet. Try to maintain this position as you bend over from the waist. Think of the arms and hands being low and relaxed as though gravity is pulling them straight down. Now stand at address with a club. Make sure that an angle is established with the wrists. This angle is important because, in essence, you are lessening the moving parts of your swing by setting the wrist cock in advance. This allows for a hinging action of the wrists and makes it much easier to release the club on the follow-through. Quite often, my students reach too much for the ball, causing the wrists to roll in the swing rather than hinge and unhinge.

Relax Your Grip Pressure
Start by determining your grip pressure. How tight are you gripping the club on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being as tight as you can squeeze it and 1 being not holding on at all? Generally, the best players grip about a 6 on this scale. Any tighter and tension gets in the way, going all the way up the arms and into the upper body. Too much grip tension inhibits the lag (delayed hit) and release motions that are critical to extension and a full release of the hands and arms. After you have set a light but firm pressure, monitor the consistency of this throughout the swing. Is it the same throughout, or does it tighten or even loosen somewhere during the swing? Keeping a light pressure consistently allows you the freedom to make the correct move. Remember, the tighter you grip the club the less your hands work in unison and the more they inhibit your release.
Develop a Pre-Shot Routine

Being tight in the body and with the grip aren't the only things that affect your game and release. Your mind must also be clear and focused. Start by using a consistent pre-shot routine. This routine should allow you to relax and visualize positive results. Developing a pre-shot routine can clear the mind so you're free to go ahead and give the ball your best shot.

Drop the Right Foot Back

Dropping the right foot back as you take some swings helps you to swing along a path that allows for a full hand release. Drop the right foot back about one foot at address and try to swing across your body with easy swings. After you get the feeling of your hands being able to release, trick yourself and retain the motion while slowly moving the foot back into the normal position.

Use the Big Muscles

To generate your full power potential, you must use your trunk and midsection. Any athlete, from boxer to baseball pitcher, will agree that their power starts from the legs, trunk, and midsection. This is where the big muscles are and where you must rely for a smoother motion. Practice feeling that the belly button is facing the target at the end of the swing and that you finish the swing balanced on the right toe. To fully release the hips, the weight must get off the left foot and up onto the toe. If you make a good body release combined with the hand release, you’ll wonder where all that power came from.

One of the biggest breakthroughs you will feel in golf is when your body and hands release their energy at the same time [additional reading: http://learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/Swing.html]. When this is happening, the right elbow stays close to the right side--almost touching the hip as both it and the hips move or release through that poor golf ball. This is what I call efficient use of energy, and it comes only through practice.

Lesson 20: Learn to Transfer Your Weight

Proper Weight Shift Spells Great Results

It seems like it should be easy: Start the swing with the weight evenly distributed on both feet and finish with it on the left foot and right toe. After all, we do this every time we take a step and in any sport I can think of. Proper weight transfer is necessary to powerfully propel an object. Yet, for some reason, many golfers can't seem to resist helping the ball get up in the air by hitting up or at it. This lesson will help you understand some of the ways to hit through the ball with a correct weight shift.

Understand Weight Shift

So often, it's hard for students to understand and feel their weight shift. A good way to begin is to close your eyes and take a few practice swings. Afterwards, give each foot a percentage weighting for the beginning (at address), middle, and end of the swing. If you're swinging properly, the beginning or address position should feel like your weight is evenly distributed between your left and right feet on a flat lie. At the top of the backswing, if you've made a good turn without swaying, it should feel like 80% of your weight is on the inside of your right foot and 20% is on the
inside of your left foot. The follow-through should feel like the opposite of this. If these closed-eye swings are opposite or way off these numbers, try the following drills:

**Walk through the Shot**
Take your normal address position and swing a club to the top of the backswing [additional reading here: http://learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/Swing.html]. As you come down and through the ball, make an effort to step forward after you've made contact—just as though you are walking. Gary Player made this move famous and still does it on many shots. This drill and position emphasizes that you've made a good weight shift.

**You "Can" Do It**
Place an object such as a soda can about a foot behind your ball. Now, using a short-iron, try to hit your ball without hitting the can. You'll notice that you're forced to come down at a steeper angle. By swinging with this steeper angle, you're also forced to shift properly off the right foot and take a divot in front of the ball. When you don't, you'll find yourself hitting behind the ball or topping it, which is often the result of hanging back on the right foot. After a few swings, try putting that same object in front of the ball about 2 feet. The goal here is to swing out over the can as low as possible on the follow-through without actually hitting it. This extension drill promotes a strong weight shift to the left leg and gets you to hit through rather than at your ball. This is great for those who have a problem topping the ball.

**Swing on a Slope**
To feel the weight shift happening naturally, try swinging while standing on a downhill or uphill slope. On a downhill slope, for example, gravity pushes your weight toward the front foot, making it easier to finish the swing with the weight fully transferred. When doing this, be sure to keep your shoulder line fairly parallel with the slope of the ground to avoid hitting behind the ball.

**Keep Your Weight Inside**
Keeping your weight on the inside of the right foot during the backswing is critical to shifting properly. Allowing the weight to get to the outside of the foot doesn't give you a strong base to push off from when "springing" over to the left side. This can also lead to the dreaded sway, which results in a lot of wasted movement and is corrosive to good swing mechanics. To find a proper position, keep the right knee over the inside of the foot at address and throughout the backswing. Obviously, it's not good medicine to think about this during the swing, but stop at the top of the swing occasionally and check your position. In time, this will pay off in added power and more solid hits.

There are many more ways to drill the concept of weight shifting inside, but first you must learn how it feels and start noticing what's going on throughout your swing. After you can do that, you will see the correlation between solid shots and good shifting. This is how the pros make it look so easy yet hit it so far. Also, try getting that right toe of your golf shoe dirty, which is a good sign of fully shifting and turning. As always, don't forget to have some fun.

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**Lesson 21: Learn to Check Your Alignment**

**Master this Cornerstone to Good, Accurate Shots**

When it comes to fundamentals, you'll often hear about grip, posture, ball position, etc. All of these are important in building a consistent swing, but alignment is the most critical. You can have the best swing in the world. However, if you're not properly
aligned with the target, you'll hit the ball anywhere. Imagine trying to sink a pool ball in the pocket without aiming at it. You'd really have to manipulate that pool cue on the forward stroke in order to get the ball on line wouldn't you? The same is true in golf; so why make a difficult game more complex?

The majority of amateurs I teach align too far to the right, setting themselves up for the familiar "over-the-top" swing in an effort to get the ball on line. The result is usually a pull, a slice, or glancing contact with the ball.

The main alignment check points are the feet, knees, hips, and shoulders. Unless you're making a conscious effort to draw or fade the ball, these points should all be consistent and parallel to the target line.

Start Behind the Ball

The first step in your pre-shot routine is to get directly behind the ball and draw an imaginary line from your ball to your target. You'll see most pros do this on TV but seldom will you see amateurs taking this approach. This allows you to get a good sense of target and to visualize a positive ball flight.

Square the Clubface to the Target

Pick a spot such as a leaf or divot in front of the ball that's on the same imaginary target line you saw when you stood behind the ball. As you set up, just align the clubface perpendicular to that spot. Another way is to line up the label on the ball toward the target and then the clubface. Check yourself often as this is an area that requires a great deal of precision.

Place Clubs on the Ground

In practice, one of the most effective ways to train proper alignment is to place two clubs in a parallel position on the ground. Start by aiming the first club directly at the flag and another parallel to it, approximately where your feet would be. Laying clubs on the ground is also a great way to spot-check how you're doing. If you set up in what you think is the correct position and every once in a while lay down the clubs, it will allow you to catch poor habits before they stick. Remember, if the feet are to the right of the target, you'll have a harder time clearing the left hip and using the legs properly. This drill ensures perfect aim.

Check Your Shoulder Position

As you look back and forth toward the flag--verifying your aim--there's a tendency to leave the shoulders open. This will prove counterproductive to an otherwise good position. To check this last area, try placing a club on the line of the shoulders with the grip end facing the flag. If you extend the line of where the grip is pointing, you'll get a good indication of direction. In doing this, you can also make sure that the shoulder line is pointing in the same direction as the line your feet are aimed on.

As you can see, alignment is imperative. In fact, without it, you could swing and hit the ball like Tiger Woods but never make a birdie or hit a green.

Lesson 22: Get that Little White Ball in the Hole

Adopting Proper Putting Fundamentals

After seeing numerous putting styles over the years, I've come to the conclusion that the
The majority of great golfers use the same putting fundamentals. Some of these are physical and some mental. Very little of the so-called "magic" actually comes from a putter design, but rather from the confidence within the player.

Think Positive
It's arguable that positive thinking is the doorway to good putting. Remember a time when you were putting well. It probably felt as though you couldn't miss and you had a greater belief that the ball would go in. Positive feelings and visualization are the keys. This belief comes from prior success; success comes from solid fundamentals and practice.

Grip for Success
Hold the hands close enough together so that they work as a unit, rather than independently. When they're separate, there's a much greater likelihood of the wrists breaking down, which leads to inconsistency. A popular grip used by many tour players is a reverse overlap that takes the forefinger of the left hand off the putter and rests it on the little finger of the right hand. A cross-handed grip is also worth trying if you tend to break the wrists during the stroke. Equally important is grip pressure. I like to see light pressure rather than tight pressure, because tightness diminishes feel.

Consider Ball Position
The left eye should be directly over the ball at address. This means that the ball is placed forward in the stance—off the inside of the left foot. This also gives you a much better perspective of your putt's intended line of travel.

Keep the Putter Moving
Accelerate the putter toward the hole. Practice some short putts (about one foot from the hole) and try rolling the ball and putter right over the hole. Remember, the follow-through should exceed the backstroke. You can ensure this by placing another ball behind the ball you're hitting on the practice green. As you make the backstroke, stop when you hit the second ball.

Have the Right Distance
If you stand too far from the ball, it causes an improper stroke path—one that makes too much of an arc from the inside so that it's difficult for the face to be square to the target. Conversely, if you stand too close you tend to force the backstroke outside of the target line. When making these mistakes, it forces you to manipulate the putter to square it at impact.

Locate the Hands Ahead
Locating your hands forward is another fundamental common to good putting technique. If your hands are behind the ball, there's a tendency to add loft to the putt and break your wrists. By keeping your hands up front and even with the ball or slightly ahead, you'll ensure a better roll.

Lock the Body
Keep body movement minimal. Good players putt while keeping their bodies locked in position for the entire stroke. Doing this allows the shoulders, rather than the hips, to dominate the movement. A great way to check how solid you are is to use the sun's shadow. Putt with the shadow facing in front of you so you can see any lateral movement. Place a ball or club on the green at the outer edges of the shadow of your hips. As you take some practice strokes, pay attention and see if you can detect any movement. You can also do this shadow trick to ensure your head and shoulders are staying in place and not swaying.
Now, if you can blend these key fundamental with your own style, you'll find that your putts will start to fall more frequently.

Lesson 23: A Few Key Points

Getting Your Total Game in Shape

Playing good golf is a lot more than just beating countless balls on the driving range. If you really want to get the most from the sport, you must concentrate your efforts on several key areas [additional info at http://learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/break80.html] that help make your game complete and keep you on track. Let's explore the areas that have the biggest impact on you.

Practice Makes Perfect

There is no sense investing in swing instruction if you can't learn to repeat it. Remember, a golf teacher is only responsible for part of the picture. Repetition breeds confidence and confidence breeds success. There's really no substitute for practice, and it must be with purpose and then complemented with play.

Get Professional Instruction

Professional instruction, on a regular basis, is vital to keeping your game on track. So often, we think we can solve our game problems without help. Sometimes, this can result in making what was a simple problem worse. A check up by a golf instructor can make a huge difference. Remember, a well-trained professional eye can see things you can't.

Get out There and Do It

Playing the game of golf is what it's all about. It's hard to perfect your technique and implement all the advice you read about unless you get on the course often. Practice and play with purpose, and measure the results.

Think Positive

This is often an overlooked part of the game but it accounts for so much. Listen to the self-talk in your head [click here for more reading: http://www.learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/Mental.html]. Are you hard on yourself? Do you take a "poor me" attitude? When you really listen to your inner self, you'll be amazed at what you hear. Try to keep a positive outlook on the course. The more confident your thoughts, the more confident your play and, before long, your scores will drop. Golf may be one of the greatest games ever devised, because it combines all the elements of balance and strength with both body and mind.

The Right Stuff

Who needs custom clubs? An easy response would be, "everyone." However, certain players tend to reap greater rewards than others from custom clubs. These players commonly have unique body features. For example, they might have short or long fingers, be tall with relatively short arms, or be short with relatively long arms. Everyone is unique. Remember, don't adjust your game to some set of clubs—adjust your clubs to your game. The club fitting info on LearnAboutGolf.com's can help you choose the best clubs for your game.

Fit Your Game

Compose your set of the clubs you are most efficient at using. For instance, there's no point carrying a 2-iron if you can't get it up in the air and you don't have confidence using it.
Instead, opt for a 5- or 7-wood [click for more details: http://www.learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/GGolf.html]. Many Senior Tour and women professionals have been doing this. Even players such as Nick Faldo have been seen carrying high-lofted fairway woods in their bags. Because the rules allow for 14 clubs only, fill your bag with the ones you use most often and most efficiently.

If taking your game up a notch is important to you, go back over this short list and make sure you give each area its appropriate attention. The results could just take you up to the next level.

Lesson 24: Getting out of Trouble Spots

Perfect Your Specialty Shots

During the course of a round, you'll often find yourself in spots that require specialty shots to get out of trouble. Most of the time, a hook or slice can be the worst thing in your world. However, sometimes you might need to deliberately hit such shots. In fact, the ability to choose your type of shot as the situation requires is what transforms average golfers into great players. This article describes different types of shots and the simplest ways to hit them.

Hook
For right-handed golfers, a hook curves from right to left. This type of shot tends to roll farther than a sliced shot. To hit a hook, the clubface must be closed in relation to the target line at impact. The simplest way to hit this shot is to start with a normal stance and grip, and direct the clubface toward the target. Next, pull back the right or back foot a few inches—so that the line of your feet is aiming to the right of the target 10-15 yards. When you align your feet this way, it forces you to swing on an inside-to-outside plane. At impact, this swing path puts a counterclockwise spin on the ball and makes it hook. This technique coupled with a closed clubface produces an even bigger hook. If you're having trouble, make sure there's a feeling of the hands rolling over through impact. For a more pronounced hook, you can also manipulate your grip. Simply rotate your hands to the right more at address.

Slice
You can hit a slicing shot many ways. The simplest way to slice on purpose is to reverse the procedure you followed for the hook. Pull the left foot back so your stance points to the left. Leave the clubface pointed toward the target and swing across on the new feet line. You can add more slice by "weakening" the grip—rotating the hands and grip position to the left. When you hit a slice, there's less hand action and rotation through the ball.

Fade and Draw
A fade is a mild version of a slice and a draw is a mild version of a hook [additional reading here: http://learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/Swing.html]. Because hitting the ball dead straight every time is so difficult, good players incorporate slight nuances of the hook or slice, and they attempt to make one of these ball flights their "bread and butter" shot. This way, they'll at least know the direction the ball is curving, allowing for greater control and course management. Jack Nicklaus has always said that the best way to hit a fade is to slightly open your clubface at address and take a
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normal swing. To hit a draw, slightly close the clubface at address and take your usual swing.

High Shot
Hitting high shots can be valuable in situations where the greens are very firm or you need to get the ball over some high object, such as a tree. This type of shot lands softer, allowing golfers to carry over bunkers and still keep the ball close to the flag. Start by placing the ball slightly more forward in the stance than you're used to. Next, visualize your spine angle being vertical to the ground at address. When you get near impact on the swing, your spine angle can be at a slightly upward or "launch" angle. You achieve this best by making sure that your head stays back through the shot. It's OK to shift the weight of your lower body, but force your upper body to stay back. A more upright swing plane promotes a higher ball flight.

Low Shot
Low shots are fun to hit especially into wind or under trees. Place the ball farther back in the stance, compared to your normal ball position. As you come through impact, there are two positions to feel. First, make sure that the hands have stayed in front of the ball, keeping the loft of the club low. Second, ensure the spine angle is still vertical and not at a typical launch angle. Often times, a shorter backswing helps here as well. This position gives you a nice controlled low shot. The shot also tends to roll more, so plan accordingly.

These are just a few of the many creative types of shots you can learn to produce in an imaginative round of golf. Keep an eye out for future lessons about specialty shots.

Lesson 25: Golf's Forgotten Shot

The Art of the Bump and Run
As the old saying goes, there are many ways to get the ball in the hole. While this is certainly true, the majority of good players know that specific types of shots are more effective and consistent than others. Conventional wisdom has it that it's best not to loft the ball any more than is necessary. Yet, many players I see insist on hitting lofted or lob shots when they aren't called for. These lofted shots are so much more difficult to control than the good old "bump and run."

If you've watched the British Open, you've certainly seen a bump and run. A bump and run is a shot that lands over the fringe and less than a third of the way to the hole and then rolls or "runs" the rest of the way. It's ideal in windy, firm conditions or when there are no bunkers guarding the front of the green. Often times on shorter distances, it's almost as though you are "bumping" the ball gently onto the putting surface and letting it run the rest of the way. Both club selection and technique are important in pulling off this shot.

Practice This Drill
One of the biggest destroyers of consistency around the green is overuse of the wrists. When they break down through impact, it opens the door to chipping hell. For the bump and run (and nearly all shots around the green), position the hands slightly in front of the ball at address. The hands should also reach impact in this position and through to the finish. To aid in this, play the ball slightly back of the middle of your stance.

A good way to ensure the correct hand position is to have a friend put the grip end of a club slightly in front of the ball as you begin your downswing. As you swing down, let your club hit
the grip end of the club on the ground—stopping your forward progress. This drill forces your hands to stay ahead of the ball—just where they should be.

**Position the Shaft on Your Wrist**
Grip your club all the way down—below the grip and on the shaft—so there's enough of the grip above your hands to rest it on your left forearm as you simulate the address position. In this position, your club will be well above the ground, so you can't hit the ball. Now, take some practice strokes. If the club's grip stays connected to the left forearm on the follow-through of your pretend chip shot, that's good. If it slips off of your forearm, it's an indication there's too much wrist use. Do this until you can keep the grip from disconnecting.

**Pick the Right Stick**
Many players use the same club for all low-trajectory shots. I've found that this isn't the most effective method. For more predictability, you should change clubs depending on the lie, the slope, green speed, and other factors. That way, you can use the same stroke every time—only changing the loft of the club rather than having to change the technique for each shot. Good [club selection][1] also requires imagination, and you should make it a priority to visualize each shot before you attempt it. Picture where you want the ball to land (always in the first third of the green with two thirds being in roll), and then choose the club that will give the desired loft.

Practice the low-trajectory shot on a flat area using the same stroke on every shot while alternating clubs—6-iron all the way down to a pitching wedge. Pay close attention to how high the ball goes and how much roll each club produces.

**Point Your Watch toward the Target**
This is an old drill I've mentioned many times, but it really works. Simply imagine the back of the left wrist (or your watch) facing the target. As you follow through, keep the face of your watch directed at the target. It will be natural for it to turn over to the left or to face upward as you go through the ball, but resist and keep pointing that wrist toward the target—and to better chipping.
Some important Pointers to consider when choosing Golf Clubs:

For the last hundred years or so golf was/is played with basically the same set of clubs. The standard set includes 3 woods (1, 3, and 5 wood), 11 irons (2 to 9 iron, PW, SW), and a putter. Does this configuration work for everyone? Hell, no! It's time to take a fresh look at what a golf club set can and should do for your game. Instead of selecting clubs based on “that's how we've been doing things around here (for the past 100 years)”, why not select clubs based on what YOUR golf game requires. This article gives you the background on what to select to improve your game, no matter if you're a Beginner, Intermediate or an Advanced Player.

Enjoying the game of golf requires many kinds of skills. Sometimes a shot requires distance and sometimes accuracy. Some shots we hit from a tee, some we play from short grass and sometimes even from oh-so-dreaded places like rough, sand and dry dirt (hardpan). Each of such situations will benefits from a different club you use. Based on our abilities, some shots will be relatively easy and some will be a pain in the you-know-what.

Case in point: If the challenge is a 200 yard carry over water to a rather tight pin on a small green, the proper choice of club for a beginner, intermediate or advanced golfer will be different. The beginner will need all the help and forgiveness possible (“...I swear, if I make this shot I'll be a good person for the rest of my life…”). The intermediate may need a little less forgiveness but still wants to be comfortable with their club. The advanced player may want more subtle characteristics of feel and clubhead response that a beginner can't even imagine (… and still pledge to become a better person if the shot works out). In the past all three were left with only a few club choices, but - thankfully - today there are many more.

Which Clubs are most important?
As mentioned, golf requires several kinds of shots - drives, long approach shots, short approach shots, pitches, chips, sand shots, putts and a variety of (what family friendly sites like ours!) call trouble shots - they are called differently during play, though! By far the most frequent shot is a putt. For an average golfer, the putter is used more than twice as much as any other club. Statistically, if a golfer shoots a score of 100, 35% - 40% of those strokes will be putts. So, quite obviously, the putter is the most important club you carry.

Generally, for most golfers the driver (also called the #1 wood) is used the next most often, about 14 times from the tee, or roughly 12-20% of the time depending on ability level and course requirements. A good drive makes the rest of the shots on that hole easier. A lousy drive means, well, you know what… That makes the driver a very important club.

For players who have a hard time hitting the green in a regulation number of strokes, the wedges may be the second most used category of clubs. Even on a good day a beginner may spend a 15 to 20 strokes chipping up to the green.

The remaining challenges in a round will utilize the rest of the clubs in your set. It is likely that no one club will be used more than a few times. This means, in terms of club usage, the putter, driver and wedges are clearly used the most frequently while the rest of the clubs will bring up the rear.
In addition, a club that is tough to hit must be given added weight. The more difficult it is to hit a particular club the more likely it is to cause disaster. The driver, the long irons, and fairway woods are the most likely culprits to cause that terrible shot. One way is to bring lots of balls, for a better way: read on…

To take some guess work out of your game, let's take a closer look at how a set for a beginner, intermediate and an advanced golfer may be configured:

Click here for our recommendations for Beginner Golfers:

Click here for our recommendations for Intermediate Golfers:

Click here for our recommendations for Advanced Golfers:
Recommended Resources:

Selected eBooks for your advanced reading:

The Simple Golf Swing [http://learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/Swing.html]

Written by David Nevogt, this downloadable eBook offers valuable advice on how to improve your golf swing. You will learn a unique setup, grip, alignment drill, backswing, downswing, and finish.

The Simple Golf Swing comes with a 60 day, no-questions-asked, money back guarantee.

Click this link for details: http://learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/Swing.html

How to Break 80 [http://learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/break80.html]

Written by Jack Moorehouse (an average Joe, not a Pro) who has the ability to explain things in extremely simple terms.

How to Break 80 is one of the best selling eBooks on the Internet. Read on to learn how you can play better golf immediately.

Click this link for details http://learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/break80.html

The Ultimate Golf Fitness Guide [http://learnaboutgolf.com/ebooks/Fitness.html]

Author Mike Pedersen is one of the most respected Golf Fitness Experts there is, full stop.

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