

LEARN TO PLAY SIMPLY GREAT GOLF!

Chapter 2: Chipping and Putting

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This chapter of Learning to Play Simply Great Golf will detail the simplest, most effective techniques for chipping and putting demonstrated by the best golfers. But first, here is a summary of Chapter 1 - Golf Homework for Better Scores:

In coordination with the best instruction, “homework practice” is the form of game improvement that can help you the most. Repetition is usually the main key to making good golf shots with a high level of consistency and Homework Practice gives you the most repetition in the least amount of time.

The first step to playing your best golf is to begin a “10/10 Homework Practice” routine beginning with putts and chips – a 10-minute session practicing 10 repetitions of various length putts and chips. The fastest route to playing better golf with lower scores is to improve your putting and chipping since these golf shots account for approximately 50% of your score.

CHIPPING AND PUTTING

The bottom line influence on the success of most golf shots is how the club head approaches and impacts the golf ball. Since you are in control of the golf club, it is then the responsibility of your body to make the proper motion. The ability to make the most effective “swinging motion” for chipping and putting (as well as most golf shots) begins with a strong Pre-Shot Routine.

THE PRE-SHOT ROUTINE - This routine consists of a positive “mindset” or attitude, using the eyes to achieve the proper mix of aim and distance, and the proper “set-up” orientation of the golfer, club and ball to the target.

1) **THE MINDSET** - The best golfers have a primary mindset that they will “hole out” on each chip and putt and they have a secondary mindset of controlling their distance so that they will leave the ball a foot past the hole, if missed.

2) **THE EYES** - The eyes and experience from practice are two very important keys to becoming consistently great at putting and chipping. The more you practice looking at the hole or the bottom of the flagstick from various distances, the better your feel becomes for making the proper length swing. The same goes for looking at the slope of the putting green for the chip or putt to achieve the proper aim. Jack Nicklaus was the master at using his eyes to achieve the proper mix of aim and distance.

3) **THE SET-UP** – The best golfers are meticulous when it comes to the details of the G.A.S.P. set-up steps (Grip, Aim, Stance, Posture) because they know how much they influence proper and improper motion.

Grip – There are several successful styles of “hand alignment” by the best putters. The goal is to use a grip that promotes “quiet hands”. Over-active hands are the biggest reason for inconsistency with direction and distance control for both putting and chipping. A grip with both hands rotated slightly outward from the relaxed hanging alignment seems to promote quieter hands. You can achieve this position by pointing your elbows toward your stomach.

This same grip can be used for chipping even though most of the best golfers use the conventional full swing grip. The 1934 PGA Championship winner, Paul Runyan, was one of the greatest teachers and a “short game” specialist and he prescribed this putting grip for chipping.

Aim – For putting, most top golfers now take advantage of using the golf ball to help them aim. They use the name on the golf ball or draw a line on their ball and use these aids to help them aim their ball toward their target and then align their club head to the ball. They also take advantage of the design of the modern putters with their alignment aid features.

Aim is always linked to distance. Try to figure your aim based on your ball finishing one foot past the hole, if missed.

Stance – Alignment of the “toe line” (the visualized line across the toes) parallel to the line on the putter and at a right angle to the lines on the club face for chipping promotes the best swing path of the club. Many of the best golfers learned to use an “open stance” for chipping which I believe is unnecessary and can promote improper club path for the average golfer.

A stance width of approximately one foot apart is the most common for both chipping and putting. “Ball position” in relation to the stance line is very important for creating proper ball-club contact. Positioning the ball two inches left of center for putting promotes a slightly upward movement of the club head into the ball which in turn promotes a smooth roll. Positioning the ball two inches right of center for chipping promotes a slightly downward movement of the club head into the ball which in turn promotes good ball-club contact and reduces the chance of hitting the ground behind the ball which can turn out to be one of the worst shots in golf – “the double hit”.

Posture – Bending over with the eyes over the “target line” is the most common posture for putting because it promotes the best “swing path”. Studies show that the optimum swing path creates the least amount of club face rotation which has been identified as the most important key for directional control. The full swing posture is most commonly used for chipping.

THE SWING MOTION –

The most effective motion for most golf shots is the swinging motion – a rhythmic fluid motion back and forth. The arms swing the golf club and move in simultaneous coordination with the upper body rotation. The lower body (hips, legs and feet) acts as a steady base and moves responsively to the upper body rotation.

The swing of the arms-club lead the upper body rotation in the swing away and the body rotation leads the arms-club swing into and through the ball for the most consistent proper club rotation and swing path. This coordination in conjunction with maintaining the beginning “swing center” of keeping your head very steady until “impact position” and maintaining the proper light tension level in the arms and hands creates the best chance of an on-line solid contact with good distance control.

The proper tension level of the hands and arms is to bring the club head up from the ground with the hands by hinging the wrists and holding the club with just enough tension to hold the shaft at horizontal. Primary control of the club is with the hands and secondarily with the arms.

I would pinpoint the ability to maintain this tension level throughout the swing (from putting to driving) as the most important measure of a golfer’s success. From my 25 years of teaching experience, I would

estimate that the increasing tension level of the quick-reflex muscles of the arms and hands during the motion is responsible for ninety percent of inadequate golf shots. Which muscles tense up, to what degree and at what point in the motion determine the features of the shot (i.e. pulled, pushed, topped, toed, etc.).

I believe in golfers saying “trigger words” to themselves prior to swinging, to help influence their bodies to move correctly. Trigger word #1 is “soft”. Soft relates to beginning with and maintaining the proper light tension level of the arms and hands. Trigger word #2 is “rhythmic”. Rhythmic relates to the smoothness of the arm swing-body rotation coordination. “Swing and turn, turn and swing” are the last trigger words to influence the arms-club swing as the leader of the body rotation in the “back-swing” and the body rotation as the leader of the arms-club swing in the down and through motion. Soft, and make a rhythmic swing and turn, turn and swing motion.

Use the instruction in this article along with the “10/10 Homework Practice” routine for putting and chipping I described in Learn to Play Simply Great Golf, Chapter 1, and you will lower your scores through better chipping and putting.

Next I will cover Learning to Play Simply Great Golf, Chapter 3: Stretching and Warm-Up Exercises for Making Your Best Golf Swings.