**The Short Game**

***The Transition from the Golf Course to the Putting Green***



***A BOOK OF GOLF INSTRUCTION***

By

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**Chapter 1**

**The Approach Game**

***"The transition from the golf course to the putting green."***

**Introduction**

Of all the challenges facing us when we play golf, navigating the different games within the game of golf can be the most daunting. Driving the ball, iron shots, putting, chipping, short game, mental strategy, and trouble shots all present different tests we must learn and execute if we can fully appreciate the game of golf in its entirety.

Added to these challenges is the often-forgotten fact that the game of golf is played in the air from tee to green. From the moment we walk on the course and place a ball on the tee, every shot is intended to get up in the air and travel a precise distance. All the clubs in our bag are designed to hit the ball a certain length and height. We continue hitting the ball in the air until we reach our destination, the putting green.

On the putting green, the game of golf is played on the ground. Rolling the ball on a relatively flat surface presents different conditions, another club, additional skills, and other mental challenges than a full swing. There are even different rules that govern the game of golf when the ball is on the green. For example, when you are on a putting surface, you may clean your ball. You can't do this in the fairway. You may also clear debris from along the path in front of your ball, and you can ask your fellow player to mark their ball if it interferes with the intended path of your ball. All of these improvements cannot be made on the fairway. The golf rules reward a player for getting their ball on the putting green, making golf's primary goal reaching the green in as few shots possible.

The transition between the power game played through the air, and the putting contest, rolling the ball on the green, is called the approach game.

The approach shot's execution is problematic because it is almost always is performed with less than a full swing. This is important because the distance an approach shot travels will be shorter than any club we carry will produce with a full swing. The challenge of the approach game is to execute finesse shots without swinging the golf club as fast and as hard as possible while still trying to get the ball on the green as close to the hole as possible. Finesse shots combine some of the power game elements, where the ball is hit in the air, and the putting game when it rolls on the ground after it has landed. The approach game's object is to transition the ball onto the green and put the ball into the hole with as few strokes as possible.

Added to the challenges of executing finesses shots are various obstacles, i.e., sand, water, dirt, long grass, etc., the ball must carry on its way to the putting green. Compounding these difficulties is there is not a specific club designated to hit this shot. The student must choose from the clubs in their bag to perform the transition shot the specific demand's specifics.

More than all the other golf challenges, the student is left at the mercy of their creativity when faced with the assortment of shots that make up the approach game. In my experience, the shot, club, and distance selection is the golf area that novice and beginning players have the most trouble with.

The variety of skills that must be learned and executed combined with the different conditions the student faces when attempting these shots make the approach game the singular most crucial skill the student must learn on the journey to becoming a better golfer. The drills and exercises in this book will help you understand the proper techniques, principles, and skills necessary to make that journey more comfortable.

**Approach Game Principles**

Like every other golf shot, the green approach must be executed from a **proper set-up and address position**.

The challenges of **Distance and Direction**, which present themselves when hitting a full shot using a power swing, also apply to hitting an approach to the green. Where do we want the ball to go, and how far do we want it to travel? Distance in the approach shot is more a product of the club's loft than how fast it is moving at impact. The direction is where the clubface is pointing when making contact with the golf ball. Mentally, that's all we have to think about when hitting an approach shot: where it is going and how far we want it to go. Those two challenges usually determine which shot and club the student uses.

The direction you want the ball to go is a visual one. As you stand behind the ball on your approach shot, you should be able to visually draw a straight line through the ball to the hole. As you address the ball, your feet, knees, hips, and shoulders should be on a parallel line to this intended line of flight. I teach my students it's like standing next to a railroad track. Your feet are on one track, and the ball is on the other.

Alignment in the golf swing is two parallel lines, the target line, and the body line. I am a firm believer if you can visualize these two lines and keep them aligned towards the target, your chances of making a good, solid, repeating golf swing, regardless of the distance involved, improve dramatically.

There is one fundamental difference between the set-up for an approach shot and a full swing. Because the approach shot travels a shorter distance, there is no need to turn and coil against the lower body as we do with the full swing. Nor do we need to move our lower bodies as quickly on the downswing. Both of these moves generate power. Because we are hitting less than a full shot and not concerned with maximizing power, we may open our stance to the target.

We accomplished this by moving our forward foot approximately 25 degrees off the body line and pointing it towards the target. It is essential to keep the heel on the ground when making this move. Opening the stance by pointing the forward toe allows the hips the freedom to rotate rather than sway during the shot's execution while keeping the club square to the direction we want our approach shot to go.

One of the frequent questions I'm asked by students when attempting approach shots is where they should place the ball in their stance? Most students have been bombarded with different philosophies about where the ball should be played. Based on forty years of playing and teaching, my answer is this, there are very few absolutes in golf and life, but this is one of them. In every situation, you encounter when playing golf, the golf ball should be at the bottom of the arc you created by swinging a golf club. And that bottom is always the **Center of Balance.**

And where is that center, you ask? There are four centers of balance in the set-up, and here's how you find them. Hold a golf club by the end of the grip with the club's head pointing to the ground. Place the end of the grip on your chin and let the club act as a pendulum, swinging naturally below your chin and between your legs. The club will bisect four distinct points on your body as it hangs freely. The chin is the top center, the sternum, or your wishbone is the upper center. Your belly button is the lower center. Where the club points to the ground is the bottom center. Remember those four points. They are the centers of your balance.

Do you recall the railroad track analogy we use above? The two parallel lines we visualized going out to the target. One is the target line; the other is the body line. When the golf club hangs through the center of our body, the club's bottom should cross the line we visualized going out to the target at a right angle, meaning it is square to the line. I try to visualize the lines going out to the target like a railroad track and the club hanging down, crossing those lines like a big **H** on the ground. The H's tops are pointing towards the target, and the crossing of the **H** is the center of balance. Picturing the **H** helps keep everything square.

This is the center of our balance; it is also the bottom of the swing's arc. When we swing a golf club, regardless of the shot or club, the swing's bottom will always be at the bottom center of our balance. And this is where the ball should be. Students ask me where they should play the ball. I tell them at the bottom of their center. And if you visualize the **H** and the ball is at the centerline of the **H**, you will always have the ball in the correct position.

Once we have addressed the ball and placed it at the center of our balance, we can begin executing a golf swing.

When we create energy with our bodies, three things must happen. There must be some motion. There must be a weight shift, and there must be a lever in there someplace. I call these **The Three Absolute Variables**.

Try jumping in the air without moving your legs. It is impossible. Go ahead and try. You just can't do it. To jump in the air, you must first bend your knees, gather your weight on the balls of your feet, and then push off the balls of your feet, straightening your knees, which then propels you into the air. As you think through jumping and the individual sequences required, try to identify where motion, weight transfer, and the lever occur. You will find they happen in the same sequence every time. These same variables occur in the golf swing when executing the power game.

When starting a golf swing, the **first variable is motion**. Motion is created by moving the upper center, our sternum, back along the body line with the shoulders, arms, and hands all connected forming a V. The golf club is attached to the end of the V will now form a **Y**. The end of the **Y** is pointing at the ball. As we create motion by turning our upper center away from the ball, the arms and club continue to maintain the **Y** as it moves back and forth on the target line.

**Weight transfer is the next variable.** Motion can only move the club so far. At a certain point, the club's weight and centrifugal force will force the club up and away from the body, allowing the weight to transfer to the back foot. This is a natural occurrence and should not be restricted. A common mistake beginning and novice players often make manipulating weight transfer by swaying on the backswing rather than allowing the motion to shift the weight to the back foot naturally.

**The lever is the third variable.** Just as motion will help the weight move to the back foot, weight transfer will force the club to load. In the golf swing, the loading of the golf club is the cocking of the wrists. The wrist cock is always vertical. The wrist should move vertically up and down, not side to side. The **V** created by our shoulders and arms is still maintained, but the club is now loaded and pointing up. We are now at the top of the backswing, and power has been created and stored. The three variables have worked in sequence to produce energy.

The process is now reversed. Motion, weight transfer, and the wrists uncocking working in the opposite direction and sequence release the power we created in the backswing. A straight wrist and arm at impact must be maintained. If you cup or bow your wrist during the downswing, you have lost the lever and also the power we created on the backswing. The wrists must never release before they reach the lower center.

This is the essence of how the power swing is executed using the three variables. As we have learned earlier, the approach shot requires different dynamics to get the ball close to the hole. The following section is how that happens.

**Approach Shot Fundamentals**

The first principle we must acknowledge in attempting the approach shot, it's always less than a full swing. The three variables still come into play but creating power is not our primary concern. The distance an approach shot will travel is always less than any club in our bag will produce with a full swing. Distance is still a concern but accuracy, getting the ball close to the hole, is now the objective.

When faced with an approach shot, most players try to manipulate the variables by changing the sequence or slowing them down to accommodate the shorter distance the shot must travel. This is a mistake. The three variables are still absolute in their application and must occur in the proper sequence. The difference between a full shot and the approach shot is we keep them in sequence but reduce how they are applied.

To accomplish this, the student must first understand the difference between address position and impact position. Address position is the position we take when we set up to the golf ball before beginning the backswing. The weight is balanced and centered between the two feet. The arms hang freely in front of our bodies, with the hands in a neutral position on the club. As we start the backswing motion, weight transfer and the club's loading occur in sequence, and power is accumulated.

On the downswing, the process is reversed; motion and weight transfer put us in a position where our weight is now on the front foot, and the hips have opened and turned towards the target. At this point, the lead arm, hands, and club are in a straight line from the shoulder to the ball, with the hands ahead of the lower center. This is impact position. In a fraction of a second, the wrists will uncock, and power is released to the ball. This process should always be a natural occurrence and never be manipulated or restricted in any way.

Because power is not the objective when attempting the approach shot, we reduce the variables rather than manipulating them by assuming the impact position rather than the address position as we stand over the ball. Let me repeat. When setting up for the approach shot, regardless of the distance or club you use, you must set up at impact position.

This accomplishes several things. It restricts the length of the backswing by preventing the upper body from coiling against the lower body. This lessens the power created during the backswing. Secondly, by placing our weight primarily on the forward foot, we prevent the lower body from swaying laterally off the lower center, making it easier to keep the hips in the proper position facing the target. Lastly, by restricting the backswing length, we reduce the centrifugal effect force has on the hands during the downswing keeping the leading arm and wrist from releasing too early at impact.

The three absolute variables are still performed in sequence during the execution of the approach shot. Their effect is lessened by the body's position rather than a conscious manipulation by slowing down or elimination.

The golf club will impact the ball at the center position without the force generated by the power swing's full turn. The speed generated by the club at impact is now constant throughout the swing. Distance and direction are controlled by how far the club is taken back and the club's loft selected to execute the shot. This is an important concept. The golf swing used for the approach shot is never forced or speeded up. It remains constant from start to finish.

**Approach Shot Variations**

Understanding how to maintain the club's speed at impact, the student must now learn how the club's loft will affect the distance a ball will travel through the air and how far it will roll once it lands on the green.

The loft of a club is defined as its angle off a perpendicular center extending upwards. Straight up and down is 0 degrees and perfectly flat to the ground being 90 degrees. Typical approach clubs and their degrees are Pitching wedges 46-48 degrees, sand wedges 50-52 degrees, gap wedges 54-56 degrees, and lob wedges 58-60 degrees. The more loft a club has, the higher in the air the ball will go. The lower the loft of the club, the lower the ball will fly. Companies that make golf clubs change these degrees at their discretion, and a student is presented with numerous options when purchasing these clubs. My advice is to try various clubs before you buy them.

Knowing the clubs and how loft degrees affect the height a ball will fly off the clubface, the student can now learn different shot variations that make up the approach game and how the shot's height affects distance. The first of these is **The Chip Shot**.

We have mentioned earlier the different obstacles that may be between the approach shot and the green. Often the student does not have a decision to make; they must hit the ball over these obstacles. But there are many times when there is nothing between the approach shot and the putting green but grass. This is the time for the chip shot. It is known by many names. Chip and run, bump and run, Texas wedge, and many others. They all mean the same thing. A low, running shot that is designed to roll more than it flies through the air.

This shot is executed using a less lofted club, often a seven, eight, or nine iron, rather than one of the wedges generally used for an approach shot. When executing this shot, the student should aim for a spot a couple of feet on the front of the green to land the ball and then allow the ball to roll the rest of the way to the hole. Take care to use a club with enough loft to fly the ball to that spot but not too much loft that the ball will check or stop rolling.

Most students' biggest mistake when executing this shot is playing the ball too far back in their stance. They think this will cause the ball to go lower, which it does by de-lofting the club. The danger when playing a ball off the middle of your center is the club is still going down when it contacts the ball, causing the club to dig into the ground stopping its forward motion. This almost always produces weak shots that stop short of the target.

With less loft, the shot will always roll farther than it flies, and the student does not need to use a long swing. By practicing with different lofts, the student will soon learn how far each club goes with the same swing. It becomes a matter of estimating how far the hole is remaining and picking the right club for that distance.

The next variation in the approach game is **The Pitch Shot**. The pitch shot is designed to go higher than the chip shot and fly about the same distance rolls on the ground. This is the shot that I ask my students to master. It is the most versatile of all the approach shots the student will need on the golf course, based on my experience.

The pitch shot uses one of the traditional approach shot wedges. Which one depends on how high the ball must fly and how quickly it must stop. The rule of thumb I use is half and half. I pick a spot halfway to the hole and use the club with the loft that will fly the ball to that spot and then roll the rest of the way. The shorter the distance, the higher the shot, and the quicker it will stop. It all depends on what must be navigated between the student and the putting green that determines how high the shot must go.

Students' most common mistake on this shot is playing the ball too far forward in their stance. This will cause the student to compensate and sway forward on the downswing, releasing the club too soon. This causes the club to de-accelerate, digging into the ground and hitting behind the ball. What is called hitting the shot fat. This shot will always land short of our target spot and never make it to the hole. The opposite problem of playing the ball forward of the center is if the student stays back and does not sway forward, the club releases early and is going up when it contacts the ball, causing a blade. This is the equivalent of hitting the ball with a club with no loft, ensuring that the ball will run past the hole and often off the other side of the green. The principles we learned earlier of stance, alignment, and ball position must be applied to every shot if the student successfully gets the ball up and down in the fewest number of strokes.

The third and last shot in our approach game arsenal is **The Lob Shot**. This is a shot that has a lot of names also. Cut shot, lob shot, explosion shot, bunker shot, sand shot, they all mean the same thing, a high, spinning shot that goes up quickly and stops just as quickly.

This is the shot, which, if it works, looks spectacular. If it doesn't work, it can produce horrible results. For this reason, I caution students to practice this shot until they are comfortable with their performance before attempting it on the golf course.

The principles are the same as with other approach shots. The fundamental difference between this shot and the others is we lay the clubface open when we address the ball, increasing the loft. This makes the ball fly to the right of the target. To compensate, we must align our body to the left of the target. Remember the parallel lines we visualized when we discussed the set-up? This shot requires an adjustment. The target line remains aligned to the hole. The body line is now pointing to the left of the target. This ensures our body is out of the way as the club follows the body line and slides under the ball. This shot will get in the air very quickly with lots of spins. As it lands on the green, it will stop quickly, often backing up. As I said, if it works, it looks good, but if we release the hands too early, move the center, or quit on the shot, it could go anywhere.

As we have learned, adding loft also decreases distance, meaning we have to increase our backswing length to compensate. The most common error students make when attempting this shot is swinging harder and faster. Don't make this mistake. Tempo, which is the speed of the swing, remains constant from start to finish. Adjusting the distance, a lob shot travels is contingent on the length of the backswing and the loft of the club

Approach shots require you to analyze how far the ball should travel through the air and on the ground. After all, this is programmed into the student's computer, which is the brain; it's just a matter of picking the shot and the club to accomplish the goal.

When I practice different approach shots, I use three balls. I pick my target and hit each shot in succession rather than hit the same shot repeatedly. This gives me the feel to navigate the distance to the target and how the different shots react on the putting surface. It is surprising how the execution of each shot will change from day to day. Some days the chip is working; other days, the pitch is rolling the closest. When I get on the course, I use the shot that's been working and I have confidence in. I continue to work on all three because you never know when you will need that particular shot.

Here are three practice drills you need to learn to accomplish the different shots required when approaching the green.

Distance and direction continue to remain the fundamental challenges students face when preparing to hit the approach shot.

Both challenges are critical if we are to improve our scores when playing golf. Statistics indicate to give ourselves a chance to make the ensuing putt, approach shots should stop within a ten-foot circle around the hole. It's not critical if the shot is long, short, to the left, or right, as long as it is within the ten-foot diameter. This is now our target, a ten-foot circle, and it gives the student some leeway with direction and direction, but not much.

Here is how to practice the feel required in stopping the ball within a ten-foot circle. This drill is: **Throw the Ball,** and it is a drill I do daily to establish the feel necessary to stop the ball within the target.

Pick a ball up with your dominant hand. For right-handed players, this is your right hand and the left hand for southpaws. Assume a balanced, athletic position facing the hole. While focusing on the ten-foot circle surrounding the hole, toss the ball underhanded towards the target. The goal is stopping the ball within the circle we have mentally drawn around the hole. This drill accomplishes a number of the dynamics needed to execute the approach shot.

The first dynamic is how far back do we take the dominant hand to produce the distance necessary? On the finesse swing, the V's tempo, which is the arms and shoulders, remains constant from start to finish. The length of the backswing produces the power that determines the distance.

The second thing this drill accomplishes is providing a reference point of where the ball should land so that it rolls whatever distance is needed to get to the target. This is especially important when remembering the half and half philosophy I used in the section before. When employing the Pitch shot, the ball will fly half the distance and roll the other half. This drill helps the student see that reference point, regardless of the shot used.

The final thing this drill reinforces is the absence of the lever in the finesse shot. Perhaps the most common mistake students make while undertaking approach shots is trying to help the club hit the ball by flicking the wrists at the last moment. Using the small muscles in the wrists will always produce inconsistent distance control and often leads to sculling the shot across the green. Throwing the ball reinforces the feeling of making a soft, underhand pitch in the air rather than an underhanded toss towards the target. Producing consistent ball flight is the key to the successful execution of the approach shot. **Throw the ball** is a practice drill that students should practice whenever they are on the practice green.

The direction of the approach shot, we have noted before, is a product of how square the club is to the target line at impact. To practice keeping the clubhead square to the line and under control, we must practice hitting the golf ball with only our dominant hand on the club. This drill is called: **The One Hand Drill.** Many golf game teachers will not let their students execute a two-handed swing until they master this drill. That's how vital this drill is in the development of a repeating golf swing.

Here's the drill. When executing the approach shot, we address the ball at the impact position. The lead arm, wrist, and club remain in a straight line from the shoulder to the ball. The trailing wrist is in a cupped position, ready to unload power at impact.

Remember, when executing the approach shot, we do not release the hands until after impact. We remove our lead hand for this drill and grip the club with our cupped dominant hand only. Assume the approach shot address position with the forward foot pointed towards the target and the hips slightly open to the target line. Now, with just the dominant hand on the club, practice hitting the ball towards the hole. The student will find it is next to impossible to strike the ball cleanly if the wrist releases too soon or swaying the body off the center of our balance. Power is generated by the club moving back and forth on the target line, with the upper center generating the motion, not the wrist flicking at the ball.

By practicing this drill, the student will soon learn how far back the club should go, which will produce the necessary force to get the ball to the target without helping the club hit the ball. Master this drill, and your scores around the green will improve dramatically.

Our last practice drill in learning the necessary fundamentals to execute approach shots is **Jump the Fence.** For many reasons, students, when faced with a daunting shot over sand, water, or long grass, feel the need to help the approach shot in the air. This, almost always, is disastrous. I have repeated throughout this book our center of balance is the bottom of the arc we create when swinging a golf club. This is where the ball is placed and where the club will be square to the target line. The loft of the club will get the ball in the air if we let it. Trying to help the ball up and over whatever it is in front of us, the student unwillingly will hit the ball with the club's bottom rather than the face, making the ball go down rather than up.

The best practice aid I have found for this drill is a plastic, adjustable hurdle I purchased to teach my dogs to jump. Now you don't need to rush out and buy this because almost anything the student places in front of the shot will help visualize a barrier to hit over, but the dog fence works for me. You can use a practice ball bucket, lay your golf bag down, or any other thing that comes to mind, but the principle remains the same. To get the ball in the air, you must stay steady and keep the club going down through the center of balance. This ensures the club's loft will hit the ball over whatever is in front of the shot. I repeat, do not try to help the ball get up. Stay down and let the club do the work it was designed to do. If you find yourself hitting the fence or your golf bag, try a more lofted club. If that does not work, then re-evaluate the fundamentals to see if you are de-lofting the club at impact.

The final process for a student to become proficient at executing approach shots is a **consistent pre-shot routine**. Fear, lack of confidence, and insecurity all contribute to a lack of execution while attempting shots around the green.

Blocking out negative results and concentrating on sound principles help the student produce consistent ball flight that gets the ball to the target without wasting shots. I always encourage students to develop their own routines, but here is one that I have developed over forty years of teaching and playing the game. It has served me well. Try it and see if it helps you.

I stand behind the shot and visualize where the ball should land and how high it must go to land on that spot and still roll to the hole. I call this: **See It.**  While still standing behind the ball, I cup my dominant hand and practice lobbing the ball to that spot on the green. I call this: **Feel It.** Finally, I pick the club I think will accomplish the height and distance I need the shot to go and **Do It:** no thinking, second thoughts, or doubts, just execution.

**See it, Feel it, and Do it** is the pre-shot routine I use. It helps me overcome the fears that prevent me from performing the shots required in the approach game. They might be right, they might be wrong, but at least I have given myself a chance to execute the shot and get it close to the hole.

Try this routine and see if it helps you develop the shots that will reduce your score and make you a better player. Reducing your score will make the game more fun to play and increase your confidence knowing you can get the ball on the green from anywhere on the golf course. Good luck.

**Chapter 2**

**The Putting Game**

***"When it's all said and done, you must get it in the hole."***

**Introduction**

The putting game is conducted entirely on the short and rolling surface of the putting green. A shot played from anywhere else is either an approach shot or a full swing. This makes putting the most individualistic of all the games of golf and the most important. One-half of all the shots you take in a golf game is usually played on the putting green.

The principles and fundamentals that generally apply to other games can be thrown out the window when putting. You can stand in anyway you want. You can hold the club how you wish. You can use one hand or two, cross-hand, split-hand, or anchor it against your forearm; it does not matter. Even the rules are different when the ball is on the putting green.

Visit the putting green of your local course on a busy Saturday morning and observe the different types of putters, grips, and styles, and you will soon realize putting is a strange animal and one that intimidates a lot of folks.

However, with all the individual methods, styles, body shapes, and different putters, only two principles are involved with the putting game. When it is all said and done, putting is quite simple. But just about everybody tries to make it much harder than it is.

The first principle is: **The putter must be square to the intended line at impact.** Pretty simple, you say, but you would be surprised how many players forget, or have never learned, this simple thing. You can have the most expensive putter in the world and the prettiest stroke you ever saw, but if the putter's face is not square to the intended line, the ball will not go in the hole. It's that simple. This is the most basic fundamental in all of golf. When putting, the object is to get the ball in the hole, any way you can, and to do that; the putter face must be square to the intended line you want the putt to start on.

The second principle in the putting game is: **The putter must be accelerating at impact.** It cannot be slowing down when it hits the ball. Beingtimid while striking a putt is as bad as being too forceful. Both of these faults are usually caused by the same mistake, over swinging.

Three variables make up the full swing: motion, weight transfer, and a lever. In the entire golf swing, these variables happen in sequence. They must be implemented correctly to create energy and then transfer that energy to the ball. Because putting is not about creating power and all about keeping the putter head square to the line, the student must resist the temptation to move, shift their weight, and apply a lever. More than any other movement in golf, the putting stroke requires the body to remain passive. Only the arms and shoulders, working together, should move when applying the force necessary to keep the putter on line throughout the stroke. Problems arise when the student, concerned with staying steady over the putt, takes the club too far back on the backswing. Realizing they have made too big of a stroke, the student de-accelerates into the ball. This causes the clubface to torque off the intended line and miss-hit the golf ball. This action will always produce a weak attempt that comes up short and offline. De-accelerating is especially critical on short putts the student must make to return a good score.

My teaching philosophy has always been to give students principles, or what I call commandments, which determine the cause and effect of the golf swing and its ensuing ball flight, and then present the student with drills to implement those principles. Putting is no different. The student must reinforce their muscle memory by breaking down the putting stroke into separate parts and practicing those parts with drills.

Here are the drills to create a sound, repeating putting stroke that will offer the student the best opportunity to make more short putts and roll the long ones close enough to make every time.

One of those principles I teach in full swing lessons is that the body creates the motion required to swing the golf club. The hands are the hinges that load on the backswing and unload on the downswing. At impact, the hands must be square to the intended line of flight. The trailing or dominant hand controls the face of the club. Where the palm faces at impact, and by association, the clubface, is where the ball will go. Because we are not attempting a full swing, it is essential to keep the hands at impact position before releasing whatever power we have accumulated on the backswing. The drill to practice this and keep the clubface square to the line is **the one-hand drill**.

Place three balls about two or three feet from the hole on a relatively flat part of the putting green. With only the dominant hand on the club, putt the balls into the hole. You cannot miss this putt. You must make it every time. This drill offers instant feedback. If you miss the hole from this distance, move closer until you can make all three-putts in succession. You must continue putting from this distance until you know you can make this putt 100 out of 100 tries. As you make more putts and get comfortable, move farther away until you start missing and then move closer until you find a distance where you can make them every time. This is your comfort zone. It will change day to day, course to course, but it is essential to know what that distance is every time you play golf. Here's why.

There are only two kinds of putts: Long ones and short ones. You must turn the long ones into short ones. I repeat, you must turn the long putts into short ones. Nobody ever lived that can make every putt. It is surprising to my students when I point out that even the best players in the world consistently miss half their putts from ten feet or more. The longer the putt, the less their chances are of making it. Yet, when I ask students if they are trying to make thirty and forty footers, they unanimously say yes when even the best players in the world cannot. While I appreciate their confidence, I don't think this is the best way to putt the golf ball.

But here is what I do believe. If you practice the **one-handed drill** and find your comfort zone, i.e., the distance you can make 100% of the time, you should work to putt the longer putts to that distance. Putting is not about making every putt. It's more about never taking more than two-putts and making the best score you can. The target now becomes that three or four-foot circle around the hole, not the hole itself on long putts. It's frustrating to watch my students blast the ball by the hole or miss-hit it coming up short and continually leaving themselves un-makeable second putts. I genuinely believe there is no excuse for being a lousy putter.

To practice long putts and ensure the putter is accelerating at impact, I want the student to **look at the hole** when they make their regular stroke. Do not look at the ball. This is a hard drill. You must train yourself not to look down when you hit the ball. This drill will give you the confidence to stroke the ball at the target rather than hitting the golf ball. Look at the hole and trust your stroke.

Think about it. When you do anything for accuracy, like shoot a rifle or throw a dart, do you look at the gun or the dart? Or do you look at the target? How about shooting a basketball? Do you look at the ball, or do you look at the basket? The same thing applies to long putts. If you are concerned with hitting the ball, rather than putting to a target, you will lose distance control. This drill works so well that some students continue looking at the hole rather than the ball whenever they have a long putt.

Remember, the goal on long putts is not to make it, although you will be surprised how many will go in if you are not concerned with hitting the ball. You must think more about getting the ball within the comfort zone you have established with the **one-handed drill**. We know we can make a two or three-foot putt. We have practiced with one hand until we can do it in our sleep. The target is now a four, five, or six-foot circle around the hole, whatever our comfort zone is that day. Anywhere within this circle will leave a two or three-foot putt or less. We own this putt and know we can make it.

Remember, the goal of long putts is to turn them into short ones. If the student can get their first putt to stop within the four-foot circle they have established as their comfort zone; they will dramatically reduce their chances of wasting shots by three or four-putting.

The next drill is the **feel drill**. This drill is the same as we used in the approach game. Pick a ball up with your dominant hand. For right-handed players, this is your right hand and the left hand for southpaws. Assume a balanced, athletic position facing the hole. While focusing on the four-foot circle that is our comfort zone surrounding the hole, toss a ball underhanded towards the target. The goal is to roll the ball with enough speed to stop within that zone. This drill allows the student to see how the ball responds to the green's speed and texture. Practice different holes on the putting green. Train your body and mind to automatically adjust to the various distances without thinking about how hard or soft it is to throw the ball. We call this: **don't think, just do**. After practicing throwing balls looking at the hole, close your eyes while trying to maintain a visual image of the target, and then throw balls at that target with your eyes closed. See the hole in your mind and throw it to that spot. Train yourself to trust what your mind can see and watch the ball roll to the target with your eyes closed. This visualization is the next step in developing the confidence to become a better putter. You will be surprised at how quickly you become proficient at this drill by feeling the distance in your mind rather than trying to throw the ball at the target physically.

Now pick up your putter and putt a couple of balls to the same holes using the same process ofnot thinking about the strokeor distance. After a few putts, close your eyes and trust yourself to feel and make the same stroke by visualizing the target in your mind. Take a mental picture of the hole and see the ball roll to the spot. Practice this drill until you can control your distance on the longer putts, and you will lose the apprehension and fear that comes from trying to make the longer putts.

By far, the most formidable mental challenge in putting is **reading the greens**. Not all greens are flat. Golf course designers build larger greens with subtle mounds and humps built-in, presenting an even more significant challenge when trying to make the putt. We must analyze several different scenarios when planning how the putt will react when it starts rolling across the green. Still, the first thing is to remember is that every putt is straight. The student must resist the temptation to guide the ball into the hole. Remember your drills.

The first thing I look for when reading greens is whether the putt is up-hill or down-hill. This determines the speed I want the ball going when the ball approaches my comfort zone. Up-hill putts will be slowing down when they reach the hole. Conversely, down-hill putts will be picking up speed as they approach the hole. My rule of thumb is always to hit up-hill putts past the hole and leave down-hill putts short of the hole. This usually doesn't happen, but this mindset makes me think about the effects the slope of the green has on the ball as it approaches the target.

When I read the green, the next thing I look for is there a side-hill and which way does it slope, to my right or my left? Remember, I believe that all putts should be played straight. The slope's effect on the ball as it approaches the hole should be calculated from that straight line. This is not an exact science. The student must guess how far the ball will break as the ball approaches the hole. The slower the ball is moving, the more the slope will affect the ball. The faster the ball is rolling; the less effect slope will have on the ball.

[<https://d.docs.live.net/75032de2b98aa4df/Documents/Rocky%20Mountain/Teaching%20Book/Short%20Game/Short%20Game%20Book.docx>My](https://d.docs.live.net/75032de2b98aa4df/Documents/Rocky%20Mountain/Teaching%20Book/Short%20Game/Short%20Game%20Book.docx) rule of thumb for side-hill putts is to always look at the putt's line from the upward slope of the side-hill to find the center of the cup from that angle. If we simply putt at the hole when faced with a side-hill putt, we will always miss the putt on the low side. Analyzing where the putt will enter the hole as gravity controls the ball gives us a better perspective of how hard or soft to stroke the putt.

The grain of the grass is next on the list when reading the greens. The type of grass growing on the green is contingent on the climate. Warm winters and hot summers will kill grasses that thrive on the cooler temperatures of the northern states. Warmer weather grasses typically have a broader leaf, which affects how the putt reacts around the hole. Experience is the best teacher for analyzing different grasses.

Once I have gathered all the information about the putt. Up-hill, down-hill, side-hill, long grass, etc., I can then draw my line to the target. That line may not be a straight line to the hole. In fact, it seldom is. Once I visualize how the ball will react to the various scenarios as it approaches the hole, I pick a spot I think will get the ball close to the hole. I then putt it to that spot, not the hole, hoping the ball will respond the way I visualized it. This is an educated guess based on experience. Reading the greens and how the ball will react is an art form and one the student should practice often.

The guessing game that makes up reading the greens is why establishing a **pre-shot routine** before every putt is critical to becoming a better putter.

I use the same **pre-shot routine** for putting that I do for approach shots. I stand behind the ball and visualize how the ball will react around the hole. If faced with a side-hill putt, I also envision it from the up-ward slope to see the break and where the ball should enter the hole. I then draw a straight line through the ball to a spot I want the ball to stop. I call this **See It**. I then practice the feel drill. I stand behind the ball and, without a ball, practice throwing my hand towards the target. I call this **Feel It.** I then step up to the putt, assume my stance, take two practice strokes while looking at the hole to establish the target's mental picture, look at the ball, and make my stroke. I call this **Do It.**

By establishing a consistent pre-shot routine, the student takes the fear and guesswork out of the putt. Regardless of the pressures of what the putt means, the student can now make a stroke with confidence knowing the principles they have practiced will reward them with an excellent repeating stroke that has a real chance of going in the hole.

Making putts is not luck. Putting well is a skill developed by practice and adherence to the principles we have outlined above. I always ask my students, "who is the best putter in the world?" Some of them will answer "Tiger, Phil, Rory" or some other well-known pro. I then tell them, "I am." They laugh, and I ask them again, "Who is the best putter in the world?" They say, "you are" I then gently remind them that "I am," and they get the point. If you think you are a great putter, you will be.

Putting is a learned skill that does not require a lot of physical talent. [The Short Game](https://www.jeffgolfguy.com/on-the-lesson-tee/short-game/) You can become a better putter by practicing the drills we have outlined above and becoming a player who saves strokes on the green rather than throwing them away by three and four-putting. And never forget who the best putter in the world is. "You are.