Putting Basics

If You Can Putt... You Can Score

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Putting

Now that you've built your chipping, pitching, and full swing motions, it's time to talk about putting. More so than any other motion in golf, putting depends a lot on your personal preferences.

You've probably seen great putters who use open stances and others who use closed stances. Some great putters have lots of wrist action, while others freeze their wrists and rock their shoulders. There are many different ways to be a good putter, but the techniques we'll present are what we consider the easiest and most effective for most golfers.

Some important concepts to keep in mind while putting:

- **Remember the Keys and Educated Hands.** As with all swings, your putting motion must be guided by your Educated Hands and comply with all four Keys.

- **Straight back, straight through.** During the putting motion, your hand and wrist alignments should remain constant. Keep the notch or marking on top of your putter's clubhead — which designates the sweetspot — directly on top of your target line during the entire stroke. Note that this contrasts with chips, pitches, and full swings, where the clubhead moves on the Sweetspot Path and does not stay directly on top of your target line.

- **Clubface is (still) king.** Putting is all about striking the golf ball with a clubface that's square to your intended target, as it's the clubface — not the clubhead path — that dictates the ball's initial direction after impact. You'll be using Clubface Motion C, so the clubface will stay square to the target throughout the entire motion.

- **Every putt is a straight putt.** For putts that break left or right, establish your target line so it points to where you want the ball to start (not at the hole). Hit the ball along this line and allow the slope of the green to bring it back to the hole. Trust this line after you establish it; many players subconsciously steer the ball back toward the hole, resulting in putts that miss on the "low side."

- **Don't forget the intermediate target.** As we first mentioned in the chipping chapter, the intermediate target is something like a discolored blade of grass or the edge of an old ball mark that lies on your target line about 6 to 12 inches ahead of your ball. After establishing your target line for your putt (pointing either at the hole for a straight putt, or left or right of the hole for a breaking putt), choose an intermediate target on this line and try to make the ball roll over this target after it leaves the clubface.

How well do you aim your putter?

Striking the ball with a square putter clubface begins with proper aim.

With our students, we'll attach a laser beam to the clubfaces of their putters and have them aim at a hole 10 feet away.

Many more people miss the target with the beam — sometimes by very wide margins — than hit it. In fact, fewer than 5 percent of them properly aim at the hole, and beginning golfers actually do better than experienced golfers.
• **Maximize the effective size of the hole.** Putts that miss should travel about 12 to 16 inches past the hole, depending on the speed of the greens. This is the ball speed at which the hole can best "grab" putts that are slightly offline.

**Pre-shot**
Your target line will serve as your guide while putting. While standing behind the ball, establish this first and then select your intermediate target.

To get a sense for the power (speed) necessary for a particular putt, stand behind the ball and swing the putter back and forth while looking at the hole.

Another way to gauge the power needed for a putt is to use the "toss technique." Without a putter, take an address position over your putt. Now, imagine taking the golf ball in your right hand and tossing it toward the hole. As you swing your arm, note the speed of your motion and the feeling of how hard you'd need to toss the ball in order to get it to the hole. With this feeling as a guide, go back and stand behind the ball, and swing your putter back and forth while looking at the hole.

**Grip**
Though dependent on personal preference, the putting grip is taught this way to our students. The main difference between the grip for putting and the grip for all other motions is where the grip sits in your left hand.

• Hold the putter out in front of you and level to the ground. Place the grip in the palm of your left hand, under the thumb pad and in the "lifeline." Close your left hand around the grip.

![Place the putter in the palm of your left hand.](image)
Close your left hand around the grip.

- Add your right hand by placing the grip diagonally across the fingers and into the "lifeline" of your right palm. Connect your right hand to your left hand using an overlapping, reverse overlapping, interlocking, 10-finger (baseball), or other grip style.

Add your right hand to the putter.

- Close your right hand around your left thumb and the grip. Your left thumb will now be in the "lifeline" of your right palm. Ensure that the first joint of your right hand index finger
(your "trigger" finger) is on the back side of (not on top or underneath) the grip so you can monitor sweetspot pressure.

Proper grip (reverse overlap grip style shown).

Setup and address

- **Posture.** To assume your putting posture, begin by standing up straight with your feet shoulder-width apart. Either place your weight evenly on both feet with a centered head, or place about 60 percent of your weight on your left side and set your head slightly forward of center. Then, bend forward from your hips and flex your knees.

- **Stance.** As long as it facilitates a "straight back, straight through" motion, your stance can be square, open, or closed. We recommend square.

- **Hands.** Your hands should be about in-line with your belt buckle and your left wrist should be bent. That same bent left wrist will be maintained throughout the stroke — this is an effective substitute for a Flat Left Wrist in putting.

- **Ball position.** We recommend placing the ball slightly forward of center, though ball position is not too critical with the "straight back, straight through" stroke you'll be using.
Proper address position.
Proper address position (down-the-line view).

**Making the motion**
You power the putting stroke by moving your hands and arms while maintaining a Steady Head. If the putt is very long, your shoulders may turn slightly to accommodate the longer putting motion, but generally your body should not move. One reason we prefer you set up with a square stance is so you have checkpoints during your putting motion: Simply move your hands straight back to the toes of your right foot and straight through to the toes of your left foot.

- **Startup and backswing.** Move your hands straight back until they’re over the toes of your right foot, keeping the clubface square to the target and your putter's sweetspot notch directly on the top of your target line.

**Prefer to rock your shoulders?**

Instead of swinging their arms and hands, some players would rather rock their shoulders when putting.

This is a viable option, but be sure you get your upper spine and the back of your head as parallel to the ground as possible when you set up. This will help keep the clubhead on your target line.

During the motion, try to emulate the action of a teeter-totter with your shoulders.
Startup and backswing.

- **Downswing.** Move your hands straight through toward the toes of your left foot, again keeping the clubface square to the target and your putter's sweetspot notch directly on the top of your target line.
• **Impact.** The clubface is square to the target, the putter's sweetspot notch is directly on top of your target line, and your hands are continuing to move toward the toes of your left foot.
Follow-through (also serves as your finish). The motion has continued until both arms are straight. The clubface is still square to the target, the putter's sweetspot notch is still directly on top of your target line, and your hands appear from your perspective to be over the toes of your left foot. If the clubface is not square at this point, adjust it until it is — although the ball is gone, you want to train your hands to know what's correct.
Follow-through.

Drills
We have a number of drills for you to use to hone your putting stroke. Some of these can be done away from the course, while others can be done not only away from the course but also without a ball. Train yourself to make the proper motion, and then let that motion make the shot.

- Sweetspot Drill
  
  *Purpose:* To educate your hands to keep the sweetspot of the putter on top of your target line.
  *Equipment:* Putter and one other club.
  *Instructions:* Lay a club down on the ground to represent your target line. Now, simply swing your putter back and forth, keeping the sweetspot notch directly on top of your target line and the clubface square at all times.
Sweetspot Drill at address.
Sweetspot Drill at the top.
Sweetspot Drill at impact.
Sweetspot Drill at follow-through.

- **Channel Drill**
  
  *Purpose:* To reinforce the "straight back, straight through" path of your hands and the sweetspot.
  
  *Equipment:* Putter, two other clubs, and a golf ball.
  
  *Instructions:* Lay down two clubs — about 4 inches apart and parallel to each other — to create a channel. Swing your putter back and forth, keeping the clubhead inside the channel and the clubface square at all times. Do this drill with and without a ball.

- **Tee Drill**
  
  *Purpose:* To reinforce the "straight back, straight through" path of your hands and the sweetspot.
  
  *Equipment:* Putter, two tees, and a golf ball.
  
  *Instructions:* Take your address position and place two tees in the ground: one just outside the toe of your putter's clubhead, the other just outside the heel. Now, make a putting motion without allowing your putter to strike either of the tees. Do this drill with and without a ball.

- **2x4 Drill (for putting)**
Purpose: To educate your hands as to what it feels like to keep the putter's clubface square at all times.

Equipment: Putter, a wooden 2x4, two tees, and a golf ball.

Instructions: Set up a 2x4 on its side with the 2-inch-wide side down. Place two tees behind it to keep it in place. Put the heel of your putter up against the 2x4 with the clubface square to the target. Move the putter back and forth along the 2x4, keeping the heel of the putter up against it and the clubface square at all times. Do this drill with and without a ball.
2x4 Drill at the top.
2x4 Drill at impact.
2x4 Drill at follow-through.

- **Two-Ball Drill**
  
  *Purpose:* To educate your hands to strike the ball with a square clubface.
  
  *Equipment:* Putter and two golf balls.
  
  *Instructions:* Place two balls next to each other (so they're touching) to form a line perpendicular to your target line. Take your address position so both balls are in-line with the clubface. Your objective is to hit both balls at once and have both go approximately the same distance.

**Training plan**
Each day you train putting, select the Channel Drill, Tee Drill, or 2x4 Drill to use. The other two drills should also be done regularly, but the plan below requires you use a drill where you can hit real putts.

After you select a drill for the day, you will putt 32 balls each for short putts (3 feet and 6 feet) and lag putts (20 feet or 40 feet) for a total of 96 putts. At each distance, you will use each set of 32 balls in a very specific way.

**Quick tips: Putting**

- Keep a Steady Head
- Minimal body motion; your arms and hands power the stroke
- Maintain the hand/wrist alignments you had at address
- Clubface must be square to your target line at impact
- Take all strokes to follow-through
- All putts are straight putts
First, putt four balls while using the "aid" (the channel, tees, or 2x4). As you putt these balls, consciously think about proper mechanics, and work to improve your clubface alignment and clubhead path.

Then, putt four balls without the aid. For these four, remove from your head all swing thoughts and other noise. Just see the ball, see the hole, and knock the ball in the hole. Let the motion make the shot, and don’t get in its way.

Repeat this (four putts with the aid, four without) three more times for a total of 32 putts at this distance. Repeat the set of 32 putts until you’ve completed all three distances. Ensure you track your results so you can monitor your progress over time.

- **Short putts**
  *Distances*: 3 feet and 6 feet.
  *Objectives (percentage of putts made)*: 100 percent from 3 feet; 75 percent from 6 feet.

  The above percentages are actually higher than the rates at which PGA Tour players make those lengths of putts. However, you have the use of an aid for half the putts of each distance. We also set the bar high to encourage you to jump — and not just trip! — over it.

- **Lag putts**
  *Distances*: 20 feet or 40 feet (choose one each day you train).
  *Objective*: Have all putts finish within one putter length (about 3 feet) from the hole in any direction.

### Importance of the short game

Out of all the strokes a typical golfer makes on the course, 60 percent of them are from 100 yards and in. Yet, most golfers spend more than 80 percent of their training time on the full swing. If you devote the majority of your training time to shots from 100 yards and in, you can realistically expect to slash 5-7 shots off every round.

Other eye-opening figures:

- A scratch golfer hits most chips to within 3 feet and easily knocks the resulting putt in for par, while a 10-handicapper chips to 7 feet and misses the par putt.
- A five-handicapper averages 30 putts per round, contrasted with a 15-handicapper who averages 35 putts and a 30-handicapper who averages 40 putts.
- If you’re only hitting chips and pitches to within 15 feet of the hole, you might as well be hitting them 30 feet from the hole. Statistically, your chances of making 15-foot putts and 30-foot putts are both poor.

Are you (finally) inspired to work on your short game?

### About the Author

Randy Sparks has been an avid student of the golf swing for more than 20 years. He teaches golf at Seascape GC at Seascape Resort in Destin, Florida.

Though Randy teaches both adult and junior golfers, his central focus and passion is the Purestrike Junior Programs he developed that today includes more than 100 junior golfers on the Florida panhandle. Over the last few years, golfers in the program have won more than 100 junior tournaments, and many are highly ranked on the Junior Golf Scoreboard.
The everyday golfers that Randy sees on the lesson tee — and the questions they ask — inspired this eBook. The concepts and recommendations in PureStrike have been battle-tested and refined through real-world teaching of golfers at all skill levels, both in one-on-one lessons and large group clinics.

Randy would like to recognize Homer Kelley and Carey Mumford for contributing to his understanding of the golf swing and influencing his teaching. He would also like to thank Matt Sluzinski, a writer he works with who assists in the development of all his writings. Also special recognition and thanks to Bob Koch and the Medicus Team for their continued support.

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