

The Scoring Zone

"If I ever needed an 8-foot putt and everything I owned depended on it, I would want Arnold Palmer to putt it for me."

Bobby Jones

"Improving your scoring zone shots is the quickest way to reducing your scores."

Brad Brewer

The scoring zone starts about 60 yards out and is the area of the course where you pitch, chip, and putt. For the best players in the world, this area represents 42 percent of their game. As your handicap increases, that percentage goes up. It's the area of the game that PGA Tour professionals practice the most. Unfortunately, it's totally neglected by most amateurs during their practice sessions.

If you want to improve your handicap and your scores in a short time frame, this is where you need to start—it's the quickest way to save strokes in everybody's game. That 3-foot putt counts the same as a 300-yard drive and, if missed, can become very frustrating.

The average high handicap golfer averages 40 putts or more per round. Compare that to the touring professional average of 29. Improving your short game will allow you to get closer to the hole and sink more putts. The scoring zone, in my opinion, begins about 60 yards from the hole.

Chipping It Close or In!

We'll start with chipping, the shots that are played from just off the putting green. You can use a variety of clubs from a 5-iron to a wedge to chip with. Choose your weapon based on how far you want the ball to run to the hole after landing on the green. Your club choice depends on your distance from the edge of the green and then the distance to the hole: 5-irons will run farther than wedges. You want the ball to become a putt as soon as possible. If you apply this simple philosophy in your chipping game, you will soon benefit from more consistent distance control and many more playable misses in general.

Be sure and pick out a line to the hole, then determine your target landing spot. Make the one-piece stroke I'll help you with shortly, then watch your ball land, roll, and get close to or go into the hole.

Chipping Keys

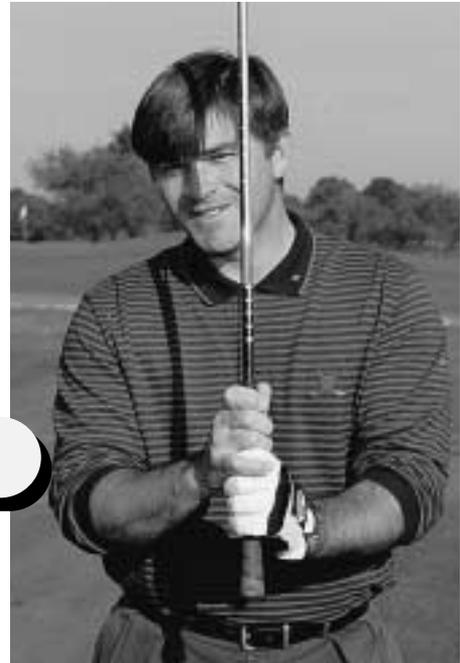
1. A good neutral grip. Same as your full swing, but grip pressure becomes even more important. The lighter your grip pressure, the better touch and feel you'll have for your club.
2. Choking down on the club.
3. Narrowing the stance.
4. Slightly opening up the feet, hips, and shoulders.
5. Swing back and through in a one-piece motion.

Choking Down on the Grip

- Gains control of a squared clubhead position throughout the stroke.
- More feel for the club you're swinging.
- Limiting your swing arc allows better control of distance allowing you to control the smooth acceleration of the club.

Address Position

Face-on view.



Down-the-line view.

- Stance is narrow and open to the target line.
- Play the ball approximately two inches off your left heel.
- Hands set-up slightly forward of the ball.





- By choking down on the club, you naturally go into more of your putting position.
- Tilted over more at address, your swing plane becomes more vertical.
- Your feet, hips and chest should be open to the target. (Aimed slightly left for right-handers and aimed slightly right for left-handers.)
- The open position will keep your hands forward of the clubhead and the ball throughout your stroke. This promotes a sweeping angle of attack.

Chipping Action Sequence

Here's what a one-piece chipping stroke looks like. Review your chipping action by taping your swing, then comparing it to mine.



As I begin to take the club back, notice the straight line going down the inside of the left shoulder running down the shaft. My hands are marginally in front of the ball because of the open stance and the ball is positioned two inches off the left heel. More weight sets upon the left side naturally.

First part of the take-away. The triangle formed between the shoulders, arms, and hands moves the club back in a one-piece unit.



The backswing: Minimal wrist action if any.



FEEL FEEDBACK

You should feel as if you're brushing the grass through impact and allowing the ball to naturally roll up the face of the golf club. You can practice that feel by taking a small broom and making the same stroke.

Forward motion is a mirror image of the backswing. One-piece back and one-piece through makes it easy to control a smooth and fluid acceleration. Just as my clubhead is about to impact the ball, see how I've returned to exactly the same position as when I just started to take the club back. Hands are slightly ahead of the club assuring a clean crisp contact of the ball in the middle of the clubface every time. Post impact: Triangle still together tells the story of a good one-piece action throughout the swing.





Follow-through. The same hand, arms and shoulder motion has carried me to my follow-through.

Brad's Chipping Drills

Here are some very simple drills to help you condition a good technique needed for chipping correctly.

Golf Ball Toss Drill



This is an outstanding drill to help you learn distance control in your chipping action.



Put a golf ball in your right hand.



Lob it underhand toward your target. developing a feel for the chipping motion. Try lofting it with different trajectories, feeling how your motion increases with higher trajectories.

Brush and Wedge Drill

This drill provides the feel and visuals of chipping with a smooth brush stroke. Begin by choking down as you hold a broom and a wedge together as I am.



As you brush the broom back, the club follows with a sweeping one-piece take-away motion.

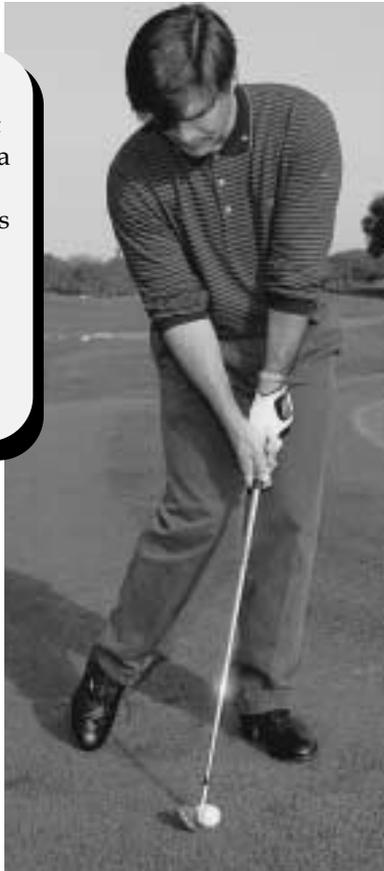


You'll hit consistent chips around the green if you sweep away with your stroke. Here the club follows the broom's lead. The ball will roll up the face of the club and nice clean contact with the ball is the result.

Flamingo Drill

One common problem I see with many golfers having trouble with their chipping is too much lower body motion. An important key to better chipping is to stay steady with your lower body. This drill will keep your weight on your left side because you hit shots with your right heel raised off the ground balancing on your toe—similar to our famous Florida flamingos.

Take your normal address position, but lift your right heel off the ground. Make a one-piece swing with your hands, arms, and shoulders working together and you'll see how the raised heel restricts your lower body movement, keeping the weight on your left side.



Two Club Chipping Drill

Developing the feel of the all-important one-piece motion is this drill's major benefit. Golfers have the incorrect tendency to slow down their arm swing and then flip their wrists as they hit chips. The drill objective is to stroke back and through in a one-piece motion without the extended club hitting your left side.

Overlap the grip of your chipping club with another club that is extended with its clubhead pointing up.



Make a good one-piece sweep-away with your hands, arms, and shoulders maintaining the triangle shape formed at address.



Swing forward, brushing cleanly through impact without having the club's extension hit your left side.



Continue on to your follow-through. The extended club kept your arm swing accelerating and did not allow you to get wristy.

Pitching

When you find yourself farther out from the green and require a longer approach shot than a chip, it's called a pitch. The ball has to have more loft to it to cover the longer distance and land softly so that it doesn't run too much. You can hit pitch shots with pitching wedges, sand wedges, and lob wedges. The built-in loft dictates which one is appropriate for the distance needed to the pin. Usually the pitching wedge is used for longer shots, the sand wedge and lob wedges are used when you are closer to the green. If you have a chance to play in Scotland, you might want to pitch with a 7-iron so that the ball can run a little farther after landing.

Pitching Keys

- Address position is similar to a chip. Club aimed at the target.
- Choke marginally down on the club, depending on your distance. This limits the length of the shaft, allowing you to have better control of your distance. For a longer distance, don't choke down as much. For shorter pitches, you can choke down the grip very close to the shaft.
- Open your stance with your feet, hips, and shoulders aligned to the left of your intended target, similar to the way you chip.
- The ball should be approximately two inches off the inside of your left heel.
- Match your swing going back and through. If you're swinging the club back halfway, for example, follow-through halfway, keeping an even tempo in-between.

Many golfers make the mistake of swinging the club too far back when hitting pitch shots. Then they have to decelerate their club coming into the shot attempting to hit it the correct distance. This causes a lot of fat chunky shots or thin sculled shots—ugly any way you look at it.

Think of your swing as a clock and swing from 3 o'clock to 9 o'clock. Practice accelerating smoothly through the shot with the same matched length at follow-through as you had on your backswing.

Hitting a Pitch

The set-up is similar to a chip but because the stroke is longer, you will have a wrist set. Keep a smooth tempo as you swing the club back and forth. Accelerate through the ball matching the length of your backswing to your follow-through. Go from 4 o'clock to 8 o'clock, 2 o'clock to 10 o'clock, and so on.



Address the ball similar to a chip.



Feet, hips, and shoulders are aligned open to the target. Choke down on the club depending on the length needed for your shot.



Take the club back in a one-piece motion with your hands, arms, and shoulders, similar to a chip.



Your wrists will set naturally as you increase the length of your swing.

Match the length of your backswing and follow-through. Smoothly accelerate through the ball.



Putting

Just as with our full and partial swings, the key to becoming a good putter is in mastering the basic fundamentals first.

Grip

I'll demonstrate the reverse overlapping grip, which is probably the most popular grip used on the Tours. It's a grip that gives you a nice snug feeling with your hands close together. You'll be able to make a unified stroking motion with this grip.



The club is more in the palm of your left hand than it would be in your regular grip.



The V formed by the thumb and index finger is pointed at your left shoulder. You should feel that the hand is underneath the grip a little bit.



As you close the hand the V of your right hand should point to the right shoulder. As you look down at your grip, the V of each hand should point at its same side shoulder.



All five fingers of the right hand are on the club with the thumb marginally down the inside right on the shaft. The index finger of your left hand is overlapped across the fingers of the right hand.

Your grip pressure should be light so that you can feel your instrument as you stroke back and forth with a good rhythmic tempo. If you can't feel the weight of the putter head swinging back and through, your hands are too tight. Keeping your hands soft will allow you to feel the weight at the end of the instrument.

BRAD EXPLAINS

Each of us has one eye that is more dominant than the other. You can find yours by staring at an object at least four feet in front of you. Curl your right hand so the thumb touches your fingers and, when held in front, you should be able to see through the hole formed. Center your hand so you can see your target. Keeping your hand in position, close one eye. If the target is still in line and can be seen through your fingers, the open eye is your dominant eye. If the target is not centered, close that eye and then open the other one. The target should appear centered—that eye is your dominant eye.

Putting Address



The ball should be in the middle of your stance.



You want to align your dominant eye over the ball. I'm hanging a club down from my eye to check on the position, putting it on top of my target line.



Alignment

Setting up as parallel to your target line as possible is the most consistent way to align yourself. I find it much easier for everyone we teach at our academies to do this but, if you have a preference for a slightly opened stance and you can sink putts with it—go with it! I suggest starting out square and then make an adjustment if it makes you feel more comfortable.

Keep your shoulders level to the ground. This is important if you want to swing back in a one-piece pendulum motion. See how I match the length of my swing back and forth. If you take it back six inches, follow through six inches.



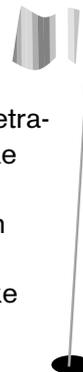
SWING KILLERS

Many people tilt their left shoulder up at address too much. This makes it difficult for them to take the putter back in a one-piece motion. They end up dragging it into the ground or picking it up with their hands. Try to keep your shoulders as level to the ground as possible, at address, to avoid this problem.



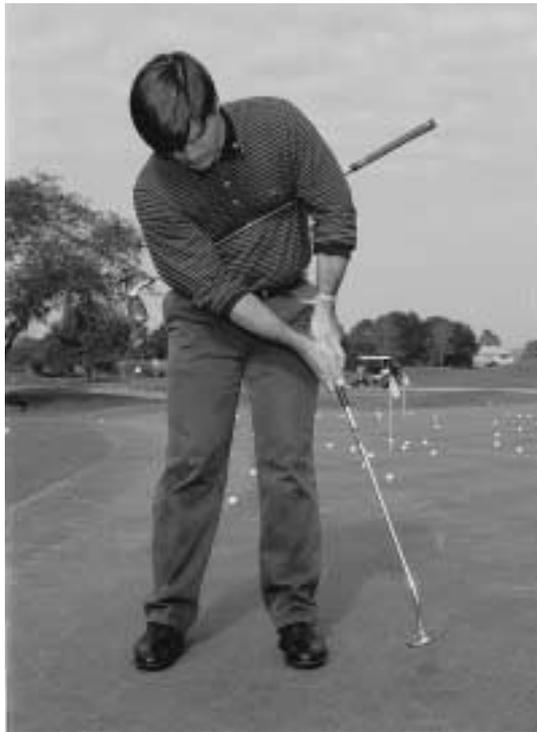
Back to Basics

Your pendulum stroke should have rhythm and tempo. I suggest using a Metronome to help develop it. Take the putter back and forth in rhythm with the sounds from the metronome. You will be amazed how silky your stroke will become in a very short period of practice from the even tempo you acquire through your auditory learning mode.



This is a close-up view of how my hands, arms, and shoulders stay together as I make a one-piece pendulum stroke.





Pendulum Drill

- Place a club under your arms and hold snugly against your chest. The club will help you align your body parallel to your target line.
- Make strokes feeling the motion of your shoulders coordinated with the pendulum motion of the clubhead swinging.
- Maintain a steady head like all the great putters.
- Allow the putter head to swing past your head—don't come up and out of the putt early.
- Another good drill is to listen for the ball going into the hole, rather than watching it. This way, you're not tempted to raise your head.

FEEL FEEDBACK

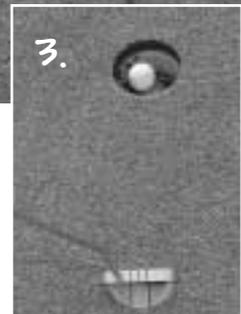
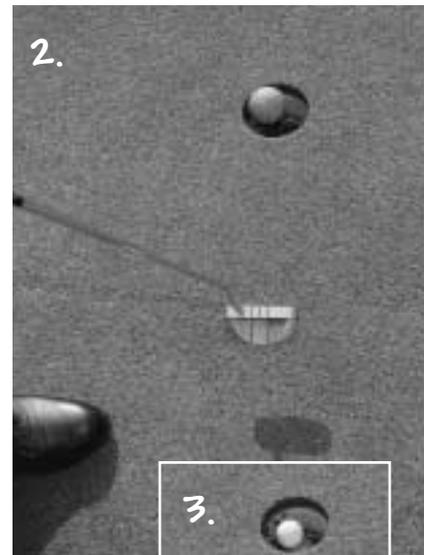
As you stroke it back and through you should feel a good shoulder, hand, and arm movement all in one unison piece. After a few minutes of practice, try making a few putts feeling the same one-piece motion that has begun to become a habit in your putting stroke.

Putt-Tee Practice Station

Set up a practice station on the green with three tees: a tee for ball position; a tee as the governor for the length of the backswing; a tee for the follow-through. Stroke within the guidelines of the tees. You'll build symmetry in your unified stroke, back and through. It's a great way to practice, getting yourself into good putting habits.



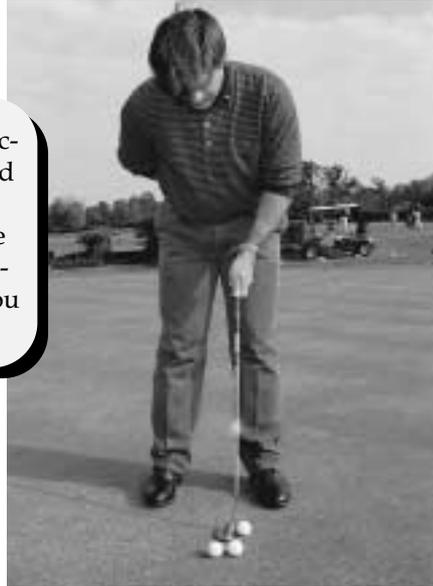
Tennis Ball Drill



Try making five putts from two feet with a tennis ball. You must make a smooth accelerating stroke. See how the ball barely fits in the hole. After this exercise, when you putt the golf ball, the hole will look as big as a bushel basket. This really will help you with the short putts many golfers have trouble with.

Left Hand Putting Drill

Putt with your left hand. This is good practice to help you work on stroking back and through. The back of the left hand should always be accelerating through to the hole and not breaking down. Stroking 2- and 3-foot putts with the left hand only gives you a good solid feel.



Spoke Drill

Take five golf balls and put them at a three-foot range around the hole. Make all the putts from the three-foot range, then set them up at the five-foot range. This is an outstanding way to practice all the breaks you may find on a green: left to right, right to left, uphill and downhill.



Take five golf balls and put them at a three-foot range around the hole.

Crystal Clear Tempo

I want to share with you the best putting tip I ever received. It came from a good friend of mine, Ian Baker-Finch, shortly after his 1994 British Open victory. We were playing golf at Winged Foot Country Club in Westchester County, New York. The greens that day were slicker than ice on a Minnesota lake in January and I was having a tough time judging my distance.

After knocking a 10-foot putt 30 feet past the hole and completely off the green, my good friend from the land down under let me in on his secret to putting fast greens. He said: "I visualize that my putter shaft is made of a very thin piece of lead crystal with a heavy putter head. I must swing the putter back and through in a very slow even pace with the head of the shaft or it will break."

Visualization can be a very powerful tool and, in this story, I went on to shoot 3 under on the back side with a total of 12 putts. I have been successful with this thought for putting fast greens many times since then. Next time you putt fast greens and you are struggling with your tempo control, try our Crystal Clear Tempo secret.

