

TWO STEPS TO A PERFECT GOLF SWING

A male golfer in a dark blue polo shirt and khaki pants is captured in the middle of a golf swing on a green course. A white dotted line traces the path of the club head, starting from the bottom left and curving upwards and to the right. A red circle with the number '1' is at the start of the line, and another red circle with the number '2' is at the peak of the arc. The background shows a lush green golf course with sand traps and a line of trees under a blue sky with light clouds. A yellow sign with a star and the text 'COWBOYS Golf Club' is visible in the foreground on the right.

SHAWN HUMPHRIES & BRAD TOWNSEND
FOREWORD BY BYRON NELSON

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SHAWN HUMPHRIES WITH BRAD TOWNSEND
FOREWORD BY BYRON NELSON

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FOREWORD

BYRON NELSON

One of the best things about my nearly eighty years in golf is seeing a young pro come along who understands the golf swing the way I do. Shawn Humphries is just such a golf professional, and I've been impressed with him from the first time we met.

When Shawn was the director of my golf school at the Four Seasons resort in Dallas from 1998 to 2001, I watched him on many occasions and noticed how he teaches the game in a way that is easy for novice golfers to understand and imitate, right from the start. I appreciate that because having given lessons for more than seventy years, I realize it's not easy to successfully demonstrate and explain the swing to someone who's just picking it up.

Every time I attended a golf school session, I was proud to hear the folks tell me how much they enjoyed Shawn and the other pros he had teaching under him. During my PGA Tour tournament a few springs ago, I got to see Shawn on the Golf Channel's "Academy Live," and I was even more impressed with how well he explained various aspects of the golf swing for everyone from high handicappers to senior pros. Shawn's method is simple, sound, and successful.

I guess one compliment I give people is "quiet and easy." Shawn is like that—very low-key and polite always—yet he is very strong about what he does, and I'm sure that's why he does it so well. I know I was very proud to have him in charge of my golf school.

I also know you'll learn a great deal from this first book of his. Brad Townsend, who worked with Shawn on this book, has been a good friend and excellent golf writer at the *Dallas Morning News*, and he has done a great job of transferring Shawn's ideas and meth-

Foreword

ods to paper. When a golfer has trouble with his or her game but the teacher isn't available, it's great to have something at hand that can help fix a swing glitch or shed light on the mysteries of the short game. This book of Shawn's will be a tremendous addition to your golf library—and your game.



FOREWORD

T R O Y A I K M A N

When I began working with Shawn Humphries in February 2002, I was a fourteen-handicap. Occasionally, I would have rounds in the seventies, but my golf game was extremely inconsistent. Shawn was in his second month at Cowboys Golf Club in Grapevine, Texas. A mutual friend, Conny Holcombe, believed that Shawn and I would work well together, and that I would get the results I had been wanting. Conny's instincts couldn't have been more accurate.

During and especially after my career with the Dallas Cowboys (1989–2000), I received a lot of advice for my golf swing, but I couldn't take my game to the level I wanted. I never felt I was on the correct path toward improving my scores and having fun on the course. Working with Shawn put me on the right path. He helped me understand why I was producing disaster shots that led to higher scores. One of the first things we did was set a goal of eliminating one double bogey on the front nine and another on the back nine, thereby shaving at least four strokes per round.

During our first meeting, before we even went to the practice tee, Shawn and I discussed the three intangibles I needed to get to the next level:

1. The desire to improve and work on my game
2. A better understanding of my golf swing and why I was producing disaster shots
3. A plan to correct my disaster shots

Shawn quickly realized that my main flaw was in my backswing. When I brought the club back, I occasionally pulled my arms toward

my body. I wasn't maintaining the proper distance between my arms or the correct space between my arms and body.

The benefits of working with Shawn were fairly sudden and definitely dramatic. Within eighteen months, I lowered my handicap from fourteen to three. Almost immediately, I started having more fun on the course, both while playing with friends and during charitable and celebrity tour tournaments.

Of course, this dramatic improvement also required hard work, desire, and patience on my part. But I am thankful that throughout my life, as a football player, golfer, and participant in other sports, I've been fortunate enough to be exposed to terrific mentors. When Jimmy Johnson coached the Cowboys, he constantly stressed to us players that games are not won simply by making great plays. Winning also is about minimizing mistakes.

Shawn helped me view golf in a similar manner. While helping me learn how to minimize mistakes, he noted that most players are fortunate if they hit three perfect shots during a round. So our focus never was to try to hit more of those perfect shots, but rather to turn the shots that once went out of bounds or into trees or water into shots that at worst, wound up in the rough.

People can only accomplish goals by having a plan. My golf game is proof that Shawn is great at breaking everything down and helping someone understand the root cause of the problem. His approach to the game is very consistent and simple.

Whether you are a beginner or an advanced player, you will no doubt enjoy reading this book. For advanced golfers, Shawn keeps your diagnoses simple. For beginners and intermediate players, his two-step process helps you not only to develop as a golfer, but also to understand the game more clearly and eventually become your own teacher.

This book is an opportunity for you to learn from one of the best. Shawn has put it all into words and pictures, and I know you'll enjoy it.



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There are many people I want to thank for the friendship, support, and opportunities that each has given me during my career:

Jim Donovan, my agent, for walking me through every step and finding me the best publishing house in the country; and Curt Sampson, who introduced me to Jim.

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Thank you, Byron Nelson, for giving me the opportunity to direct your golf schools, and thank you for sending me students. You are an incredible mentor. Your wisdom is for the ages!

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My mother, who taught me patience, that when you see it you will believe it, and that dreams do come true.

And to my father, who recently passed away: I wish you here to read this, but I know you are watching over me.



TWO STEPS

TO A PERFECT

GOLF SWING

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YOU'RE ON THE RIGHT TRACK

Your golf swing is a work in progress. The work begins the moment you grip your first club and doesn't end until you walk off the eighteenth green after the last round of your life. In between will be periods when your scores rise and your swing feels out of sync but you can't pinpoint why. You will take lessons, spend extra hours on the practice range, and experiment with clubs, balls, swing thoughts, and the latest surefire gadgets.

With *Two Steps to a Perfect Golf Swing*, however, you're going to eliminate the guesswork, rescue your sanity, and preserve your bank account. As the title implies, this is a straightforward book and teaching method that, as hundreds of my students can attest, refines and simplifies one of sports' most difficult skills.

Just as in my golf schools, the first priority is to make sure you are using proper fundamentals, including grip, posture, and setup. Then I explain the functions your hands, wrists, arms, and shoulders play

in your swing. These chapters are significant because they lay the groundwork for your new and improved swing.

Next, I boil your swing down to two basic steps, which I call Position One and Position Two. Finally, but no less important, I discuss practice techniques that will help you maximize what I call rehearsal opportunities, both on the practice tee and at home.

You will discover, as my students have, that streamlining your swing into two steps eliminates clutter from your thought process and makes it easier to visualize and understand how your swing is supposed to work. Soon Position One and Position Two become a routine. The routine becomes a sequenced motion.

Along with improved scores and a more sequenced swing, your game also will benefit over the long haul. During those inevitable days and weeks when your game dips, or you have a lengthy layoff, you won't be forced to start from scratch or experiment on the practice tee. Instead, you will simply brush up on your fundamentals and retrace to Position One and Position Two. You'll find those periods to be much less frustrating and more time-efficient.



Never Too Old or Too Great to Learn

If you have played much golf, you probably have discovered that the game's inherent difficulty makes your great shots and career-best rounds feel all the more rewarding. They're the moments that bring you back and that keep you striving to improve.

Rest assured, golfing is an educational journey for everyone, whether you play once a month and carry a twenty handicap, or you're a golf legend. If I didn't realize that before, it became vividly clear in March of 1999, when I was in my second year as director of the Byron Nelson Golf School in Irving, Texas. This particular morning brought a special visitor—Lord Byron himself—and one of the

most enlightening moments of all my fifteen years as a teaching professional.

Since the day I started running his golf school, Byron Nelson and I had developed a friendship. I felt privileged to have my name associated with his, treasured his wise guidance, and was mesmerized by his stories about his fifty-two-win tour career—especially his record-setting eighteen-victory season of 1945, which included an astonishing eleven straight wins.

He had dropped by the golf school before, but this time it wasn't a social visit. He came to the school's practice tee to prepare for his annual trip to the Masters, the major tournament he won in both 1937 and 1942. Since the early 1980s, Byron, Sam Snead, and Gene Sarazen had served as the Masters' honorary starters, hitting the ceremonial opening tee shots.

But now Byron was eighty-seven. Back and hip problems had weakened his legs and limited his playing. After twenty minutes of grinding on the range and failing to get his drives consistently airborne, he looked puzzled and somewhat dejected.

"Hey, Shawn, do you mind watching me hit a few balls?" he asked.

To this day it amazes me that I didn't keel over on the spot, not from the north Texas heat but from shock. I've had the opportunity to work with men and women tour players and world-class athletes like former Dallas Cowboys quarterback Troy Aikman. I've talked about my teaching methods on national TV. But this seemed beyond any instructor's comfort zone. What help could I possibly offer a man widely regarded to be the father of the modern golf swing, a player whose mechanics were so fundamentally sound and ball flight so straight that the U.S. Golf Association named its club-testing apparatus "Iron Byron"?

"OK," I thought, trying to look composed. "We know who's going to get the lesson here."

It didn't take long to spot the source of Byron's problem. He had the ball too forward in his stance. Instead of positioning it on a line just inside his left heel and big toe, he had the ball even with his little toe. During his heyday, Byron played the ball more forward in his stance than most players because he used a lot of leg action. But now he had the ball even farther out, and being less limber, he had trouble getting his clubhead to it, much less with enough speed to get the ball up quickly.

How does one tell Byron Nelson that he is lined up incorrectly? I could only think of one way. I went into the golf school office, retrieved the book *Byron Nelson's Winning Golf*, and thumbed to a photo of Byron during his tour days.

"Byron, look where you have this ball position."

"Just inside the left foot," he answered, studying the picture.

"Byron, now you have it all the way toward the outside of the foot."

Byron stepped back, thought for a moment, and smiled. "You know what's amazing?" he said. "We get off track and don't even realize it." He paused again, his blue eyes turning more serious: "That's true in life, too."

Leave it to one of golf's greatest gentlemen to remind me that no one truly masters the game (Photo 1.1). And while the fundamentals of a great swing are much the same as they were sixty years ago, we as individual golfers fluctuate our mechanics, bodies, flexibility, thought processes, and practice habits.

Most players begin on the wrong track and spend exasperating years experimenting and playing mediocre golf without having learned the basics of the swing.

That is why it is so vital that beginners use Position One and Position Two to get started on the right track. Or if you've been a struggling golfer for years, it is important that you get onto the path you should have been on all along.





Photo 1.1 Shawn receiving advice from the legendary Byron Nelson.

Gain Knowledge, Acquire Skill

I have worked with and observed every category of golfer—men, women, seniors, kids, thirty-handicappers, and scratch players. I played college golf at Oklahoma City University and coached a junior college team while serving as director of instruction at Carmel Valley Ranch in Carmel, California, from 1994 to 1998. I have conducted intensive two-week golf schools as well as five-minute lessons. I've taught corporate CEOs and manual laborers. I've worked at plush country clubs around the world, on cruise ships, and on dusty municipal-course driving ranges.

Having seen tens of thousands of golfers, I feel fairly safe in making this generalization: some players are blessed with above-average

athletic ability—the vast majority of players are not. As a teacher, you welcome that as a challenge. You learn to look for and maximize the strengths each individual has rather than dwell on the person's limitations. You learn, particularly as a golf instructor, that while talent can't be taught, you definitely can teach knowledge. You also learn from experience that students can, in fact, convert knowledge into skill.

One of the reasons I have broken down the swing into two steps is so anyone can learn the knowledge and skill. And because I don't bog you down with a lot of technical terms, you can acquire the knowledge more quickly and easily. I can't begin to count the number of times we have repeated this scene during our clinics: a virtual assembly line of ten, twenty, even fifty golfers with varied athletic abilities, learning Position One and then Position Two (Photo 1.2). Suddenly, balls are in the air and the players are turning around with expressions of "Holy cow!" It is as though lightbulbs turn on in their heads at the same time.



Talent Isn't Everything

Even for golfers who are athletically gifted and above-average players, knowledge often is a lacking ingredient, the missing piece of the puzzle. It is the intangible every player must have to truly fulfill his or her potential. It is far easier to progress from a twenty-five-handicap to a fifteen than it is to improve from an eight-handicap to a five. Knowledge, like a sharpened razor, shaves those hardest-to-get strokes and smoothes the rough edges of your game.

When I met Troy Aikman in February 2002, he was a fourteen- or fifteen-handicap. I was in my second month at Cowboys Golf Club in Grapevine, Texas. A mutual friend, Conny Holcombe, phoned to say that Troy had been taking lessons but wasn't getting the results that he wanted and was looking for a new teacher.



Photo 1.2 Students learning Position Two at one of the many clinics/schools Shawn offers.

As soon as Conny and I hung up, Troy was on his way to the club. When he arrived, I picked his brain on where he wanted to go with his game. I shared with Troy my belief that golfers need three intangibles in order to take their game to a new level:

1. Desire
2. Better understanding
3. A plan

As a teacher, one of the first things I look for in each student is his or her source of desire. Exactly why does the student want to improve? What dangling carrot will serve as the motivation while the student goes through the peaks and valleys of the learning process? The incentive could be something as simple as wanting to be the best among your weekly Thursday morning foursome. A junior player may just want to make his or her high school team. A wife or mother

may view learning golf as an opportunity to spend more time with her avidly playing husband or child.

After talking with Troy for a few minutes, it became obvious why he was a number one draft pick, why his Cowboys teams won three Super Bowls, and why he is a golf instructor's dream. His desire to improve stemmed from the fact that he was starting to play in more celebrity tournaments and charity events. But mostly, it's in Troy's nature to excel at anything he does. He realized that in order to improve as a golfer, he needed to learn everything he could about his swing. This is the same cut-no-corners route he took as a quarterback and has since taken as a member of Fox's lead NFL broadcast team.

To sum up Troy's swing flaw and tie it in with this book, he wasn't maintaining Position Two (which I will explain later) during his backswing. In other words, instead of maintaining width with his arms and keeping them away from his body, he pulled his arms in as he brought the club back.

Troy's improvement, from a double-digit-handicap down to a three in one year, was so dramatic that we were asked to appear on the Golf Channel's "Academy Live" in April 2003 as part of the show's "Master Your Game" week (Photo 1.3). It wasn't my first "Academy Live" appearance, but as is often the case, the student provided the night's most valuable insight. Troy's calm demeanor and attention to detail impressed me and everyone on the "Academy Live" set. Prior to our arrival, he wanted to have all the details of what was going to happen on the show and what type of questions he would be asked, so he could be as prepared as possible. During the show, he was both engaging and informative. His knowledge and appreciation for golf were evident to anyone who watched.

I'm sure some of you are wondering, as some of that night's Golf Channel viewers probably did, how your golf swing is supposed to relate to Troy Aikman's—or for that matter, to Byron Nelson's. More than likely, you aren't six foot four, with wide, powerful shoulders



or world-class hand-to-eye coordination like Aikman. And if your golf wisdom were anything close to Byron's, you wouldn't be reading an instructional book. But we can always learn from great examples. Picturing eighty-seven-year-old Byron Nelson practicing for several weeks in order to hit one perfect tee shot is a great reminder that golf takes dedication and that the importance of rehearsal cannot be stressed enough.

As in Troy's case, realize that many, if not most, pro athletes are crazy about golf. They play several days a week during the off-season, and during their post-career years they play year-round. Despite being athletically superior to most people, most pro athletes are fortunate if they ever break eighty. If you ever watch those celebrity events on TV, you know what I'm talking about. Charles Barkley comes to mind.



Photo 1.3 Shawn and Troy appearing on the Golf Channel's "Academy Live."



Like other great athletes, Troy could have relied solely on his raw power and natural athletic ability. Instead, he has become a sponge for knowledge. Yes, he has the talent, but he also has acquired knowledge and skill to go with that talent. In fact, Troy has become so knowledgeable about his swing that to a large degree he has become his own teacher—just like you will, once you fully grasp Position One and Position Two. Having students become their own teachers is sort of the mixed blessing of being a teacher.

Troy and I spend a lot of time together on the practice range from February to May, but for the rest of the year he's pretty much on his own. Whenever we cross paths, however, the first thing Troy says is, "Hey, take a look at my backswing. I feel like I'm getting more width there."

He always wants that confirmation that he's on the right track.



GET A GOOD GRIP

My philosophy about the grip differs from that of most instructors. Many teachers emphasize the grip first when working with a new student, even if the student is an intermediate or advanced player. I agree that it is vital for a beginner player to have a fundamentally sound grip and that the grip is a good starting point in learning the swing. But when an intermediate or advanced player asks me to work with him or her, seldom do we start with the grip. Usually, we start by analyzing the player's swing. Does the player have the proper plane and swing path? Does the player have the type of swing that produces the ideal ball flight—a draw—which for a right-handed player is a slight right-to-left trajectory? After we work on swing changes and the intermediate or advanced student is comfortable with them, then we go back and fine-tune the grip.

Why do I use what others might consider a reverse teaching approach? Most intermediate and advanced golfers have been playing for years, so more than likely they have conformed their grip to suit their swing and ball flight. For instance, if their tendency is to slice the ball fifteen yards, they probably have fifteen yards of hook in their grip. In other words, they use a strong grip. Actually, this is a mistake made by players at all levels. They assume the best and eas-

iest way to alter their ball flight is to change their grip. What you will come to understand as you learn the two-position method is that the factors that most influence your ball flight are the plane of your swing (where your golf club is in relation to your arms, hands, body, and setup) and the path of the club as it travels down and through the ball.

Believe it or not, I see a lot of players who hit thirty- or forty-yard slices even though they have thirty or forty yards of hook in their grip. That means they have an awful lot of slice in their swing. They have stacked one error upon another; if they stay on that track, it won't take long for the stack to grow higher. After I help such a player get the proper plane and path, the player often starts hooking the ball because the clubface is closing too much. The player asks why he or she is hooking it, and I tell the player that his or her grip is too strong. We adjust the grip and the ball flight straightens.

For the purposes of this book, I start by teaching what I call the landscaping, or fundamentals, of a good grip. For beginning players, the grip is one of several key basics I emphasize before moving on to Position One and Position Two. If you are an intermediate or advanced player, consider this a refresher chapter. No matter what level of player you are, chances are good that you will make slight grip adjustments after you learn Position One and Position Two and become comfortable with your swing.

It's All in the Fingers

The first thing I tell students about the grip is to think of the golf club as though it were an eating utensil. In other words, grip it as much as possible with your fingers.

When most beginners pick up a club, their first instinct is to hold it in the palms of their hands. That's probably because people are taught to hold a baseball bat and tennis racket that way. There's a



reason why they're held that way: a bat or racket handle is larger in diameter than a golf club, so naturally it engulfs more of your hand. Holding the golf club in your palms, however, severely restricts your ability to cock your wrists when you draw the club back to begin your swing. It also makes it more difficult to properly use your wrists and hands during the downswing and follow-through.

Think of it this way: have you ever watched toddlers eat? Until they're old enough to learn how to hold a spoon in their fingers, they clutch it in their palm. So what happens? In order to get the spoon to their mouth, they have to raise their elbow, arm, and even their shoulder. Similarly, when you hold the club in your palms and are unable to properly cock your wrists, you are forced to rely more on your arms and shoulders to generate club speed. Your limited wrist action also makes it difficult to get the clubface square to the ball at impact. As a result, you leave the clubface open and hit a lot of fades and slices.

I have found that one of the most effective ways to teach a proper grip is to start without a club. If you are a right-handed player, hold your left hand out in front of you, with the palm side of the hand facing up (Photo 2.1).

Then take the index finger of your right hand and lay it diagonally across the fingers of your left hand. You want the base of your right index finger to rest on the base of your left pinkie finger. The tip of your right index finger should lie across the top knuckle (or digit) of your left index finger (Photo 2.2).

Next, wrap the fingers of your left hand around your right index finger (Photo 2.3). Then with your fingers still wrapped around the index finger, fold



Photo 2.1 Hold left hand in front of your body.

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Photo 2.2 Right index finger lies across the fingers of the left hand.



Photo 2.3 Close the fingers before placing the pad on top.



Photo 2.4 Right index finger rests in the fingers of the left hand.



Photo 2.5 Fingers of left hand wrap around the index finger of the right hand.



Photo 2.6 Pad of left hand rests on top of the knuckle of the right index finger.



Photo 2.7 Left thumb rests on top of the right index finger.



your left hand over the top so that your left thumb rests atop your right index finger and the pad of your left hand rests atop your right knuckle (Photos 2.4–2.7).

Now repeat the exercise, this time using a club (Photos 2.8–2.10). Make sure the club rests diagonally across the fingers. Why diagonally? Because it sets your club and hands in the correct angle when you set up to the ball.

Also, make sure your left fingers are wrapped around the bottom of the club before you fold your left hand over the top (Photos 2.11–2.13). This initially may feel strange if you are accustomed to holding the club in your palm, but the first time you take a swing you will appreciate how much easier it is to cock your wrist.



Photo 2.8 Notice how the club works from the base of your left pinky down to the index finger.



Photo 2.9 First close the fingers before folding the pad of your left hand on top of the handle.



Photo 2.10 At address the golf club rests at an angle running diagonally from the pinkie to the index finger.



Photo 2.11 Side view of fingers wrapping around the handle.



Photo 2.12 Side view: pad of left hand folds on top of the handle.



Photo 2.13 The left hand is in a very secure position with the left thumb resting atop the handle. Notice the fingers wrapped around the handle of the club.



For Lefties Only

If you are a right-handed player, skip ahead to the next section. If you play left-handed, know that I feel your frustration. Even though I play mostly right-handed, I'm a natural left-hander. I can hit thirty yards longer with a left-handed driver than with a right-handed one. Once in a while, for fun, I play nine holes left-handed. I also have quite a few students who are left-handed. As a left-hander, I know it's irritating to pick up an instruction book or watch a swing video that describes everything from a right-hander's perspective. Thus

whenever possible, this book will include teaching points and photos geared for left-handed players so that you don't have to visualize every teaching point in reverse.

So for you southpaws, here is the left-hander version of the grip exercise I described in the previous section. Hold your right hand out in front of you, with the palm side of the hand facing up (Photo 2.14).

Take the index finger of your left hand and lay it diagonally across the fingers of your right hand (Photo 2.15). The base of your left index finger should rest on the base of your right pinkie finger. The tip of your left index finger should lie across the top knuckle of your right index finger.

Now wrap the fingers of your right hand around your left index finger (Photo 2.16). Then take the pad of your right



Photo 2.14 Left-handed version of grip exercise.



Photo 2.15 Rest the left index finger across the right hand, making sure it starts at the base of the pinkie finger and extends to the top knuckle of the right index finger.



Photo 2.16 Fold the fingers of your right hand around the left index finger.

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hand and fold it over until your right thumb rests atop your left index finger and the pad rests atop your right thumb (Photos 2.17–2.20).

Now try it with a club, making sure that the club rests diagonally across the fingers and that you wrap your fingers around the bottom of the club before you fold your right hand over the top of the club.



Photo 2.17 Side view: left index finger lies across the right hand.



Photo 2.18 Fold the fingers of the right hand around the index finger of your left hand.



Photo 2.19 Right pad of right hand folds on top of the bottom knuckle of the left hand.



Photo 2.20 Right thumb rests atop the left index finger in line with the pad of the left hand resting atop the bottom knuckle of the left index finger.



Like Clockwork

When you hear golfers and instructors talk about a neutral, strong, or weak grip, they are referring to the position of your hands on the club. Let's begin with the left hand. (Or if you are a left-handed player, your right hand.) If you are a beginner, it's a good idea to start with a neutral to strong grip. Since 90 percent of beginners slice the ball, it's better to err toward a strong grip than a weak one.

To determine what differentiates strong from neutral, hold a club in front of you, making sure the toe of the clubhead is pointed toward the sky. Imagine the grip of your club having a centerline on the top, running lengthwise down the grip. If you place your left thumb (or right thumb for lefties) on that line at one o'clock (or eleven o'clock for lefties), your grip is neutral (Photos 2.21 and 2.22). If you choose to start with a stronger grip, place your thumb at two o'clock (or ten o'clock for lefties), just right of center.

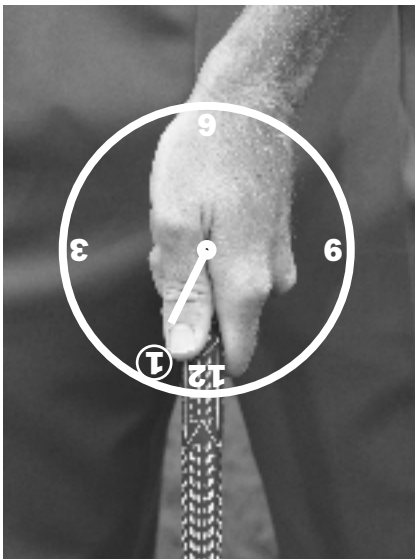


Photo 2.21 Neutral grip: left hand of a right-handed golfer. Left thumb points to one o'clock.

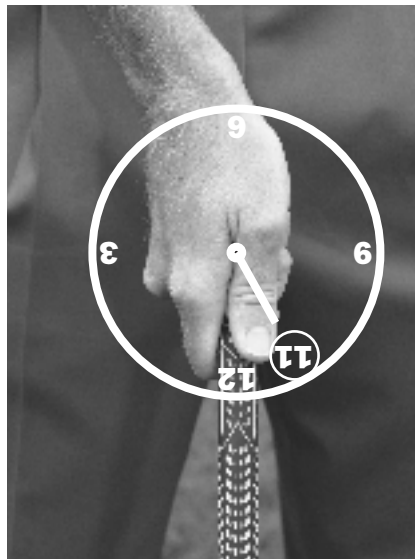


Photo 2.22 Neutral grip: right hand of a left-handed golfer. Right thumb points to eleven o'clock.



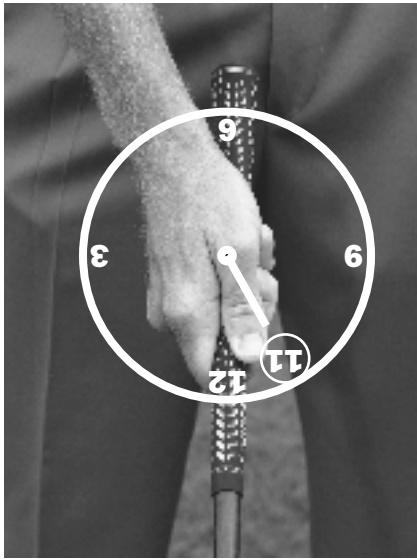


Photo 2.23 Neutral grip: right hand of a right-handed golfer. Right thumb points to eleven o'clock.

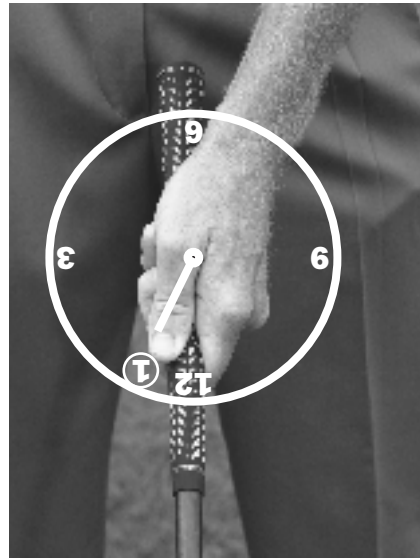


Photo 2.24 Neutral grip: left hand of a left-handed golfer. Left thumb points to one o'clock.



Now for the right hand. The right-hand thumb should point to eleven o'clock. Left-hand (lefties') thumb points to one o'clock (Photos 2.23 and 2.24). See more weak, neutral, and strong grips on the next two pages (Photos 2.25–2.30).

A question I frequently am asked is, “How far are the thumbs supposed to extend down the grip?” (Photos 2.31 and 2.32). You want to have what I describe as a short to medium thumb—in other words, slightly bent (Photos 2.33 and 2.34). This enables you to apply most of the pressure to the club with your last three fingers (middle, ring, and pinkie).



Photo 2.25 Right-handed golfer with a weak grip: Notice how both hands are rotated left. You can see a portion of the handle because the left hand is in a very weak position. The thumb and index finger of both hands have created lines. In a weak grip these lines point toward your left shoulder. This is referred to as the slicer's grip.



Photo 2.26 Left-handed golfer with a weak grip. The lines of the thumb and index fingers point toward the right shoulder.



Photo 2.27 Right-handed golfer with a neutral grip: hands are in a neutral position with thumbs in the correct position. The left- and right-hand lines are pointed toward your right cheek or just right of your belt line.

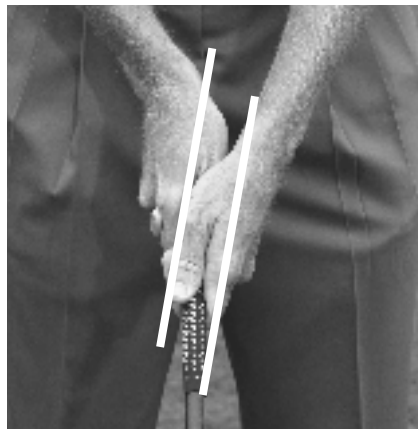


Photo 2.28 Left-handed golfer with a neutral grip.



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Photo 2.29 Right-handed golfer with a strong grip: Notice how both hands are rotated to the right—opposite of the slicer's grip. This is referred to as the hooker's grip. Lines created with the fingers point toward the right forearm.



Photo 2.30 Left-handed golfer with a strong grip.



Photo 2.31 If the left thumb is overextended, it inhibits the pressure in the pinkie, ring, and middle fingers and limits your wrist movement.



Photo 2.32 Long thumb extension.



Photo 2.33 Here the left thumb is shorter, allowing you to keep the pressure in the last three fingers and to maximize your wrist action.



Photo 2.34 Medium to short thumb, side view.



Mirror Image

The lower hand in your grip (right hand for right-handed players, left hand for left-handed players) should in some respects mirror the other hand.

You should grip the club in your fingers, with the club angling from the base of your pinkie to the last knuckle of your index finger. Then you wrap your fingers around the bottom of the club.

When folding the top hand over, you want the lifeline in your palm to rest against the side of your other thumb. If you are a right-handed player, you want your right thumb to rest on the club in the eleven o'clock position (Photos 2.35–2.39). For a left-handed player, the left thumb should be in the one o'clock position (Photos 2.40–2.44).

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Photos 2.35–2.39
Achieving the proper grip
for a right-handed golfer.



Photos 2.40–2.44
Achieving the proper grip
for a left-handed golfer.



The index finger of your lower hand should be ever so slightly separated from your middle finger and should wrap around the bottom of the club (Photo 2.45). The top of your thumb should not extend past the index finger (Photo 2.46). Envision pinching someone's arm with your thumb and index finger, and you get a good idea of where they should be positioned. The thumb and index finger basically serve as the trigger fingers of your grip. The majority of the pressure applied to the club should be with the thumb on top and the index, middle, and ring fingers on the bottom. Lefties, check the photos on the next page (Photos 2.47 and 2.48).

Another question I'm often asked is, "How much space should there be between the index finger and middle finger?" This depends mostly on individual feel. Some people have long, thin fingers. Others have short, stubby fingers. Sam Snead, who won more career tour



Photo 2.45 Slight separation of the index finger from the middle finger. Two keys to remember: the right index finger should be slightly separated and the pad of the left hand should rest atop the handle of the golf club.



Photo 2.46 Neutral grip: right index finger extends past the thumb.



Photo 2.47 Two key points for lefties: the left index finger should extend with a little separation and the pad of the right hand should rest atop the handle of the golf club.



Photo 2.48 For lefties: the left index finger extends past the left thumb.

victories than any other player, used to stick his index finger out well beyond his thumb, as if he was pushing an ignition button underneath his club.

Interlock or Overlap?

The answer to this age-old question, I've always believed, is a matter of personal preference. Go with whichever type of grip feels more comfortable.

Most of the golfers whom I see prefer an interlocking grip (Photos 2.49–2.52). Generally speaking, if you studied fifty people on a practice tee, thirty to thirty-five of them probably would have interlocking grips. Stronger players, people who generate more club speed, tend to favor an interlocking grip. I use an interlocking grip when I play right-handed, but an overlapping grip when I play left-handed.



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Photo 2.49 Right-handed golfer with interlocking grip: the right pinkie finger and the left index finger create the interlock.



Photo 2.50 Left-handed golfer with interlocking grip.



Photo 2.51 Right-handed golfer—fingers interlocked.

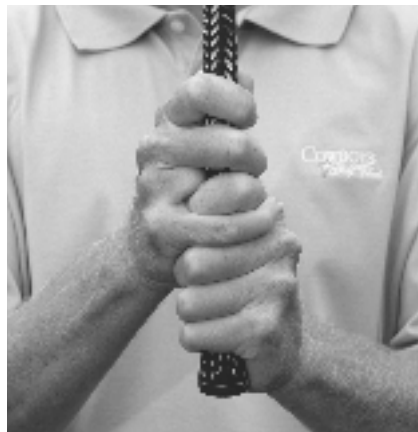


Photo 2.52 Left-handed golfer—fingers interlocked.

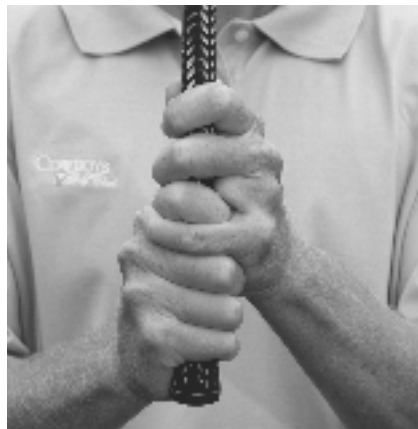
Physical factors, too, can affect an individual's grip preference. One of the reasons I use an interlocking grip when I play right-handed is that I lost my right index finger due to a competitive bike-racing accident when I was nine. When I play right-handed, my grip feels more secure with the interlocking method.



If you are a right-handed player, an interlocking grip entails locking your left index finger between your right pinkie and ring finger. For an overlapping grip, your right pinkie rests on top of your left hand—either on top of the left index finger, or between the index and middle fingers (Photos 2.53–2.56). Again, interlocking or overlapping is an individual preference.



Photos 2.53–2.54 Right-handed golfer with overlapping grip.



Photos 2.55–2.56 Left-handed golfer with overlapping grip.

A third type of grip is one that I believe players should avoid: the baseball grip. Many beginners, as well as players who have difficulty generating power, resort to this grip because it has worked for them as baseball or softball players. Using a baseball grip can lead to several swing flaws, but probably the biggest drawback is that your hands tend to separate on the club. This separation causes your right hand (for right-handed players) to become the dominant hand. In a proper golf swing, your hands should work as one unit.

Odds and Ends

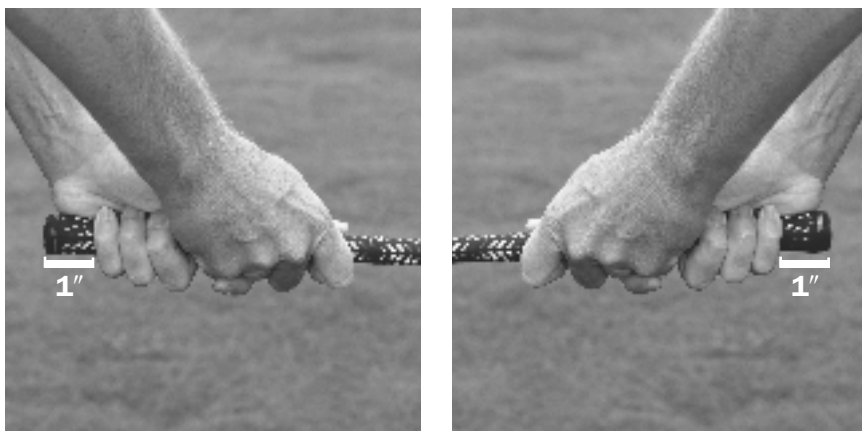
Here are a few more questions players often ask about the grip.

Where Should the Hands Be in Relation to the End of the Club?

Generally, the butt of the club should extend about an inch from the bottom of your left pinkie finger (if you are a right-handed player) (Photos 2.57 and 2.58). How far you choke down on the club can depend on several variables. Many players like to choke down another one or two inches to give them better control, especially when they are hitting an eight-iron, nine-iron, or wedge. Just remember that when you choke down, it tends to slow your club speed, which means you probably have to hit a lower-numbered club. For example, if you are 150 yards out and usually hit your seven-iron that distance, you probably need to hit a six-iron.

At the other extreme, some players make the mistake of not choking down enough. A telltale sign that you may be holding too close to the butt of the club is if you go through a lot of gloves. If holes develop in the palm area, it could mean that the butt of the club is rubbing the glove.





Photos 2.57–2.58 The little finger of the top hand should be positioned approximately one inch from the end of the club.

Is It OK to Play Without a Glove?

Although you see a few tour guys play without a glove, I strongly recommend using one. Novice and intermediate golfers simply don't play enough to form calluses on their hands, which is a must if you play without a glove. In fact, I don't see anything wrong with wearing gloves on both hands. I even encourage women players to wear two gloves because their hands are softer and blister more easily.

When beginners develop blisters, they often assume that they are holding the club incorrectly. But that isn't necessarily true. If you haven't played much golf nor worked much outside with your hands, you have a good chance of developing blisters early on, even if you wear a glove.

At my golf schools, we keep a lot of Band-Aids and medical tape on hand.

What About Wearing Jewelry?

If you wear rings, I recommend you take them off. Of course, if it's your wedding ring, you probably should check with your spouse first. Some tour players remove their wedding rings; others keep them on.

Some players don't wear watches, because they don't want the potential distraction of something on their wrist. I have never considered watches to be a problem unless they are loose and slide up and down your wrist area. Obviously, if you play in a hot climate, you certainly would be wise to wear a sports watch rather than one with a leather band.

No Two Are Alike

Though I have given you guidelines for a sound grip, don't be surprised if you end up adjusting your grip as your swing evolves. Just make certain you don't radically deviate from these basics: do not place your thumbs in the ten o'clock or two o'clock position, and do not resort to a baseball grip.

But also understand that much like snowflakes, no two grips are exactly alike. Look at the various types of grips out there on the senior tour. You'll see a lot of exotic grips and self-made swings on that tour because many of those players never had instructors to start them on what would be considered a fundamentally correct track.

The reason these players still became world-class is they spent decades playing hundreds of rounds. They worked hundreds of hours on the practice tee, honing their particular grip or swing until they were consistent and dependable. Plus, the majority of senior tour players probably were born with more talent than the average player. PGA Tour player Paul Azinger has a good twenty yards of slice in his swing and a good fifteen yards of hook in his grip, so he hits five-



yard fades. He has played that way his entire life, and he has won twelve tour events including the 1993 PGA Championship. Then there was Ben Hogan, who had such a severe hook that he nearly quit tour golf. But at age thirty-four, he weakened his grip, eliminated his hook, and won nine of the last sixteen major championships in which he played.

If your grip works well for you once you've learned Position One and Position Two, don't allow a buddy, or a well-meaning teacher, to convince you to change. If your grip is fundamentally sound and your results are positive, nothing else matters.



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POSTURE AND SETUP

Your golf swing works in sequence; all its aspects are like rungs leading up a ladder (Photo 3.1). You probably don't realize it, but your posture and the manner in which you set up to the ball are part of that sequence. True, they represent the bottom rungs of the swing ladder, but don't underestimate their significance. If you have poor posture or a flawed setup, you have little hope of executing a proper swing.

I tell students that they should never deviate from their posture and setup, because those are static positions. Anytime you have a static position, you should be able to manage it. The most effective way to manage your posture and setup is to rehearse them until they become second nature (Photo 3.2).

Let's start with your posture. Here is a drill I use to show students how much their torso should tilt when they are in their stance. Most teachers will tell you to tilt forty-five degrees, but I have found that many students have difficulty grasping how much, or little, represents forty-five degrees. Students seem to find that it is more effective if I show them, so follow along.

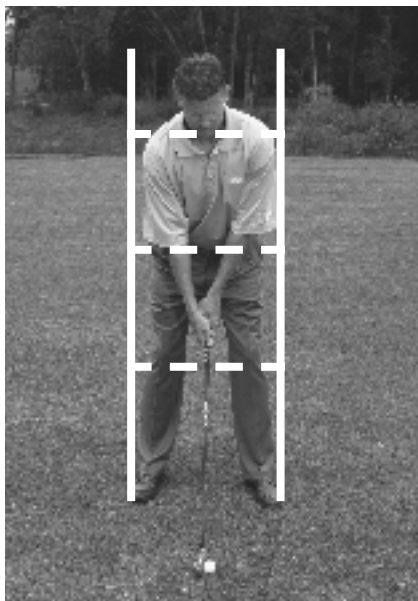


Photo 3.1 Stance is the width of your shoulders: knees stacked on top of feet, hips on top of knees, shoulders on top of hips.

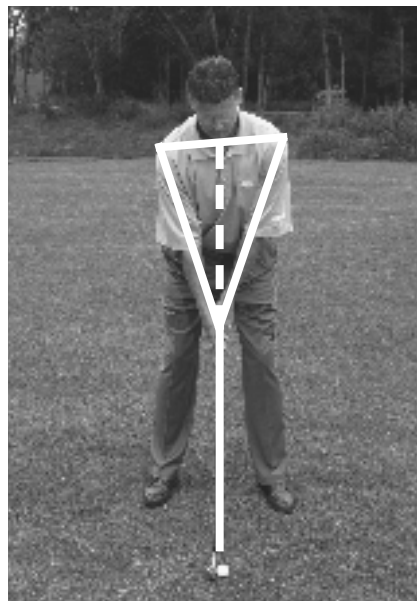


Photo 3.2 Face-on address: Right shoulder is only as low as you reach below your left hand to grip the club. Hands are level with the ball and in line with your chin.



Pick up a club, preferably a seven-iron, grip it, and set your feet at shoulders' width, as though you were preparing to hit a shot. However, I want you to stand upright, with no tilt in your torso or bend in your knees. Allow your arms to hang straight down in front of you, while holding the club parallel to the ground (Photos 3.3 and 3.4).

Now tilt from your waist without bending your knees. Keep tilting until the clubhead is about twelve to fifteen inches above the ground (Photo 3.5). You should never tilt farther forward than that. I see far too many players with too much tilt.

Now slightly unlock your knees (Photo 3.6) and lower the clubhead until it touches the ground (Photo 3.7). When I say "unlock"



Photo 3.3 Create the triangle, hands in line with sternum.



Photo 3.4 Wrist is hinged so club is parallel to the ground.

your knees, I mean just that. I don't want you to bend your knees. I'm sure many have heard players or instructors say, "Bend your knees as though you are sitting on a bar stool." I cringe when I hear that terrible advice. I've never seen a golfer hit a ball from a bar stool. Having too much bend in your knees restricts your lower body, inhibits your upper torso turn, and limits the amount of leg strength you can use in your swing.

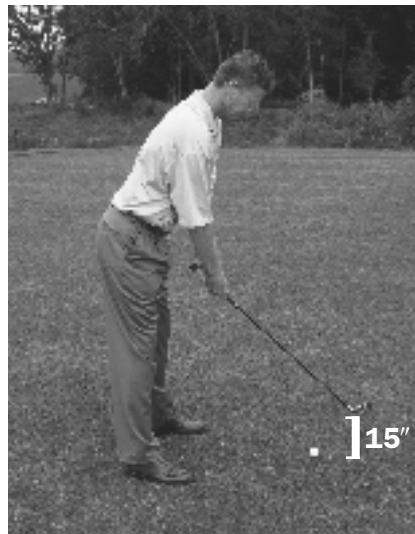


Photo 3.5 Tilt from your waist until the club is approximately twelve to fifteen inches above the ground.





Photo 3.6 Knees are slightly unlocked.



Photo 3.7 Too much bend in your knees will create problems in your swing.



So just unlock your knees. Retaining some flexibility in your knees makes it much easier to shift your weight to where it needs to be—on the balls of your feet.

Three-Point Check

Here is a way to confirm that your posture is correct. For this exercise, it is helpful to stand sideways in front of a full-length mirror or to have a friend help you verify the three key points.

When you tilt from your waist and unlock your knees, you should be able to invisibly draw a vertical line from (1) your shoulder blade, to (2) the back of your kneecap, to (3) the balls of your feet. In other

words, your shoulder blades, kneecaps, and balls of your feet should align. You can check your posture by placing a golf club shaft or metal measuring tape on one of your shoulder blades and aim it down the side of your body to see whether the three points connect (Photo 3.8).

Another good way to check your posture is to place a three- or five-metal on your back, running down the length of your spine (Photo 3.9). As you hold the club with your left or right hand, the club will rest against your spine and extend toward your head. In order to maintain the ideal posture, your back should align with the club shaft, and the shaft should come within a few inches of touching the back of your head.



Photo 3.8 Three-point stance.



Photo 3.9 A three- or five-metal will help you with maintaining a straight spine.

Setup

I get as many questions about the setup as I do about the swing. Probably the most frequently asked question is, “How far do I stand from the ball?” Unfortunately, no instructor that I’m aware of has come up with a precise answer to that question. The best answer I can give is this: return to your setup as if you were going to hit a ball. If you play right-handed, take your left hand off the club and make a fist (Photo 3.10). Left-handers, make a fist with your right hand.

Point the top of the fist away from you and try to pass it through the space between the end of the club and your belt line. Then try to pass your fist between the club and each of your thighs. If you can pass your fist through those areas with a little space to spare, you are standing at the correct distance from the ball, or at least as close to correct as you can be. If you can’t fit your fist through, or you have a two-fist or more separation, return to the beginning of this chapter and check your posture.

Using your fist is not an exact measurement, but it’s the closest thing to a standard as I can find. Byron Nelson once remarked to me



Photo 3.10 Pass your fist between the handle and each of your thighs.

that “you cannot stand too close to the ball.” When you think about it, that’s a great point. If the butt of the club were less than a fist from your belt line or thighs, it would be virtually impossible to swing the club. Conversely, when you watch a PGA Tour tournament, note that you never see players standing so far away from the ball that they have to extend their arms to hit it. Just remember that you can’t stand too close, but you can definitely stand too far away.

Ball Position

Now that you have the proper posture and are standing at the correct distance from the ball, it’s time to discuss where the ball should be positioned in your stance.

For beginners and intermediate players, I recommend that you position the ball in the center, or slightly forward of center, of your stance (Photo 3.11). If you are a right-handed player and are wearing a golf shirt with a logo on the left chest area, the logo is a good



Photo 3.11 Ball position should be positioned on a line just inside the left logo of your shirt.



Photo 3.12 Ball position is too far forward in stance.

reference point for where the ball should be positioned. If you play left-handed, position the ball on a line just to the right of your sternum.

Many players tend to position the ball too far forward in their stance, out near their front foot, either because they believe this makes it easier to turn their shoulders behind the ball and generate more distance or because they see tour players do it (Photo 3.12). Not true. If you err in either direction, it should be toward the middle of your stance, especially if you are a beginner or intermediate player.

To understand why ball positioning is so crucial, it helps to know what happens at the bottom of your swing—that is, the point at which your club meets the ball and ground. Your swing works in a circular motion, because like tennis, soccer, and baseball, golf is a side-on sport. *Side-on* means you are standing to the side of the ball when you strike it.

What happens when you hit a ground stroke in tennis? If you are a right-handed player, the ball generally curves from right to left. The same thing happens when you kick a soccer ball. And when your baseball bat makes great contact with the ball and swings through, the ball usually curves to the side you are standing on. When Mark McGwire set the all-time, single-season home run record, 90 percent of his home runs were pulled into the left-field stands. The player who broke McGwire's record, left-handed hitter Barry Bonds, pulls

so many of his hits to right field that opponents often shift their shortstop to the other side of second base to defend against him.

The golf swing, if executed correctly, has much the same effect on the ball. The difficult part is getting your swing to have the correct arc so that when the swing bottoms out, your clubhead catches the inside portion of the ball (Photos 3.13 and 3.14). Depending on the arc of your swing, the club can bottom out in three areas (Photo 3.15): the low point (toward the back of your stance), the midpoint (near the middle of your stance), and the high point (toward the front of your stance).

Players who draw or hook the ball tend to bottom the club out a little more toward the low point of the swing (Photos 3.16 and 3.17). This means the club comes more from the inside and then hits the inside portion of the ball. Because of the club's path, the right-



Photo 3.13 Face-on view of where the club should bottom out and make contact.

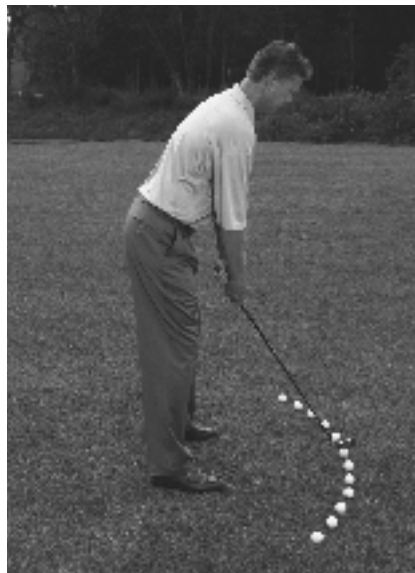


Photo 3.14 Golf balls creating the arcing motion that the club travels throughout the golf swing.



TWO STEPS TO A PERFECT GOLF SWING

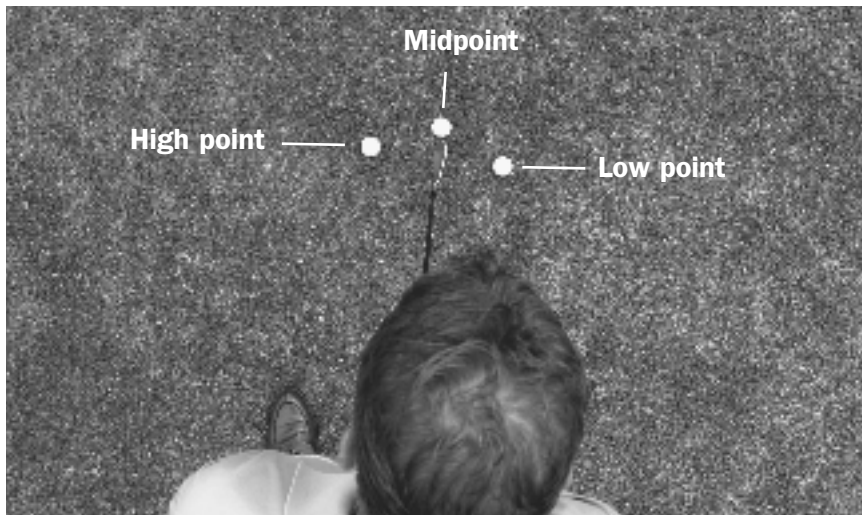


Photo 3.15 Aerial view of the low, mid-, and high points of where the club bottoms out in the golf swing, or where the player makes contact.



Photo 3.16 The club bottoms out toward the low point of the golf swing, producing a draw or a hook. This is a great illustration of why a player benefits from having the ball positioned in the middle of his or her stance.



Photo 3.17 Aerial view of club working from the inside to the low point of the golf swing.

handed player's ball flight tends to start toward the right and curve to the left.

When players slice the ball, the club's path comes from outside the ball back to the inside, causing these players to hit across the ball (Photos 3.18 and 3.19). The sidespin causes the ball flight to curve clockwise for a right-handed golfer and counterclockwise for a left-handed golfer.

But many slicers don't realize that moving the ball forward in their stance causes an even more pronounced slice. Why? As I noted before, the clubhead travels in a circular path. During the downswing, once the clubhead passes your sternum, its circular path starts to arc toward your front foot. So moving the ball forward causes the club to cut across the ball from an even sharper angle, producing more spin.



Photo 3.18 Club on the downswing angled left toward the high point, producing a cutting action resulting in a slicing ball flight.



Photo 3.19 Club bottoms out toward the high point of the golf swing, producing a fade or slice.



Conversely, if you position the ball farther back in your stance, you have a much better chance of getting the club into the back of the ball sooner, with less spin. That is why I tell beginning and intermediate players, who are more likely to slice the ball, that if they err in their ball position, err toward the middle of their stance, or even a couple of inches back from the middle.

Advanced players generally can play the ball a few inches forward in their stance, because the path of their swing tends to come from the inside and they usually draw the ball.

Adjust for the Club

Instructors and advanced golfers will attest that the club you hit with on a given shot influences where you position the ball in your stance. Your ball position, however, shouldn't vary as much as you may have been led to believe. To keep it simple, I recommend only three ball positions at address.

I use the following demonstration for ball position with students. Place three balls on the floor in a straight line, leaving no space between the balls. Each ball is 1.62 inches wide. Your ball position should not vary in your stance more than the width of three balls.

Here are the ball positions I suggest for beginner and intermediate players: When you are hitting an eight-iron, nine-iron, or wedge, your ball position should be in the middle of your stance, perhaps even an inch or two behind center (Photos 3.20 and 3.21). For the three-iron, four-iron, five-iron, six-iron, seven-iron, or seven-metal, move the ball forward about the width of a ball. When you hit a driver, three-metal, or five-metal, move the ball forward by another ball's width.

Again, once you become comfortable with your new swing and start hitting draws or hooks, you can position the ball slightly for-



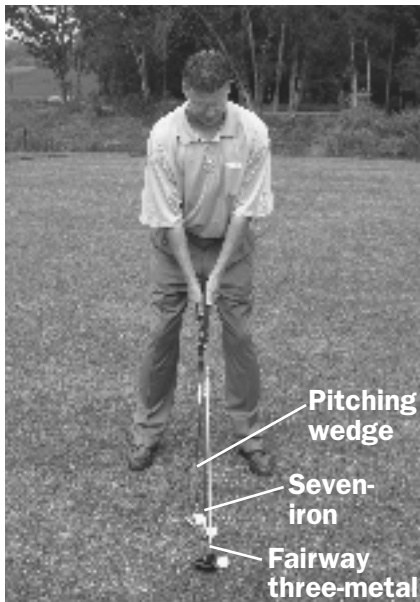


Photo 3.20 Suggested ball positions for different clubs.



Photo 3.21 Even with different clubs and ball positions, the distance you stand from each club should not change.



ward in your stance. How far the ball can move forward depends on the individual player and swing. But no matter what level of player you are, the ball should never be positioned out toward your front foot. It's simply too difficult to get the clubhead out that far on a consistent basis, much less to make consistently solid contact.

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HANDS, WRISTS, ARMS, AND SHOULDERS

Before you learn Position One and Position Two, it helps to know the roles your hands, wrists, arms, and shoulders play in your swing. Separately, each plays a vital part, but ultimately they must function as one unit. If one component breaks down, the others will, too.

Let's start with the wrists because your swing largely is built around proper wrist action. Your wrists are the igniters, providing the final bursts of speed and power through impact. Moreover, if you cock your wrists correctly, your hands and forearms usually are positioned properly as well, because those parts are so intertwined where your swing is concerned.

Most players never learn how to use their wrists correctly and consequently never really get their games off the ground. That is because poor wrist action makes it extremely difficult to get the clubface square to the ball at impact. Hitting slices becomes all but a certainty.

I recommend two drills to help you gain a working knowledge of how your wrists, hands, and forearms should function. You can implement these drills on a practice tee or even at home.

A Little Guidance

The first drill requires some creativity—maybe even a little rearranging of your living room. What you need is a guidepost. If you are at home, you can use a table, couch, or chair. If you are at a golf course or practice facility, you can use a golf cart. Basically, you need something that has a straight edge at least the length of a golf club and is roughly the height of your waist.

When I work with students on this drill, we use a golf cart. Right-handed players stand just outside the cart on the driver's side, with the outside of their right leg about three inches from the cart. Left-handers stand on the passenger side, with their left leg about three inches from the cart. The same positioning applies if you are using a table, couch, chair, or other object.

Now, gripping a seven-iron, get into the correct posture, tilting at the waist and slightly unlocking your knees (Photo 4.1). Set up so that when you grip the club, your hands are even with or a couple of inches behind the edge of the cart, table, couch, or chair. It's crucial that throughout this drill you keep your hands in line with your belt buckle. Although your wrists and forearms rotate, your upper arms and shoulders should remain virtually stationary.

The first phase of the drill demonstrates what constitutes a proper wrist cock. Keeping your hands in front of your belt buckle, and the toe end of the club pointed away from you, slowly raise the clubhead toward your nose (Photo 4.2). Notice that your wrists work like hinges, allowing you to raise and lower the club using only your hands, wrists, and lower arms. Raise and lower the club as many times as it takes to get a feel for cocking and releasing your wrists.



Photo 4.1 Cock the club up toward your nose, with the toe of the club pointing toward the sky.



Photo 4.2 Begin to lower the club, using your wrists.



This is the same wrist action that you will use in your swing, the difference being that you will bring the club back to the right if you are right-handed and to the left if you are left-handed.

Now for the second phase of the drill: using the same wrist action, slowly bring the club back until it is parallel with the ground—no

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higher or lower. The golf cart, table, or chair helps you bring the club back on the correct path and angle (Photo 4.3). If you bring it back too far to the inside, the clubhead will hit the cart, table, or chair before you get the club shaft to parallel position.

Here are some checkpoints for indicating whether your wrists, hands, and forearms are positioned and functioning correctly. First, for right-handed players: As you draw the club back, keeping your hands in line with your belt buckle, your forearms should rotate to the right while your wrists cock up. The back of your left hand and the clubface should match, both pointing away from your body. Also, your arms should maintain their distance from your body (Photos 4.4 and 4.5). You need to make sure you keep a very close eye on your right forearm and elbow as you rotate the club back. Finally,



Photo 4.3 Using a golf cart will give you a great opportunity to keep the club in line with your feet while you work your wrists.

you should be able to draw an imaginary line from the back of your left hand over the top of the ball, perpendicular to the ground. The toe end of the club should point straight up toward the sky. The club shaft should be parallel with your feet, hips, knees, and target line.

If you play left-handed, here are the indicators to watch for: As you draw the club back, keeping your hands in line with your belt buckle, your forearms should rotate to the left while your wrists cock up. The back of your right hand and the clubface should match, pointing away from your body. The toe end of the club should point straight up toward the sky (Photo 4.6).

Try this drill numerous times until you feel comfortable rotating your forearms, cocking your wrists, and bringing the club to parallel position (Photos 4.7 and 4.8).



Photo 4.4 Hands are in line with your belt buckle. As your wrists work the club back the hands stay in line with the ball.



Photo 4.5 Notice the club is parallel to the feet, hips, knees, and shoulders. The toe of the club is pointing up toward the sky.

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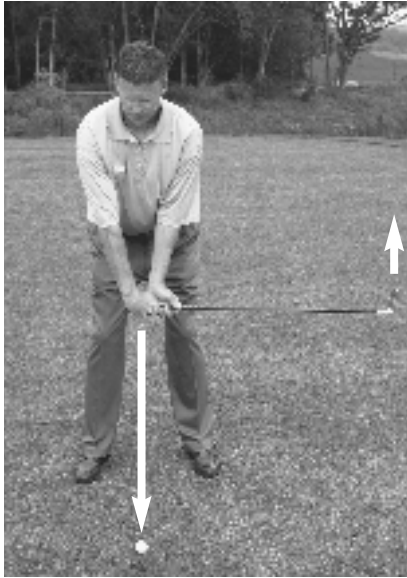


Photo 4.6 For lefties: the back of the right hand remains in line with the ball and belt buckle; the toe of the clubface points toward the sky.



Photo 4.7 Wrist crossing over to the left: Everything trades places. The right hand crosses over the left hand. The back of your right hand should match with the back of the clubface.



Photo 4.8 Left-handed version.

Brush Your Tees

The second drill is somewhat of a continuation of the first one. This drill doesn't require a golf cart, chair, or couch, but you do need a fifteen- to twenty-foot-long hitting area. If you don't have fairway-height grass from which to hit at home, I suggest you go to a practice tee. You also need a seven-iron, three tees, and one to two dozen balls.

First, place the three tees in the ground in a line, with about six inches between each tee—but don't put balls on the tees. The tees should stick no more than half an inch out of the ground.

Now, gripping the seven-iron, set up to the first tee as if there were a ball on it. Bring the club back to parallel position just as you did in the first drill, making sure that your forearms rotate, your wrists cock, and the back of your left hand and clubface point away from your body.

Now for the downstroke and follow-through. I'm not talking about a hard swing, but one with enough momentum to brush or pop the tee out of the ground (Photo 4.9). Allow the weight of the clubhead to work its way down and brush the tee. Once again, the objective is to ensure that your wrists, hands, and forearms are in the correct positions and are functioning properly.

As the club starts down and forward, you want your forearms to rotate and your wrists to unhinge naturally. If you are a right-handed player, it's important that you don't force the club down with the right hand. Likewise, left-handers shouldn't force the club down with the left hand. Remember, this needs to be a relaxed motion. All you want to do is brush the tee, not generate club speed.

Another important point: if you are a right-handed player, as the club comes down and brushes the tee, make sure that you maintain a little pressure, or tension, in the back of your left hand. You don't want too much pressure in the back of the hand, but enough to keep you from flipping (suddenly turning) the club as it brushes the tee.





Photo 4.9 Brushing tees out of the ground is key to getting the ball in the air.



Likewise, left-handed players need to maintain just enough pressure in the back of the right hand.

Since this is not a full-speed drill, you don't want a big follow-through after you brush the tee. If you are a right-handed player, keep your left arm relatively straight but, and I emphasize, *not stiff!* Even after you brush the tee and turn your wrists, hands, and fore-arms over on the follow-through, your left arm should not travel past your left thigh. For you left-handers, your right arm should not exceed your right thigh. Just as you don't want to bring the club shaft past parallel position on the takeaway, you should not take it past parallel on the follow-through.

Repeat the drill, brushing the second and third tees out of the ground just like you did the first. If necessary, place the tees back in

the ground and keep brushing them until you feel comfortable. As you do this, keep in mind that your wrists, hands, and forearms must work as one unit. Going from the takeaway to parallel position should be one smooth motion. The downstroke, brushing of the tee, and follow-through also should be one smooth motion. The more you do the drill, the more natural it will feel. Eventually, the takeaway, downstroke, brushing of the tee, and follow-through will feel like one continuous motion.

A few indicators will confirm that you are doing the drill correctly. As the club travels down and brushes the tee, your hands, wrists, and forearms should return to their starting positions. This means that if you are a right-handed player, the back of your right hand should match up with the back of the clubface, both pointing in the opposite direction from the target line.

Another point that I cannot overemphasize: from the takeaway to the follow-through, everything must trade places. In other words, everything that your wrists, hands, and forearms do during the takeaway must occur in reverse during the downswing, brushing of the tee, and follow-through. It's the old physics law: for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.

To gain a clearer understanding of this point, I recommend that you use the cart again for the follow-through. This time, if you are a right-handed player, stand on the right, or passenger, side of the cart. As the club brushes the ground and begins to work up, you can see that everything trades places in terms of how they were positioned during the takeaway.

As you follow through, making sure the club doesn't hit the cart, notice that the back of your right hand faces away from your body and that the back of the clubhead matches up, pointing in the same direction as the back of the hand (Photo 4.10). The club shaft is now parallel to the ground, feet, hips, shoulders, and target. It's the mirror image of the takeaway.



Photo 4.10 Work the club to the left using the golf cart.



Hit Some Balls

Now you are ready to graduate from brushing tees to hitting balls, although you are not going to take full swings just yet.

Arrange your three tees just as you did earlier, about six inches apart and sticking out of the ground no more than half an inch. You are going to use the same wrists, hands, and forearms drill, making sure the club doesn't exceed parallel position on the takeaway or the follow-through. The only difference is this time you will place balls on the tees.

The objective remains the same: concentrate on brushing the tee. The biggest mistake you can make is to focus on the ball. As with

many aspects of the golf swing, concentrating on brushing the tee is an example of focusing on the process rather than the result.

When the club brushes the tee, what happens to the ball? It pops up in the air (Photo 4.11). That's all you're trying to do here. The ball should travel no more than fifteen to twenty-five yards. If you hit one to two dozen balls, they should wind up in a nice grouping no more than a few yards in diameter. If your grouping is scattered, or if some of your shots glance off the clubhead wildly to the right or left, go back and make sure you are doing the drill correctly: your wrists, hands, and forearms are in the correct positions and the club-face is square to the ball at impact. If you are pulling shots, then you are overrotating the club. If you are pushing shots, then you are not



Photo 4.11 Using only the wrist, remember to focus on brushing the tee out of the ground. When you do this, the ball will pop up into the air. Focus on the tee, not on the ball!



cocking your wrists correctly on the takeaway or correctly rotating your forearms, wrists, and hands prior to and through impact.

Keep doing the drill until your shots consistently wind up clustered in the same area. The drill may seem a bit tedious, but in the long run it will help you learn how to work your wrists, hands, and forearms correctly and do so more consistently.

Occasionally, students ask why I suggest using a seven-iron. The reason is the angle of a seven-iron's clubhead has enough loft to help pop the ball in the air. It also is flat enough so that when you start generating speed and hitting full shots, your ball flight should have some curvature. Typically, I suggest that beginner and intermediate students start most drills with a seven-iron, then gradually work toward using a six-iron and then a five-iron.



Making the Turn

For the rest of this chapter, let's talk about arm positioning, arm speed, and shoulder turn. As I mentioned previously, your wrists are igniters, providing the final burst of speed and power. But speed and power start with a proper shoulder turn and correct arm positioning. Power is the product of the speed of the arms, which is generated by your shoulder turn and the positioning of your arms in relation to your body.

As you learn more about your swing, you'll discover that your shoulders control your entire body movement. Your lower body becomes a product of what your upper body is doing.

I'd like to take you through a drill that demonstrates proper shoulder turn; then we will incorporate your arms and discuss how your shoulders and arms should be sequenced.

Set your clubs aside for a few minutes. Cross your arms and position the palm sides of your hands just below the front of your shoulder blades (Photo 4.12). Your fingertips should rest just on top of

your shoulders but apply no pressure to the shoulders. Now try it holding a golf club (Photo 4.13). Golfers of all levels use this drill, but many of them make the mistake of placing their hands tightly against their shoulders. You want to simulate the way you turn your shoulders and upper body while making a full swing. When people hold their hands tightly against their shoulders, they tend to use pressure from their hands to help turn their shoulders. Obviously, that's not a natural shoulder turn.

With your arms folded and your fingertips resting on your shoulders, get into the proper golf stance and posture. If you are a right-handed player, turn your shoulders to the right until your left shoulder is pointed to the spot on the ground where the ball would



Photo 4.12 Lightly rest your hands on your shoulders.



Photo 4.13 Using a golf club gives you a good visual when you begin your shoulder turn.

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be (Photos 4.14 and 4.15). Left-handers, turn your shoulders to the left until your right shoulder points toward that spot (Photos 4.16 and 4.17).

Try this several times, making sure that you maintain your original body tilt and spine angle while you turn. Novice players tend to straighten their back, raise their chin, or do both. If you do that during an actual swing, you would then have to make a drastic adjustment in your body angle during the downswing to get your arms back on the proper plane.

I recommend using one of your clubs to check your spine angle. Use a longer club, such as your three- or five-metal, and hold the club



Photo 4.14 When you turn your shoulders, use the core muscles around the trunk of your upper body.



Photo 4.15 Again, the golf club gives you the visual reference. Shaft points at the golf ball or a little behind it.



Photo 4.16 Lefties, your right shoulder will point to the ball.



Photo 4.17 The golf club points toward the ball or a little behind it.

vertically in line with your spine with your right or left hand (Photo 4.18). The shaft should run the length of your back and up to your neck and head. That allows you to keep your head and spine in position while you turn your shoulders. If your head is within a few inches of touching the club shaft, you are in excellent position.

The same rule of thumb applies when you turn your shoulders forward: make sure that you maintain your original spine angle. Novices have a habit of lowering their tilt during the downswing. If you do that while trying to hit a ball, the clubhead will scrape a lot more dirt than ball.

A question students often ask is, “How much should my hips turn during the takeaway or backswing?” Novices see PGA Tour players’ swings analyzed in slow motion on TV and notice that the pros’ hips



Photo 4.18 Place a shaft in line with your spine to give you an excellent idea of your spine angle and posture.



turn very little. The problem with that comparison is that most tour players are more supple than the average man or woman.

For instance, I consider myself to be in good shape. I can place my hands flat on the ground without bending my knees. But when it comes to swinging a golf club, I can't turn my shoulders without my hips also turning somewhat. Hip turn varies from individual to individual. You just have to go with what your limitations allow. For most novice and intermediate players, your objective is to establish a little bit of resistance to where your shoulders turn full and your hips make a half to three-quarters turn.

Tying It All Together

Now let's incorporate your arms with your shoulder turn. We don't want to get too specific before you learn Position One and Position Two, but you need to keep some basic concepts in mind concerning your arms and their positioning (Photos 4.19–4.23).



Photo 4.19 Cross hands over your shoulders.



Photo 4.20 Turn your shoulders; either your back is pointing toward the target or your left shoulder points at the ball.



Photo 4.21 Turn your shoulders while maintaining the position of your arms away from your body.



Photo 4.22 Allow your arms to hang at address. This establishes the width of your golf swing.



Photo 4.23 This is an example of the arms folding and losing the width of your backswing.

Pick up a seven-iron and get in the proper setup, but don't worry about using a ball or tee. Note the width between your forearms, your elbows, and your upper arms. Note the distance between your arms and body. Throughout your swing, it's important that you maintain those space relationships. We'll get more specific about this in the next two chapters, but this is a key point of emphasis.

Many beginners and intermediate players tend to pull their arms toward their body during their backswing. This decreases the width, or radius, of the swing, which makes it extremely difficult to get consistent results. Usually, it also causes a significant loss of power. Remember, proper shoulder turn and arm positioning help generate arm speed. Arm speed translates into power. Your arms work in conjunction with your wrists and hands. Your wrists, when properly cocked, serve as igniters.

Now let's briefly tie together everything you've learned in this chapter. You can do this at home or at the practice tee, with or without a ball. Work the club back the way I described, rotating your forearms and cocking your wrists. As you continue to take the club back, make sure you maintain the width between your arms and the distance between your arms and your body. Brush the ground with the clubhead, making sure it is square at impact. When you follow through, make sure your hands, wrists, and forearms change places. That, generally speaking, is the skeleton of a fundamentally sound swing.

Now you are ready to get more specific and enter the meat-and-potatoes phases of your new and improved swing: Position One and Position Two.



POSITION ONE

Even if you have never taken a lesson, you probably have heard a few old clichés regarding the takeaway: “keep your head down,” “low and slow,” and “keep your left arm straight.” With all due respect to players and instructors who apply these swing thoughts and other philosophies concerning the takeaway, I offer a better and, yes, easier alternative: Position One.

Sure, low and slow sounds simple enough, but that’s assuming the golfer has a technically sound takeaway and backswing. Some of these clichés do not promote proper wrist cock. For example, low and slow can help prevent you from taking the club back too quickly and steeply, but it doesn’t necessarily set your swing on the proper plane and path. Position One promotes and emphasizes proper wrist cock. It gives you a great opportunity to set the club on the correct plane. It also establishes proper width, which is the amount of space you need to maintain not only between your arms, but also between your arms and body.

Most golfers learning the game try to do everything at one time during the backswing. Low and slow, and most other teaching meth-

ods, requires players to initiate hand, wrist, forearm, upper arm, shoulder, and upper torso movement simultaneously. Position One, on the other hand, sequences and minimizes your movements, making them as precise and uncomplicated as possible.

And I'll let you in on a little secret. You already know more about Position One than you probably realize. Remember the wrist, hand, and forearm drill I discussed in Chapter 4, the one in which you brought the club back to parallel position while keeping your hands in line with your belt buckle? That drill, generally speaking, gets you to Position One. In this chapter, I'll first explain Position One in more detail for beginner and novice players. Later in the chapter, I provide a more comprehensive breakdown of Position One for intermediate and advanced players.

The key thing for players of all levels to remember is that Position One is merely one of two steps. This is a two-part program. You can't have Position One without Position Two, and you can't have Position Two without Position One. They are intertwined. In other words, once you've learned Position One, don't go to the practice tee and start hitting balls in the belief that you can skip over Position Two or learn it later. I know from experience that when students learn a new concept, they naturally become eager to try it. Too often, they get ahead of themselves, and before you know it, they're ad-libbing on the practice tee and have forgotten what they learned before. So let's take one step at a time, and rest assured, you are on the right track.

Those of you who have taken lessons, read other books, or watched other instructors on TV or videos will quickly notice what distinguishes this approach and why it's so much easier to learn. First and foremost, this method is ideal for beginners and novices because you work your hands, wrists, and forearms during the takeaway without moving your upper arms, shoulders, or body. You will find that because the other parts of your body are stationary, the takeaway is simpler. Many players, especially beginners, start turn-



ing their shoulders before they bring the club back. But when they do that, their arms aren't synchronized with their shoulders. Other players try to swing their arms first, but their shoulders barely move.

Also, you will find that with Position One, your swing is better sequenced and flows more naturally. Simplifying the takeaway means fewer factors are in play, which means fewer things can go wrong and you have a higher probability of success.

Beginner and Novice

When I teach Position One, Position Two, and other aspects of the swing, I apply the same fundamental principles with all students. But my instructional approach is different with beginners and novices than with intermediate and advanced players.

My primary objective with beginners and novices is to simplify tasks as much as possible. Even though the golf swing is continuous motion, I view it and teach it as motion put into positions. I break the process into steps. You can't ask beginners to jump in and start performing fluid, complete motions, because those players don't yet have the feel and knowledge of how their swing is supposed to work. So for you beginners and novices, we're going to trim the fat, boil it down, and make Position One as basic as possible.

Just as you did in Chapter 4, pick up a seven-iron and find a place inside or outside where you can maneuver. Get into the proper posture and setup, and bring the club back to parallel position. Remember, it's important to keep your hands in line with your belt buckle as you cock your wrists and rotate your forearms. If you are a right-handed player, make sure the back of your left hand and clubface match, both pointing away from your body (Photos 5.1 and 5.2). The opposite is the case for left-handed players (Photos 5.3 and 5.4). You should be able to draw an imaginary line from the back of your hand over the top of the ball, perpendicular to the ground. The toe end



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Photos 5.1–5.2 For the beginner, we take the golf swing and break it down into positions. Wrists working the club back to Position One.



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Photos 5.3–5.4 For lefties, the wrist is working the club back on the takeaway. Wrists are the only moving parts here.

of the club should point toward the sky. Now you are in Position One. Bring the club back to parallel position several more times until it feels so natural that you no longer think about cocking your wrists and rotating your forearms.

Now let's get a different, and I believe invaluable, perspective on Position One. Find a full-length mirror. If you don't have one, perhaps you can use a half-length bathroom mirror and step back until you can at least see the tops of your knees. I use mirrors all the time, not only as a teaching aid, but also to check my own swing. In fact, I have a freestanding mirror that I take outside on the practice tee. Often, my students gain a better understanding of what they're supposed to do by looking in the mirror rather than by watching themselves on videotape. I can't begin to guess the number of times I've heard phrases like, "OK, now I get it."

Eventually, you'll discover that the more you use a mirror, the more you realize that it's the ultimate personal coach. Why? The mirror never lies to you. It always tells you exactly what you're doing.



It's L-ementary

Let's start by facing the mirror straight on. Draw the club back to Position One and look into the mirror (Photo 5.5). If you are a right-handed player, note that your left arm and the club shaft form a nearly perfect L. If you are a left-hander and look into a mirror while in Position One, you will see a backward L.

Whether it's backward or forward, the important thing to realize about the L is this: it is the hallmark of Position One. It is the indicator, the proof, that your takeaway is fundamentally sound. It shows that your arms hang from your shoulders at the proper angle and that your arms are apart at the correct distance. This means that you have established not only wrist cock, but also one of the absolutes of the golf swing: width. As you will discover in the next chapter, the L is



Photo 5.5 By checking Position One in the mirror from the face-on view, you can make sure you are forming an L with your left arm and the club.



as crucial a hallmark of Position Two as it is of Position One. In fact, if you take just one teaching point, one key aspect of this entire book into the rest of your golfing days, make it the L.

Now let's use the mirror to examine Position One from another angle. If you are a right-handed player, turn to the left so that the mirror is to the right of you (Photo 5.6). In teaching terms, this is referred to as the down-the-line view. If you are a left-handed player, turn so that the mirror is to your left (Photo 5.7).

Draw the club back to parallel position. The club shaft should be parallel to your feet, hips, shoulders, and target line. If the club is not parallel to these indicators, it means you are bringing the club back too much to the inside (Photo 5.8) or too far outside (Photo 5.9).



Photos 5.6–5.7 Use a mirror to check your takeaway in Position One and make sure your club is parallel to your feet, hips, knees, and shoulders.



Photo 5.8 Here the club has worked its way too far inside. It is parallel to the ground but not with the feet, hips, shoulders, and knees.



Photo 5.9 Here the club has worked its way too far outside. The feet line again is parallel to the ground but not the feet, hips, knees, and shoulders.



Keep working the club back and checking your position in the mirror until it's parallel to your feet, hips, shoulders, and target line.

If you continue to have problems bringing the club too far inside or outside, go back and repeat the drill I talked about in Chapter 4—the one in which you use a cart, couch, chair, or table as a guidepost.

Intermediate and Advanced

As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, my teaching approach to intermediate and advanced players is different from my approach to beginners and novices. With beginners and novices, I view the swing as motion into positions. For intermediate and advanced players, I teach it as positions put into motion.

With intermediate and advanced players, my teaching is more specific and diagnostic. Since most intermediate and advanced golfers have been playing for several years and have a clearer understanding of and comfort level with their swing, I look for the most glaring mistakes that cause disaster shots. Then I put a plan together to help soften these mistakes. Ultimately, minimizing the student's disaster shots leads to lower scores.

Naturally, I teach Position One differently to intermediate and advanced players than I do to beginners, which is why I break it down more specifically during the rest of the chapter. For instance, I cover in more detail the correct positioning of your arms, upper body, and the angle in which you should draw the club back (also known as the plane) during the takeaway.

Unlike with beginning and novice players, with whom everything needs to remain stationary during the takeaway except the hands, wrists, and forearms, I encourage intermediate and advanced players to incorporate some shoulder and upper body turn into the takeaway.

Get Sequenced

I have already discussed how important it is for beginning and novice players to use a mirror when learning Position One. Using a mirror is equally important, if not more so, for intermediate and advanced players. The teaching is somewhat more detailed because you are trying to make corrections while relearning movements. So I recommend that you find a full- or three-quarters-length mirror and an area that gives you some working room. If you need to put the book down periodically or lay it nearby and look at the photographs as guides, you should have no problem learning as you go.

Take a seven-iron and get into the proper posture and setup (Photos 5.10–5.14). Remember the drill you did in Chapter 4 in which you crossed your arms and lightly laid your fingertips on your shoulders while turning your shoulders and upper body? That should give you good indication of how you should sequence your shoulder turn as you draw the club back to Position One with your hands, wrists, and forearms. If you feel as though you need a refresher, go back and repeat that drill a few times. As you start the backswing, your wrists should feel like they're cocking up in a perpendicular direction.

Unlike the beginner and novice, you want your shoulders to turn with the golf club (Photo 5.15). It's also important that as you start the backswing, you feel the muscles around your rib cage tighten slightly. That slight tightness helps you sequence your upper torso turn with your shoulder turn.

One constant for players of all levels is the creation of the L. You still keep your hands in line with or in front of your sternum. As the club reaches parallel position, or Position One, you want the back of your left hand (if you are a right-handed player) and the clubface to match, both pointing away from your body.

As with the beginner or novice player, the intermediate or advanced player not only creates, but also maintains the L. The difference is that you should not pause when the club gets to parallel

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Photos 5.10–5.14 As an intermediate or advanced golfer, you need to have the sensation that the wrists hinge up and down on the takeaway.



position, because your shoulders and upper body are still turning. It should be one fluid motion. The club passes through the point at which the club is parallel to the ground, your feet, and the target line. If someone were to take a photograph when the club reaches parallel position, it would look like you stopped at what beginners know as the stationary Position One. In reality, it's a still image of the L taken as your shoulders, forearms, and wrists are taking the club past parallel position. This is what I mean when I define the intermediate and advanced swing as positions put into motion.



Photo 5.15
Intermediate golfers should focus on cocking their wrists while turning their shoulders at the same time.

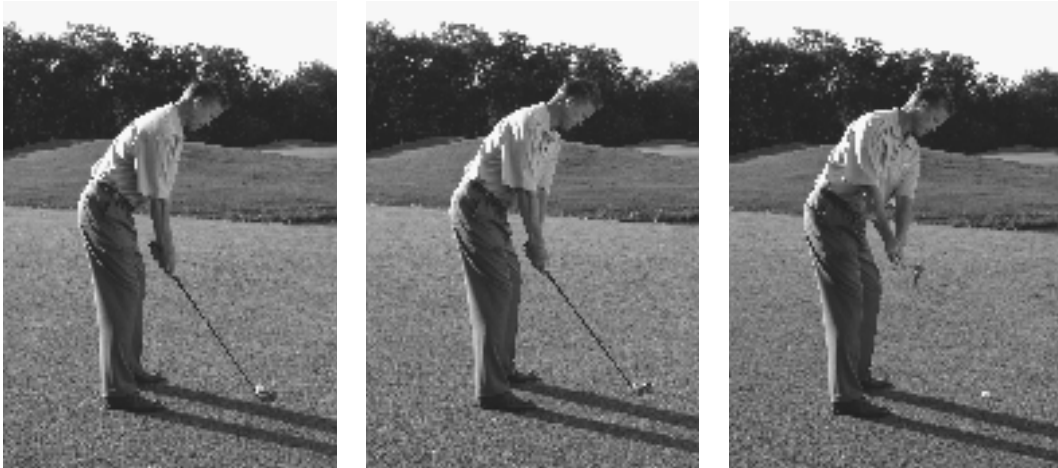


Execute your takeaway several times while facing the mirror. Go slowly, because you need to confirm that you are forming the L, that the clubface and back of your left hand match and point away from your body, and that your shoulder turn and arm movements are synchronized.

It's All in the Takeaway and Backswing

Now turn to the side so that your feet are perpendicular to the mirror and when you bring the club back you do so toward the mirror, giving you the down-the-line view. Let's check the angle, or direction, of your takeaway. Photos 5.16–5.18 show some things to keep an eye on, not only for the purpose of learning Position One, but also for

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Photos 5.16–5.18 Sequence of the takeaway for intermediate golfers: the wrists begin cocking up as the shoulders start to turn, while the hands remain in front of the sternum.



those inevitable times in the future when you feel yourself getting off track.

With the ability and knowledge that you have as an intermediate or advanced player, there is no reason why you shouldn't be able to establish the correct takeaway. The most important thing you need to remember is to keep the club out in front of you. You absolutely need to maintain spacing between your arms and body (Photo 5.19). Many players tend to bring the club back too low and inside. When you bring the club back too low and too much to the inside, the club-head tends to rise too steeply. Some players actually have too much wrist cock. The arms and wrists of such players need to be a little more passive.

Now if a player errs, I as a teacher would prefer he or she do so in the correct direction. In the case of the takeaway, I would rather see a player take the club back too much to the outside rather than too far inside (Photos 5.20 and 5.21).

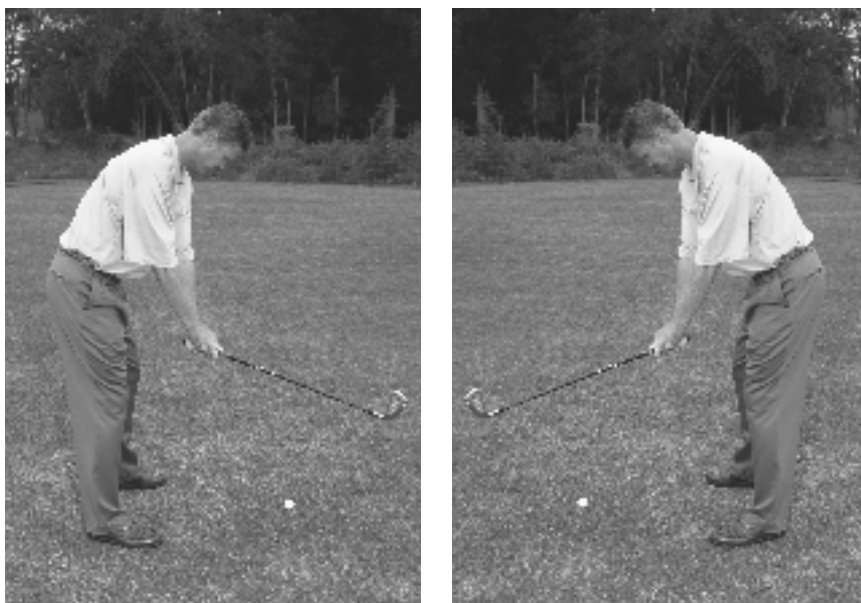
Ideally, you want to see the following when looking into the mirror from the down-the-line view during your takeaway: when the club shaft reaches parallel position, it should also be parallel to your feet and target line. In other words, if the club shaft is parallel to the ground but angled over part of your back foot (for instance, over your outside toes), it means your takeaway is too low and inside. If the club shaft is angled away from your body to where the clubhead is outside the target line, it means your takeaway is too far to the outside.

Once again, I'm describing positions put into motion. Intermediate and advanced players should have a smooth, sequenced takeaway. As the club passes parallel, your shoulders should be slightly



Photo 5.19 Here, the wrist actually hinges downward, resulting in a club that is low and inside. Notice the club is not parallel to the ground, feet, hips, knees, or shoulders.

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Photos 5.20–5.21 Here is an example of the club working outside the target line on a takeaway. Remember if you err, do so in the right direction. I would rather see you work the club outside than on the takeaway.



turned toward the mirror. Your lower body at this point should be relatively static.

It's easier said than done, but here is something intermediate and advanced players should keep in mind about the takeaway. Ideally, you'd like to start with 25 percent wrist hinged, 25 percent shoulder turn, 25 percent lower body turn, and 25 percent forearm rotation. As an instructor, I determine what is out of sync and try to balance the percentages. That is where the diagnosis comes in. When you are out of sequence, your percentages may be, for example, 10 percent wrist, 5 percent forearm, 10 percent shoulder, and 75 percent upper body.

If you can manage a perfectly sequenced takeaway every time you draw the club back, you're practically a professional! It's an awful lot to ask. That's why beginner and novice players need to focus on the

wrists and forearms while keeping everything else stationary, and everyone else needs to merely add a slight shoulder and upper body turn.

No matter what level you are at, my best advice is to forget about percentages, technical jargon, and swing thoughts such as “low and slow.” Focus on creating and maintaining the L. Once you have mastered the L and are in Position One, everything else falls into place. Before you realize it, your swing is segueing to its natural continuation: Position Two.



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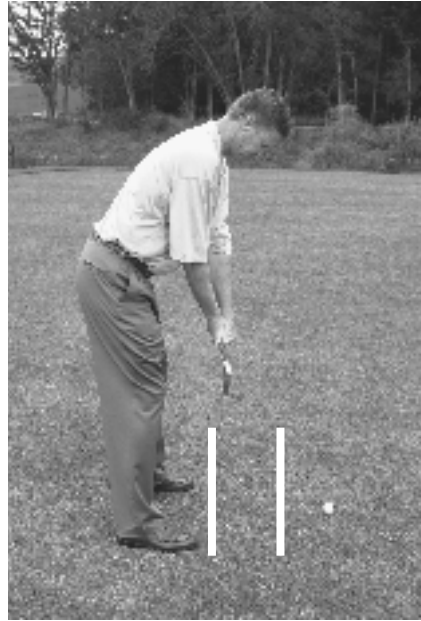
POSITION TWO

Now that you have learned how to cock your wrists and have attained Position One, you are well on your way to establishing the two true hallmarks of great ball striking: width and plane. Width is the amount of space you need to maintain between your arms, as well as the distance between your hands and your body. Plane is the angle in which the golf club travels during the backswing as well as during the downswing and through impact. Plane allows you to brush the correct amount of turf. Plane also influences your ability to square the clubface to the ball and target line at impact.

If references to width and plane seem technical and intimidating, don't worry. That is the beauty of the two-position teaching approach. When you correctly execute Position One and Position Two, width and plane take care of themselves.

You have already learned how simple and straightforward Position One is: just keep your hands in front of your belt buckle, cock your wrists, and create the L with your left arm and the golf club (Photos 6.1–6.4).

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Photos 6.1–6.4 Before we march into Position Two, we need to make sure we have created the L, which is the hallmark of Position One.

Getting from Position One to Position Two is just as easy and straightforward. You simply maintain the L while turning your shoulders, until your left arm (for right-handers) and the golf club have exchanged positions in the L. Your arm is now parallel to the ground and comprises the bottom of the L. The club now forms the vertical edge of the L (Photos 6.5–6.8).

Although I break down Position Two in more detail during the rest of this chapter, the execution truly is that basic. In fact, it is so straightforward that unlike with Position One, which I simplify when teaching beginners and novices, my instructional approach for Position Two is the same for all levels.

Position Two is merely a continuation of Position One. Position One is the takeaway, Position Two the backswing. Although there are two steps, there is one fluid motion—like saying “one-two” without pausing. And the two-position method is as effective as it is efficient. I remember the day I fully realized just how efficient and effective it is. It was during the mid-1990s. I was in my late twenties, working as the director of instruction at Carmel Valley Ranch on California’s Monterey Peninsula. I already had been teaching the two-position approach for several years.

On this particular day, my student was a blind man in his late thirties or early forties. He was a beginning golfer. After teaching him Position One and Position Two, I lined up several tees in the ground and helped him set up to the first one. He brought the club back to Position One, moved it into Position Two, and then let the club naturally fall down the plane that he had established during the takeaway and backswing.

He brushed the tee beautifully, popping it out of the ground. He repeated the steps again and again. It was uncanny how consistently he brushed the tees—not only because he was blind, but also because he was a beginning player. It almost seemed like he was on automatic pilot.

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Photos 6.5–6.8 Now the left arm (for right-handers) is parallel to the ground, creating the bottom portion of the L. The golf club creates the vertical edge of the L.

Then I realized what was happening. Clearly, the main reason why he was so consistent was that Position One and Position Two helped him establish the correct plane and width. It was at that moment that I fully understood and appreciated how important plane and width are, and how effective the two-position method is. If a blind person can easily learn and excel with the two positions, you can too. Someday, after you become really proficient and comfortable with the two positions, try them blindfolded or with your eyes shut. You might be surprised how consistently you make solid contact.

Since that day at Carmel Valley Ranch, I have had the opportunity to teach numerous handicapped players, some of whom were blind. Believe me, once they begin hitting balls, they react like anyone else when they catch shots flush in the center of the clubface. Even though they can't see the results, they have an expression of "Wow, I didn't know this was going to work."

This is how strongly I believe in the two-position method: when I instruct a beginner, or a group of beginners, and have limited time to work with them, I stand next to them and physically place them into Position One, then Position Two. Then I step out of the way and tell them, "OK, let your arms fall and brush the tee." The tee pops in the air every time. Why do I believe it is important to place beginners in the two positions? Because when I work with students who are new to the game, I want them to feel what it is like to swing a club from the ideal positions.

When you have only thirty minutes or an hour to work with a beginner, you want the student to experience success. That gives the person motivation to stay on track and keep working on his or her swing. I also realize that a beginner can't be expected to learn Position One, Position Two, and all the other swing fundamentals and absolutes in this book in just one lesson.

You are more fortunate. You are learning about and improving your swing in the best possible way. You have invested time and

patience and already have soaked in more knowledge than many golfers do during their lifetime. You are not only on track, but also much farther down it than most players ever get.

Now let's walk you through Position Two and get you even closer to the first tee box.

Picture It, Feel It, See It

Just as when you're learning Position One, it is important that you not only visualize in your mind where Position Two is, but also actually see it. Try to find a place where you can work in front of a mirror, although you should leave your clubs to the side for the time being. I recommend that you find a lightweight, medium-sized ball. It can be a rubber kick-ball, a plastic supermarket ball, or even a soccer ball.

So many players transition from the takeaway to the backswing mainly with their arms. Consequently, they usually stiffen their arms. Right-handed players particularly tense up their left arm because they have heard all their lives that they are supposed to keep their left arm straight. Left-handed players hear the same thing about their right arm.

Remember the drill from Chapters 4 and 5 in which you cross your arms and lay your fingertips lightly on your shoulders while turning your shoulders and upper torso? That is the same feeling you want while transitioning from Position One to Position Two. You need to maintain relaxation in your arms while turning your shoulders and torso.

A quick drill with a lightweight ball will reinforce what I am talking about. Facing the mirror, place your hands on both sides of the ball and get into your posture and setup (Photo 6.9).

Use your shoulders and upper torso to bring the ball back as you would a golf club, keeping your arms relatively soft and maintaining

some flexibility in your elbows. As you turn your shoulders and upper torso, you should feel the muscles around your rib cage flex and contract (Photo 6.10). Those are your latissimus dorsi muscles, better known as lats. They are the muscles you feel when you row a boat or work out on a rowing machine.

The following key point bears reemphasizing: in order to go to Position Two, your shoulders and upper torso turn your arms. Do not use your arms to turn your shoulders. It's the old cliché: does the dog wag the tail, or does the tail wag the dog? In this case, there is no doubt that the dog wags the tail.

As you repeat the ball drill several times, check your positioning in the mirror. Obviously, you cannot create an L without a golf club, but look to make sure your shoulders and torso are turning and your arms are not stiff.



Photos 6.9–6.10 Create some space with your hands by turning your shoulders and your torso while keeping your hands at the same distance from your shoulders. This will help you learn how to properly execute Position Two.

Breaking Down Position Two

Now you are ready to go to Position Two with a golf club. Facing the mirror, grip a seven-iron and get into the proper posture and setup.

Note that as your arms hang from your shoulders at address, your arms should be relaxed, even slightly bowed out and forming an oblong circle. Time and again, I see players set up to the ball with their arms as straight and stiff as boards. What those players don't realize is that the more relaxed the arms are, the easier it is to cock the wrists during the takeaway. As I discussed in Chapter 4, your wrists are your igniters, and your swing largely is built around proper wrist action. Do not render your wrists powerless in your swing by stiffening your arms. That is like taking a boat onto a lake without a motor.

Now that you are in a proper posture and setup and your arms are relaxed, take the club back to Position One a few times, making sure you keep the club out in front of you. Also make sure that when you get to Position One, the club shaft is parallel to your feet, hips, and shoulders. You have created the L (Photos 6.11 and 6.12).

Now you are ready to continue to Position Two, the backbone of your swing. While turning your shoulders, it's important to keep your head up so that your shoulders can turn under your chin. Your head needs to tilt with your shoulders. The old cliché of keeping your head still will cause more problems than you want. The best point of reference I can give you is if you are a right-handed player, your right ear should tilt slightly toward your right shoulder as you turn your shoulders.

While maintaining the L, turn your shoulders and upper torso until your back is to your imaginary target—pick out a spot on the wall or if you are outside, make your target a tree or bush. Check your position in the mirror (Photos 6.13 and 6.14). If you are a right-handed player, your left arm should be parallel to the ground.





Photos 6.11–6.12 Checking your Position One in a mirror is very helpful face on and down the line.



Photos 6.13–6.14 The down-the-line view is the best way to check your backswing and Position Two. In Position Two, the shoulders turn the arms. Keep your head up to allow you to turn your back toward your target.



The golf club should be perpendicular to the ground. You should still have the L, but now your arm and the club have exchanged places. You are in Position Two.

There is nothing too difficult or complicated about that, right? Some of you probably are wondering, “Am I doing this correctly? I’ve maintained the L and I’m in Position Two, but are my hands, elbows, the club, and so on in the absolute precise, ideal positions?”

In the rest of this chapter, I discuss some indicators for you to look for, preferably with the help of a mirror. My objective isn’t to fill your head with so many swing thoughts that you can’t think straight while standing over the ball. Rather, the following sections are just a menu of indicators you can use to confirm that you are on the right track. Use the menu as a mental and visual checklist until you become comfortable with Position Two. Once you begin playing, you will likely use only one or two of the menu items. Even then, you probably will refer to them only when you feel yourself getting off track.

I have found that some items click in more clearly with particular students, while other checklist items click in with other students. It depends on each individual and the way he or she learns and communicates.

Level Elbows

Once you have turned your shoulders, upper torso, and arms to Position Two, your elbows should be fairly level. A good way to check this is to face the mirror, get into Position Two, and then take a second club and lay it across the insides of your elbows (Photo 6.15).

If your right elbow is too high (for right-handers), the club resting across your elbows will tilt to the left (Photo 6.16). This means you are not on plane. If you were to go ahead and execute a downswing with the club you are holding, the angle in which the club travels toward the ball would be too vertical. In that case, most likely the



Photo 6.15 Correct plane is established at address. The line running through the shoulders is parallel to the line at address.



Photo 6.16 Having your right elbow above the left (for right-handers) creates a plane that is too steep or vertical, causing the downswing to hit too much turf or to slice the golf ball.



clubhead will take too much turf, causing your hands and arms to reverse-rotate and open the clubface. Chances are you'll either hit a slice or a weak pop-up to the right.

If your left elbow is too high (for right-handers), the club resting across your elbows will tilt to the right (Photo 6.17). That is a warning that your plane is too flat. If your plane is too flat in Position Two, you will have difficulty brushing the ground. Most likely you will top the ball or at best, hit a low line drive.

I often find that when players are learning Position Two, they tend to lift one or both of their arms near the top of their backswing. They see professional players take the club so far back that the club

shaft is parallel to their shoulders, but what fans don't realize is that pros still maintain the L to the very peak of their backswing.

For right now, especially if you are a beginning or novice player, simply focus on maintaining the L to Position Two, with your left arm (for right-handers) parallel to the ground and your elbows level. Also, maintain some flexibility in those arms and elbows throughout the backswing. The angle of the club shaft at Position Two should be somewhat parallel to the original angle of the club shaft at address (Photo 6.18).

The key is not how far you go back with the swing; it's how you get there. If you are supple enough to get to the top of the backswing while maintaining the L, like Tiger Woods, Ernie Els, Vijay Singh, and Davis Love III, great. But understand that players who are not



Photo 6.17 If your left elbow is above the right (for right-handers), it creates a flat or laid-off plane. This causes you to top the ball or produce low line drives.



Photo 6.18 Measure the correct angle of your plane by using a line of golf balls that extends parallel to your feet and target line. The end of the club needs to point toward, or just inside, the line of golf balls.

as supple—for example, Craig Stadler, Duffy Waldorf, and Jeff Sluman—have enjoyed success without taking their backswing to the top.

Hands in Front of Your Sternum

When you are in Position Two, your hands, at the very least, should be even with your sternum. If you need a different point of reference, use the buttons or placket on your golf shirt.

It's not a bad thing at all if your hands end up slightly higher than your sternum, provided you maintain the L. But if you are a right-handed player, your hands should extend no higher than your right shoulder (Photo 6.19). If you are left-handed, your hands should not surpass your left shoulder.



Photo 6.19 As your shoulders turn, keep your hands in front of your sternum or the buttons of your shirt. This allows you to maintain the width in your golf swing.





Photo 6.20 Keeping an eye on your width in your backswing/Position Two works hand in hand with the plane of the golf swing. Remember, you never want to decrease the distance between your hands and body once you begin your backswing.



I have found that checking the height of your hands while facing the mirror also gives you a great visual of how the width of your backswing should look (Photo 6.20). Width, remember, is the amount of space you need to maintain not only between your arms, but also between your hands and your shoulders.

Back of the Left Hand (or the Right Hand for Left-Handers)

Besides the plane and width, the position of the back of the left hand at the top of the backswing is one of the most overlooked and under-rated elements of the golf swing.

While you are in Position Two, the back of your left hand needs to align with the top of your left forearm. In other words, the area between your lower forearm and the knuckles of your hand should be flat. If you were wearing a slightly loosened watch, you should be able to stick a writing pen between your watch and wrist at the top of your backswing, and the pen should lie flat against your forearm, wrist, and hand (Photo 6.21).

What you absolutely need to avoid is a cupped left hand; that is, the hand is bent back, creating curvature, or a cupped appearance, between your lower forearm and your hand (Photo 6.22). A cupped left hand leads to an open clubface at impact, resulting in a slicing ball flight.

Golfers who have a squared left wrist at Position Two are almost guaranteed to be on plane through the downswing and impact (Photo 6.23). If you are on plane, the club can fall from inside the target line, make contact with the inside portion of the ball, and pro-



Photo 6.21 When you reach Position Two, check to make sure the back of your left hand is flat and in line with your forearm.



Photo 6.22 A cupped left hand leads to an open clubface in your backswing, resulting in a slicing ball flight.



duce that beautiful high draw or hook that all players desire. When you watch a tour player's swing analyzed on TV, look closely when the video is freeze-framed at the top of the swing. No matter what else is happening in their swing, the majority of tour players have their left wrist square at the top of the backswing and their left wrist is in line with the club face.

Lee Trevino is sometimes criticized for his unorthodox swing, but what most critics overlook is that at the top of Lee's backswing he has all the true hallmarks of a great ball striker. He has the width, he has the plane, and the back of his left hand is so square that it is almost pronounced. I never had the privilege of watching Byron Nelson hit balls during his prime, but I've seen Lee Trevino hit balls. He



Photo 6.23 Back of the left hand and the clubface are perfectly in line with each other.

is the best ball striker I've ever seen. He is an example to all golfers in that if you are going to perfect some fundamentals, make sure they are the most important fundamentals. Lee's swing may have some flaws, but the things he does right are so positive that they overshadow everything else.

Another indicator to look for concerning the back of the left hand is that it should match up with the clubface. The back of the hand and clubface should point in the same direction. This is true when you cock your wrists and form the L at Position One, and it's also true at Position Two. If the back of your left hand and the clubface are pointing in the same direction, this also confirms that you are gripping the club correctly.

Of course, I have talked so much about the left hand that a natural question is, “OK, what is the right hand supposed to do?” For the most part, the right hand is along for the ride. But in terms of grip pressure, it should be fifty-fifty—equal for the right hand and the left.

Toe of the Club

After confirming that the back of your left hand is square with your forearm, and that the back of your left hand points in the same direction as the clubface, look to see where the leading edge of the clubhead is pointing. This is the edge that runs from the heel of the club (near the hosel) to the toe. If you are a right-handed player, the leading edge of the clubface should be in line with the back of your left hand and in line with the club shaft.



Butt of the Club

Another indicator that many players find useful is the direction the butt (or bottom knob) of the club points in when in Position Two.

To check this indicator, you need to place a ball on the floor or ground. Next, place a golf club, tape measure, or any other thin, straight object behind the ball, establishing a line going away from the target. Or you can simply visualize a line coming out of the back of the ball.

Now take your seven-iron and set up behind the ball as if you are going to hit a shot. Bring the club back to Position Two. Look at the butt end of the club and the spot on the floor or ground that it's pointing to. The butt of the club should point to a spot that intersects with the line coming out the back of the ball (Photo 6.24). If it points inside the line, your plane (and as a result, your swing) is too vertical. If it points outside the line, your plane is too flat.



Photo 6.24 Check to see whether you are on plane. The butt of the club needs to point toward the balls or just inside the line of balls.



Limit Your Menu

Remember, the previous sections are just a menu of indicators. You certainly aren't expected to use or remember all of them. In fact, narrow down your menu to the two or three indicators that best suit you.

If I were to emphasize one indicator more than the others, it would be to make sure the back of your left hand is square to your left forearm. Otherwise, rest assured that if you satisfy two or more of these indicators, you look awfully good in Position Two. It also means that you have established width and plane, the two absolutes that are imperative for a great golf swing.

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So how does it feel? You have learned Position One. You have learned Position Two. You have acquired a lot of knowledge that, without a doubt, will be beneficial for as long as you play golf. Best of all, the hard part is definitely behind you. I'm sure you are anxious to move on to the downswing, and I'm certain that you are prepared.

It's go time!



THE DOWNSWING

You have reached the mountaintop. Pike's Peak. Mount Everest. You are at the pinnacle of the backswing. In one sense, your journey is half done, but everyone knows that the climb was the difficult part. The trip down is easier, especially if you follow your original path. So it goes with your downswing and follow-through. You simply need to make certain that you maintain the same plane and follow the route that you established on the way up.

You have worked so hard to get to this point—from grip, to setup and posture, to cocking the wrists and creating the L for Position One, to maintaining the L for Position Two. Let's not ruin that hard work by straying off track. Surely you also are eager to implement Position One and Position Two on the practice tee, but let's not get ahead of ourselves. We'll get there later in this chapter.

First, find an area with enough room so you can practice a full swing. It can be inside (preferably in front of a mirror), in your backyard, or at a practice tee, but for the moment you're going to work without balls or tees.

Set up with a seven-iron, and bring it back to Position One, then to Position Two. Now at three-quarters speed, allow your arms, hands, and the club to fall toward the ground and then through the

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impact area; then take them up and around your left shoulder (if you are a right-handed golfer).

As you do this several times, keep in mind that you must maintain the same spacing between your arms, and between your arms and body, as you had while in Position Two, which is the top of your backswing. We won't go into the specifics about the follow-through until the end of the chapter, but you can't take full swings, even at three-quarters speed, without following through. So go ahead and take your arms all the way through and pivot off your right foot as you shift your weight from the right leg to the left (Photos 7.1 and 7.2).

More than anything at this point, get the feeling of allowing your arms, hands, and the club to fall while maintaining your arm spacing. Since you already established your plane with Position One and



Photos 7.1–7.2 Rehearse your finish in practice swings. Your weight has transferred from your right to your left leg. Remember to maintain your width on the follow-through. Notice the window with your right and left arm.

Position Two, allowing the club to fall down the same path line is like allowing nature, specifically gravity, to take its course. If it doesn't feel natural at first, don't worry. Just keep taking relaxed, three-quarters-speed swings until you feel comfortable.

Arms First, Body Follows

Now that you have taken some full swings, let's discuss the downswing in more detail. You may find that my philosophy about the downswing differs somewhat from what you may have heard or read elsewhere. For one thing, there has long been a misconception that the body starts the downswing. Actually, in a perfect world the downswing should start with a combination of the body, arms, and shoulders turning together.

But this isn't a perfect world, and more than likely you are not a perfect golfer. If you were, you wouldn't be reading this book or believe that you needed help. Since no one is perfect and for other reasons that I will explain, I tell all students—no matter the level of ability—the following about the downswing: the arms swing, the body follows. I firmly believe that if you begin your downswing with that premise, you will avoid pitfalls that plague many golfers.

One of the biggest mistakes recreational golfers make is to use too much of their body during the downswing. They confuse speed with force, believing that the more body parts, muscle, and weight they throw into their downswing, the faster their club speed will be. Certainly, that philosophy works when it comes to throwing a baseball, swinging a tennis racket, and so on. But when it comes to the golf swing, speed is a product of swinging your arms. Force then becomes a product of speed.

Many right-handed players lower their right shoulder and then try to thrust their body into their downswing. Likewise, many left-handed players lead with their left shoulder and use too much body.

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I am not just referring to novice and intermediate players. It happens to advanced players as well. Advanced players, having had years to refine their timing and synchronization, generally start their down-swing with a balanced mixture of arms, shoulders, and body. But when they start hitting the ball particularly well, what often happens is greedy thoughts creep in: “Hey, my swing is in such a groove, I bet if I swing harder the ball will go even farther.” This is simply human nature and a product of how the mind works. Again, confusing force with speed, advanced players try to swing harder and unknowingly get off the track fundamentally. They swing harder, put more body thrust into it, and suddenly, their fine-line balance of arms, shoulders, and body is out of sync (Photo 7.3).



Photo 7.3 Here is an example of trying to hit the ball with the body. (The body lowers toward the ground and the golf club is extremely vertical.)

The following happens when you lower your shoulder, your upper body, or both during the downswing: your plane becomes too vertical, which leads to some serious disaster shots (i.e., hitting too much ground, hitting slices). Suddenly, the foundation you established in Positions One and Two has crumbled.

That is why I advocate allowing your arms, hands, and the club to fall first. That way you keep the club on plane, and maintain the width between your arms and the distance between your arms and body. Once your arms fall, your shoulders and body naturally chase your arms.

Despite what you may have heard, seen, or read, the following things should *not* occur during your downswing: your arms should not be pulled by your shoulders, your body should not turn first, your left knee should not move toward the target, and your hips should not slide toward the target.

If you lead slightly with your arms, maintaining the width and plane you created with Position One and Position Two, you need very little body movement, if any, to generate club speed and distance.



Hold That Thought

Now let's apply the "arms swing, body follows" philosophy with a brief drill that should help you gain a better understanding of how the downswing should feel and look.

Pick up your seven-iron, return to your spot facing the mirror, and make certain there is enough room to take a full swing. Take the club back to Position Two and look into the mirror. Now very briefly hold your right shoulder stationary while allowing your arms, hands, and the club to fall down and forward. You may be wondering, "How long should my shoulder remain stationary? How far should my arms fall before my shoulders turn? An inch? A few inches?"

Truthfully, the answers to those questions cannot be quantified in inches. The key thing to remember is that your objective is to start the downswing with your arms. Obviously, your arms are attached to your shoulders, so your arms can't move very far without your shoulders turning as well. You certainly don't want to keep your right shoulder so stationary that it restrains your downswing. You simply want to make sure that your arms, hands, and club get a slight head start.

Look closely into the mirror as you try several downswings at half-speed. If you are a right-handed player, a good indicator is your right shoulder. It should remain steady as your arms begin to fall, whereas for many players the right shoulder begins to move down and across their body before their hands fall below the top of their stomach. If you prefer, you can focus on keeping your left shoulder stationary. Or you can focus on keeping your back to the target. It doesn't matter. They're all the same. You just want your shoulders and upper body to lag just enough so that your arms lead the way.

Keep taking half-speed swings until your backswing, downswing, and through-swing together become one fluid, comfortable motion (Photos 7.4–7.8). You want to feel that your arms are relaxed, and that they aren't so tense that veins bulge in your lower arms and hands during the downswing.

Once you feel comfortable taking half-speed swings, turn so that the mirror gives you a down-the-line view. Take a few more half-speed swings. Look closely at what happens as the club drops down. It falls back into Position One. If someone were to take photos of you during your downswing, there should be a point when the club is parallel to the ground, and the back of your left hand and the club-face should point away from your body.

In reality, you never lose the L, or at least you aren't supposed to lose it. If you lose it, you probably prematurely lowered your right shoulder and did not allow your arms to drop first, which caused you to lose the width between your arms and the space between your



The Downswing

Photos 7.4–7.8 Once you have reached Position Two, the arms begin the downswing by relaxing and falling. In this sequence, the shoulders barely move, if at all, as the club falls and passes through Position One before impact.



arms and body. In that case, you need to keep rehearsing half-speed swings until you are certain that you are leading with your arms and maintaining the L down to Position One.

There is another indicator of a proper downswing that you should check in the mirror. While facing the mirror, try a few slow-motion

downswings, stopping at Position One. At that point, your sternum should be in a one o'clock position. Your shoulders and hips also should be slightly turned. If you get to Position One and your sternum, shoulders, and hips are back to where they were at address, or a little beyond address, then you are leading with your shoulders and body rather than your arms.

The next time you see a PGA Tour player's downswing analyzed in slow motion, watch the downswing very closely. The arms will begin to fall on the downswing and the body will follow the arms. When this happens, there will be a point when the club is parallel to the player's feet, parallel to the ground, and parallel to the target. These absolutes must occur in a fundamentally sound downswing.

Pop Some Tees

Now that you have a feel for what is a correct downswing, place a few tees in the ground. I recommend you go to a practice tee, because after you pop some tees, it'll be time to hit some balls at last.

Place a few tees in a line, just like you did while learning to cock your wrists for Position One (see Chapter 4), with the tees sticking no more than half an inch out of the ground. With a seven-iron, set up to the first tee and rehearse your positions. Stop at Position One, then at Position Two. In slow motion, allow your arms, hands, and the club to fall, brush the tee, and continue through, up and over your left shoulder. We're still not worried so much about the follow-through, but in order to properly brush the tees you have to follow through.

After trying it in slow motion a few times, go ahead and increase to three-quarters speed—fast enough so that you aren't guiding the club down, and with enough velocity to pop the tee out of the ground. Try to focus on brushing the tee, and try to not think about



the downswing itself. You will find that the more you rehearse and the more comfortable you become, the more allowing your arms, hands, and the club to fall first will become second nature. As you improve your comfort level, gradually increase your club velocity until you are popping tees at 80 percent speed.

Graduation Time—Hit Some Balls

Here, finally, is where the rubber meets the road. Let's get some balls in the air.

I'm sure you are anxious to start blasting away with a driver, or to go play eighteen holes and show off your new swing to your buddies, but take it one step at a time and keep making steady progress. You have worked too hard to veer off the track so close to the finish line.

Continue using a seven-iron, and for the time being only hit balls off of tees. Start at three-quarters speed, focusing not on the ball but on brushing the tee. As was noted in Chapter 4, this is a case of focusing on the process rather than the result. I guarantee that if you brush the tee, the ball will pop up in the air very nicely (Photo 7.9).

As you become more comfortable, gradually increase your club-head speed. But if you hit several poor shots in a row, don't hesitate to back off, retrace, and rehearse the steps you have learned to this point: (1) grip, (2) posture and setup, (3) wrist cock and establishing the L to Position One, (4) maintaining the L to Position Two, and (5) allowing your arms, hands, and the club to fall to start the downswing.

If for some reason you are topping the ball or sticking the club into the ground, don't make the mistake of thinking that something is going on in your golf swing that wasn't covered in this book. Understand that your downswing is only as good as your backswing (Position Two). Your backswing is only as good as your takeaway





Photo 7.9 Arms fall and wrists rotate to pop the ball into the air.



(Position One). Your takeaway is only as good as your grip, posture, setup, and wrist cock.

If your club is coming in too steeply (at too sharp an angle) and hitting too much ground, there is a good chance you are lowering your right shoulder (or left shoulder, if you play left-handed) or lowering the club with your body. Remember, those are symptoms of trying to swing too hard, of mistaking force for speed, or of not allowing your arms, hands, and club to start your downswing.

Hit about fifty balls with your seven-iron, or as many shots as you need to get to the point where you are brushing the tee consistently, which means your shots are consistently getting airborne. For beginners and novices, that's all you're asking at this point.

For intermediate and advanced players, once you feel comfortable with the seven-iron, go ahead and gradually work down to the six-iron and then the five-iron. Once you start hitting the five-iron consistently well, you can go ahead and experiment with your other irons. You are well on your way to incorporating Position One and Position Two into your golf game.

Look, Learn

Now that you have hit some balls, here is a question that may seem out of left field yet is significant to the long-term success of your golf swing and enjoyment of the game: where are your shots going? Don't feel badly if you aren't sure of your answer. The vast majority of recreational golfers play for years without having a clue of why they have disaster shots—and just as important, why their ball flight is erratic.

The culprit is easy to pinpoint. It is one of the many swing tips golfers hear from the time they are kids, especially when they are topping the ball: “Keep your head down.” I couldn't disagree more with that advice. Certainly, I'm not telling you to take your eye off the ball and raise your head and upper body before the club meets the ball. I simply know from experience that golfers who focus too much on keeping their head down often experience unnecessary havoc in their swing. When players keep their head down, they often stay down on the ball too long. Sometimes their head remains down well after the club meets the ball, causing the club to hit too much turf, which often results in the player's arms to reverse-rotate and their ball flight to slice.

Here is the advice I give students: as you turn your arms, shoulders, and body through impact, look down the target line and follow the flight of the ball while allowing your shoulders to come up. Why? Aside from the potential problem of hitting too much turf, you



need to enjoy your golf shot. Or if it's off-line, you need to see where the ball is going so you can find it.

Besides, you have an even more important reason to watch your shots. Your ball flight provides important clues about your swing. Your ball flight, like the mirror, never lies. You have learned so much during the course of this book that you are becoming an educated swinger of the club. An educated golfer knows his or her ball flight and understands which factors cause a shot to go right, left, high, or low, and how to adjust accordingly.

In Chapter 9, "Coaching Yourself," I will discuss self-diagnosis—what causes right, left, fat, and thin shots and how to make the appropriate correction without throwing the other facets of your swing off track. But for now, just focus on becoming more proficient and comfortable with your swing—and on gaining familiarity with your ball flight.



The Finish

The finish, also known as the follow-through, is the icing on your swing. It is the spice that gives your swing a little flavor. I often tell students, "Even if you don't hit a good shot, you need to look like you know what you're doing."

The truth is, although I believe the finish is important, it is not as important as others think. My ranking of order of importance in the golf swing is Position One, Position Two, the downswing, impact, and then follow-through. Pro golf has had its share of stars—Arnold Palmer, Lee Trevino, and Chi Chi Rodriguez come to mind—who had less than artistic finishes.

It's not surprising that you see a wide variety of finishes from tour players to recreational golfers, because the finish is a product of the downswing. The finish is affected not only by the path, but also by the speed of the downswing.

In order to develop a fundamentally sound follow-through, it's important not only to visualize and rehearse it, but also to check your positioning in the mirror while executing it. The most telling view of the follow-through is from down the line. So if you are right-handed, turn so that the mirror is to your right. Start by taking a few swings at one-quarter speed.

When you reach Position Two, allow your arms, hands, and club to fall and brush the carpet; then swing your arms up and over your left shoulder while pivoting slightly off your right foot. One of the most important points to remember is that you need to maintain the same width between your arms and the same space between your arms and body from the backswing, to the downswing, to the follow-through.

Recall that in Chapter 6 I talked about the need to make sure the back of your left hand is square to your wrist at Position Two (for right-handers). Well, during the downswing and through-swing, everything trades places. As the club falls down, makes contact, and continues through, your arms rotate right over left. Your right hand also rotates over your left hand.

Now the club is in parallel position on the other side of your body—the exact opposite of Position One. Just as the back of your left hand and the clubface pointed away from your body at Position One, the back of your right hand and the back of the clubhead are now matched in the other parallel position—both aimed away from your body.

Now as your arms swing up and over your left shoulder, look into the mirror at what happens. Check the back of your right hand. It should be square to your right wrist and back of your forearm at the top of the follow-through, just as the back of your left hand was square to your wrist and forearm in Position Two (Photo 7.10).

Players who draw or hook the ball almost always finish with their right hand square to their wrist. Players who slice the ball almost always finish with their right hand bent back toward their wrist, cre-





Photo 7.10 The follow-through is a mirror image of the backswing. The back of the right hand is on plane, and the right hand matches the angle of the clubhead. This type of finish predominates among players who hook the ball.



ating a cupped appearance (Photo 7.11). Recall from Chapter 6 that players who cup their left wrist at Position Two almost always hit a slice.

Those are good indicators to look for in a fundamentally sound finish. Here are a few more. In terms of your balance, you want your weight to shift from primarily your right side during Position One, Position Two, and the start of the downswing to primarily your left side at the finish (from left side to right side for left-handers). Unlike what you may have heard or read, you don't have to finish with your right toe pointing into the ground and your right heel sticking straight in the air. All you need to do is pivot off the right foot.

Also at the finish, the angle of the club should be such that if you look into the mirror from the front view, the club shaft should be



Photo 7.11 A cupped right hand on the finish is the finish of a person who predominantly slices the ball.



behind your head, giving the appearance that it is entering your left ear and exiting your right, like an arrow. Now that's a stylish finish. "Posing" is the catchword many golfers use to describe someone who has just hit a great shot and is frozen in the follow-through, confidently waiting for the ball to land exactly where it was aimed.

Until you feel totally comfortable with Position One, Position Two, and the downswing, it will take a little time and rehearsal before you can impress your buddies with a round peppered with birdies. But until then, you will at least look like you know what you are doing—not only at the finish, but also during your takeaway, backswing, and downswing.

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BREAK OUT THE CLUBS

After seven chapters, two positions, numerous drills, and various poses in front of the mirror, you may have noticed that you have worked predominantly with one golf club: the seven-iron. By now you probably are wondering, “Will I ever hit another club?” and “Does the Position One–Position Two method apply to every club, including fairway metals and the driver?” The answer to both questions is, “Absolutely.”

I recommend that students, particularly beginners and novices, start with a seven-iron. The seven-iron has enough loft to help get the ball airborne, yet the face of the club is flat enough so that when you generate club speed, there is curvature in the ball flight. I have always believed that beginners and novices should stay with the seven-iron until they have experienced consistent success with it. Also, those students should hit off of tees until they can brush the tee nearly 100 percent of the time without taking too much turf or topping the ball.

By now I’m sure you have made progress with the seven-iron. Ideally, you have launched a few shots that started your adrenaline flowing and created excitement and anticipation for taking the next step. So in this chapter, you are going to gradually work your way through

most of the other clubs in your bag, from fairway metals to wedges. Although I explain why the widely varied club-shaft lengths will require making minor setup and ball-position adjustments, Position One and Position Two fundamentally remain unchanged.

But if you are a beginner or novice, even if you are brushing the tees somewhat consistently, I recommend that you continue to hit off of tees until you become comfortable and consistent with all of your clubs. You have worked so hard to improve your execution and knowledge while raising your confidence and comfort levels that attempting to hit balls off the ground too soon can be counterproductive, both fundamentally and psychologically.

When you hit too much turf on your downswing, it can jar your elbows and wrists. In my experience with beginners and novices, even if they hit too much turf only once in every five or ten swings, they tend to start flinching during the downswing. They pull in their arms, raise their head and upper body, or don't follow through on their swing. That does not promote confidence. Nor does topping the ball—or whiffing the club over the top of it—once every five or ten swings.

You don't want to pick up bad habits at any time—particularly not this early in your development. So continue to focus on the process—grip, posture, Position One, Position Two, downswing, follow-through—without overly focusing on the results.

Let's keep the ball on the tee, enjoy and appreciate those great shots, and continue to bolster your knowledge, confidence, and skill level. Don't worry, you will be hitting off the ground soon enough, and by then your swing will be so finely tuned that the transition will be easy.

Work Your Way Down

Once students become comfortable hitting a seven-iron, I generally have them transition to a six-iron and then a five-iron. You will find

there isn't a dramatic difference in the three clubs other than that the six-iron and five-iron have slightly longer shafts, weigh slightly more, and have clubheads with a straighter face. The main thing to keep in mind when hitting the six-iron and five-iron is that from a technique standpoint, everything basically remains the same. Mostly, it is a matter of getting used to standing slightly farther from the ball because you are using a longer club.

Still, the butt end of the club is the same distance from your body as with the seven-iron or any other club. Remember the fist rule that I discussed in Chapter 3? At address, you should be able to make a fist and pass it through the space between the end of the club and your belt line, and between the club and your thighs (Photo 8.1). If you have more than a two-fist separation, you will have to stretch your arms to reach the ball, making it extremely difficult to relax your hands, wrists, and arms during the takeaway and backswing. That will make it extremely difficult to execute a proper wrist cock. It also will cause your plane, the angle at which the club travels during the backswing and downswing, to be too vertical.

As a teacher who spends approximately 1,500 hours giving lessons per year, I can tell you that 90 percent of beginners and novices stand too far from the ball. But if you simply make sure you have an approximately one-fist separation, none of these problems will occur. Remember what Byron Nelson said: "You cannot stand too close to the ball."

Also recall something else I discussed in Chapter 3: ball position. I recommend that beginner, novice, and intermediate players position the ball in the middle of their stance, or perhaps an inch or two behind center, when hitting an eight-iron, nine-iron, or wedge.

When hitting the three-iron, four-iron, five-iron, six-iron, seven-iron, five-metal, or seven-metal, they should move the ball forward in their stance by roughly the width of a ball. For the three-metal, five-metal, or driver, they should move it forward another ball width (Photos 8.2 and 8.3).





Photo 8.1 At address, you should be able to make a fist and move it from your left to right thigh without touching the club. You should have just enough space to do this.



As you transition from the seven-iron, to the six-iron, to the five-iron, patience is the key. Take the time to go through your steps: grip, posture and setup, Position One, Position Two, downswing, and follow-through. Start at three-quarters speed and gradually work up to full swings. It simply takes time to get used to swinging a slightly longer club, but you will find that the two-position approach is equally simple and effective with different clubs as with a seven-iron.

If you progress to the point where you hit the five-iron successfully and consistently, go ahead and try the four-iron. For beginners and novices, however, I recommend not carrying anything lower than a four-iron in your bag. Since beginners and novices generally have slower swing speeds, even a four-iron can be difficult to hit con-



Photo 8.2 Address position using a three-metal, seven-iron, and nine-iron. The distance you stand from the ball should vary with each club, but the hand position remains the same.

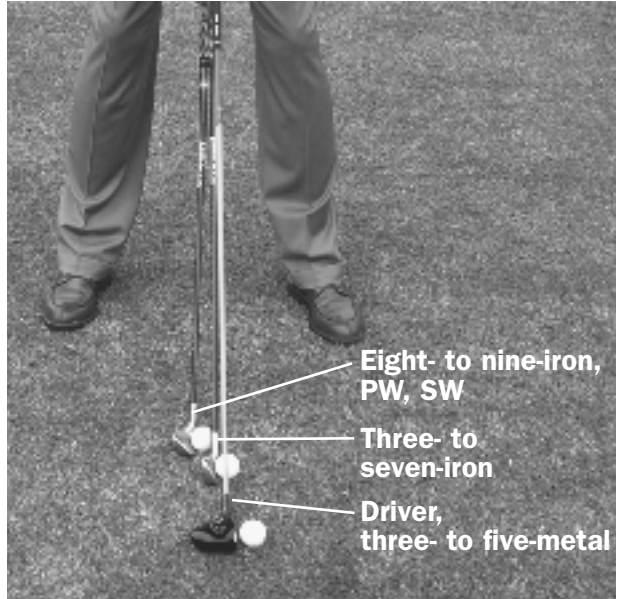


Photo 8.3 Using a three-metal, five-iron, and nine-iron, here are the three ball positions you should focus on. Driver and three-metal to five-metal: just left of sternum; three-iron to seven-iron: one ball width to the right of the metals; eight to nine, pitching wedge (PW), sand wedge (SW) iron: one ball width to the right of the three- to seven-iron.

sistently well. You may be better off hitting a seven-wood instead of a four-iron, and a five-wood rather than a three-iron.

They're Just Metals

It is only natural, especially for beginners and novices, to be somewhat intimidated by the thought of hitting a fairway metal. First of all, you notice obvious differences as soon as you pick up the club. It is much longer and has more mass. When beginners and novices first make the transition from irons to metal woods, their first

thought often is, “Wow, I’m not even sure I can swing this club, much less get the clubhead on the ball.”

If you are a beginner or novice, I suggest you start with a four-metal, five-metal, or seven-metal. If you are an intermediate or advanced player, you probably have the ability and experience to start with a three-metal, but you might as well begin with a four-metal or five-metal. You will get to your three-metal and driver soon enough.

As in the case of hitting long irons, the most important thing to do is to stay patient. No matter what level you are at, it’s not a good idea to just step up and start whacking balls off a tee. Start without a ball, cocking your wrists to create the L at Position One. Brush the tee a few times from Position One. Take it to Position Two and again, work on brushing the tee. During the backswing, downswing, and follow-through, using a metal wood feels much different from swinging an iron.

Since it is a much longer club, the arc of the swing is wider. Your arms are the same distance from your body (remember the one-fist rule); however, they feel like they are farther away because of the club’s length. But you know what? As you improve and start hitting fairway metal shots flush on the clubface, you come to realize the benefit of having a longer club with more mass and a bigger arc. Namely, you hit the ball a heck of a lot farther.

The following sections address things to keep in mind when hitting fairway metals.

Plane

When you use a longer club, your plane is flatter, even when you are at address. Why? Because you are standing farther from the ball. When you take the club back to Position Two, the plane is even flatter. Even though the takeaway, backswing, and downswing are fun-



damentally the same, they almost feel like a baseball swing because the club travels at a flatter angle.

No Divots

Notice that when you swing a mid- to high iron (five-iron to wedge), you are much more likely to brush turf along with the tee. The reason is the shorter the club, the steeper the plane. In other words, the club comes down at a sharper angle during the downswing.

With a longer club like a fairway metal or four-iron, you really don't want to brush much ground. You want to brush the tee. And when you eventually start hitting fairway metals and long irons without a tee, you still don't want to brush much ground. If you do brush the ground, then the club is coming in too steeply and you'll probably hit a slice.

Patience

Because you are using a longer club with more mass, you may feel that your arms are traveling a little slower during the downswing and become worried that you are losing valuable speed and thus, power. In reality, this is not a source of concern. For now, focus on making sure the downswing is on the same path as the takeaway and backswing, and on getting the clubface square to the ball at impact.

If you hit the ball square and in the middle of the clubface, I assure you it will go as far as you need it to. And as you become more comfortable swinging a fairway metal, your club speed will increase, probably without you even realizing it. Even though you are hitting a longer club with a larger clubhead, the club is actually lighter than your irons. There is no question that, scientifically, you will swing fairway metals and drivers faster than you swing irons. It's just a little awkward at first.



Inconsistency

You have spent a considerable amount of time hitting a seven-iron and executing many drills with it, so realize that it will take at least as long to develop the same consistency with fairway metals. Don't be concerned if, at first, half of your fairway metal shots are dead straight and long and the other half go dead right or left. A wider arc means more margin for error. Also, it takes longer to master the timing with a longer club. But once you do, it really becomes second nature, just like hitting a seven-iron.

Stay with the Plan

When inexperienced players initially struggle with fairway metals, they sometimes conclude that they simply can't hit the club. They start improvising and looking for shortcuts. They might change their grip. Or they might alter their takeaway and backswing.

Improvising is the worst mistake you can make. If you hit a string of poor shots, retrace your steps, rehearse Position One and Position Two, and get back on track. If you stay with the plan, you will be much more consistent in the long run. Improvise with fairway metals and you may develop poor habits, not only with those clubs, but also with iron shots. Suddenly you have wasted all your hard work.

Don't Use a Driver, Yet

If you are a beginner or novice, I recommend that you don't hit a driver, even on the practice tee, until after you are comfortable and confident with the rest of your fairway metals. The driver is by far the most difficult club to master, no matter what swing philosophy you subscribe to, because the club has such minimal loft.



The average driver has nine to ten degrees of loft, which means that you are more likely to influence sidespin than backspin on the ball. A three-metal has twelve to fifteen degrees, a four-metal fifteen to seventeen degrees, a five-metal seventeen to twenty degrees, and so on. The more loft you have, the more backspin. The more backspin there is on the ball, the more up and down it will fly with less deviation to the left or right. That is why tour players hit three-metals or long irons off the tee when a hole has a narrow fairway. Reaching for the club with more loft allows them more margin of error and a higher probability of hitting the fairway.

Remember, your goal is to build knowledge, consistency, and confidence. Once you take your game from the practice tee to the course, tee off with a three-metal at most. And for goodness sake, play from the forward tees. Don't put yourself at a disadvantage before you even get out of the gate. You will know when you are ready to graduate to a driver.



Don't Overlook or Underestimate the Little Clubs

Of course, the opposite extreme of transitioning to longer irons and fairway metals is learning how to hit shorter irons and wedges. Actually, once you start hitting eight-irons and nine-irons on the practice tee, you will find they don't differ significantly from hitting a seven-iron. Hitting wedges, however, certainly requires some adjustments.

The first thing you will notice is that because the club is so much shorter, you must stand much closer to the ball. Keep in mind, though, that fist measurement still determines the distance between the butt of the club and your belt buckle and thighs.

Since wedges are shorter, you also have to bend over a little more. The more you bend, the more vertical your plane gets. For even though the club is short, it still has to brush the tee and the correct amount of turf. When hitting wedges, many beginners and novices have difficulty maintaining their spine angle from Position One to Position Two and through the downswing. They aren't used to bending over that far at address, so when they bring the club back, they subconsciously return to the body tilt they use when hitting, for instance, a seven-iron.

Aside from adjusting to a more vertical plane and having to bend over more, one of the biggest hurdles inexperienced players confront when hitting wedge shots is a psychological one. Once beginners and novices move from the practice tee to the course, they are caught off guard by how often they find themselves twenty to eighty yards from the green. Such shots aren't of the type they normally practice, so sometimes they panic.

There are two types of golf swings: the full swing and the chip shot. The full swing entails bringing the club all the way back and executing a full follow-through; a chip shot is what you hit from just off the green to bump-and-run the ball to the hole. Some players confuse pitch shots with chip shots. But pitch shots fundamentally are just like hitting a full iron shot except you don't take the backswing all the way to the top. This type of shot is perfect for Position One and Position Two because the method easily allows you to adjust the backswing to whichever point is needed for the desired distance.

Very few players, even intermediate and advanced players, bother to rehearse pitch shots. But as you prepare to take your new swing from the practice tee to the course, discipline yourself to practice pitch shots. Then you won't enter panic mode when you find yourself fifty yards from the hole with a bunker in front of the green and water on the right.

The following sections describe a few things to keep in mind about wedge play.

Don't Change

Just because the wedge is a shorter shot that may require a shorter backswing does not mean you change your mechanics. In fact, since you are standing closer to the ball and have a more vertical plane, it is even more important that you retrace and rehearse your steps. Go to Position One, brush the tee a few times. Go to Position Two and do the same. You also need to take some full practice swings to remind yourself and train your body to maintain the more tilted spine angle (Photos 8.4–8.6).



Photo 8.4 With wedges, you stand closer to the ball and bend more from your waist.

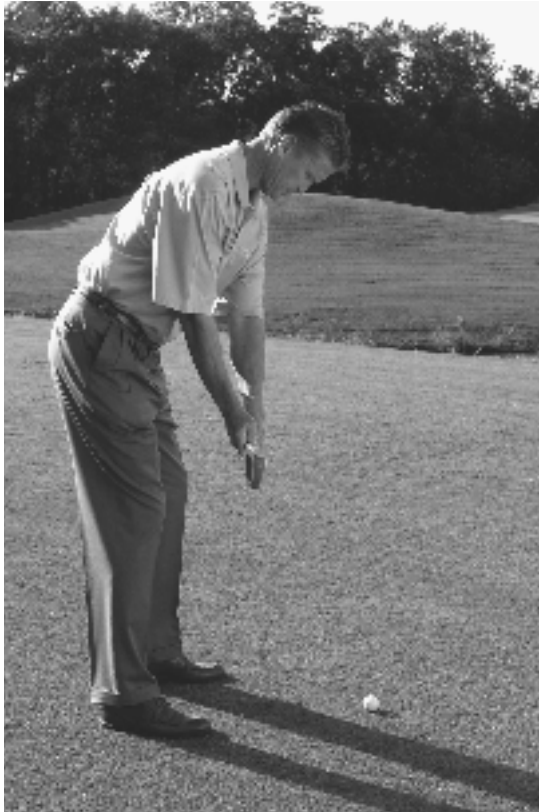


Photo 8.5 Position One is no different with a wedge than with any other club.



Watch the Pros

If you start to feel sheepish about taking more time to hit pitch shots, just watch a tour event. Tour players often take six or seven more practice swings before a pitch shot than before any other kind of shot.

When you think about it, it makes a lot of sense. More than likely, they just hit a big drive to leave a pitch shot or a full sand wedge from the green. Now they are swinging a shorter and heavier club. So they take extra practice swings to make sure they are taking the club back the correct distance and brushing the right amount of turf. There is a reason why pros have uncannily short games. They real-



Photo 8.6 Position Two remains the same with a wedge—the only difference being the plane is steeper because you have more upper body tilt due to the club being shorter.



ize how crucial the short game is to shooting low scores, so they practice.

Learn Your Distances

If you are a beginner or novice, you probably don't carry three or four wedges in your bag like some intermediate and advanced players do. For example, there are sand wedges, lob wedges, and wedges that vary in angles, ranging from the forties to the low sixties. However many wedges you have, practice with them enough so that you know how far you typically hit them. Depending on your ability level, you may hit one type of wedge 70 yards and another type 120

yards. Pros are so dialed in to their swings that they know exactly how far they hit each of their wedges. Learning your capabilities and limitations will help you immensely.

I have noticed that recreational golfers try to hit wedge shots a lot farther than they actually can. Great players never max out with their swing speed. They always remain at roughly 80 percent. Why? At this speed it is easier to keep everything sequenced—arms, wrists, shoulders, body, and most important, the club.

So whichever club you are using, make sure you swing at a speed that allows you to remain sequenced. When you are hitting wedges, the objective isn't distance, but accuracy. I can't stress that enough. There is a reason why most tour players carry three to four wedges in their bags. Those are their precision clubs—in other words, their money clubs. Typically, they carry forty-eight-degree, fifty-two-degree, and fifty-six-degree wedges, and sometimes a sixty-degree wedge.



Practice with Purpose

As mentioned earlier, many players don't have time, or don't bother, to practice wedge shots and pitches. But the longer you play golf, the more you will come to realize how many strokes you will save if you can consistently get the ball up and down from inside 100 yards.

COACHING YOURSELF

You have come to the last chapter, but by no means is this the end of your golf education. As Byron Nelson taught us, the learning continues for as long as you play the game. My sincere hope is that *Two Steps to a Perfect Golf Swing* takes your game and enjoyment to new levels—whether you are new to the sport or an eight-handicapper looking to shave a few extra strokes.

When I conceived the idea for this book, my objectives remained much the same as they have been during my fifteen years as a teaching professional. My purpose has been to

1. Teach a proven, straightforward, two-step method that simplifies one of sports' most difficult skills
2. Enhance your ability to learn and execute Position One and Position Two by focusing on fundamentals such as grip, posture and setup, downswing, and follow-through
3. Boil down the equivalent of weeks or months of lessons into an easy-to-navigate book that you can refer to for years to

come. Perhaps it will be one chapter, one swing thought, or one photograph that will relight that bulb in your head: “Oh, yeah, now I remember. Now I know what I’m doing wrong.”

4. Increase your knowledge of the swing so that like Troy Aikman, you can become your own teacher

The importance of the fourth objective cannot be emphasized enough, which is why this chapter is devoted to looking ahead. As a golf teacher, I can’t help but feel a little like a mother bird who knows she has to nudge her hatchlings out of the nest so they can learn how to fly. But I also want to make sure my students don’t enter the golf world with a hard thud. So in this chapter, I will help you transfer your game from the practice tee to the golf course and in turn, convert each hole into a practice opportunity.

Realizing that many of you have families, jobs, and limited spare time, I will discuss the importance of having a practice plan, as well as how to refine and maximize your practice tee sessions. And because golf is a game of ups and downs and frequent tweaking, I will talk about the importance of knowing your swing and your ball flight, which greatly improves your ability to self-diagnose: “Why does the ball go right? Why does it go left? How do I fix the problem?”

One of the most valuable aspects of the two-position method is that the key answers are ingrained in your thought process or at the very least, are at your fingertips. I know from experience that when I give a private lesson, the average student retains roughly 10 percent of what he or she hears. My goal, then, is to make sure the student thoroughly understands 90 percent of what he or she retains. That is why the two-position method is boiled down to the simplest terms, into easy-to-learn steps that are also easily retraced. The great thing is you can retrace them in your mind, on the practice tee, or even on the course, which is where most golfers find it difficult to make adjustments.



Taking It to the Course

Golfers, especially those new to the game, have a misconception that it's easy to take their game from the practice tee to the course. At least that is what they think until they get to the number one tee box.

What they don't take into account is that most driving ranges are 100 yards wide. It's difficult for them to get a true gauge of how well or poorly they're hitting the ball, or of their consistency level. None of their shots spin out of bounds or splash in water, so they get lulled into a false sense of security. Then they get to the course, hit a few shots from the practice tee while joking with their buddies, take a couple of practice putts, and go to the first hole. They tee it up. They look down the first fairway and suddenly, everything changes.

Out of bounds stretches down the right side of the fairway; trees and a bunker loom down the left. The golfers become consumed with what the course presents—they become nervous. They become so engulfed by what is in front of them that they completely forget what they've been working on and what has gotten them that far. This is a natural reaction, especially for those relatively new to the game. But if you carry that type of apprehension onto the course, you have lost the battle and the war.

On many occasions, I have taken students onto the course to help them make the transition. After several sessions of learning the fundamentals, Position One, and Position Two, my message to them has been “OK, now let's take what we have learned and work on it while we're on the golf course.” In the case of beginner and novice players, I have seen time and again how playing the course as an extension of the practice tee speeds their learning curve and increases their enjoyment. But beginners and novices aren't alone. Intermediate and advanced players can benefit from that approach as well.

If you want proof, just watch the best of the best: PGA Tour players. If you are ever fortunate enough to attend a tour event—espe-



cially a major tournament like the U.S. Open, Masters, or PGA Championship—you can really enlighten yourself by going to the course on Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday. Granted, the tournament doesn't start until Thursday, but you can learn a lot about how to improve your own practice habits by watching tour players during their practice rounds.

Tour players use these rounds not only to learn about the course, but also to gauge the state of their games. Sure, the practice tee is where they make swing changes, but the course is where they put those changes to the test and to see how their new ball flight performs in “game conditions.” You will see pros hit two or three shots from the same spot. They will hit their approach shot onto the green, then while walking up, stop short of the green and hit chip shots. Sometimes they purposely aim away from the pin just to see how the ball will react to hitting that part of the green. This is no different from an NFL team working on its two-minute drill during practice, or an NBA team practicing the out-of-bounds play it would use in a game if it trailed by one point with five seconds to play.

The more practicing you do on the course, the more comfortable you will feel the day you are tied on the eighteenth hole in a match with your buddy and you are both, say, 120 yards from the green. If you have practiced that shot more than he has, your chances are better to out-execute him when it counts.

The following sections suggest ways to take your game from the practice tee to the course and in the process, take your practice habits to a new level.

Why Not Play Five?

No rule says your first round of golf has to consist of eighteen holes, or even nine holes. For that matter, even if you are a relatively experienced player, there is no rule against going out and playing five, six, or nine holes. Some golfers simply don't have four or five hours in

which to take off work during the week, or half a Saturday or Sunday to spend away from their families.

There is no doubt that playing five or six holes is more constructive than spending two hours on the practice tee. Obviously, from a financial standpoint you are better off going to a municipal course rather than to a club that charges \$100 per round whether you play six or eighteen holes.

Also, it's important that you go during a time of the day when there aren't many players on the course. That way, especially if you are a beginner or novice, you are less likely to impede the pace of play for others.

Tee It Up

I'm not referring just to tee shots here. Go ahead and use a tee for iron and fairway metal shots, both from the fairway and the rough. That even goes for chip shots.

Golf traditionalists would argue that this breaks the sport's golden rule of "hit the ball where it lies." Believe me, as someone who loves the game and owes his livelihood to it, I value the fact that golf, more than any other sport, is built on honor, integrity, and playing within the rules.

And once you become comfortable with your swing, it goes without saying that you should strictly adhere to the rules. There is no honor, or fun, in shooting ninety-nine or eighty-nine or seventy-nine for the first time while knowing in your heart that you took a couple of mulligans or kicked your ball from behind a tree while your playing partners weren't looking.

But when you are learning the game, the objective is to have fun and improve in the process. You are not playing in the U.S. Open. Until you start brushing the tee out of the ground every time, you aren't ready to put the ball on the ground. I can't count the number of times I have recommended to students that they tee up all their



shots, and then had them come back to me and say, “That was the most enjoyable round I have ever played.”

Focus on the Process

Too many players get on the course and become obsessed with their score. They make a seven on the first hole and fret that their round has been ruined or that they are slowing down their playing partners or the group behind. The next thing you know, these players are consumed about chasing one white ball around the course rather than having fun. They focus so hard on the outcome that they forget about the process.

When you forget about the process, especially if you are a beginner, you might as well walk off the course then and there, because you’re doomed to a day full of lousy shots. Take your time. If you hit a poor shot, get up to the next one and go through the steps: (1) grip, (2) posture and setup, (3) Position One, (4) Position Two, (5) downswing, (6) brush the tee, and (7) follow-through. Rather than allowing your head to fill with thoughts like, “Gosh, I hope I don’t go in the water,” or “Keep it away from that bunker,” or “I have to get it onto the green,” concentrate on the process. The more often you focus on the process, the quicker the process becomes routine. Soon your swing and ball flight are taking shape, and the next thing you know, your ball is on the green and you barely noticed the bunker it cleared to get there.

Hit Multiple Balls

Again, make sure you go to the course during a time when there aren’t many players. Put three balls in your pocket, tee off on the first hole, and when you get to your tee shot, drop the other three balls



nearby. Tee up each of the balls. Now all of a sudden, it's target practice. There is no pressure of knocking the first shot onto the green, or even the second, third, or fourth. All you should focus on is making four good swings and trying to go four for four in brushing the tees.

What you are doing is taking a practice segment to the playing field. Instead of a 100-yard-wide fairway with a couple dozen flags spread all over the place and no green to aim at, you have a finite putting surface with one flag and one hole. You have created a "game situation" and the fun part is you have four swings at it. To equate it to basketball, going from the practice tee to practicing on the course is like going from a layup drill to a full-court scrimmage.

Let's say on the next hole your approach shot is from 150 yards. There is nothing wrong with hitting that iron shot and then on the way to the green, stopping and hitting a wedge from 100 yards. Then like the pros, you can hit some chip shots when you get near the green. As long as you aren't holding up play behind you, you can use each hole, with its distinct challenges, as a new practice opportunity.



Helping Eyes

When I was head instructor at Carmel Valley Ranch, I gave lessons to many couples. If your significant other plays golf, I encourage you to have him or her come to the practice tee and watch you work on Position One, Position Two, and the fundamentals. It's always good to have a second pair of educated eyes. You would be surprised how many of the wives I taught at Carmel Valley knew their husbands' ball flights and swing tendencies equally as well, if not better, than the husbands did. You would also be surprised how many husbands and wives who play together for a long time develop very similar swings.

Monitor Yourself

The longer you play, the more important it becomes to learn how to coach yourself. Lessons are a good idea for beginners and novices, but your instructor won't be with you when you are playing a match with your friends and you suddenly start hitting pull hooks on the back nine. Although you will always have this book as a reference, I doubt that your playing partners would understand if you stopped in the middle of the fairway, pulled out the book, and said: "Hold on, guys. There is something I need to look up about Position One in Chapter 5."

The reality is you will have plenty of days where you will struggle. That's part of golf. There will always be elements of your swing that you execute well, but you'll also have some that you never quite master and that need constant monitoring. That is why it is so important for you to know your strengths and weaknesses and your normal ball flight. For instance, if you usually hit the ball fairly straight, but all of a sudden your shots start drifting to the right, you need to be able to recognize and know how to correct the problem.

It's no accident that you see tour players rehearsing their swing or checking their swing positions during a round. They are so in tune with their swing that they probably noticed a slight flaw during their previous shot. A prime example is Tiger Woods. The average fan may not always know when Tiger's swing is out of sync, because he can struggle and still shoot a sixty-eight. But if you watch him between shots and see him off to the side taking practice swings twelve to fifteen inches above the ground and working his arms in front of his body on the downswing, you know he isn't satisfied with his swing.

When Tiger struggles, it's usually from getting the club a little too far behind his body on the downswing, which causes his ball flight to be high and right, or sometimes even a snap hook. He not only knows that but also understands why it happens and how to correct it. Taking rehearsal swings above the ground is Tiger's way of giv-



ing himself a mental and physical reminder that he needs to make his plane slightly flatter and his backswing more rounded. It also reminds him that he needs to hold his shoulders and work his arms in front of his body on the downswing. Of course, all of this seems complicated to the average golfer. That is why Tiger is the number one golfer in the world.

You have a long way to go to become as knowledgeable about your swing as Tiger Woods is of his, but the good news is you already know how to rehearse your swing during a round. Just step back, get into your setup, take the club to Position One, take it to Position Two, make sure your arms start your downswing, and then brush the ground and swing through.

Moment of Truth

Understanding your swing and knowing your ball flight are two key pieces of the puzzle. The third is to gain an understanding of what happens at the point of impact—at the bottom of your swing. Or as I often refer to it, the moment of truth.

I call it that because the point of impact tells you the truth about what is happening in your swing. At the point of impact, the club will either take too much turf, not enough turf, or just the right amount. The amount of turf your club takes indicates whether your swing plane is too vertical, too flat, or just right. And virtually 100 percent of the time, the amount of turf you take has a direct correlation with whether your ball flight slices, hooks, or travels fairly straight.

Recall that in Chapter 3 I discussed the three areas in which your swing can bottom out: the low point, which is toward the back of your stance; the high point, which is toward the front of your stance; and the midpoint, which is self-explanatory. Players who draw the ball usually bottom out the club toward the low point of the swing. That means the club travels on a path that starts inside the ball posi-



tion, remains inside the ball position on the downswing, and strikes the inside portion of the ball. If you are a right-handed player, hitting the inside of the ball causes it to start to the right and curve to the left. Players who hit a lot of slices tend to bottom out the club toward the high point of the swing. That means the path of the club starts from outside the ball position and moves back to the inside during the downswing, causing you to hit across the ball. The sidespin causes the ball to curve away from the toe of the club.

With these factors in mind, let's review the most common golf problems, which swing flaws generally cause those problems, and how to correct them.

Problem One: Taking Too Much Turf

CAUSES: Either your plane is too vertical or you are lowering your upper body during the downswing.

SOLUTIONS: This is one of golf's most common and misdiagnosed problems. If you are playing with a buddy and he notices you hitting a lot of fat shots, he might say, "Hey, raise your upper body a little during the downswing." The detrimental thing about that type of advice is that it's reactionary. What you are doing is stacking a mistake on top of a mistake. If you correct every error with another error, pretty soon they'll be stacked so high that it will take a miracle to unpile them.

If you are taking too much turf, the first thing you need to do is retrace your steps. Go to Position One, then go to Position Two, and then allow your arms to start your downswing. If you realize you weren't starting the downswing with your arms, there is a good chance you were lowering your shoulder or upper body.

If you realize your plane is too steep, go back, get in front of a mirror if possible, and carefully check each step of your swing. On the takeaway, make sure you keep the club out in front of you. If you bring it back too low and inside, the clubhead rises too steeply.



Also, take the club back to Position Two and go through the menu of checkpoints that I discussed in Chapter 6. For instance, one of them is to lay a club across the inside of your elbows to make sure they are level. If you are a right-handed player and the club is tilted to the left, it means your right elbow is too high and indeed, your plane is too vertical.

Problem Two: Hitting Slices

CAUSES: Your plane is too vertical or you are bottoming out the club toward the high point of your swing. In other words, the club is brushing the ground toward the front of your stance.

SOLUTIONS: If most of your shots are slices, you are hardly alone. About 90 percent of amateur golfers hit mostly slices. Most players who have double-digit handicaps are slicers.

The quick fix, your buddies might tell you, is to strengthen your grip by moving your left hand (if you are a right-handed player) well over the top of the club. The theory is, “Hey, if I’m slicing the ball thirty yards to the right, let’s put thirty yards of hook in my grip.”

That’s unwise because again, you are stacking a mistake on top of a mistake without getting to the root of the problem. What happens if pronounced slices creep back into your game? You can only strengthen your grip so much.

If you are slicing shots, the first thing you should do is check your ball position. Many players tend to place the ball too far forward in their stance, believing that it makes it easier to get their shoulders behind the ball on their backswing, thereby adding power and distance. Actually, having the ball too far forward makes slices even more pronounced. Since the golf swing is somewhat circular, like a baseball or tennis swing, your club is likely to cut across the ball if the ball is positioned too far forward.

If your ball position is correct and you are still slicing shots, the next step is to go back to Position One and Position Two to see why

your plane is too vertical. Remember, you want to make sure you aren't bringing the club back too low and inside. And go through the Position Two checklist: Are your hands in front of your sternum at the top of the backswing? Is the back of your left hand square to the back of your forearm? Is the back of your left hand pointing in the same direction as the clubface?

If you start consistently hitting slices during a round, I suggest you borrow Tiger Woods's approach to the backswing. Go through Position One, Position Two, and the downswing, but do so while keeping the clubhead about a foot off the ground. That will help give you the proper feel of a flatter, more rounded backswing, instead of one that comes in at too sharp an angle and cuts across the ball.

Problem Three: Topping Shots

CAUSES: You are raising your shoulders and body during your backswing or your plane is too flat.

SOLUTIONS: If topping shots becomes a frequent problem, it's definitely time to go back in front of the mirror. Go through your swing steps, carefully checking to make sure you aren't raising your upper body during the backswing or downswing. Many recreational players start pulling up little by little and don't even know it. This can be from taking too much turf too many times, which jars the wrists and elbows and causes players to flinch or pull up during the downswing.

Another potential cause is that your plane is too flat. Go to Position Two and lay a club across the inside of your elbows. If you are a right-handed player and your left elbow is raised, causing the club to tilt to the right, then your plane is too flat, which causes you to hit the top portion of the ball during the downswing. If that is the case, you need to retrace and rehearse all of your steps until you get back on plane.



The final cause is losing the width on your backswing. Remember, at address your hands are a particular distance from your shoulders. You must maintain this width on your backswing.

Have a Plan

Elevating your game takes a lot of work, no matter your level of ability. Improving from an eight-handicap to a five requires just as much time and persistence as improving from a twenty-five-handicap to a fifteen. But as much as it requires work, it also requires thought. Change happens when you think about it the most. If you think about your swing ten times in a week, even though you might only get to the practice tee once, change is much more likely to happen than if you think about your swing just once.

Realizing that time is a precious commodity, it's helpful to know that there are ways to improve without spending ten or fifteen hours a week on the practice tee and the course. When I coached junior college golf for five years in California, I quickly learned that there simply aren't enough daylight hours when you are working with kids who have varied class, homework, and social schedules. The team lived in a five-bedroom house. We built a makeshift indoor "swing room" that included mirrors, mats, a hitting net, and video equipment so players could work on their swings at night, or when they had only limited time between classes and homework.

You can incorporate the same approach to your game, to whatever degree your free time and living space allow. For instance, while getting dressed to go to work, perhaps you can spend five minutes going through Position One and Position Two in front of the mirror, even if you have to do so without a golf club. Anyone who is great at what he or she does takes the time and effort to rehearse and polish his or her craft. Entertainers go through vocal exercises, spend



time in the studio, and work on their dance steps. Ballerinas spend hours in front of mirrors rehearsing their positions.

And when you can carve out the time to go to the practice tee, make sure you are organized. Streamline your time on the tee and focus on the areas you need to improve the most. I can tell you this: the reason many players don't practice is they don't know what to work on, much less how to go about it. They go to the practice tee without a plan, hit poor shot after poor shot, and become frustrated.

Let's say you have an hour to spend on the practice tee. I would suggest a routine along the following lines: Put some tees in the ground. Spend two or three minutes going through Position One and Position Two, make sure you are maintaining the L, and brush the tees. Start hitting balls with a lofted club such as a nine-iron, and then work your way down to a five-iron or four-iron, spending about five minutes with each club. Then move on to the fairway metals. If you are having problems with a certain club, by all means spend a few extra minutes with that club. But don't become so obsessed with one club that you don't leave enough time to hit at least a few balls with your other clubs. And don't forget to spend a few minutes with your wedges. Your score will reflect your attention to that key part of your game.

Last, but equally important, make sure you set goals. When you reach those goals, set more goals. Always give yourself a dangling carrot, something toward which to strive, a little added motivation. Perhaps your goal is to break 100, or 90, or 80. In Troy Aikman's case, we decided that a good goal for him would be to eliminate one double bogey on the front nine and one double bogey on the back nine. By doing that, he would shave four strokes off of his handicap.

That was a pretty lofty goal, but you know what? He did it. Then he set more goals. Within a year, he went from a player who used to shoot in the mid- to low eighties to one who shot consistently in the mid-seventies. Troy said taking that approach was natural because it reminded him of his early days with the Dallas Cowboys. The phi-

losophy of his coach, Jimmy Johnson, when entering every game was that whichever team did the best job of limiting its disasters would win.

I don't claim to be Jimmy Johnson or Red Auerbach or Joe Torre, but I have full confidence that *Two Steps to a Perfect Golf Swing* has placed you on the right track. And just as important, it has provided you the tools you need—fundamentals, knowledge, and a simple two-step swing method—to remain on course for years or decades to come. Even if you aren't blessed with abundant natural athletic ability, you now have the best substitute: a thorough and well-rounded skill set. Believe me, I have seen it happen. Knowledge *can* translate into skill.

And don't forget: now you not only have the knowledge to coach yourself, but also a reference book that you can use for the rest of your life. No matter what, you have a foundation, which is something that many golfers never acquire. Your foundation is called Position One and Position Two. Most important, you now have everything you need to go out and make your golf game what it's supposed to be above all: fun.



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APPENDIX

IT'S A GAME OF THREES

I often tell students that golf is a game of threes. In fact, I often use that as a teaching tool. I have found that when students realize that most factors and results of the golf swing are limited to three possibilities, it helps streamline and simplify the learning process.

And there is even better news. In some cases, a golfer doesn't necessarily have to get it exactly right. As a teacher, I'm usually satisfied if the student falls within two of the three categories, as long as he or she errs in the correct direction.

Here are some examples of how golf is a game of threes.

The Grip

It is either neutral, or too strong, or too weak. If you err, do so toward the strong side. But if you are a right-handed player, make sure your left thumb doesn't exceed the two o'clock position.

Body Tilt

During the takeaway and backswing, you either maintain the original spine angle, or raise your upper body, or lower your upper body. Make sure you maintain the original angle.

Weight

You are either on the balls of your feet, or on your heels, or on your toes. In this case, don't err. Make sure your weight is on the balls of your feet.

Ball Position

It is either just right, or too far forward, or too far back in your stance. If you err, do so toward the back of your stance.

The Takeaway (Position One)

You either bring the club back on the right path (parallel with your feet line), or too far to the inside, or too much to the outside. If you err, do so slightly to the outside. Bringing it back too much to the inside causes your plane to be too steep and leads to slices.



The Backswing (Position Two)

If you have created the L and turned your shoulders to Position Two, the club is either on the correct plane, or too flat, or too vertical. In this case, it's best to stay on plane.

Width

Your arms are either the correct distance from your body, or they are too close to your body, or they are overextended. Make sure they are the correct distance from your body.

Back of the Left Hand (at Position Two)

It is either square to the back of your forearm, or too cupped (hand bent back toward the back of your forearm), or angled slightly down. I prefer that it be square, but if you err, make sure it isn't cupped.

The Clubface

It is squared at impact, or opening, or closing. You make contact in the center of the club, or the heel, or the toe. Make sure the club is squared at impact and that you strike the ball in the center of the clubface.

Turf

You either take the correct amount, or too much, or none at all. Obviously, you want to take the correct amount, but if you are going to have a miss-hit, you would rather produce a line drive than a fat shot.

Bottoming Out

The swing bottoms out either at the midpoint of your stance, or at the high point (front of your stance), or at the low point (the back of your stance). If you err, you want it to bottom out toward the low point. Players who hit draws tend to bottom out at the low point.



Ball Flight

It is either just right, or too high, or too low. It's fairly straight, or it slices, or it hooks. If you err, better that you hit a slightly lower ball that slightly hooks.



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SHAWN HUMPHRIES'S ULTIMATE GOLF GETAWAY!

OFFICIAL RULES

NO PURCHASE NECESSARY

1. **HOW TO ENTER:** To be entered in "The Ultimate Golf Getaway" you must register at www.shawnhumphries.com. This giveaway is only offered to people living in the United States, including Alaska and Hawaii. You must be 18 years of age or older. Only those registering will be entered into the drawing. "The Ultimate Golf Getaway" drawing will be held, as follows:

Prize Location	Entry Period	Drawing on or about
Sunriver Resort, Sunriver, OR	April 1, 2004 until June 16, 2004	Week of Father's Day, June 20, 2004
Wild Dunes® Resort, Isle of Palms, SC	June 20, 2004 until September 1, 2004	Week of Labor Day, September 6, 2004

You may also enter the sweepstakes by mail. To do so, hand-print your name, address, city, state, ZIP code, and complete e-mail address on a 3½" × 5" piece of paper, insert in a stamped envelope, and mail to the Sponsor of this promotion: On Par Productions, 4020 North MacArthur Blvd., Suite 122-116, Irving, TX 75038, USA. Limit one entry per person per drawing using either the online method or the write-in method. An eligible entry will be included in the applicable drawing per the date such entry was received (in accordance with the chart above). Entries received after the last day of the Entry Period will not be included in the drawing. "Releasees" (as defined below) assume no responsibility for lost, late, illegible, incomplete, damaged, postage due, or misdirected mailed entries, which will be void, or for any problems or technical malfunction of any telephone network or lines, computer equipment, software, failure of any email service, or any combination thereof, including without limitation any damage to entrant's or any other person's computer resulting from participation in this promotion. Entries generated by script, macro, or other automated or mechanical means are void. Any entry information collected from the sweepstakes shall be used only in a manner consistent with the consent given by entrants at the time of the entry, with these Official Rules and with Sponsor's Online Privacy Policy, which can be found at <http://www.shawnhumphries.com/giveaway>. All information collected online and mail-in entries become the property of Sponsor.

2. **ONE (1) PRIZE PER ENTRY PERIOD:** A (three-day) weekend golf package worth US \$2,000. This prize includes hotel accommodations, daily golf, and round-trip air travel for two people to one of Destination Hotels and Resorts properties in the United States, which destination is to be determined by the Sponsor. See locations listed in drawing information. Food, beverages, and other incidentals are not included in the prize. Total of all prizes is \$4,000. Federal, state, provincial, local, and any other applicable taxes in an eligible jurisdiction in connection with prizes are the sole responsibility of the winner. No substitution or transfer of prizes permitted, except by Sponsor who reserves the right to substitute a prize of comparable or greater value.

3. **PRIZE DRAWING:** A potential winner will be selected by OPP on/around the date(s) specified above from among all eligible entries received during the applicable Entry Period. Decisions of Sponsor and the independent judges are final and binding on all issues relating to this sweepstakes. The odds of winning depend upon the total number of eligible entries received by the end of the Entry Period. The drawing will take place at OPP's office in Irving, TX. Winners will be e-mailed and required to fill out an affidavit of eligibility/liability and a publicity release and return same, properly executed, for Sponsor's receipt within 14 days of e-mail notification. If Sponsor is unable to contact the winner by e-mail, or if any winner fails to respond to the prize notification within 14 days of issuance of notification, or if any winner fails to comply with any of the requirements, prize will be forfeited and Sponsor may select an alternate winner for the applicable drawing. By acceptance of prize, winners consent to the use of their name, likeness, and

place of residence for advertising and promotional purposes in any and all media, including online announcements, without additional compensation, except where prohibited by law. Allow 2-3 weeks after verification of winner status for the receipt of prize by mail.

4. **GENERAL CONDITIONS:** By entering, participants without limitation release and hold harmless Sponsor and its affiliates, licensees, parents, franchisees, subsidiaries, advertising, and promotion agencies and their respective employees, officers, directors, shareholders, successors, and assigns (collectively "Releasees") from any and all liability for any injuries, loss, or damage of any kind in connection with participation in this sweepstakes or acceptance or use of any prize. Any issues concerning the validity, interpretation, or enforceability of these Official Rules, or the rights and obligations of entrants and Sponsor, shall be governed by and construed in accordance with the laws of the State of Texas, USA, without giving effect to any conflict of law rules which might find otherwise. If for any reason this sweepstakes is not capable of running as planned or infection by computer virus, bugs, tampering, unauthorized intervention, fraud, technical failures, or any other causes beyond the control of Sponsor corrupt or affect the administration, security, fairness, integrity, or proper conduct of this sweepstakes, Sponsor reserves the right at its sole discretion to disqualify any entrant or to modify, terminate, or suspend, in whole or in part, the sweepstakes. Should the sweepstakes be modified, terminated, or suspended prior to the stated expiration date, notice will be posted on the Shawn Humphries website and Sponsor reserves the right, at its discretion, to award prize from among all eligible, nonsuspect entries received for the applicable drawing. Any attempt to damage the Shawn Humphries site or undermine the legitimate operation of the promotion is a violation of criminal and civil laws. Should such an attempt be made, Sponsor reserves right to prosecute violators to the fullest extent allowable by law.

5. **ELIGIBILITY:** This sweepstakes is open to registered Shawn Humphries' "The Ultimate Golf Getaway" members 18 years of age or older. The prize check will be issued in the winner's name. This promotion is not open to employees of Sponsor or its affiliates, licensees, parents, franchisees, subsidiaries, advertising or promotion agencies, or members of the immediate family member or household of each. In these Rules, "immediate family" means parents, children, siblings, and spouse, regardless of where they reside. All federal, state, and/or local rules and regulation apply. Void where prohibited.

6. **WINNERS LIST:** Winners List will become available approximately 14 days after a drawing date. To obtain, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to: "The Ultimate Golf Getaway," c/o On Par Productions, 4020 North MacArthur Blvd., Suite 122-116, Irving, TX 75038, USA. The Winners List will be available for a period of 90 days after winner(s) are confirmed.

7. **SPONSOR:** On Par Productions, 4020 North MacArthur Blvd. Suite 122-116, Irving, TX 75038, USA. **ADMINISTRATOR:** On Par Productions. This is not a McGraw-Hill promotion.