

Beginning to Putt Your Way to a Better Golf Game

Finally, all your hard work has paid off. You hit the perfect drive, and watched proudly as your ball soared all the way over the fairway. Then, you followed that up with a sublime chip that rolled the ball into an amazing position several yards away from the hole.

Now, all that you need to do is finish it off with a putt, but although the hole seems to be so close, and although everything seems to be going your way... there's still a lot of things that could go wrong.

Putting is, honestly, one of the hardest and most challenging parts in the game of golf.

So even once you're right up there on the green and everything appears to be going great, you could still end up dropping a shot, or two, or even three. And let's face it, no one wants to end up doing that.

To play golf effectively, you need to have mastered as many aspects of the game as possible. It isn't enough to have a great drive, and a pin-point accurate chip. No. You definitely need to also know how to putt.

Why? Well, apart from the obvious reasons, we'll be looking more thoroughly at the importance of putting later on. In fact, we'll be looking at *everything* about putting.

Fine, maybe not exactly everything, but we're certainly going to come close enough. Reason being that with a more solid understanding of the background upon which putting is based, you'll find that more things just seem to 'click' into place.

Learning putting, or any aspect of golf, is something like a gigantic jigsaw puzzle. Before you even stand a chance of completing the jigsaw, you're going to need the individual pieces, and know what they look like so that you can recognize where they'll fit.

Don't worry; it isn't half as complicated as some of those jigsaws with thousands and thousands of pieces.

But a little know how is going to go a very long way towards improving your putt. After that, the club is going to be in your hands, and it's up to you to take whatever you've learnt and put it to practice.

Admittedly, we're getting ahead of ourselves at this juncture. What we should be doing is getting back to the basics, beginning to lay down the foundations of a good putting game. Solid foundations are the key to everything, right?

Anyway, our very first question that we're going to need to discuss is...

“What is Putting?”

It may seem that this answer is really pretty logical, but you'll see why it is significant later on. Promise!

Now the most typical response to this question would simply be to say, “Putting is a type of shot, taken on the green, using a putter.” At least, it would be something similar to that response anyway.

Some may even go so far as to say that it is the final few shots taken once the ball is close to the hole.

Needless to say, all of these types of responses are pretty much correct. But they aren't *entirely* correct, and because they are slightly incorrect, they can cause a lot of confusion for inexperienced beginners.

So what would the correct answer be?

Well, generally speaking it would be best to refer to a putt as simply a shot which intends the ball to roll along the ground. Already, that distinguishes it from every other type of shot out there, bar one, which we'll see soon.

Now, *normally* a putt is made on the green, and using a putter. Normally, but not *always*.

That's where our previous response was lacking, though it must be acknowledged that there are very few occasions where you would want to make a putt when not on the green. However, the second part of that response, about using a putter, is more important.

Frankly speaking, you could attempt to putt with any club at all. On a more serious note however, you should know that there are certain situations where using a club other than the putter will be beneficial.

In a nutshell, don't make too many assumptions about what putting is, and what putting isn't, as well as what putting can and can't accomplish.

Just to round things off, we'd mentioned earlier that there was one other type of shot that also filled the definition of 'rolling the ball along the ground', and this shot is known as the 'lag' shot.

Sharing many qualities with putting, it could even be considered a type of putt, but it is one that is taken from a long distance, and specifically intended to place the ball near the hole, where it can be finished off by a more conventional putt.

Both the putt and the lag are really so similar that when you start to improve one, you automatically form the foundation to improve the other.

Right now, we should both be on the same page regarding what putting actually entails. On top of that, from knowing anything about golf at all, you should also know that everyone is constantly working to improve their putting.

The big question here is: Why?

Importance of Putting in Golf

Even if you know just a little about golf, you will undoubtedly know that every aspect of the game is important in its own way. Failing to perform at any type of shot that is required would mean that you end up being much worse off in terms of score.

Apart from that very obvious reason though, is there anything that distinguishes putting, and makes it even more important?

Well, for one it is unavoidable. As in, *completely* unavoidable. Granted, the same is true of driving, but at the end of the day, putting is always a lot more complicated than driving, for reasons that we will soon cover.

Another way to look at it is to simply observe professionals at play. If you watch these golf matches, you'll notice that they often only manage to get on par by sinking that final putt on the first go.

Why? Well, as you should see while you're watching golf matches, their long-game ends up raising their score. Generally speaking, each green on the golf course is equal to two putts, but by only using up one putt on the green to finish the hole, professionals end up on, or below, par despite maybe dropping a point in their long-game.

In the average golf course, you can expect this to hold true for you as well. Although the long-game is very essential still, the easiest way to lower your score is by working on your short game, and that means: putting!

Due to this fact, i.e. that it is a reliable way to lower your score, putting improvement should become your priority.

Basically, yes, putting is important. More than that though, it is important in helping you to improve your own golf game, as any and all improvements you make in putting will translate onto your score board very well.

But if it is so important, why is it that so many beginners end up going wrong when it comes to putting?

Common Problems Faced When Putting

To put in the blandest terms possible: The biggest problem faced when putting is that the shot misses the hole.

Okay, you knew that already. So the question that we really should be asking is, “What makes a putt miss the target?” And if you can answer that question, then you’ll probably be able to hazard a guess as to what would make the putt *hit* the target.

Depending on the type of putt you’re taking, missing may even actually be expected. Let’s face it, sinking a 40-yard putt is no easy task, even for the best of golfers. However, when you end up missing a 2-yard putt, well, that’s a slightly different story.

Admittedly, even professional golfers miss what appears to be the easiest of putts, but you’ll want to keep such occurrences to a bare minimum.

One of the most infuriating problems is when the putt seems to be going great, and heading right for the hole, only to somehow miss it by a hairsbreadth. While this may be really annoying, it is only a big problem if it is happening consistently.

Many beginner golfers end up eventually realizing that most of their putts that miss, miss in a certain direction. In other words, the putt tends to end up either to the right or left of the hole on a regular basis.

Often, this problem is caused because of a mistake in gauging the ‘target line’. Don’t worry if you don’t know what that means at this juncture, we’ll be looking at it more later on in this guide.

Yet another commonly faced problem is over-accelerating the ball and then watching in dismay as it rolls clear past the hole. Likewise, an equally common problem is under-accelerating the ball and then having it stop just a yard short of the hole.

Either of these problems can be corrected with practice, and a little more technique.

Of course, very few greens are completely flat and even surfaces, and so you’re undoubtedly going to find yourself in situations where you have to putt uphill, or downhill, or even across a raised surface.

Naturally, this ends up affecting the path of your ball, and leads to many a missed putt.

Do you notice a common trend emerging? Well, just like any other shot in golf, putting is affected by numerous factors, and it is when those factors aren't met that problems begin to emerge.

Let us look a little more deeply into the process of putting itself, so that we can better establish areas in which you can improve *your* putt.

Factors That Affect a Putt

When you think about putting, what first pops into mind as a factor that affects it? Let me guess, you probably answered 'the swing' or something like that.

Certainly, every type of golf shot around is affected by the swing, but we're looking to get a little more specific than that. Knowing that your putt is affected by the swing is a good place to start though, so let's take that, and then look at what it is precisely that is affecting the swing itself.

First off, there is obviously the type of golf club used. With putting, this is most often a putter, but as we mentioned earlier, other clubs have been known to be used from time to time and in various specific situations.

What else is there though?

Well, there are the usual suspects, of course. Such things as the grip in which you're holding your club and the stance that you're using also play a role in your swing. Once again, these can, naturally, vary in many ways.

Finally, the motion of the swing itself needs to be considered. While it is true that with putting the backswing and downswing are nowhere near as wide as driving, for instance, they're still going to play important roles in the final result.

With that, we've pretty much covered every aspect of the swing itself. Great, but is there anything else that affects putting?

If you think about what we've already talked about, you'll see that the answer is really staring you right in the face. Don't see it? Do you remember our definition of putting that was discussed earlier?

Just to tweak your memory, here it is roughly: Putting is a shot that rolls the ball along the ground.

Yes, putting is affected by the ground itself. More specifically, it is affected by how you compensate for any variations in the surface of the ground, which would most commonly be slopes.

Being the precise art that it is, putting requires *planning*. And this planning is as big a factor in the success of the putt as the swing. Planning is required, even for the most simple putt, and even more so for the more complicated kinds.

So as you should realize, you're going to need to put as heavy and emphasis on your planning skills as you are on your actual putt.

Anyway, as you can see now, we have established several different areas that are worth working on. Over the next few sections, we're going to be looking at each individually, in a fairly chronological order.

Course, some parts are going to take practice before you actually get them down pat, but that's probably something that you already expected.

Without further delay, let's get to work!

Planning Out a Putt

Before you do anything else as far as putting goes, you need to have a plan. Basically, all that this plan consists of is an idea of how you're going to get the ball from where it is, into the hole that awaits it.

Sounds simple right?

Unfortunately, it isn't really simple at all. Many things affect the path that a ball is going to take, and could end up making your putt go horribly wrong if you don't take them into account. That is why you want to plan it out in the first place – to take account of these factors.

Before we get started, you need to understand that a lot of what you're about to learn will only really come into its own once you get some experience under your belt. There is no shortcut to it.

What we're going to be doing in this guide though, is letting you know everything that you need so that you can get a head start. That way, instead of being completely clueless, you'll have a reference point and be able to actually know what you should be thinking about.

Bearing this in mind, let's kick off our guide into planning out a putt by looking at the factors that you should take into consideration.

Factors That Affect the Path of the Putt

What do you think could change the path of a putt and somehow turn a perfect shot into a terrible miss? We've already mentioned one of these factors previously, but we're going to look at *exactly* how it affects putting now.

Pay close attention, this part is very important!

Surface Slopes

Yes, your putting green is not going to be entirely even, and knowing where the slopes are can help you predict how your ball is going to move. Remember also that slopes can not only alter the path of the ball, but also affect its speed.

If there is a downward slope, the ball is, naturally, going to end up picking up speed, whereas the opposite is true for an upward slope.

When you're hitting into a slope, i.e. the slope is slanted between your ball and the hole, then your ball's path is going to end up curving in the direction of the downhill of that slope. Depending on how steep it is, this could end up being a sharp or gradual curve.

Length and Grain of the Green

Now this is a factor that makes slopes seem like a walk in the park by comparison. As you would expect, no two greens are the exact same length, and depending on how long or short the grass is on the green, your ball would end up going slower or faster respectively.

Similarly, the grain of the green, i.e. how it is cut, also is going to play a role.

If you're hitting your ball against the grain, it is bound to go slower than when you hit your ball with the grain. Of course, trying to tell the grain of the green is very much easier said than done, but it is something that you should at least try.

Professional players tend to touch the green to determine its length and grain, and this could be a habit that is worth cultivating. It may take some time, and experience with several different greens before you can reliably tell the length and grain on touch, but you'll get there eventually.

Having discussed these two main factors that you're going to have to consider when planning your putt, let's move on to developing an actual process that you can use.

Reading the Green

In order to plan out your putt, you're going to have to read the green as accurately as possible. This is, needless to say, the tricky part.

Based on the factors that we just discussed though, you have a decent starting point. Seeing as you know how to determine the length and grain of the green, in theory at least, that's probably the very first thing that you should do.

Even though you probably won't be able to be a hundred percent sure as to how your ball is going to move on the green, at least not until you're more experienced, if you start now, you'll be able to gather that experience a lot faster.

Once you're done with the green itself, it's time to check out the slopes.

Now, there is a very good three-step way to determine the slopes, and you should probably follow it as closely as possible, until you develop your own method or alter it to suit your needs.

First, look at the path between the ball and the hole from behind the ball itself. Mentally make note of any slopes that you see.

Then, go midway between the ball and the hole, and take a look from that point in both directions, i.e. to the ball, and to the hole. Again, make a mental note of any slopes.

Finally, go to the hole itself, and take a look from there to where your ball lies. At this point, you should have a very clear picture of where all the slopes lie, and can therefore start to predict how your ball is going to move against them.

Completing all of this should give you a clear picture of the green, and so all that you need to do is spend a few minutes determining how you want to hit your ball. Yes, it isn't easy until you've gathered experience, but you should at least be able to 'guess' roughly how the ball is going to break against any slopes that lie in its path.

What you're trying to determine, really, include both the direction in which you're going to hit your ball, as well as the speed with which you want to hit it.

If you can accomplish that, even just slightly, then you've already improved your putting ability by acres! Still, there is much more that you can do, as you're about to find out as we move on from section to section.

Choosing the Right Club

What is the 'right' club to use for putting? We'd mentioned earlier that it wasn't necessarily the putter, but if so, what should you be using, and when should you be using some other club?

As far as putting goes, you could use any club that you like, really. And you should definitely be aware that there are no hard and fast rules as to which one is best. In essence, the choice of club tends to vary from person to person.

At your disposal are several options: The wooden putter is by far the most commonly used, and is largely deemed to be the putter of choice. On the other hand, the iron putter offers a firmer alternative, but it tends to keep the ball very close to the ground, and can cause it to be overly affected by any factors that lie there, such as the green's length and grain.

For that reason, instead of an iron putter, some golfers opt to simply use their regular irons for putting.

Honestly, speaking, the choice lies entirely in *your* hands, and the only way you're going to know for sure which one you prefer is to actually experiment with each option. Remember, golf is a game that revolves around feeling as much as it does actual fact.

So the 'right' golf club which you should choose is really simply the one that you feel most comfortable with, and helps you obtain the best results.

See, that wasn't so hard was it? Well, it is going to get a bit tougher now, as we look at the actual pre-swing preparation.

Gripping the Golf Club for the Putt

At this juncture, we've already covered a lot of what putting requires. Not only do you know how to plan out your putt, but you also already have a good idea regarding the golf club options that you could use.

That brings us to our very next topic: Execution of the putt.

But before you learn how exactly to swing your club, you're going to need to know a couple of things, and one of those is how you're going to hold your club. Make no mistake, knowing the right grip is as important as anything else in putting.

Why does the grip play such a crucial role? Well, quite literally it is the focal point on which you're going to be channeling the force of your putt. Basically, any and all control over your putt is going to go through your grip.

So if your grip is not positioned correctly, or worse, then you'll undoubtedly end up with a putt that goes wildly off target.

Sadly, it isn't easy to know the right grip to use, seeing as depending on whom you ask, you're bound to end up with different answers. In a nutshell, there really are *several* grips that could be used for putting.

Instead of confusing you with a whole lot of mumbo jumbo, let's just introduce two of the most popular grips at this point. Don't worry, we *are* going to be looking at how to improve your grip, just not in terms of the type of grip that you can use.

Here are two of the most popular grips for putting:

1. The Reverse Overlap Grip

Despite being regarded as the most traditional and conventional putting grip, that doesn't make it outdated at all. In fact, Tiger Woods uses it, so you shouldn't need much more convincing than that as to its usefulness.

Basically, all that you need to do for this grip is to place your leading hand on the grip, and your trailing hand just below it. Then, lift up the index finger of your leading hand, and point it downwards, over the fingers of your trailing hand.

In this way, you link both your hands together and have greater control.

2. The Cross-Handed Grip

Really, the name itself is pretty self-explanatory, as this grip requires you to cross-hand, or rather, reverse your regular grip.

What that means is that instead of what would normally be your leading hand going on top, it is going to be at the bottom, and what would normally be your trailing hand will be above it instead.

Sounds confusing? Well, just take your golf club and grip it as you would normally. Then, switch your hands.

Simple enough right? After you've done that, just link both hands together by wrapping the index fingers of the upper hand over the lower, and you've completed your cross-handed grip.

Right, so these are the two most popular grips. Granted, there are many other grips that can be used for putting, and if you don't find either of these comfortable, then you should experiment with them.

Bottom line, you're going to just want to find a grip that you're at ease with and feels as natural as possible.

As we mentioned a while ago, our focus for improving your grip isn't going to be in the type of grip itself though, it's going to be in other factors. Time to get into that!

Improving Other Aspects of Your Grip

Along a similar vein as other grips, with your putting grip there are a few things that you should be mindful of, so that your grip doesn't end up being the cause of your putt going awry.

Primarily, the main area in which many beginners end up running into problems is the strength of their grip. Here, the usual rules still apply, and while the grip should be firm, it should never be *too* firm.

Unfortunately, due to the heavy mental exertion and concentration that is part and parcel of putting; it is almost automatic that your entire body, including your grip, goes tense.

Be sure to not make this mistake, and don't vary your grip's pressure too much either. Clenching and unclenching your hands while gripping the golf club is a nasty habit that can lead to even further problems in consistency.

Aim for a something in between a firm and a light grip. End of the day, you want your grip to feel as natural as possible, and give you a smooth, free-flowing swing that is ideal. Use your fingers, and be wary of your club accidentally sinking into your palms. Unlike your fingers, your palms are not equipped for the kind of control that you'll want to be able to assert on your putt.

Accomplish all of this, and you'll have a great grip to base your putting on. Don't get complacent though – you're going to need to keep remembering these aspects of your grip until they come to you as a second nature.

Before we move on to the actual swing-action, we're going to need to take a look at another prelude to it.

No prizes for guessing what it is!

Setting Up a Putting Stance

How you stand to take your putt, or in other words, your stance, is next on our list of topics to cover. Just as we discussed grip and how it could be improved, we're going to have to take the same type of approach for stance.

Fortunately, as you'll see along the way, there is a whole lot less confusion when it comes to stance, and a lot more agreement regarding what you should be doing.

The ideal putting stance is really pretty normal at first glance. Firstly, you should be standing close to the ball, closer than with any other type of shot really. This should allow you a greater amount of close control over the golf club.

When it comes to your legs, they should be bent at the knees, as usual. Keep both feet close together though, and definitely do not stretch them wider than your hips. In most cases, the ball would be roughly in between your feet, or possibly even slightly further forward, depending on your preference.

Much of the idea behind this stance is to produce a swing that is 'straight' with regards to the hole, and help ensure that you hit the ball squarely in the process.

Keep the bulk of your weight on your leading leg if you can, just so that you don't throw yourself off balance. Pretty soon, you'll understand that throughout the stroke, your legs should not move at all.

That's it – the basics of a putting stance. See, there really is very little that is out of the ordinary about it. However, we still haven't covered one of the most important aspects of the putting stance, and chances are you'll never guess what part of your body it relates to.

To cut a long story short, the most important aspect of your putting stance is your eyes.

No, we're not kidding. Your eyes should be directly over the ball when you take up your stance. Not doing so will end up causing some of the problems we had covered earlier, in particular, the ones where your putts consistently veer off to the left or right.

For this reason you should definitely be very sure of the position of your eyes when you first take up your stance, and then be aware enough to note the same again right before you actually take the putt.

Keeping your eyes where they belong is going to be a very big deal, especially when you're taking difficult putts.

Reckon you can manage all of that? Sometimes it may seem like a lot to be thinking about, but given time, you'll begin to adapt. Anyway, there isn't really that much more that we have to cover!

Finally, we're done with all the preface material, and are moving on towards the action.

Yes, that's right, it is about time we delved into just how you are going to putt, as well as how you can improve yourself.

Essentials of the Putting Swing

Unlike any other golf swing, the putt is a thing of precision and ultimate finesse. It isn't about raw power, but is more about pristine accuracy.

Due to this focus, the key is to strike the ball straight and square with the head of the club, and getting it rolling down your target line that was determined when you planned out your shot. Then, the rest should fall into place.

Of course, direction isn't really the only factor, but it is possibly the most complicated. Speed also, as you well know by now, plays a role. Despite this, you're never going to need to 'forcefully' putt a ball, but you might need to increase your backswing slightly to get that extra bit of speed.

As far as getting the 'correct' amount of speed on the ball is concerned, a good rule of thumb is to imagine as though you're hitting a little bit further than the hole actually is. If you do so, you'll see that you have enough speed in the shot to safely rest assured that it does not fall short of the hole.

At the same time, you'll also know that you don't have too much speed on the ball that your entire planned path is affected and the resulting shot goes somewhere else entirely.

One of the best strokes for putting is a simple pendulum motion that in which you move your arms back slightly for the backswing, and then forward again. During this motion, your wrists should not hinge at all, nor should you be swinging from your elbows.

For every putt that you take, you should keep your swing speed constant, and just increase the backswing if you require a further putt. Think of your putt as swinging *through* the ball, rather than simply swinging *at* it.

If you can allow your putting swing to become one smooth and fluent motion, you're on the road to success.

Do not decelerate towards the ball, or stop yourself from the followthrough. Frankly speaking, the followthrough is as essential a component of putting as any other, as it is the completion of your swing, and trying to rein in your followthrough will automatically end up in you decelerating your swing at those final few moments before impact.

Incidentally, throughout your putting motion, you should keep your head as still as possible. Admittedly this really is one aspect of putting that many find difficult to get used to, as the natural impulse is to turn your head to watch the ball as it rolls off.

Succumbing to this impulse will cause your body to shift, and, by default, also cause your aim to shift. Needless to say, once your aim is shifted that late in the swing, you'll have no time to even attempt to correct it, and will end up with a poor putt for a result.

So it really is in your best interests to try your very hardest! In time, you *will* get used to it, but when you're starting out, it is imperative that you constantly remind yourself to keep your head stationary.

There you have it – the putting swing that you so desired.

Here and now, we've taken you from the very basic foundation of putting, right up to your complete guide to putting as a whole. And we're not done yet!

What more is there to learn? Well, shortly we're going to be looking at a few tips and tricks that can help you to improve your putting in general. That way, you'll be fully equipped to become an expert in putting.

Of course, all the tips and tricks in the world are little substitute for practice. Really, that's what you're going to need now. Let's face it, you should know more than enough by this point to get out there and start working on your putt.

Remember everything you've learnt so far, and you'll be more than fine.

Anyway, let's look at those tips and tricks that you were promised.

Tips and Tricks to Improve Putting

Before we leave you to your own devices, it would probably be best that we make certain you're going to be on the right track. That's where these tips and tricks come in – they're not miracle workers, but if you follow them, you'll find that your efforts are going to be augmented.

One of the first things that you should start to do is get into a putting routine. Over the course of this guide, we've described from top to bottom the process that is involved in putting, and you should take that, and form a regular routine out of it.

That means that every time you go to make a putt, you'll perform the same routine, instinctively.

Not only does this decrease the likelihood that you accidentally 'forget' something, but it will also help relax you, and lessen any tension that you may feel. After all, when you're following a routine there's a certain feeling of familiarity that is pretty comforting.

Even professional golfers go through their own routines, which is why you often see them doing the exact same thing before each and every putt they take. But just because you're following a fixed routine does *not* mean that you shouldn't be open to changing it.

With time, you'll find that you're better able to adapt your routine to suit your putting preferences, and that's when you're really going to see results.

Another tip that would probably do you a world of good is to vary your practices. Don't just practice long putts, or short putts, but rather you should end up practicing a whole range of putts on a variety of greens.

Naturally, to start out with you may just want to get a better feel for putting in general, but don't make the mistake of thinking that just because you're good at 40-yard putts that you'll be fine for 5-yard putts.

It's hard to believe how many golfers actually end up missing easy putts due to the fact that they simply never practiced short-range putts.

Last, but certainly not least, if ever you seem to find that your putting is just completely thrown off for some reason, don't panic. It happens to even the best of golfers. What is important at such a juncture is that you maintain calm, and try to adapt to get out of your rut.

Change your grip, shift your stance, use a different club – these are all valid options that could help you shake yourself out of the bad spell that your putting may be in.

So long as you keep to the simple foundations that we've been outlining throughout this guide, you need not worry whether or not you'll end up ruining your putting even more. Who knows, you may even find a better way of putting!

Conclusion

Well, that brings us to the tail end of our look at how you can improve your putting, and boy has it been a journey.

Everything we've looked at has slowly been pieced together to form the complete picture of putting that you should now have. All that is left for you to do now is start to apply what we've been going through.

Over the course of this guide, we've mentioned again and again how practice is going to be crucial, and there's no time like the present to start!

Keep reminding yourself of what you've learnt, and in time, you'll see the results just roll in. In a more literal sense, you've just gotten the ball rolling towards the hole, and that's reason enough to be proud.

Good luck with your putting!