



THE GAME OF GOLF

Everything You Need To Know

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Table of Contents

Getting Started: Learn, But Enjoy
Golf Rules & Etiquette
Judging Equipment With Common Sense
Exercises For Better Scores
Get A Grip
Swing Drills
Swing Time!
Shorten Your Long Game
Slicing: Pizza Good. In Golf, Bad.
Hooks: In Fishing, Good. In Golf, Bad
Make Your Short Game Shorter
Bunker Shots, Not Tequila Shots
Chips, Without the Fish
Perfect Putting
Reading The Green
Golf Courses Around The World
Golf Widows' Revenge
Glossary of Golf Terms

THE GAME OF GOLF

Getting Started: Learn, But Enjoy

In 15th century Scotland the game of "gowf" was born. Around 1744, the Company of Gentlemen Golfers, established in Edinburgh, then codified the first rules of play. And the world has never been the same since. Golf is one of the most popular sports in the world; played in countries as far flung as Mexico and Ireland, South Africa and China. And, of course, Scotland. There are even universities that offer a major in Golf.

So, for the novice getting started, the game entails entering a world with rich and varied history, a potentially major investment of time and money, a steep physical and mental learning curve — and enormous fun! The best way a beginner can begin is by learning what NOT to do.

First, don't rush out and spend a large amount of money on course fees, equipment, lessons, clothing, and so forth. You don't yet know which courses are worth it, what equipment is quality and which suits you, and lessons can wait a short while.

Part of the excitement is the newness and the joy of finding a sport that you can play alone, with friends and spouses, or even with the whole family. But golf is a difficult game to play well and can be frustrating and expensive if you don't invest a little time finding out what you need to know.

Start small and don't take everything too seriously too soon. Many pros will advise against spending many weeks on a driving range when first beginning, because they want you to avoid developing bad habits which are hard to break. But, some time on a range can be a cheap way to get your muscles moving, find out if you have an aptitude or interest, and give you an idea of the types of clubs and balls to use.

Find an inexpensive course and wear comfortable, loose clothing that doesn't bind your arms and shoulders. Save that \$1,000 you'd spend on pants, shoes, and shirts for later. Start with a simple three club set borrowed from a friend or rented from the clubhouse. A Nine iron, a wedge, and a Number 5 wood is plenty. Actually you'll use the wedge less on a driving range, but you can add a putter and move to the putting practice area later. Some have miniature sand traps to practice escaping.

Relax, observe those who hit well and imitate their grip, stance, and posture. Tee up, keep your eye on the ball as you swing, and give it a firm whack. If you miss a few, so be it. Enjoy. You're teaching your body what the swing feels like, what angle and impact produces what kind of flight.

On the putting green, start very close to the hole — no more than a couple of feet. When you can make 25 putts in a row more or less consistently, move back to six feet, 10 feet, 20 feet — no farther. 'More or less' consistently — even the pros sometimes miss a two-footer!

Whether driving or putting, stand so that a casual push wouldn't knock you over. Golf is about balance, concentration, and some simple physics. Now, go have a cool drink in the clubhouse and enjoy the day. You did well your first time out.

Since a game of golf can cost anywhere from \$5 to \$100 dollars, sooner or later you're going to get the urge to do more than whack a ball around a hundred times. Good!

But before you rush out and spend hundreds on your own clubs, invest \$50 on a lesson or two. That investment, if made with the right instructor, will get you started on correct grip, stance, posture (the essentials!), swing mechanics and exercises, as well as proper equipment selection. Start with putting practice, and a few weekends on the driving range. Move up to nine holes, then onto 18 after a few weeks. During the week, do some of the basic exercises, while you learn the rules and etiquette.

So what are some of the basics?

CLUBS

There are three basic categories: irons, woods, and putters. Woods are used to hit farthest, irons intermediate distances, and putters for up close. The lower the number club used, the farther (we hope!) the ball travels. On average, a 1 wood used correctly whacks a ball about 170 yards or more, a 5 iron about 100 yards, a 9 iron about 60. Putters are used to push the ball a few feet to a few yards across a much smoother grass area called the green. Pitching and sand wedges are special, sharply angled clubs for chipping up steep hills or out of sand traps. Get clubs with grips that are neither so small the club twists in your hands on impact, nor so large you can't wrap your fingers easily around it.

STARTING GRIP

To get started, remember the grip is vital. There are a dozen different kinds, but the most common is the one in which the index finger of the left hand hooks the pinky of the right. (For right handed individuals.) Then for proper alignment, "check the V's": The V's are the angle between your thumb and forefinger on each hand. These should point between your chin and back shoulder. Make sure that when looking down, you can see the first two knuckles of your left hand and a "V" formed between the thumb and forefinger pointing toward your right shoulder. With the right hand, have the "V" pointing toward your chin or slightly to the right shoulder.

SWING

Start at address with a Nine iron. (A term for standing near, and ready to hit, the ball. Who knows where these words come from!) With your heels about shoulder width apart, take a few practice swings. You want to hit the ball squarely in the middle of the club left to right, but slightly up from the bottom. Take a firm grip and balance stance, but don't crush the club nor dance on your toes. Try to keep the swing in one plane. (A plane is a flat surface; think of swinging alongside the top of a round table tilted on end. Curve with the table edge.) Follow through after making contact with the ball. Keep the ball in the center of your field of vision.

RULES & ETIQUETTE

RULES

Like any game, the official rules are many and complex. But the simple version is this: Tee up, hit the ball toward the flag. Try to get the ball in the hole the flag is in. (When you get close, take the flag out!) The fewest strokes over the course of all holes wins. Hit your own ball and count every stroke.

ETIQUETTE

Don't endanger another player by standing too close to them when you or (s)he swings. And don't make excessive noise when someone is hitting. Avoid holding up players behind or with you. If you lose your ball, let them 'play through'. Replace 'divots' (chunks of earth and grass you dug up by using the golf club — accidentally — as a shovel.) Fix other damage made. In short, be courteous to those around you. Golf is one of the few games where civilized behavior is actually enforced!

WRAPPING IT UP

For the novice, golf can be enjoyed from the start. For those interested and motivated, there's an inexhaustible supply of information about the physics and physiology of swing mechanics, grip, stance, and other arcana. Tiger Woods has been practicing and playing from a young age and he still takes lessons. For the beginner, there's a large amount of knowledge to absorb and physical movement to practice right at the outset. But don't get so overwhelmed that you forget the primary purpose: to have fun!

Golf Rules & Etiquette

In 1744, the Company of Gentlemen Golfers was established in Edinburgh and then codified the first rules of play. They've been evolving ever since. The official USGA rules, plus decisions, covers over five hundred pages. So, no brief article can cover every facet. The following is highly simplified.

In general, the idea is to hit your own golf ball the fewest number of times in order to reach a hole that starts a couple of hundred yards distant. Remember, the rules may not always be fair, but like your parents' rules — they're rigid.

TEEING OFF

You should tee off between or behind (up to two club-lengths), not in front of, the tee-markers.

BALL IN MOTION INTERFERED

If you deflect or stop your ball in motion you've cost yourself two strokes. Accidents will happen, but you still pay the price. If a ball struck by you is interfered with by someone else,

play it as it lies. If your ball is struck by another ball — oh well, that's life. Unless you're both on the putting green at the start, in which case "that's life" costs two strokes.

PLAYING THE BALL

Play the ball where it lies. Don't try to improve your position by bending anything fixed or growing, except in taking your stance or making your swing.

BALL AT REST MOVED

If you move your ball after it's come to rest, you've cost yourself a stroke. It all counts, baby.

BALL LOST OR OUT OF BOUNDS

If you lose your ball and can't find it after five minutes, you have to play another ball from the spot where the last shot was played. You lose one stroke.

OBSTRUCTIONS

You're allowed to move rakes, beer bottles, etc if they're in your way. If you put them there to interfere with your partner, you owe him a beer. If an immovable obstruction, such as a water fountain, interferes with your stance or swing, you're allowed to drop the ball within one club-length of the nearest clear point that's not nearer the hole.

ON THE GREEN

An area about 10 yards in diameter of smoother, lower grass near the hole is called 'the green'. When you've been skilled or lucky enough to get your ball there, remove the flagstick from the hole and replace it when all players have finished the hole. You can pick up and clean your ball on the green, provided you replace it exactly where it was. And, by the way, you're expected to do all this with golf clubs, (no more than 14), and nothing but golf clubs.

ETIQUETTE

The ideas behind golf etiquette are all common sense courtesies. Dress appropriately, don't make loud noises, and don't toss cans or bottles onto the course.

Most courses are pretty busy so arrive on time. And, if you can't get through a hole or a shot in a reasonable amount of time, let those behind you play through. No taking calls in the middle of play!

Who plays first is usually decided by a coin toss, but you can be creative. Spin the beer bottle works for some.

Don't get in the way of someone's shot. This is not only courteous but in the best interest of your safety. A one-pound clubhead moving at 100 miles per hour can easily turn your head into mush.

Replace divots (chunks of turf and earth scooped up during a swing). And, unless you have magical powers, rake the sand trap after you're done making your bunker shot.

Don't fling your club fifty yards when you miss that two foot putt.

Now that you've heard a dozen or more "Don't(s)", here's a "Do". Do have a good time.

Judging Equipment With Common Sense

Proper grip, stance, posture, swing — all essential to the game. But don't forget you are doing all those things with golf equipment and, like any product, some are better than others. Here are a few things to consider when looking for clubs, shoes, and all the rest.

Equipment, like people, comes in all shapes and sizes. The reason is simple: those differently shaped and sized people! Golf is played by young children, men and women of all races and builds. Manufacturers have risen to the challenge by offering products to match that variety.

For the younger players, shorter and lighter clubs are a given. Accept that your young teen isn't going to do well playing with your adult set. Many women, too, fit into this 'less-tall, less-strong' category and need equipment suited to them.

Clubs for those individuals have lightweight shafts and smaller diameter grips. Clubs that are too heavy will be difficult to control. A club that's too long or too short will throw off your stance and your swing. Too long and the toe of the club will tend to point further up, causing a tendency to hook. Too short and the iron will have a toe that points toward the ground. That's a recipe for slicing.

The best way to judge length is by holding at least three different length clubs and checking to make sure a natural swing contacts the clubhead at the sweetspot.

In addition to length, clubs have flex and torque ratings.

Contrary to myth, shafts do not tend to lose stiffness over the years, so buy the most expensive club you can afford. Worn grips are relatively inexpensive to replace. If you're an adult and continue to play, you'll use them for years before technology compels you to upgrade. If your clubs are more than five years old, you'll want to investigate getting some of the newer clubs.

Flex is the amount a club will 'pendulum' back and forth in a plane. If the shaft is too flexible, you have less control and will tend to hook. Too stiff and your shot will lose distance, and tend to slice. Experiment is the only way to know what's right for you.

Torque ratings measure the degree the shaft rotates counter and clockwise as you look down on the shaft toward the head. As the ball compresses against the clubface, the shaft is rotated slightly by the impact. Both the de-compression of the ball as it comes away from the head, and the rotation of the shaft back to the starting point contribute to a controlled, long flying ball. Start with 2.5, hit some long drives, and experiment to find what's best for you.

Modern clubs have more variety in design. Longer heads, heavier heads, cavity-backed heads, titanium vs steel vs. graphite vs aluminum shafts, head inserts all make subtle differences. But picking one depends critically on your swing speed and style and other personal factors. The best advice is to be patient and investigate which, of those you can afford, gives you the best results. Read reviews with a skeptical eye.

A Few Words About Shoes

The average recreational golfer will spend several hours once a week walking a couple of miles or more. At the same time, he or she will be tending feet and hoping for a solid footing, twisting, springing, etc. All this calls for quality footwear.

As with clubs, buy the best you can afford. In this case, since they'll wear out much more often than clubs — buy a little better than you can afford. They'll usually last enough longer than to justify the expense. Of course, don't rush out your first weekend and buy \$400 shoes. Make sure you are going to play for years to come first.

When buying shoes with spikes (not allowed at all courses!), make sure there's no spike directly beneath the ball of your foot. That tends to produce sesamoiditis, a too-common-among-golfers pain in the ball of the foot.

When trying on prospective shoes, wear the same size and thickness sock that you'll wear on the course. Naturally, they shouldn't bunch at the toe, nor tend to slip inside the shoe.

Check the fit by putting weight on one side and wiggling your toes. On tiptoe, the shoes should bend where your foot does, across the toes. There should be about a half-inch of space from your big toe to the inside of the shoe.

Leather tends to shape itself to the foot and also helps to keep out moisture. Save the running shoes for jogging.

Exercises For Better Scores

Like any athletic activity peak performance is not just superior technique, but having a body that does what you need it to do. Toning, stretching, warming-up, and easy weight training all help improve scores on the course.

STRETCHING

Putting requires relaxed concentration, driving mandates strength and limber joints. Start by rotating all the 'golf' joints — hands and fingers, wrists, elbows, shoulders, hips, knees and ankles. Then loosen up that all important neck and spine by rotating the head gently counter then clockwise.

Start slowly, stretch less than the maximum possible. Hold each stretch for several seconds, then repeat until you work smoothly out to the maximum extension.

Standing straight, stretch the arms straight up, rotate the forearms, then wrists, then flex the finger joints. Follow by rotating the entire arm, first one then the other then both together. Reverse directions and repeat.

With elbows bent and hands clasped above the head, use the right hand to pull the body right, followed by the left hand to pull the body left. That stretches those major muscles called the latissimus dorsi. (The long ones running from the shoulder blades down to the waist.)

Separate the feet to about shoulder width and bend side to side, front to back. Remember to keep pressure off the lower back, by keeping the angles shallow until you've achieved athletic fitness.

Keep all angles and extensions age appropriate.

WARM-UP

Start by walking around in a circle of about twenty feet in diameter, building up to the distance around a city block. To elevate muscle temperature, start with simple aerobics. A short jog on a gentle surface, or even a few minutes running in place. Keep in mind, you're not doing weight loss exercises, just getting lots of blood flow to the muscles and raising the heart rate slightly.

LOW IMPACT EXERCISES

Hip Internal Rotation

Sit on a chair with your knees pointed straight in front of you. Rotate your ankles outward keeping your knees and thighs pointed straight ahead.

Hip External Rotation

Same position. Now, cross the left ankle in front of the right and, keeping the thighs and knees pointed straight, hold for one second. Repeat, reversing ankles.

Hip Abduction

On your left side bend the left knee slightly and straighten your right. Raise your right leg straight up, keeping it in the plane of your body. Hold for one second and count to two as you lower the leg. Repeat on the other side. In a few weeks, try adding a one- to two-pound ankle weight.

Hamstring

Extend your left leg, knee straight on a low bench. Keep your back straight and chin up as you slowly reach toward the toes. Hold for two seconds, then repeat on your right leg.

Lower Back

Sit with head erect, shoulders squared on a low bench. Slowly turn to your left, to slightly less than maximum. Reach hands around as if reaching for a seat back. Remember to keep your feet nearly flat on the floor. Hold for two seconds, then repeat on right side.

Forearms

Extending your left arm straight out, palm face-up, use your right hand to pull back the fingers of your left hand. Then turn your palm down and again use your right hand to gently pull back the fingers of your left. Hold each position for 10 to 20, then repeat, switching arms.

Start slowly and increase repetitions, adding weights to wrists and ankles as you gain strength.

Balance and Posture, Prelude To Winning Swings

In golf, everything counts. Good equipment, fitness, grip, stance, posture, balance, swing. All important. But mastering a good grip is pretty straight forward. With guidance, a good swing is achievable with moderate practice. There are thousands of programs that teach fitness.

But the proper stance, posture, and balance seem to elude many. So here's some advice about how to get set on that all important 'middle-ground'.

Nothing kills a good swing, and lowers scores, like improper tension. Of course, you have to have a firm grip and you need to coil and spring on the swing. But when your body, as a whole, is tense your mind is tense. Take a couple of deep breaths. Loosen up those neck and shoulder muscles.

It really is ok if your head moves slightly. Most good players will move the head 4-6 inches during an elegant and powerful swing.

Now take a good grip and address the ball with your heels at about shoulder width. Slightly further apart for wood and low numbered iron shots, a little less for chips. Bend slightly, at the hips not the waist, but keep the back straight. Don't fear jutting your butt, but don't exaggerate.

Let the arms swing freely with your weight slightly forward toward the balls of your feet. Your chin should not be tucked into your chest, which you can prevent by keeping your eyes pointed away, at the ball.

At this point, you should be balanced and relaxed. If you can lift one foot without falling over, you don't have your weight balanced. If you can be pushed left or right by a slight nudge, you don't have a firm stance and you're out of balance. If you could be pushed over backwards with a slight shove, your weight is too far back on your heels.

If your weight is too far back toward your heels, you'll tend to swing too much from the inside to outside. That's a recipe for a hook. Check it by ensuring that your kneecaps are almost directly above the balls of your feet.

Examine your stance. Your left foot should be slightly open, your shoulders level and aligned along the target line. Swiveling your head to the left (for right handed players), an imaginary line running across your eyes should run parallel to the target line. In the proper position, your spine will angle slightly away from the target, even though your weight remains equally balanced.

You should remain balanced throughout the swing. Practice a backswing-to-downswing. You should be moving through a single swing plane throughout. If you're out of balance, that will be difficult to maintain.

As you move into the back swing, your weight will move to approximately 75% on the (inside of the) back foot, 25% on the forward. Through the downswing to impact, the percentages will reverse.

Your swing evolves from your setup. Master stance, balance, and posture and a good swing is halfway in the bag. Or is that, in that hole?

Get A Grip

Dozens of different factors play into a good golf shot — grip, posture, stance, balance, swing, concentration, and many more. But it all starts with the right grip. Though there are a variety of different grips for different purposes, here are some steps to start out right.

"Top hand holds, bottom hand throws" is a catchphrase heard among experienced golfers. Keep that in mind, for all the following (Notes: Steps assume a right-handed golfer):

Step #1 With the golf head down, grip using only the last three fingers and the pad of your left hand. Grasp with your left hand and adjust the club so the grip is in your fingers, not your palm.

Step #2 Make sure your left hand thumb is straight down. The point where your thumb meets your hand should be near the top of club.

Step #3 Now grip with the fingers of your right hand. Note the small vertical crease in your right palm near the wrist. Overlap the creases of your hands.

Step #4 Grab the pinky of your right hand with the index finger of your left. Note the index finger and thumb of right hand. You should see a 'V' where they meet. That vertex (the point where they meet) should point to your right shoulder.

Step #5 Make sure your right thumb is not running straight down the club but instead is pointed slightly toward your right shoulder.

Those are the five basic steps. Now let's check some qualifications and exceptions, and other important items.

Check #1 Players with large hands should use an overlapping grip, with the right pinky finger resting between and on top of the left hand's forefinger and middle finger. (See Step #4)

Check #2 Players with smaller hands should use a 10-finger grip, with all fingers on the grip like a baseball grip. This is an exception to the general rule of Step #4.

Check #3 Players with medium-sized hands should use an interlocking grip, with the pinky on the grip, but between the middle and forefinger of the left hand.

Check #4 To double-check that your grip is correct, make sure you can see three of your knuckles on your left hand.

Check #5 Hold the club lightly, but firmly with both hands. The more relaxed your grip, the straighter and farther you'll hit the ball.

Don't squeeze the life out of the club. To ensure you avoid this, extend your target arm. Hold the club at an angle in front of you with the heel pad of your left hand on top of the handle. This puts the club across the top joints of the fingers (where the fingers meet the hand). The heel pad supports and traps the club, relieving you of the need to hold it in a death grip.

Some final words of wisdom:

One of the most common errors among golfers is a weak lead-hand grip (left hand for the right-handed golfer). This produces a shot that slices and lacks power. So later, we'll cover how to avoid slicing.

Left wrist and forearm strength are critical to golf success, so we'll discuss some good exercises elsewhere. But for now a simple daily routine is to hold the club straight out in front of you using the last three fingers of the left hand. From the wrists, move the club up and down 10-12 times. Three controlled sets without bending the arm will strengthen your muscles and get the proper motion into your muscle memory.

Practice daily, and try to build up to a consistent grip.

Swing Drills

There are dozens of sometimes clever, sometimes ridiculous tricks for improving your swing. We'll review some shortly. And hope they're viewed as clever, not ridiculous! But, first, some basics.

STANCE AND BALL POSITION

Your feet should be about shoulder-width apart (unless you are Mr. Universe); slightly less for short irons, wider for long irons and wedges. Aim the club directly at the target and imagine a line between your position and it. That's the target line. Your body should be parallel to the target line, with the line of the shoulders perpendicular to the club face. Imagine you're

standing on a ladder on the ground, with your feet on one side, the target line on the other. One rung connects you to the ball. If you're driving, you know you have the ball teed correctly if the top of it is slightly above the club's head. For a putt, since the common putter has a short, flat face, it should align along the ladder rung.

WRISTS AND GRIP

The grip should be firm, but not tense. You want control, not muscle. Your wrist position is essential to creating maximum impact at the proper angle. That does a lot more for distance than brute force. The most common mistake is to allow the lead wrist to collapse at impact. To firm up the wrists, take a club and raise it just using the wrist, keeping your arm at your side. Point the toe parallel to the ground and hold for five seconds. (Tough, isn't it!?) Repeat until your forearm feels used, but not sore. Switch arms and repeat. Take some swings with one hand/arm only. It's not a natural thing and doesn't improve your swing by itself; it's too different from a two-handed swing. But it helps develop control.

BODY

Take your normal address. (Address: the stance and position with respect to the ball before the swing.) Hold a club across your shoulders, then turn as if you were making a backswing. Get someone to watch you and verify that the club points four feet or more beyond the ball.

SWING DRILLS

Remember that a swing is a kind of rotational movement. Key to that movement is to stay in the same plane on the downswing as you were in the backswing. Think of that plane as a round table top, tipped on edge and placed on the ball. The bottom half of the rim of that table is the arc your club should go through on the entire swing.

Practice a backswing to downswing movement, but stop at the point of impact to verify that the clubface is along the rung of that ladder. If the clubface is open, you've rotated your right forearm too much. (For right-handed golfers.)

Place a half dozen tees in the ground a few inches apart along the rung of the ladder. Swing at one, then move forward to the next. With practice, you should be able to consistently clip the middle of a tee while staying in the swing plane.

RHYTHM AND BALANCE

That leads us to the last important elements: rhythm and balance. You can see it in person or on television — the greats all have beautiful rhythm. That's key to a consistently good swing. But you can't have good rhythm without good balance and vice-versa.

The proper position and stance are static, balance is dynamic. Start with the static — you can't do otherwise. But you need to retain good balance and rhythm through the entire swing.

Don't rush your swing. With the spine tilted away from the target at address, your weight should be evenly distributed between your right and left feet. Then take a smooth pull back and an easy swing down.

As you practice a few swings have a friend gently push your shoulder blades, lower back, one shoulder in one direction then alternate. In every case, you should be solid and not about to fall over at any time. (We assume you've saved the drinking for AFTER the game!) Every portion of the swing should be smooth and on the backswing and the downswing you should feel like a well-oiled machine.

Swing Time!

Grip, stance, balance, posture, swing plane, backswing, downswing — enough already! So much to think about just to hit a hard little ball straight ahead two hundred yards. So let's take it a step at a time.

No single aspect in isolation determines whether or not you have a satisfying swing. Grip is essential, so are balance and the rest. To get them all working in concert, relax and take a good deep breath. Anxious tension in the arms commonly leads to a poor swing.

Move your heels apart to about shoulder width and don't be afraid to jut your butt. Take a firm grip, but don't squeeze the life out of the club. That produces that evil tension.

Think first about three components of swing: backswing, downswing, and swing plane.

Backswing is just what it sounds like — the part of motion when you take the club back in a smooth arc with your thumb knuckle above your right ear. When you draw it back your club head traces out a circle. Think of that circle as the rim of a round table tipped on edge.

Point your chest away from the target.

Now for the downswing, where you swing the club down and through the ball. This is where physics becomes your friend. A heavy club head, swung in a circle gains a large angular momentum. (A fancy way of saying something you knew already: when you swing a heavy thing in a circle, it whacks whatever it hits real hard.)

Take advantage of that and let your natural body motion carry the club head through the ball's position, toward the target. Swing down in the same plane as your back swing. (Remember the rim of that round table!)

Ah, so simple. Simple to say, hard to do. But here are some hints about how to achieve that smooth, forceful swing.

Keeping your left elbow straight, take the club straight back and up. That's the backswing plane. Let your left arm roll slightly clockwise at the start of your backswing. Be sure your wrists are cocked at a 90 degree angle by the time your left arm is parallel to the ground.

Keep your feet on the ground to anchor that backswing. Remember not to start your downswing with your shoulders. Start your downswing with your lower body. As you bring the club down, turn your belt buckle toward the target. Turn your hips as fast and as powerfully as you can, while retaining control.

At the bottom of the arc, your wrists 'snap' and you follow through, as if the ball weren't there. (By now, it isn't!) Your left arm has swung across your body near the right armpit.

Your shoulders will turn from parallel to the target line, to perpendicular to the target line. Your weight should end on your left foot and keep your eye on the ball.

Of course when you do it this way your shoulders will still turn but you should feel much more torque building through your body.

Instead of creating torque by turning your shoulders, turn your lower chest away from the target. (Torque is another of those handy physics terms. It just means a force in a circle. For those who like science, a larger force from a longer club creates a lot of torque. So whack hard with a short club, or not so hard with a longer club... you get the same torque.)

Your finishing position should be:

- Weight balanced on your front hip,
- Back toe on the ground,
- Hands should be up above your front shoulder and your chest,
- Back knee should be facing the hole,
- Ball much further down the course in the direction you want.

You know, come to think of it, that's still a lot to remember! Get out and practice and it will soon seem 'body' natural, and you can forget thinking about it.

Shorten Your Long Game

Before you can putt you have to get on the green. To get there in one shot is the ideal you aim for. Here's some advice to approach it.

GRIP AND POSTURE

Once you've selected good equipment, it all starts with grip and posture.

Position your left thumb to the right of the middle of the grip, making the V formed between your thumb and forefinger point toward your right shoulder. This helps your club sit more in your fingers, less in your palm.

Remember, the key to maximizing distance is not how tight or strong your grip is, but how fast your club head moves (and at what angle, assuming the correct impact point). Keep your grip relaxed but firm.

The correct posture is one which allows you to swing your arms and turn your body freely back and forth throughout the swing. To check this, let your arms hang down with your back straight, your knees slightly bent. Your arms should be a few inches away from the front of your thighs.

To maximize distance, widen your stance. Position your feet outside your shoulders. This helps create an elongated takeaway and a wide backswing arc. It also tends to restrict your hip movement, helping you build coil. Third, you'll find it easier to shift your weight to the left on the downswing.

Flaring out your right foot can also help you make a more powerful turn away from the ball.

SWING

Power comes from the 'coil' in the backswing. To create coil you also need resistance.

To form the proper coil, turn your hips 45 degrees and your shoulders 90. Your right knee should stay in the position made at address. The back and shoulder muscles (which provide most of the force) will twist and compress, ready to unwind through the ball.

Instructors will sometimes tell a student to keep his head down. But, with your head down, your leading shoulder can't turn under your chin on the backswing. The result is, your weight stays on the same side as your front foot. If you hit the ball with your weight moving away from the target, your swing loses force. Your head should move with the swing, allowing a full shoulder and weight shift.

One of the newer styles is exemplified by Tiger Woods. It's a kind of two-pivot swing that you might experiment with. During your backswing, as your upper body turns, allow your left shoulder to move across toward the right. This moves your left shoulder above your right foot at the top of your backswing. Start your downswing, trying to finish with your right shoulder above your left foot.

IMPACT POINT AND ANGLE

But, more than anything, you have to practice consistently impacting the ball at the proper point on the clubface, with the correct angle. (Remember, there are two angles involved — clubface open or closed, and the angle the clubface makes with the imaginary 'wall' at the front of the ball. Keep both in mind.) If you top the ball, or contact it with the club too near the heel or toe, all the speed in the world won't help you make longer drives in the desired direction.

Slicing: Pizza Good. In Golf, Bad.

There are as many different ideas about how to cure a slice as there are experts. But there are some fundamentals on which most agree.

What Is It?

A slice is a ball flight that curves from left-to-right (for right-handed golfers, right-to-left for the left handed). There are different causes for this, but the two main ones are a swing from over the top so the clubhead cuts across the target line. The second, related, cause is presenting a clubface that stays open and produces a left-to-right spin.

At a downswing speed of around 100 miles per hour, with sixty rotations per second just after impact, that can produce a large deviation from the target line. The initial momentum of the ball sends it straight, but as the ball slows, the spin factor becomes dominant.

What Causes It?

Golfers sometimes roll the clubface open on the backswing and there are, too, different causes for that. Part of the effect is a weak grip, causing the shaft to rotate slightly. But having too strong a grip contributes also, when it leads to excessive tension in the forearms and rotation on the downswing.

Stance plays a part as well. If the stance is too open — the front foot back from the target line — the body angle is too close to facing the hole. That tends to produce an outside-in swing and too much spin.

Incorrect ball position can contribute to the problem, particularly when it promotes a poor stance. A ball that's played too far forward forces the shoulders open. Too far back and the shoulders become closed.

How To Cure It

Keep the shoulders aligned along the target line, right foot straight ahead, the left slightly flared left. Your belt buckle should point straight ahead along the line through the ball. Increase your spine incline by bending more from the hips and jut your butt. (Imagine you need to sit on a bar stool that's just a little too high.)

Grip with your left hand, putting your thumb along the line of the shaft. The line through your thumb and index finger should point toward your right eye.

Check your V's. You should see the first two knuckles of your left hand and a V formed between your thumb and forefinger which points in the direction of your right shoulder.

Keep the elbow relaxed, but straight, and grip firmly but not in a death squeeze.

Position the ball where it allows your shoulders to remain parallel to the target line. Depending on the length of your clubs the angle to the ball can vary, but you should not have to stretch uncomfortably to put the clubhead at the ball.

On your backswing, start the club back low and slightly to the inside, keeping the right elbow close to your side. On the downswing, keep part of your attention on maintaining the right elbow close your side and allow the clubhead to swing to one o'clock.

Some Practice Drills

Point the end of the shaft at your navel. On the backswing, keep the end pointed at your navel until the clubhead is just outside your right foot. Now complete the swing to the top and start the downswing. Now the end should point away from your navel.

That tends to force the clubhead to move along the correct path.

At impact, the belt buckle should be even with the ball and most of your weight should be on your left foot. Avoid rotating your hips at the start of the downswing.

Good job. Now go have a slice of pizza!

Hooks: In Fishing, Good. In Golf, Bad

Since there are an infinite number of wrong paths for a golf ball to fly, but only one right path, the odds are not in your favor. But, as Hans Solo said: "Never tell me the odds!" Beat them by looking at the cause of a hook and practicing the cure.

A hook is a shot that moves to the left of the target line. (For right-handers, for lefties reverse the directions.) Sometimes it starts out to the right, then veers left; sometimes it starts left and curves further left. (If it shoots off behind you, you have a different problem...)

As with any undesired path, the causes are many and varied. Still, some fundamentals remain. A hook is the product of one or more of: (1) incorrect grip, (2) poor stance, (3) wrong swing. Any or all can contribute to a closed clubface, producing counter-clockwise spin and a shot that moves left of the target line.

(1) Grip

You may have an overactive right hand, in which the hand and forearm rotate too much, too quickly, bringing the clubface closed.

To check this, start with the static grip. The V's in each hand should point toward your right shoulder. If they point further right, your grip is probably too strong. Remember to grip firmly, but lightly. A death squeeze leads to tension in the forearms and incorrect swing.

The back of your left hand and the palm of your right hand should face the target. You should see only two knuckles of your left hand. If three are showing, you probably have too 'strong' a grip. Make sure your left is not too relaxed, though. This tends to cause the right wrist to take over, again leading to a closed clubface.

Grip the club more in the palm of your hands than the fingers. This will help reduce wrist action and premature closing of the clubface. Hold the club only tight enough to keep control.

(2) Stance

In order to hit the ball squarely with any consistency, you have to return the club to the original spot (sweet spot on the ball) at impact with the club squared.

So start with the club in the proper position, by taking the proper stance. Your knees, hips, and shoulders should be parallel to the target line.

To ensure the clubface isn't closed at address (your starting stance before beginning the swing), align the scoring lines of the clubface at right angles to the target line.

(3) Swing

In order to hit the ball squarely with any consistency, you have to return the club to the original spot (sweet spot on the ball) at impact with the club squared. Yes, I said that in (2) — it bears repeating.

The lesson here is that the club should remain in the same swingplane both on the backswing and the downswing.

Make sure the right forearm is not far below the left.

On the downswing, make sure that the action is from the body, with the legs relaxed. This helps to reduce wrist rotation and closing the clubface. Your weight should shift to your left side.

Make Your Short Game Shorter

Since 70 percent of shots are made within 120 yards of the hole, improving your short game can lead to better scores with less effort. One technique, mental as much as physical, to improve your short game is by starting from the hole and working backwards. Everyone knows the frustration of missing those two foot putts, but that can be practiced off the course.

On the course, start with the right club selection. A higher shot such as a lob, will need a club with more loft, so match the distance and height to the number. But keep in mind, you want the ball on short shots to stay out of the air as much as possible.

To keep the shot low, position your chest in front of the ball, with about 75 percent of your weight shifted to the balls of the feet. When you need to make those higher shots, the chest is further back, even slightly behind the ball with only 60 percent of your weight forward.

Proper contact at impact will do more for accuracy and proper distance than a forceful swing. Most golfers hit plenty hard enough. Concentrate on consistently connecting with the ball at the sweetspot, with the clubface square. This is critical with wedges where the loft of the club can easily encourage hooks or slices. And remember, the handle of the club should always be in front of the face at impact.

Practice a few "flamingo drill" shots by hitting some chips and pitches with the toe of your rear foot balanced on your front foot. This puts the weight on your front leg. (Either that, or you fall down. A position from which it's difficult to hit much!) Now, put your foot down to the normal position and hit a few more. Notice how the exercise helps to prevent hanging back and lifting the ball into the air.

Remember, if your head is behind the ball, your weight will tend to be behind the ball. You want more of your weight on the front to prevent those fat chip shots. Also, keeping the ball on the ground longer will increase accuracy.

Take a 7 or 8 iron and grip closer down toward the bottom of the grip. Open your stance slightly and align the shoulders on the target line. Using a putting stroke — arms and shoulders do the work, while the lower body stays quiet — draw the club back about 18 inches. The down swing should follow through the same distance after impact.

For good chipping, set your hands slightly ahead of the ball and lean a little toward the target. Flex the knees slightly and narrow the stance. The swing doesn't require great force, if your impact is square and on the sweetspot. Aim to impact down on the backside of the ball to keep it from gaining too much height. Accelerate smoothly. Remember, don't uncock your wrists too early on the downswing.

When your short game is as short as possible, the next best percentage play is to practice those putts.

Bunker Shots, Not Tequila Shots

The way some duffers approach bunker shots, you might think they'd been drinking before the game rather than after. So here's some sober advice about how to tackle those tough traps.

A "bunker" is a prepared area of ground, often a small valley, in which turf and earth has been removed and replaced with sand, water, or taller grass. (Also known as a 'trap') A 'cross bunker' is one in which crosses the line of play, requiring the player to shoot over the bunker.

STANCE

Establish a firm footing that will support your swing without slipping. Form a solid base. Be careful not to dig your feet too far down, though — that will make your legs rigid, encouraging too strong a shot. The lower body should stay quiet; i.e. very little motion in the legs.

Start with your weight favoring your left side. (For right-handers. For lefties, reverse directions.) Stance should be open and a little wider, to restrict your backswing and steepen the swing. Let the knees pinch in slightly, putting more weight on the inside of the feet.

GRIP

Light, but firm. Holding the grip too hard will make your wrists rigid, making it harder to slide the club under the ball into the sand.

Choke down on the grip a bit, half an inch will do, allowing you to more easily hit under the ball. (That also helps to discourage burying your feet too far down in the sand.)

Hinge the wrists earlier than you would for a normal shot. That encourages a steeper angle of attack for the downswing. Of course, you're using a wedge for this.

SWING

With a large-soled sand wedge, shorten your backswing to about three-quarters normal. Mirror the distance on follow through. Remember that, counter-intuitively, you're not going to hit the ball with the club at all. Instead, you're aiming about two to four inches behind the ball, scooping sand that makes contact with the ball and forces it up and out of the trap.

On an uphill slope, keep the shoulders level — not tilted with the slope. On a downhill shot, open the stance and make a steep backswing and an aggressive downswing. Don't close the face and accelerate through the ball.

DRILLS

To get comfortable with the bunker shot, try some of these.

Stick a tee in the sand so that only the top is visible. Put a ball on the tee, then try hitting the tee half way down its length. That helps focus on getting under the ball, about an inch.

If you're digging too deep, open the clubface of your wedge, then grip. That helps shallow out those divots.

Draw a line in the sand about eight feet long with the rake handle. Straddle that line so that it's slightly left of center. Practice making swings that splash sand forward, making the entry point of your club on the line.

Walk down the line and try again. After some practice you should be able to consistently hit that line. Then put down a ball a couple of inches to the left of the line and repeat.

Now you can go have a few shots of tequila.

Chips, Without the Fish

In the average round of golf roughly 70% of shots are made from 120 yards or less from the pin. That means, your chip shot is key to taking those extra strokes off. A chip shot is a low-trajectory flight that rolls further than it flies. A pitch, by contrast, flies higher, carries farther, and rolls less.

Start with the right club. Save the wedge for pitching and use an 8 iron as a middle and work up or down the numbers depending on the distance. This little chart will give you a rough guideline:

9 Iron - For every foot in the air the ball will roll about 2 feet.

8 Iron - For every foot in the air, rolls approximately 3 feet.

7 Iron - For every foot in the air, ball rolls about 4 feet, etc

As always, stance is important so be sure your feet are close together, for shorter shots, slightly wider for longer chip shots. About one foot apart for medium shots.

Your stance should be open at about 30 degrees, with the club face directed at the target. Shift your weight slightly (about 60%) on to your lead foot. (Left foot for right-handed golfers, right foot for left-handers.)

Your hands should be positioned ahead of the club head and they lead the head through the shot. Most bad chip shots happen when the club head overtakes your hands.

Ball position should be slightly back of center, off the trailing foot toe.

Take the club back with the shoulders, no wrist break, with your hands leading the clubhead on the downswing. To check this: Grip your club far down the shaft and hit some practice chips. If the handle strikes you, you're breaking your wrists. The handle will stay well away from you if your wrist action is right.

You'll feel a tendency to point your shoulders left, because of the open stance. But keep a check on it; shoulders should line up parallel to the target line. But be aware of your lower body, as well. When it's rigid, you're overdoing it.

The basic stroke is the familiar pendulum swing using just the shoulders and arms. Since you're not driving the ball long distances, your backswing should be relatively shorter. As a guideline, if you swing back to your waist, and accelerate the clubhead down, the average golfer will shoot the ball in excess of 25 yards. Adjust the amount of backswing for the distance.

The two most common errors in chipping are chunkers that fall too far short and skulls that fly past the green.

Chunkers are the result of hitting up. Be careful not to get too far under the ball, hitting the ground. Don't scoop it. But don't go too far in the other direction and hit the top of the ball with a rising or leading edge. That causes a low shot that overshoots the pin. Just slide the head barely under the ball in a smooth pendulum motion, keeping your wrists still.

Experiment with different clubs to find out what works best for your height and strength for a given distance. Pretty soon, you'll be in the chips!

Perfect Putting

Ok, so there really is no such thing as perfect putting — but you can get pretty close. Just follow some of these helpful tips:

GRIP and STANCE

Start with the correct grip. Lightly place your hands on the club. It's not a python you have to squeeze to death before it kills you. Use a very light version of your normal grip, but with the pinky on the club, rather than overlapped or interlocked. When you close your fingers, don't force the club into an angle. Address the ball squarely. Relax.

Place the ball toward the front of your stance, centered between your shoulders. Keep your hands near the top of the grip and focus your eyes directly over the ball. The target line is perpendicular to a power saw that would slice your body in half. This makes it easy to give a natural pendulum stroke along the target line.

If you're right handed, lock in your left hand. Left-handers, lock in the right. The putter face should be perpendicular to the target line, and the ball at the sweetspot, usually. As you lean over, your eyes come into line parallel with the target line. A ball dropped from your nose would land onto that line.

Feet will be generally set no wider than the hips, weight balanced slightly toward the inside of their left heel.

BALL

Your ball should be placed roughly between the center of your stance and your left instep. This squares up the path and the clubhead prior to impact. Also, it allows any approach angle to level out enough to for good follow through.

STROKE

Sweeping strokes are usually positioned slightly left, while a tapping motion should be more centered. Your goal is to strike the ball in the center (the sweetspot), unless you're putting on a downhill slope. Then, try hitting closer to the toe of the putter. This gives slightly less impact force, and lowers the odds of overshooting the hole. A smooth stroke back, followed by a forward motion in the same plane is the ideal. Remember, left hand holds, right hand strokes. (For right-handers.)

PRACTICE

If you look closely at most golf balls, you'll notice a line around the 'equator', where there are not dimples. A well constructed ball will be perfectly balanced, with equal weight on any line through the center. But not all are. Good manufacturers, ensure the cover is the same thickness all around, and the core materials a uniform density.

Still, not every ball is perfect. On a practice green (flat, dry, and level), try lining up the line on the ball with the target line toward the hole. Take a few practice putts from 3-6 feet from the hole, then ten feet. Look for any tendency of the ball to veer one way or the other that isn't due to errors in your stance or stroke. (Be honest!)

Now lay down a series of markers (strings or quarters, for example), at different distances from the hole. Try one foot, three feet, six feet, 10 feet, 15 feet. Practice shooting NOT for the hole, but to consistently place the ball within the markers. This will give you a good feel for how hard an impact at what angle rolls the ball how far.

Change the distance between the markers, making them closer together, and repeat until you can put the ball anywhere you want.

See, now you are perfect!

Reading The Green

Every golfer knows that a good putting game is the difference between winning and losing. Central to improving that crucial part of the game is developing a well-honed ability to read the green.

Part physics, part art, being able to judge the territory and predict a ball's speed and path marks the master putter. Developing precise control and aim is essential, but useless if you can't tell what the ball is rolling over.

The first important clue is to recognize that, until you've had considerable experience, you can't tell what the green is like standing up and looking out over 10 or 20 feet of grass. Judgment errors about the roughness and contour of the surface, the density and wetness of the grass, and even the distance increase the farther away you are and the higher up you stand.

So get down on your knees and take a good look at what's between the ball and the cup. Lay a club down in the direction of the hole and get even closer to the ground to look along the shaft.

Look for any bumps, curves left or right, and hills or valleys. Estimate how much downhill versus uphill lies between you and your goal. Get a feel for how wet the grass is. Even a small amount of moisture can alter ball travel distance by 8 to 14 inches over that of a shot across dry ground.

Equally important is to judge the mow height and whether it's been double cut. (When the maintenance man cuts the grass in one direction, then again perpendicular to the first, it's said to be 'double-cut'.) Double-cutting can change ball travel distance 6 to 12 inches for the same

impact. Similarly, lowering mow height by one-sixteenth of an inch can increase roll by 6 to 10 inches. More difficult to judge is whether the green has been rolled — which compacts the soil. That increased ground hardness affects roll by 4 to 10 inches.

Beyond all these factors is the amount and direction of curve. Intuition is enough to tell you that the force and angle of your shot varies considerably by whether you are downhill or up, and how much to the left or right the green breaks.

Of course, these factors all have an effect and can't be quantified without advanced measuring devices. Since you don't normally carry those around, use the one attached to your neck. Take into account the factors listed above but also rely on experience and practice.

Take practice shots on both practice greens and real greens when you're not in active play. Take a look from the opposite side of the flagstick to get another point of view — that of the hole's. Watch your partners' putts and take that into account.

You can only take time to do these things when others aren't waiting, of course. But courses have slow days too that allow you to take your time. Use those days to discover the details of each hole. Don't be afraid to take notes. Then the next time you play that course, use that information to judge how to putt that hole.

Reading the green well can easily decrease your scores by several strokes. Who doesn't need that?

Golf Courses Around The World

Golf is NOT played everywhere on the globe — it just seems like it. There are about 32,000 known golf courses (not counting your cousin's back yard or those impromptu setups in Antarctica). But, there don't seem to be any in the Ukraine (population about 48 million) or Yemen (pop. 20 million), or a few other places around the world.

Though there are all kinds of contenders for the longest course, one such has to be the International Golf Club in Bolton, Massachusetts at 8,325 yards. (That's from the "Tiger" tees. From the regular tees, it's a mere 6,547 yards. Wimp.)

One competitor is a course near the Himalayas that claims 8,548 yards. But at an elevation of 10,000 feet it's hard to verify, since it's situated in a mountainous region of China.

For those of you who think that sand trap you played last Sunday was horrible, head to the one at the Pine Valley Course in New Jersey called Hell's Half Acre. To compensate for your feelings of inadequacy, fly back to Massachusetts and wander around the 28,000 square foot green on the 5th hole. Sink a putt on that baby and call yourself king.

The longest single hole is said to be found at the Satsuki Golf Club in Japan. A mere 909 yards. (No doubt by the time this is published, someone will have surpassed it. Golf courses are cheaper to build than skyscrapers.)

If you thought that course in the Himalayas was tough on the lungs, try the Tactu Golf Club in Morochocha, Peru. 14,335 feet above sea level at the lowest point. Be sure to take your oxygen tank.

For those who might be looking for something that's playable, as opposed to just intrigued by interesting statistics, there are still lots of options from around the world.

Scotland, of course, hosts dozens of some of the finest courses in the world. But for my money, the one near Stromness has the rest beat. It's not the most difficult or even the prettiest. But how often do you get to play within a few minutes of a 5,000 year old burial mound, like Maes Howe? Kinda makes you feel younger after you've missed that three foot putt.

India boasts the second-oldest course outside Scotland. Located in Calcutta it's 175 years old. And though not the oldest, one of the most delightful is the Bangalore Golf Club. Founded in 1876, the fairways are dry and sandy, but the greens are lush. If that's too new for you, there's the Bombay Presidency Club built in 1827. Look out for the hazard at the 16th hole, though. It's an elephant pit.

If that course in the Himalayas seems a little remote, but you still find yourself in China wanting to hit a few rounds, head for the Beijing Golf Club. It's only 30 minutes from Beijing International Airport and the Great Wall is visible when playing the first hole.

Speaking of traps, there's the 10th hole of the Kasumigaseki Golf Club in Japan. Opened in 1929, that hole crosses a deep ravine and several man-swallowing sandtraps. Individual holes are separated by tall pines, so you can imagine you're in Idaho.

Ok, so what about Idaho? Well, it's not the largest, the highest, the most difficult or the oldest. But the Hidden Hills Resort near Hope, Idaho has some of the loveliest scenery. Wild deer and moose wander only a few yards away from some of the water traps, and the enormous log cabin-style lodge has the best food and drink for a hundred miles around. Tell them I sent you.

Golf Widows' Revenge

According to figures derived from the National Golf Foundation and the US Census, there are at least 5.5 million golf widows in the United States. They are the women who stay home or sit by the pool while their spouses enjoy golfing with their buddies.

But two can play at that game — literally. Today, more and more women are playing golf for both recreation and development of business relationships. Though they tend not to be able to hit quite as far, on average they have superior accuracy so scores are comparable.

Gone are the days when it was exclusively a men's club. (Augusta notwithstanding.) Even a chauvinist can rejoice. Where else do you get to see a fine form in motion without penalty?

It's been said that living well is the best revenge, but I lean toward the old saying that getting better is better than getting even. So beg, borrow, or buy (ah, credit card revenge!) a half-set

and take some lessons. It won't be long before you're embarrassing the mate by sinking that twelve-foot putt when he or she just missed a two-footer.

Of course, those without an interest in golf (bite your tongue!) can enjoy other pursuits. It's not difficult to make sure that planned trip to Maui for a week on the links contains sights and delights to occupy the 'abandoned' spouse, male or female. Makena's 1,800 acres of lush green and dramatic cloud bedecked mountain views practically guarantee that.

If African safaris are more to your taste, there's even a course in The Gambia, a little sliver of a country with a coast carved out of Senegal. I'd stay out of the water traps, though.

For the stay near home types of either sex, you might welcome a chance to get a few of those projects done without some of the — oh, I'm sure very valuable, yes indispensable — advice they often engender. If you'll forgive the pun.

Such projects could involve taking the spouse's second set of clubs to the repair shop for getting that long-delayed re-grip. Or, for the really ambitious and tidy, you could polish the grass stains off those woods and take a good saddle soap to that leather bag. Er... not what you had in mind? Hmm... some people are just couch potatoes, I guess.

Probably the best advice I've heard to rein in a golf fanatic is to make easing up seem like the duffer's own idea. Of course, it's hard to get them to sit still long enough for hypnosis to take effect.

So, how about this?

Rather than harangue and insist the golfer play less golf — suggest they play even more. Yes, but add that it would be just delightful if the three children were taught to play. That way the golfer still gets to golf and the whole family can still be together.

Of course, all would just have to have individual custom sets at \$2,000 per. Not to mention, those great \$100 shoes — which, kids being kids, would need to be replaced every few months. Throw in three more course fees twice per week — more during summer vacations.

Pretty soon the hobby, er... excuse me, the "well-spring of life sport", is costing an extra \$1,000 a week. Before long that photography hobby is looking like a bargain.

Or, the golfer could just play less golf. Ouch! That hurts just to say out loud.

Glossary of Golf Terms:

Like any human activity, golf's enthusiastic participants have created a whole dictionary's worth of words that may not mean what they do in everyday life. Since the rules of golf have been around since 1744, the situation is amplified.

Here's a selection so that pretty quickly you can sound 'in the know'. (Then, get out and practice looking like one!)

Address: The stance taken before a swing.

Airshot: A swing and a miss. Counts as one stroke.

Back Nine: The final nine holes of an 18 hole golf course.

Bunker (also known as a "trap"): Prepared area of ground, from which turf or earth has been removed and replaced with sand, water, or tall grass.

Birdie: One stroke under the par for the hole.

Bogey: One stroke over the par for the hole.

Clubhead: The base of the club, where the ball is intended to be struck.

Divot: Turf removed from the ground when a player's swing hits the grass.

Dog-leg: A hole that follows a broken, sharply angled line from the tee to the green.

Drive: The longest type of stroke made during play, usually with a wood or low numbered iron.

Eagle: Two strokes under par for a hole.

Fairway: Closely mown grass area (usually one-half to three-quarters of an inch) between the tee and the green.

Flagstick: A movable pole centered in the hole to show its position, usually with a small flag at the top.

Fore: A shout to warn other players that a ball is headed in their direction.

Handicap: A numerical measure of playing ability. The lower the handicap, the better the golfer. Less skilled players are allowed to deduct strokes when playing against better players. (Hence, the latter are 'handicapped'.)

Hook: A stroke which curves the ball to the left of the target, if made by a right handed player, and to the right if made by a left handed player.

Iron: A metal golf club numbered 1-9, with a flat, thin, angled face. The lower the number, the less steep the loft. Lower numbered irons are intended to be used for longer shots.

Loft: The angle of the clubhead, measured with respect to the shaft.

Match Play: A type of competition in which each hole is a separate contest. (See "Stroke play") The lowest number of strokes on a given hole, wins that hole.

Net Score: Gross score minus your handicap.

Par: The number of strokes a hole is designed to be completed in, based on its length. Also describes the number of strokes in which the course should be played.

Pitching Wedge: A club with a steeper face, used when close to the hole. (See "Sand Wedge".)

Putter: A club with a vertical face designed for use on or near the green.

Sand Wedge: A club with a steeper face, used to hit the ball out of a sand trap or high grass. (See "Pitching Wedge".)

Slice: A ball flight which curves to the right of the target. (If made by a right handed player; to the left if made by a left handed player.)

Stroke Play: Competition based on the total number of strokes taken. (See "Match play".) The lowest number of strokes over the entire course wins that game.

Tee: A small, usually wooden (sometimes plastic), device designed to raise the ball off the ground. Must not be longer than 4 inches nor influence the movement of the ball.

Wood: A club with a large, rounded head (usually made of wood or composite), used to hit the ball over great distances.