

{ COVER FEATURE }

# PLAY YOURSELF BETTER

Improve while you play with these on-course tips. With **Gareth Johnston** and **Steven Orr**

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IMPROVE  
WITHOUT  
HOURS AT  
THE RANGE

They say in golf that thoughts of technique should be left on the practice ground and never taken to the course. During practice, we have the time to groove what we believe is the perfect technique, creating a repeatable motion that we are confident will provide results. But what happens if the great shots we hit on the range with our seemingly flawless method don't transpire on the golf course? In this situation, we need a temporary fix that will get us through the round without major damage to our scorecard. This section brings together a collection of tips that you can implement instantly on the golf course, without the need for practice. Suddenly started hitting a banana slice? Feeling nervous over short putts? Suffering from chipping nightmares? Panic not. We've got it all covered so no matter which part of your game is mysteriously misfiring, you'll be able to overcome it with ease and scramble your way to a respectable number. >>



# 1 Use the tee to help alignment

Find the fairway every time by taking advantage of your greenkeeper's work

We're often all too quick to blame a bad golf swing when we miss the fairway off the tee, but have we ever considered the possibility that we hit the ball exactly where we were aiming? Perhaps we just weren't aiming in the right place. If you think you've made good golf swings early in your round but you're not

finding the short grass, it's most likely that your alignment needs adjusting. A great way to be sure you're aimed correctly is to use the mower strips on the teeing ground. Use these strips for starting the ball on the right line, for aligning your feet, or both. Use this routine to take 'Dead Aim' on the tee.

## CHECK THE LINES

Stand behind your ball looking to your target, making sure the mower strips point from your ball down the target line. They won't always! Use your driver's shaft to line up and connect the ball to your target.

## PICK A NEAR TARGET

Track the line to a few inches in front of your ball and pick a few blades of grass on that mower strip. The more specific you can be, the more margin for error you'll have when you execute the shot.

## TRUST YOUR AIM

Approach the ball and take your set up, aligning the clubface to the grass you've targeted. You are now ready to hit your ball straight down the target line. Just pull the trigger, commit... and trust your alignment.

# 2 Play to your strengths

Tee up on the correct side of the tee depending on your shot shape

During the early part of your round, you will often develop a certain shape of shot that is either the same as usual but more extreme, or a different shape altogether. Alternatively, you may know which way your ball tends to fly but don't maximize the potential for that shape of shot to find the

fairway. Whichever, remember to use the correct side of the teeing ground to gain an advantage. You can always sort out the cause of this shape on the range after the round but trying to figure it out on the course is not the best idea. The course is the time to execute shots, not think about technique.

## USING YOUR SHAPE

Knowing which way the ball will curve is a great advantage to hitting the fairway – just hit up the side you know the ball will curve away from. Even if it stays straight, you will still find the fairway fringes.

## HOOK? USE THE LEFT

If you've developed a strong hook shape, tee up on the left side of the tee and aim right. This allows you to hit across the fairway, maximising the room for the ball to curve but still stay on the fairway.

## SLICE? GO RIGHT

If you tend to slice or are hitting it left-to-right on the day, tee up on the right side of the tee and aim left. This ensures you are hitting towards the fairway rather than away from it, increasing the landing area.

# 3 Change your grip to kill a slice

One simple grip change and swing thought is all it takes to sort your slice

You've developed a weak slice out of nowhere and it's costing you distance... and shots. It's a fault that you need to fix – and fast – if you're going to save your round. The two major causes of the slice are an open clubface through impact and a swing path that works excessively from out-to-in, across the ball. The

best way to fix this fault quickly is to understand the importance of the grip in reducing the amount of left-to-right sidespin that you apply. Remember that the hands are your only connection to the club so they are therefore of huge importance in straight golf shots. Apply the following points if a slice occurs...

### TOE PASSES HEEL

A slicer will naturally 'hold off' the clubface through impact, so try to imagine the toe of the club overtaking the heel through impact, ensuring the face 'squares up' sufficiently to eliminate the sidespin.

### TOP HAND HOLD



### ROTATE FOR STRAIGHT

Turn the left hand more over the top of the handle so you can see three or four knuckles with a short left thumb. A short thumb promotes wrist and forearm rotation through impact and seeing three or four knuckles dynamically assists the rotation of the clubface through impact.

### IMPROVED PATH

The golfer holds the face open because he hits from out-to-in. Better clubface rotation will naturally force you to swing more down the line, knowing the out-to-in swing path will now send the ball well left.



# 4 When to think... and when to play

Improve your shot success by getting your thinking done before you hit shots...

It's important to understand that technique and rehearsal drills should be left on the driving range. Bringing these thoughts to the course can lead to excessive tension, resulting in poor shot execution and a drop in performance. The way to combat this problem is to imagine a line on the ground, behind the ball

and at right angles to the target. This line forms two zones: the 'think' zone and the 'play' zone. This is perfect for golfers who tend to think too much over the ball. This is especially useful if you've had a lesson the day before you play. See more strategy tips at [www.todaygolfer.co.uk/playitsafe](http://www.todaygolfer.co.uk/playitsafe)



### COMMIT BEFORE HIT

In the 'think' box, gather all your information, visualise your upcoming shot and make your practice swings. Make sure you've committed to the shot in your mind before stepping over into the 'play' zone.

### 12-SECOND LIMIT

The aim is for golfers to get the shot away in under 12 seconds. Any longer than that and statistics have shown that the golfer will be doing some kind of thinking that should have occurred in the 'think' zone.

### 2. PLAY ZONE

The zone in front is the 'play' zone. Once the golfer steps over the dividing line into the 'play' zone, the thinking stops. All that happens here is that the player executes the shot and nothing else.

### 1. THINK ZONE

The zone behind the line is the 'think' zone. When in the 'think' zone, the player is allowed to plan the shot, choose the appropriate club, pick an aim point and think about any relevant swing thoughts.



# 5 Leave the hero at home...

Play it safe from tricky situations and keep your round going

This situation is a very common one. You've driven into trouble early on the front nine and are faced with a dilemma. Do you risk it and go for the green or chip it out and play safe? A simple rule of thumb when you are trying to decide whether to go for it is to ask yourself a question: Could you pull the shot off at least five times out of 10? If

you could, then go for it. If you feel it would be less than five, then play out to the fairway. Don't kid yourself, you'll only regret it. If the doubts gather, then the smart play is to get the ball back into play and keep your round going. Doubt will kill a risky escape.

See more rescue tips at: [www.todaysgolfer.co.uk/roughrescue](http://www.todaysgolfer.co.uk/roughrescue)

### SHARPER STRIKE

Extra wrist hinge in the backswing gives us a steeper angle of attack. This will reduce the amount of grass that gets trapped between club and ball, promoting a better strike and more distance in long grass.

### RISK-FREE OPTION

The safe play is to chip out. This shot is far easier to play, especially if you've caught a poor lie. The landing area is much larger, giving you more margin for error. A par is still possible from here.

### TAKING THE SHOT ON

There's a chance you could hit the green with a low punch shot under the tree with draw spin to keep it running up the fairway. But the likelihood of pulling this shot off is less than 50-50, don't attempt it.

### ROUGH GRIP TIP



### INCREASE THE PRESSURE

Through impact, try to feel you grip the club a little tighter with the lead hand. This fights the tendency for the grass to turn the clubface over, causing the ball to come out low and left and possibly strike the tree.

SEE THE TG WEBSITE FOR MORE GREAT ESCAPES

# 6 Become a consistent pitcher

Stop fat and thin pitch shots by employing a safer technique

During some rounds, we have an inexplicable inability to strike pitch shots correctly. Whether we're hitting them fat or thin, mis-struck pitch shots generally occur when a golfer isn't positive through impact and tries to help the ball into the air with poor positioning of the body weight. This could be down to

tension or poor technique, but either way, it needs addressing if you're to score well for the rest of the round.

A pitch shot requires a slightly descending blow and a committed throughswing so apply these simple techniques to overcome those pitching nightmares.

### BALANCED LENGTH

Make a backswing and through swing of equal length. Imagine a clock face around your body and swing from a 9 o'clock to a 3 o'clock position, making sure the throughswing feels faster than the backswing.

### CONSISTENT TEMPO

This gradual acceleration helps to swing positively and commits you to the shot. The ball may roll slightly more than normal using this method but it is a surefire way to improve the consistency of strike.

### PITCH CLUBBING



### KEEP A STRAIGHT FACE

Take a stronger club than you're used to, for example a pitching wedge over a sand wedge. This, coupled with an accelerating rhythm, allows you to swing knowing that you have enough club to get the job done.

### FORWARD THINKING

Make sure that your weight favours the left side slightly at address and it stays there throughout the shot. This is a shot of accuracy, not power, so needs no weight shift but plenty of precision.



**NEUTRAL STANCE**  
The modern sand wedge accommodates a squarer clubface, so why complicate things? Square up your stance and clubface, and hit more up the back of the ball. Your results will be more consistent.

**BUNKER DRILL**



**CROSSHAIRS REFERENCE**  
The cross in the sand represents a square stance and face aim. Imagine you're looking down at this cross when you play. Keep shoulders, feet and hips square, the ball just forward of centre, underneath the left eye.



**STRIKE UP THE LINE**  
Just thump the ball forwards, striking the sand two inches behind the ball. Make a full followthrough. This gives a more neutral path, putting forward momentum on the ball, reducing sidespin and increasing consistency.

**7 Don't come unstuck in sand**

Some simple tips can help you get the better of bunkers

Poor bunker play can often be the result of golfers becoming too open with the stance and also the clubface. Traditional bunker technique has been an out-to-in splash, but cutting across the ball can cause problems as the angle of

attack gets too steep, and judgement of distance suffers as the degree of openness in both stance and clubface varies. Modern sand wedges have enough bounce to work with a square path, so keep things simple and stay neutral.

**CHIP SALVATION**



**USE A WRIST-FREE GRIP**  
Changing your grip to a putting grip, with the left index finger running down the shaft, alters the feel of the shot. This grip helps to keep the hands more secure and enhances the feeling of firm wrists throughout the shot.



**CHANGE YOUR CLUB**  
Choosing a hybrid club will help you get the sense of brushing the ball forward instead of hitting sharply down or up. This increases the margin for error and helps you get it closer when your chipping lets you down.

**8 Chipping nightmares?**

Go to a putting grip to strike your chips better

The chip shot is often the hole's make-or-break moment, and that adds pressure. Extra tension can see our technique evaporate, meaning we often need a quick fix during our round that will help us put the

club on the back of the ball cleanly. If this happens to you, you need to change your pattern of behaviour and quickly. So give these two quick fixes a go... and see your coolness under pressure improve.



**GETTING HANDSY**  
When the pressure is cranked up, anxiety tends to cause your hands to get busy. That leads to an erratic angle of attack, with both duffs and thins the inevitable result. The answer is to change your grip.

# 9 Knock in more short putts

Be confident from three feet with this simple line drill

Missing short putts early on often sets a trend mentally for the rest of the round. We sometimes accept that this is what's going to happen for the remaining holes and there's nothing

we can do about it. But this is not the case. Put any early misses down to a lapse in concentration and then adopt this routine, designed to boost confidence through better aim.

Holing a few short putts can make a huge difference to your score. ▶ See FREE video tips on how to hole more putts at [www.todaysgolfer.co.uk/shortputts](http://www.todaysgolfer.co.uk/shortputts)

## 2. GET IN LINE

Lower yourself behind the ball and assess the break on your putt. Once you've established the line, for example a 'right edge' putt, align the line you've drawn on your ball to that point as accurately as possible.

SEE TG'S  
WEBSITE  
FOR MORE  
PUTTING  
DRILLS

## 3. SQUARE BLADE

Once you have aligned the line on the ball to your chosen path, take great care setting the putterface behind the ball, square to that line. Always aim the blade before taking your stance; set up around the club.

## AIMING THE FACE



### USE PUTTER MARKINGS

Putter makers put lines on the putter for a reason – to help you aim the face. Make sure you use them. Place your clubhead behind the ball aligning the lines on the back of your putter with the line on the ball. You are now assured that your clubface and therefore ideal putter path are aligned correctly every time you have a clutch putt. Knowing this will help give you the confidence to stroke it home.

## 1. MARK YOUR BALL

Draw a straight line on your ball using a marker pen over the logo of your golf ball. The line will be a great tool for aligning the putter face on your chosen line of putt and will help you commit to the putt.