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# Golfer

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- Read putts like a pro



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PICTURES BOB ATKINS

# 10 STUPID MISTAKES (and how to stop them!)

Put an end to the daft errors you know you really shouldn't make

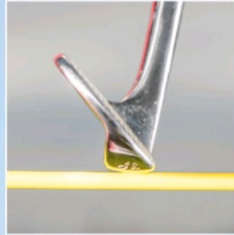
**G**olf, we are often told, is a game of misses – and most of them we can't be blamed for. After all, the game isn't exactly easy. However there are some errors that, if we are honest, we really shouldn't make. Many of us, for example, never tee the ball up in the same position in our stance from one drive to the next. We are also chronic under-readers of putts; and plenty of us are serial duffers of simple chips. These are all simple errors easily avoided – and here, two of our elite top 50 coaches have joined forces to put an end to 10 such Doh! moments.

■ Photographed at the Palmeraie and Ourika resorts, Marrakech, Morocco. Visit [palmgolfclubmarrakech.com](http://palmgolfclubmarrakech.com)

Avoidable error  
#1

## Duffing a simple chip

Afraid of catching the ground before the ball on a chip shot, the club golfer typically moves the ball back in the stance and pushes the hands forward, reasoning that a more downward strike encourages clean contact. In fact it promotes the very contact he's trying to avoid.



### See the bounce

Your wedges were built with a duff safety net – bounce on the sole. It sets the middle of the sole lower than its leading edge, with the club soled in its designed position. Using it means that, even if you hit behind the ball, the club will resist digging and rescue the strike.

### Use maker's angle

Put the club down as its designer built it, the sole flush to the turf, and you'll see gentle forward shaft lean. At this angle the curved, forgiving part of the sole engages the turf.



### Focus on the shaft angle

Hit some chips in practice to get used to the feeling of using the sole. Place the club behind the ball in the middle of your stance and deliver it with that slight forward shaft lean you set at address. You'll soon develop a consistently clean strike.



### Why this set-up digs the turf

'Ball back, hands forward' creates massive lean in the shaft, which seats only the sharp, leading edge of the wedge's sole against the turf. This sharp edge digs as soon as it makes contact with the ground, meaning any pre-ball ground contact results in heavy contact rather than 'bruising' it.

**TG TOP 50**  
GARETH JOHNSTON  
CALCOT PARK, BERKSHIRE



PGA  
Professional  
and Director  
of Golf at Calcot  
Park, near  
Reading.

Avoidable error  
#2

## Aiming your body, not the clubface, at the target

Many amateurs work hard to get their feet, hips and shoulders aiming dead at the target at set-up. The problem with that is that you don't hit the ball with your body, you hit it with the club – and because we stand to the side of the ball, they can't both aim at the target at the same time. Follow this guide to easily solve this problem.

### Go parallel

Good alignment, and a better swing path, needs feet, hips and shoulders parallel to your ball-target line. For the right-hander, that means them aiming a little left of the target.

### Crossed lines

The ball-target line is different to the body-target line. Aim your body at the pin and you effectively aim clubface and ball to the right. You must come 'over the top' to hit the ball straight, a move that breeds a slice.



### Aim the butt

Place the club across your chest to find the parallel position with the ball-target line for your feet, hips and shoulders. When you get it right, the butt will point left of target.

### Square alignment

Use the ball-target line as your starting point. Take some time to visualise it, then position the clubface square to it before taking your stance and setting up square around it.



**TG TOP 50**  
ADRIAN FRYER  
FELLOW OF THE PGA

Based at True  
Fit Golf Centre,  
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Avoidable  
error  
#3

## Under-reading putts regularly

Most cups are cut into a slight slope, so have a high side and a low side. The high side is considered the pro side as putts can drop in from there; but most amateurs miss low, giving the ball no chance. This makes our list as it's such a simple thing to address... and here's how.



### 1 Make your read

Head to the practice green and create a 15ft putt with a sideslope. If there isn't a cup cut in the right position, putt to a tee peg. Spend some time reading the putt, both from the side as well as behind the ball.



### 4 Assess well-paced putts

Focus only on balls that finish your chosen distance at or behind the hole – these represent the line you have read. Repeat the drill on various sideslope putts, until your read sees putts either go in or miss on the high side.

### 2 Pace affects line

Before you pick your line, you must first make a decision if you will die the ball in, or run it past 18in if you miss. Either is fine, but decide now, as it dictates the line you must take.

### 3 Create a gateway

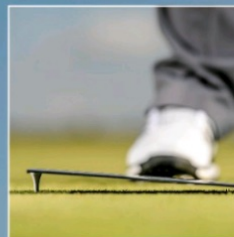
Having decided on pace and line, set up a tee peg gateway a foot in front of the ball – this represents your ideal starting line. Hit some putts through it, and watch the results.



Avoidable  
error  
#4

## Chopping down steeply with irons

Club players have been bombarded by the instruction to hit down on their iron shots, to the extent that many overdo it. It creates a weak chopping action, when in fact a subtle descending blow is all that's needed. Here's how to get a better understanding of the desired attack angle.



### Better by degrees

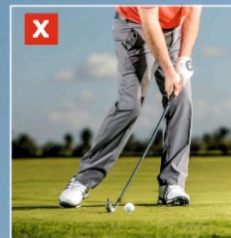
The average 7-iron attack angle on Tour is 4.3° down. To realise how subtle that is, buy an impact board and prop up its back edge with a tee an inch or so into the turf; it shows the 4 or 5° angle.

### New approach

The canes illustrate the difference between the overly steep attack and the shallower one. The correct, shallower attack focuses the swing's low point just after impact.

### Blade runner

To flatten a steep attack, place the propped-up board six inches behind the ball. Hit 7-irons, picturing the sole of the club tracing the board's angle into the back of the ball.



### Choppy waters

When we try too hard to hit down, we send the club's energy down into the turf instead of forward into the ball. If you're lucky enough to catch the ball cleanly you'll generate an erratic and ineffective flight – either popping the ball up or driving it too low.



Avoidable error #5

## Curing a slice by making it worse

Most slicers respond to the dispiriting sight of the ball cutting away by closing the clubface. While it seems logical, closing the face only increases the slice. Here's why... and what you should do instead to cure it properly.



### Closed loop

Seeing their shots curve away to the right, the right-hander typically reacts by aiming the face further left – as illustrated by the magnetic aim device on the face. It might feel reassuring as you look down, but it actively encourages a slice-inducing delivery of the club.



### Anti-rotation impact

The golf ball slices because the face is held open to the club's path through impact. Close the face down and you only increase the need to hold the face open through the ball. That closed face actually promotes the non-rotation of the clubhead that causes a slice.



### Open the face

To beat this vicious circle, aim the clubface right of the target at set-up (if you are a right-hander, left if you are left-handed). Yes, this is a leap of faith for any golfer afraid of the ball slicing, but golf technique is often a game of opposites, and this is a classic example.



### Face rotates

From that open set-up aim, you force yourself to rotate your forearms through impact to square the blade. This is the root of the technique that applies drawspin to the ball. Try it on the range first... and when you've built confidence with it, use it on the course when the ball starts slicing.



### Index linked

The key to a better interlock is not to link the hands with the full length of your fingers. Position them so the trail-hand little finger and gloved-hand index finger are only partially entwined.

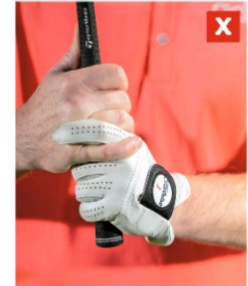
### Finger hold

Grip the club with this reduced interlock and you will be able to hold the club in the fingers and not the palms – allowing much more wrist mobility and a full, powerful wrist cock.

Avoidable error #6

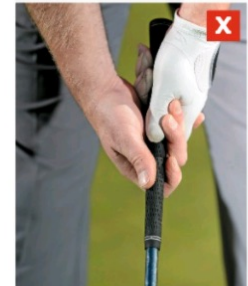
## 'Overlocking', not interlocking

The interlocking grip places the index finger of the gloved hand between the ring and little fingers of the lower hand. It's a good way of uniting the hands, used by Jack and Tiger, but if you choose this grip you have to be careful. That interlocking is often overdone... with power and club control taking a hit.



### The overlock

In interlocking the fingers, many club players push the full length of the index finger right through to between the base of the fingers of the other hand before taking their grip.



### Palm hold

Doing this slides both hands too far under the grip, placing the handle into the palms. At best, one knuckle is visible on the back of the gloved hand.



### Wrists immobilised

Gripping the club in the palms locks up the wrists. If you can't cock the wrists to form an L-shape between lead arm and shaft, you can't create power from lag and the swing's sequencing suffers.



**Step 2: Move trail foot**

To create your ideal stance width, leave your lead foot where it is and pull your trail foot away until its instep is under your trail shoulder. This sets your ball position consistently.

**Works for all clubs**

This drill gives ball position consistency through the bag. Just pull that trail foot away less far as the club gets shorter to put you more on top of the ball with the lofted irons.

Avoidable error #7

**Inconsistent ball position with a driver**

Many amateurs fail to tee the ball up in the same position twice in a row – or, for that matter, at the same height in relation to the turf. And when you vary your tee height and ball position, your driving patterns become more erratic.

This happens because the club is effectively travelling in a circle, so varying ball positions mean it will 'collect' the ball at different heights, on a different path and with a different face angle. Even just an inch of variation can make a difference.

Your ideal ball position, in harmony with the design of the driver, places the ball 1-2 inches inside the lead heel. Use this two-stage drill to get on top of this issue.



**Erratic impact**

Teeing the ball up in different positions sees impact happen at varying points along the club's arc and on different parts of the face. It forces inconsistency with the impact path and face angle.



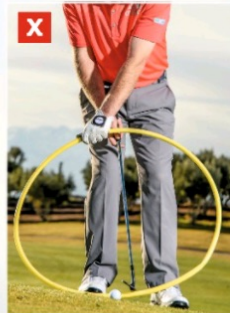
**Step 1: Lead foot forward**

Place your feet together, the ball in the V of the toes. Check the top of the driver is opposite the ball's equator. Keep your weight 50-50. Now move your lead foot 1-2in towards the target.

Avoidable error #8

**Heavy contact off downslopes**

Playing off a downslope is tricky, yet many club golfers are determined to make the worst of it, catching the ground early when there is no need to. It's often caused by leaning back and trying to scoop the ball up. Instead, trust the loft to send the ball up and work on your 'low point'.



**Way off base**

This plastic hoop shows the base of the club's arc. As you lean back to help the ball up, the arc's low point moves back with you. With the land higher behind the ball, you'll inevitably catch it heavy.



**Divot after the ball**

Practise swinging with this forward-leaning stance, feeling the sole impact the turf after it would have hit the ball. Bring the same feeling of hitting down the slope into the shot itself.

**Forward thinking**

Off downslopes you must keep the low point of the club's arc holeside of the ball. That way you can engineer a downward attack angle that allows a clean strike from this lie.

**A new low**

For the hoop's low point to be ahead of the ball it has to move forward. So you do too: your shirt buttons moving ahead of the ball, creating a forward lean in the shaft.



Avoidable error  
#9

## Keeping your head down... and stalling the release of the club

Although this is golf's most common tip, golfers hardly ever actually lift their heads. If the head level does rise it's far more likely to be due to issues with flexibility or hitting too hard. But the tip is so ingrained that many golfers still obey it. Alas, it causes only restricted motion and weak shots. Instead, think more of letting your head rotate with the club through impact.

### Let your head rotate

Instead of trying to keep your head down, allow your eyes to follow the clubhead. This adds freedom and fluidity to your move through the ball, giving a series of important benefits.

### Improved rotation

If your head turns through, you free your chest and shoulders to rotate - note how my sternum faces the clubhead at this stage. The body's bigger role adds power & you're less handsy.



### Down and out

Trying too hard to keep your head down means your upper body is unable to rotate, so you are flat-footed and side-on to the target. It forces a handsy, flippy release of the club and produces weak, high shots.

### More extension

With the chest and core freed up to rotate you can clear your lead side better. That gives room to extend the arms and club further down the line, adding power and direction.

### Shallower attack

Moving your head like this will allow you to collect the ball with a shallower attack angle. Keeping your chin down tends to see the arms swing down at the ball on an oversteep path.

Avoidable error  
#10

## Getting the ideal grip pressure completely the wrong way round

Many of the golfers I coach think delicate short-game shots demand light grip pressure, while powerful full swings need a firmer hold - perhaps because long-game shots require physical force and short-game shots more finesse. In fact they have it the wrong way round... and this is why.



### Long game: Go soft

Swing speed equals yards and to create speed in the downswing we must move in a certain sequence, the lower body moving the upper, which drives the arms that deliver the club.

### Short game: Firmer hold

Around the green, control is key - and that means stabilising the clubface with a firmer grip. A firm hold also quietsens the hands, which encourages body rotation to play a bigger role, adding consistency.

### Pick up speed

Soft grip pressure permits a full wrist hinge and the creation of lag as you start down, storing a powerful angle that is released into the ball. That angle is not created with a tight grip.