

330 BEST COURSES IN ENGLAND

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Today's

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Golfer

THE EQUIPMENT ISSUE

TOP GEAR!

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TIPS TO HIT
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**OUR TEST VERDICT ON THE
110 BEST CLUBS OF 2017**

RATED INSIDE: 20 new drivers

■ 20 fairways & hybrids ■ 30 sets
of irons ■ 10 wedges ■ 30 putters

**TIGER WOODS
EXCLUSIVE!**

He talks Augusta, modern
technology & swing changes

**DOUGHERTY
OPENS UP**

Our new columnist on the real
reasons he quit the pro game

FAIRWAYS/HYBRIDS

Find that narrow piece of short grass off the tee or hit the green 200+ yards away

The famed versatility of the hybrid comes through the head's shape and weight distribution. Rounded and weighted low, it is equally at home digging a ball out of a divot or sweeping it off a tee. Though more forgiving than ever, the fairway wood is a little more limited. Base your club selection on the ball's lie.

BALL SITTING DOWN USE YOUR HYBRID, AND THINK 'STACK'

To squeeze the ball out of a cuppy lie, use your set-up and swing to create downward pressure into the ball. Unlike your average 3-wood, the hybrid has enough loft and a low centre of gravity to send the ball up even from a downward blow.

HANDS LEAD HEAD

During the downswing, make it your key swing thought to get the hands to pass the ball before the clubhead. Keep your upper body rotating, work on retaining an angle in the back of the trail wrist, and delivering the forward-leaning shaft angle you created at address.

FEEL THE SQUEEZE

Alongside those set-up and backswing changes, this thought helps you deliver the squeezing downward strike that permits solid contact from a nestled lie. Expect the ball to come out low and hot, but the low-CG hybrid will always give you plenty of launch assistance.



ADDRESS: SET UP TO HIT DOWN

Position the ball centrally in your stance – under your shirt buttons – and create a continuous line between the clubhead and your lead shoulder. This builds the forward shaft lean that encourages a downward attack angle.



BACKSWING: 'STACK' YOUR UPPER BODY

To promote the downward strike this tough lie needs, keep your weight and pressure over the ball as you turn. To practise this 'stacked' feel, dangle the club over the ball and rotate until your lead arm meets the grip.

GOOD LIE OR TEED UP USE FAIRWAY OR HYBRID, AND THINK 'SWEEP'

It's often said the hybrid strike should be downward, like an iron. That's not bad advice from the fairway, but with the ball teed up a downward strike is less effective. Instead, work on the more sweeping, level attack you'd use with a fairway wood.

HIT FORWARD

Feel your shirt buttons stay behind the ball as the club sweeps through. Try to feel "wide" either side of the ball; it'll help you create a flat spot at the bottom of the arc, just what you need for this level attack.

BRUSH ASIDE

When you use your fairway or hybrid off the tee, go to the longer grass to the side to make your practice swings. Work on brushing the grass with the sole as it swings through; if you're taking any sort of divot, you're too steep.



PROMOTE A LEVEL BLOW

Play the ball an inch or two inside the lead heel – just slightly further back than your regular driver position. Position the grip level with the head to avoid shaft lean and encourage a level attack angle. If on the tee, tee the ball to put its equator opposite the meat of the head.



BACKSWING: TURN BEHIND THE BALL

To help create a wider, more sweeping arc, feel your upper body rotate behind the ball. To work on the right move pin the club to your chest, letting the shaft hang. Now turn so your chest is over your trail knee, and the club hangs inside your instep.

WEDGES

Use the built-in forgiveness to knock them close to the flag

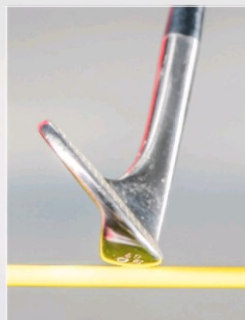
The latest generation of wedges showcases the great advances in face technology in recent years. Yet the basic shape of the head has remained fairly traditional. This is because the way the club needs to engage the turf – using the curved sole to guard against digging – has not changed. Use these ideas to make consistently clean and solid contact.

IMPACT: RETURN TO ADDRESS

Use those two lines to help you find a similar and effective impact position. As you strike the ball, feel your lead shoulder remains over your lead foot and the shaft is delivered at the same angle, the hands marginally ahead of the clubhead.

REPEAT PERFORMANCE

Recreate address and you'll keep the low point of the swing's arc constant, aiding a pure slightly downward strike. You will also ensure the curved sole interacts with the turf and that you apply the maker's loft to the ball, helping flight and distance consistency.



DESIGNER STYLE

Here the wedge is in its designed position, balanced on the low point of its sole. The curved sole just raises the sharp leading edge, eliminating digging, chunky contact. Leaning subtly forward, the shaft angle lets you strike down on the ball while using the sole. Great wedge players apply the club to the ball in this position.



SET-UP: USE THE MAKER'S DESIGN

To apply the club in the maker's position, set it there at address and focus on two key markers to hold it there as you swing. Set up with a straight lead side, lead shoulder above lead foot. Play the ball centrally and let the designer's shaft angle set your hand position. If you have canes, set these two lines to guide you.

WORK ON RADIUS... WITH A SMILE

A second concept that is vital to great wedge play is the width of your arc, or the swing's radius. At set-up your hands are a set distance from your chest; maintain that distance through the swing and your striking will improve. Here's how.

CRACK A SMILE

Maintaining the stretch in the bungee will massively help you find that constant arc. But whether you have the bungee or not, focus on making a smile shape with your hands, back and through. This will help you find that gentle down-and-through arc.

MIND THE GAP

Good radius sees the gap between hands and chest remain constant through your action. Maintain this distance and you set a steady arc to your action, promoting the smooth and slightly descending attack angle that allows you to use the sole. If the gap shortens and the bungee slackens, you'll get narrow, steep and choppy.



RUBBER NECKING

To illustrate radius I've placed a rubber bungee strap around my neck, secured against the grip by my hands. If you can use a bungee yourself, so much the better; the stretch in the rubber helps you feel and maintain your width of arc.



PUTTERS

Roll your rock with more consistency and confidence

The latest generation of putters features more technology than ever to help you create the ground-hugging roll that keeps the ball online. But it's important your stroke allows you to make use of that technology, and that means developing a rhythmic technique with the face rising slightly through impact. Here, I'll show you how a humble doorstop or two – cheap to buy from any DIY shop – can help.

DRILL 1

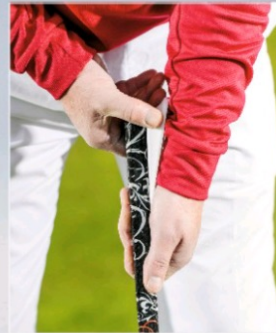
You'll deliver your best roll of the ball when you make a smooth, rhythmic stroke, controlled by your bigger arm and shoulder muscles. Put the doorstop between the butt and your lead arm to help.

TRY IT FOR REAL

The doorstop gives you a little helping hand by securing the handle in position. But when you've got the feeling of the butt pointing at the navel through the stroke, discard it and try to repeat it with your regular action.

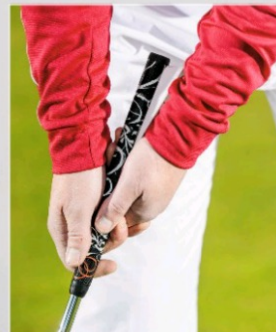
SET THE BALL ROLLING

If the butt starts to point away from your stomach during the stroke, it indicates independent hand action that can compromise rhythm, attack angle, path and a smooth delivery of the putter. But keep the butt/lead forearm relationship constant and you'll find a better roll.



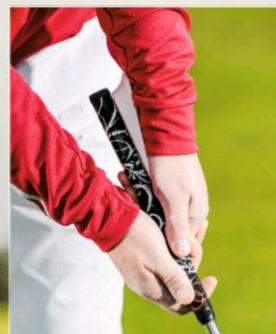
DOORSTOP BRACE

Grip down the putter's handle. Position the doorstop between the handle and the inside of your lead forearm. Note how the butt of the grip points up towards your navel.



BUTT TO NAVEL

Swing the putter back. The doorstop locks the handle and forearm in position, calming hand action. See how, when you do this, the handle's butt remains looking at your stomach.



CONTROLLED RHYTHM

Now swing through, retaining that same putter-arm relationship. Again, those muted hands mean the butt still points up to your stomach. This is a great indicator of a controlled, rhythmic stroke.



DRILL 2

Stats from SAM PuttLab reveal the average Tour pro's putter is rising 2-4° through impact. Position two doorstops ahead of the ball to find a similar attack, and improve your direction.

BUILD GATES

Place the doorstops a putterhead in front of the ball, either side of it as shown, the higher ends further from the ball. Let them frame the ball's path to the hole, and keep them close enough that the putter would strike them if it followed through low to the ground.

ON THE RISE

Now take your regular stance and strike the putt. Your simple task is to let the putterhead trace the slope of the doorstops as it follows through. Hit putts until you can consistently create a solid strike with this rising throughswing.



CUT SPIN

A rising attack angle minimises backspin on the ball, helping you send the ball out smoothly along the turf. Striking the doorstops reveals a more downward attack that imparts more spin; the ball will tend to jump off the face, and skip offline.