

FIVE KEYS TO CONSISTENCY

Five pillars of swing consistency that will help you find more fairways and greens

IMAGES BOB ATKINS



“I just want to be more consistent.”

This statement is right up there alongside “I want to hit it further” as the request I hear the most. As a keen student of the game, I get where you’re coming from.

As experienced players, we know we are going to hit our share of unintended shots every time we tee it up... but how great it would be if they ended up a handful of yards into the rough and playable, as opposed to the lost balls and OB that zap our scorecard and sap our confidence.

Whether we call it reining in our dispersion

or making our bad shots better, hitting good strikes more often is without question a key part of shooting lower scores.

So in this article I want to take you through what are, for me, the five essentials for consistency. If you can improve in these areas, you’ll start to find your less-impressive efforts ending up closer to the fairway and green – with those true horror shots becoming increasingly rare.

Sure, this will take a bit of work, but with winter upon us, now is the time to get stuck in and get your game in peak shape for next spring. Good luck!

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With thanks to The Dunas at Terras da Comporta, a stunning new David McLay Kidd design weaving through the pine forests and sand hills south of Lisbon, Portugal. The course made a top-10 debut in our recent list of Continental Europe’s Top 100 courses.

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PILLAR #1 TAME HOOKS AND SLICES

Manage the clubface



While there is certainly an orthodox golf grip we coaches tend to teach, consistent golf can be played with a variety of holds; consider Ryder Cup teammates Jon Rahm, who employs what we call a 'weak' lead hand, and Matt Fitzpatrick, who uses a 'strong' lead hand. But what these golfers do is match the way they release the club to the way they grip it. If you want to play consistent golf, it's vital you do the same.



Knuckles up

A strong grip wants to rotate the clubface from open to closed, so the very worst thing a golfer with this grip could do is develop a release that sees forearms and wrists actively assisting rotation: expect plenty of quick hooks! Instead the release must calm it... and the best way to achieve that is to feel you keep the back of the lead hand and the knuckles facing the sky through impact.

'STRONGER' GRIP:



Quieten rotation

In a so-called strong grip, the lead hand sits more on top of the handle and the trail hand more underneath it. Perhaps the simplest way to see this is by clasping tee pegs in the Vs formed by the thumbs and index fingers. They will angle aggressively back across you, through your trail arm and below your trail shoulder.



Held-off release

That knuckles-to-sky feel is an effective rotation resistor, taming the strong grip's natural tendency to close the face and instead holding it square. Strong grippers such as Fitzpatrick, Dustin Johnson and Zach Johnson have proved that you can be consistent enough to win Majors with this combination. So if you have a strong grip, don't rush to change it; just make sure you combine it with this held-off release.



Knuckles down

The tendency of a weak grip is to deliver an open clubface to the ball – so in this case, any intention to hold off the release or delay rotation will bring disastrous results, the ball flying high and right. The weak gripper needs actively to assist clubface rotation. The ideal feel here is to turn your lead hand knuckles to the floor and your palm to the sky.

'WEAKER' GRIP:



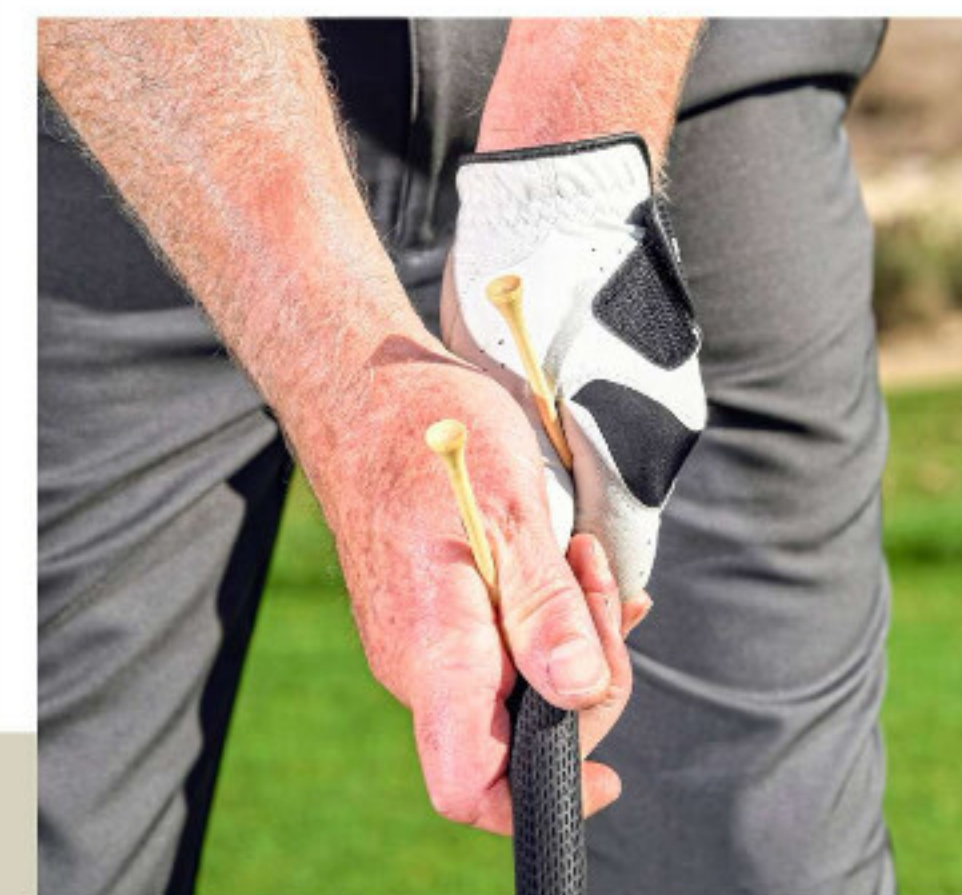
Encourage rotation

With the weak grip, the lead hand is turned slightly under the handle with the glove badge looking square at or even slightly left of the target. Usually, only one knuckle is visible as you look down to your hands. The trail hand often works as a neutraliser and is relatively orthodox, the peg in the V pointing up towards the trail ear.



Squared-up strike

If your preference is for a weaker grip, experiment with this release. That action of twisting the back of the hand to face downwards is what squares and strengthens the face... and in time you will learn how to blend it with your hold. As with the strong grip, it might sound like two wrongs making a right... but again, the likes of Rahm and Collin Morikawa have demonstrated how it's a combination good enough to win Majors.



Neutral option

Hopefully, this section has shown you how a perfectly orthodox grip is more a preference than a must-have. In terms of the grip, the key to consistency is not so much how you hold the club as how you blend your hold with your release/delivery of the club. Sure, a neutral grip (pegs pointing to the trail ear/shoulder) means no need to encourage or resist rotation; but even here, squaring the face remains a skill you must learn, just as with the strong and weak-grip deliveries.

PILLAR #2 TAME FATS AND THINS

Take control of 'low point'

During the golf swing, the clubhead broadly describes a circle around us. In a game where the ball is lying on the ground, the most important section of this circle is, inevitably, its lowest point. When we are not in control of where the club bottoms out, we will make heavy and thin contact. Let's focus on two easy ways to gain that control.



DRILL 1: PEG DROP

Our starting point for controlling low point is a simple drill that both explains how we control it and what an effective, functional impact position feels like. All you need is a tee peg.

Low point under lead chest

The low point of the swing is strongly influenced by the position of our head and upper body. Broadly it falls under the lead chest – the point of maximum extension of the lead arm and clubshaft. A clean and solid strike, then, is dependent on us setting our upper body into the ideal position as we make contact with the ball. Here's how you can work on this.

Tee to divot

Use a 7-iron. Take a swing that makes a divot. Note that this divot represents the low point of the swing. Clasp a tee peg between your teeth and set up with the divot just forward of centre in your stance and opposite your lead chest. Swing to the top... then slowly down to pose an impact. Let the peg fall from your mouth. When your head and upper body are in the ideal position, the peg will land level with the divot.



Error 1: Falling back

Our swing's low point shifts with our upper body. When our tendency is to fall back behind the ball, we bottom out early... and with the club rising through impact, we can expect both heavy and thin contact. If this is your tendency, the peg will fall behind the divot.



Error 2: Drifting forward

We can also drift forward – towards the target – on the downswing. Again the swing's low point follows the upper body and we bottom out well after the ball. This time the peg falls in front of the divot. We can expect glancing, erratic contact.

DRILL 2: CHALK LINE

Now we have a better feel for where we need to be at impact, let's introduce some movement. For this exercise you will need one of golf's most underrated training aids – a piece of chalk. Leaving clear, removable marks on both grass and range mats, chalk can be used in all kinds of ways, but in this case, simply draw a line at right angles to your target line and take your set-up with the line just forward of centre in your stance.



Gathering dust

This drill provides both feedback and some elementary low-point training. Without a ball, swing with the intention of striking the chalk line as you swing through. A successful effort will be rewarded with a puff of dust. But the line also helps you see your low-point pattern – is the club tending to strike the ground before the line... or after?



Add a ball

When you've hit the chalk five times in a row, place a ball just behind the line. Hit the shot, looking once more to repeat that chalk-line strike. Does the ball affect your success? If so, how? Keep working on this until you can take chalk on a regular basis, and note just how pure – and consistent – your ball-striking becomes.



PILLAR #3 THE FACE/PATH RELATIONSHIP

Find the 'power channel'

⤵ We do not need perfection to find consistency, but we do need to work within certain parameters, and swing path is the perfect example. Effective golf shots are the result of a harmonious relationship between the path of the club and the aim of its face at impact... but if we are swinging excessively across the ball, it becomes much, much harder to find that relationship on a regular basis. To work on this, set up your own 'power channel'.



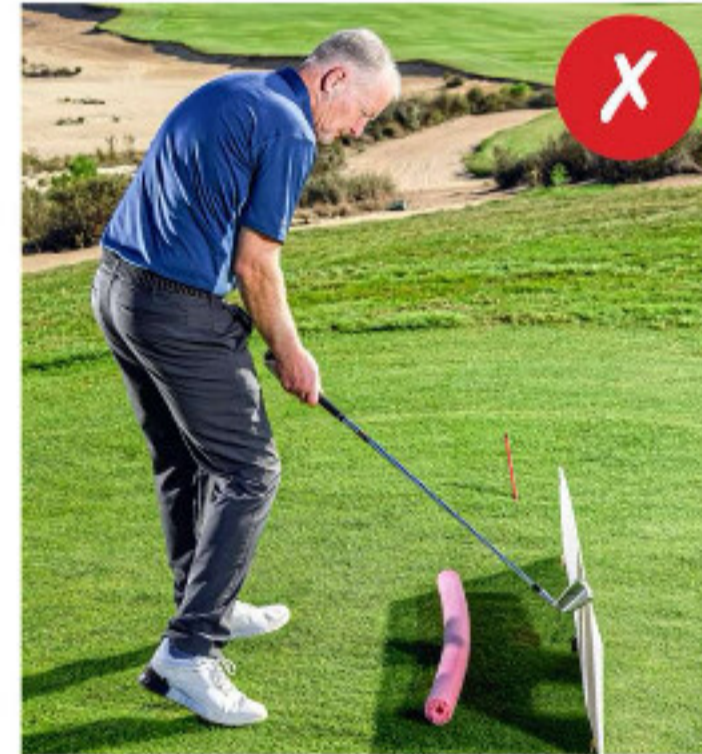
Path finder

I've used a small piece of board and a swimming noodle to create this impact-zone swing channel. It's not that important what you use, though make sure striking either side won't damage anything and ideally have your inner border arced like the foam. The key is the gap between the two: leave a clubhead's length either side of the ball to permit a slight in-to-out or out-to-in delivery path. Ideally, place an object ahead of your channel to define your ball-target line.



Arc of triumph

The channel serves both to define a neutral swing path and to provide valuable and instant feedback on your ability to swing down it. A pure, neutral-path delivery will see the club miss both sides, but the width you have set permits acceptable off-neutral paths.



Excessive out-to-in path

If your swing pattern is to attack the ball from well outside the ideal path, the power channel will let you know it; you'll end up striking the back end of the outer border or the front end of the inner one.



Excessive in-to-out path

Attacking too far from the inside is far less common, but again you'll know it because your club will impact the back end of the inner border or the forward section of the outer one.

STRAIGHT SHOTS, DRAWS AND FADES

Simply creating a channel like this and swinging through it will sharpen up your path by itself, but if you are finding progress slow – or simply want to improve your feel and awareness of path and how you can influence it – focus on your delivery position.

Neutral: Clubhead behind hands

Swing to the top, before moving down slowly to this position, the clubshaft level with the ground. A perfectly on-plane swing will see the shaft parallel to the ball-target line at this point, the clubhead directly behind the hands.

Going online

Of course you'll be swinging fast through this position when hitting balls, but simply connecting with the ideal, on-plane position is a great exercise to improve your awareness of what a neutral position feels like. So hold the position for a while, absorb it... and look to move through it as you swing down and release the club.



Draw swing: Clubhead 'inside' hands

You can perform a similar exercise to boost your feel for the subtle in-to-out path that promotes a draw... or simply to move away from an unwanted out-to-in path. Swing down to the same position, but this time work to point the shaft right of the target (right-handers), the clubhead back 'inside' the hands.



Fade swing: Clubhead 'outside' hands

Naturally your fade swing will have the opposite feel. This time get the shaft pointing left of the target by working the clubhead outside the hands as you swing down. Again, absorb the feel... and look to repeat it when you want to shape the ball from left to right.

PILLAR #4 TAME STRIKE CONSISTENCY

Find the sweetspot

Regular solid contact is, of course, at the very heart of consistent golf. There is a perception among club golfers that if you get your technique right, the strike will come automatically. That's not the case. Strike is something you can work on directly and independently, and is one of the best ways you can use your practice time. First, address your balance point, then try the following three drills...

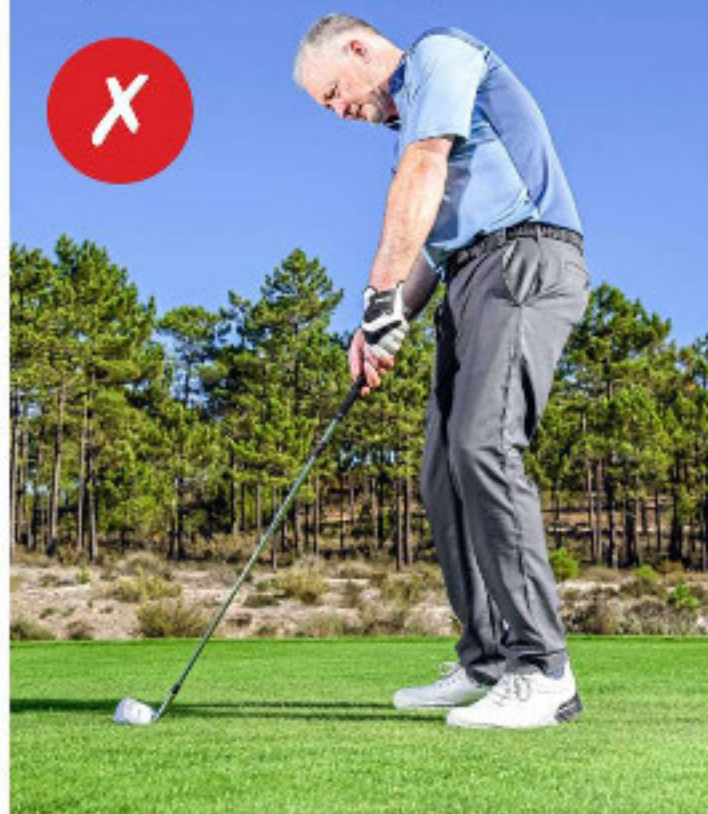


Centred strike through balance control

Most club golfers are so set on hitting the ball as far as possible that balance goes out of the window. This is self-defeating because we need strong, centred contact for distance... which we only get from a balanced motion.

Common error: Into the toes

By far the most regular issue here is the golfer shifting into their toes coming into impact. Our instinctive efforts to find balance affect our fundamental distance from the ball, typically bringing us closer to it. We will tend to register heel strikes... but efforts to compensate will bring about a general inconsistency.



Address: Set your balance point

One of the big causes for that toe shift is the common 'advice' to set up with weight on the balls of your feet. Follow this idea and you will almost certainly end up with your weight too far forward in both feet.

Balls... and heels

Instead, I prefer the concept of weight spread evenly between the balls and heels... a more central feeling that helps you become more grounded and stable at address. You can easily create this weight distribution by taking your stance and rocking gently forward into your toes and backward into your heels, before sensing and settling on the perfect middle ground.

1. SWING: GO TOE-HIGH

A balanced swing brings a repetitive motion and strike, and ultimately more consistency. But do not conflate keeping balance with a lack of movement. The golf swing is a dynamic motion asking us to shift and rotate within balance, which we need to train. So work on this directly. From that new, solid address position, hit

shots with your attention solely on the quality of your balance. If you struggle, here are a couple of footwork messages that may help:

- Picture your feet 'rolling' as you shift weight back and forward.
- Through impact, curl your lead toe up and bank the trail foot along its instep. This aids a balanced clearing of your lead side.



2. BUILD A 'STRIKE STATION'

Whether you are working on your balance or not, you can always train strike consistency by creating your own impact station. I've used a sponge outside the toe and a short alignment stick – set to match the shaft angle – inside the heel. You can follow this example or create your own using headcovers or even tee pegs. Whatever you use, the important element is the size of the gap you leave between them; leave only a minimal margin for error. Once you're set up, simply focus on delivering the club through the gap; it's incredible how a simple intention to place your attention on contact can see it improve.



3. UNDERSTAND YOUR TENDENCY

Do you truly know which part of the club is making contact with the ball? Few amateur golfers do, and no wonder; the strike point is notoriously hard to gauge. But it is well worth investing in two proven strike revealers – clubface stickers or foot spray. After just a few shots with either, you'll develop a clear picture of your mistrike tendencies and understand what adjustment is needed to correct them. Add this valuable feedback to your work on strike training and balance, and your striking consistency can't help but improve.



PILLAR #5 TAME YOUR AGGRESSION

Harness speed creation



Every club golfer wants to generate as much club speed as possible, but there aren't many who understand how it's done.

It's this lack of clarity that causes inconsistency on a grand scale, with a constant search for those few extra miles per hour playing havoc with rhythm, coordination and timing. So let's make this simple: focus on the two most basic and effective speed generators – core rotation and wrist cock – to fire speed into a consistent framework.

1. ROTATIONAL SPEED

Core rotation is literally at the centre of smooth and effective power. When we learn to pivot correctly, we create the conditions for the arms and club to flow with freedom and power. Try this simple exercise.



Address: Picture box

Take your regular stance and set-up posture, but fold your arms in front of you as shown, stacking one forearm on top of the other. Tilt your shoulders slightly so that your lead side is slightly higher. Picture a rectangular box shape formed by your shoulders, chest and arms.

Backswing: Carry the box away

From there, rotate to 'carry' that box away from the target. Keep your head level as you turn. This will help you get the feeling of 'loading up' or coiling your upper body over your lower half, your weight centred over your trail side.



Throughswing: Box to target

The throughswing should feel like a role reversal. While the upper body turned the box away from the target, it's your lower half that pulls your chest around to face it. So feel your hips and pelvis rotate, dragging the chest and 'box' with it.



TURN KEY

Repeat this drill several times – slowly at first, before adding some speed. Note how accelerating core rotation could help you release – increasing speed, through the arms, into the club. Known as centrifugal force, this is powerful, controllable and encourages sound swing mechanics. If you want consistent speed, keep core rotation at the heart of your golf swing.



2. RAMP UP YOUR WRIST SPEED

From banging in a nail to throwing a ball, we all instinctively understand how cocking and uncocking the wrists allows us to fire speed into a handheld object. However we do not always make proper use of this important power source, leaving us to try to generate speed in far less controllable and consistent ways. Our grip is the place to start.

Right angle

The two main obstacles to wrist cock are a palmy lead grip and excessive tension. To work on both, hold the club in front of you in your trail hand only, angled away at 45°. Place your gloved hand against the handle, fingers and thumb outstretched. Ensure the thumb angle matches the shaft angle.



Palm into fingers

From here, bring your gloved hand straight towards you until the handle sits against the first joint of the index finger and the end of the little finger. This subtle shift moves the handle from the palm into the fingers.



Light pressure

Fold your fingers around the handle and check:

- Your thumbnail is opposite your index fingernail.
- The heel of your hand sits on top of the handle.

■ Where 10 out of 10 is as tightly as you can grip, your hold is no more than a four.



Cock sure

This lead hand position allows your wrists to cock and uncock... and so form a vital lever in creating clubhead speed. Practise this cocking/uncocking, taking the clubshaft through 90° from horizontal (wrists uncocked) to vertical (wrists cocked).

PUTTING IT TOGETHER: CONSISTENT, CONTROLLABLE SPEED

We've just learned about two speed sources – turning the body and swinging the arms/club – and how they blend to create consistency through the controlled creation of speed. Let's now learn a drill that will help you train the two together.



Begin by presetting your wrist cock. Stand upright with your hands in front of your chest. Cock the wrists so the clubshaft is angled at 45°, running up through your trail shoulder. Check you have around a 90° angle between your lead arm and clubshaft.



Maintaining that wrist cock, tilt forward until your hands are at belt height. This is effectively your address position, but with the wrists and club pre-cocked. That wrist cock should see your trail elbow flex inward, towards your side.



From here, shift your focus to core rotation. Turn away as you learned in part one, your hands remaining in front of your chest. Your position at the top starts to represent stored speed, your turned core primed to rotate and your flexed wrists ready to uncock.



Practise swinging down and through, feeling your unwinding body team with your uncocking wrists to deliver easy speed into the club. Finally, put a ball down and feel how easy it is to swing with speed and consistency when you build your speed from the correct sources.