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NOT AGAIN...!

TG Elite coach, Fellow of the PGA and all-round coaching powerhouse Adrian Fryer has been at the coal face for some 45 years, giving around 90,000 lessons to golfers like you and me... and he's still talking to us! Here are nine things we can learn from a coach with an unrivalled experience of where we go wrong...

PHOTOGRAPHY BOB ATKINS

YOUR COACH



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A special blend of passion, creativity and simplicity has made Liverpool-based Adrian Fryer a constant presence in this magazine for the past two decades. Indeed, after first appearing way back in 2002, Adrian can claim to be one of *TG*'s longest-serving instructors. But he can also make a second, rather broader assertion – that when he has not been helping *TG* readers play better golf, he has been busy giving as many if not more lessons than any other active coach in the UK.

No-one, then, is better placed to understand the most common and persistent problems that plague today's golfer... and to offer the most effective solutions. "Since turning pro back in 1978, I've given something in the region of 90,000 lessons, working with everyone from folk who have never touched a club before to touring professionals," Adrian reveals. "This has of course spanned a changing landscape for golf tuition... from the first scratchings of video to today's biofeedback and launch monitors. Yet despite all this change, there is no question that certain problems and misconceptions endure. In fact it is amazing how the same issues crop up time and again. In a typical week I will see all of the nine issues I detail here; in fact seeing all of them on the same day is not unheard of.

"No doubt you will recognise one or two. As ever for the past 22 years, I hope my advice leads you to lower scores."

#1 SELF AWARENESS (LACK OF)

↳ Pretty much every golfer I have coached over the years has spent some time watching the best in the world; you folks know what a good swing looks like. So why do you keep putting your bodies into positions so far removed from that desired motion that it's sometimes hard to believe you're playing the same sport?!

Shock tactics

OK, that may be a little harsh. But in so many lessons, I find myself thinking that what the student needs more than anything else is a healthy dose of self-awareness. Unfortunately, that base desire to club the ball into next week is powerful enough to drive thoughts of form, balance and coordination out of the mind, leaving many golfers with almost no awareness of the quality of their motion. No wonder that, on seeing their swing on video, the club player's most common reaction is shock.

Reflected glory

Compare that to a ballet dancer learning moves in front of a mirror. At all points, they can see how their movement relates to their mental picture of what is required. Even if the details need refining, the basic motions are quickly absorbed and trained. This approach is of course not so easy for a golfer, whose head is looking down at the ground. But there is a similar exercise you can do that will help you gain more awareness of the quality of your movement: swing with an invisible club...

INVISIBLE CLUB DRILL

Because it is the club, the ball and the desire to bash one against the other that hinders self awareness, we are going to put them to one side.

1



Begin by taking up your address with an imaginary golf club. If you can spy your reflection in a mirror or window, so much the better. How does your posture and balance compare to images of our heroes on tour?

2



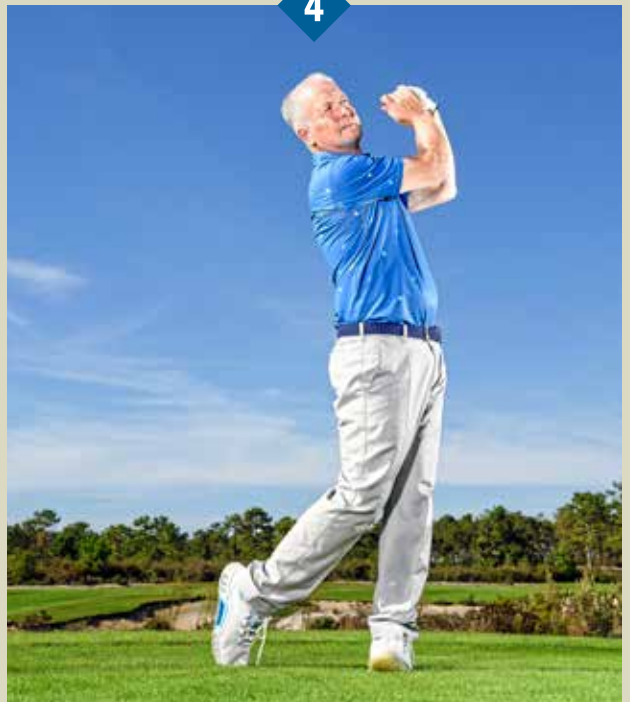
Think of the golf swing as made up of these four reference points: Address, at the top, impact and finish. Move slowly through each position with your imaginary club, placing your awareness on your motion.

3



We all know instinctively what a good swing looks like. But what actually makes a good-looking swing? Balance? Coordination? The general sense that the various components are moving through the right places at the right times? Check your motion against these known virtues as you move the club in a circular motion through these four reference points.

4



With no ball to belt, you'll find it easier to build awareness of the quality of your motion. Yes, the hands, arms and the squaring of the club play vital roles in the quality of the shot; but for the multitudes who insist on finding funky positions as soon as a ball is there to be thwacked, let's start by getting the general shape of your swing closer to the ideal.

#2 HITTING HARD (INEFFECTIVELY)



We hit the ball with the clubhead. If you think that is an obvious thing for me to say, why are so many of you trying to belt it with everything but?! Unfortunately it's one of the most common sights I see – the golfer apparently forgetting the golf club and seemingly trying to create power by swinging themselves at the ball. It shows up in two, equally common swing traits:

1. Over the top

The shoulders and upper body lead the downswing, the club thrown way outside its ideal path. The many golfers who fall into this trap will see erratic contact and, usually, big pulls and slices. We are looking for effortless power, but this move merely brings powerless effort.



2. Poor balance

An ungainly finish, often characterised by a high trail shoulder, as the golfer struggles to contain the excessive, aggressive upper half.



SHOULDERS TOO FAST, CLUB TOO SLOW

Both of these damaging moves have one thing in common: the shoulders are moving too fast and the club is not moving fast enough. For golfers who fall into this trap, we need to reverse the situation. Let's now turn to two exercises you can try.

TWO DRILLS TO SPEED UP GOLF'S ULTIMATE POWER SOURCE

It's important for all golfers to remember that the ultimate power source is the golf club. If we want to gain power and distance we need to get that moving faster... and for golfers who habitually overuse their upper body, we need to factor in calming the shoulders too. These two exercises will help...



1. Back-to-target drill

Drop the club but take your regular address position, arms hanging and palms facing each other. Now swing to the top, picturing your back facing the target (1). From here, try to leave your back in place – facing the target – while swinging your arms down and through as far as they will go (2). Swing down to this position twice before letting the momentum of your swinging arms pull you through to a finish on the third downswing (3). This is a neat exercise to speed up the hands, arms and ultimately club while quietening the shoulders and upper body.



2. Time the towel flick

Use your bag towel for this exercise. Grip it in your trail hand and address a high tee peg. Now swing back to the top before trying to whip the tee out of the ground with the towel. You'll only manage it when you fire speed and momentum into the towel, a move that will feel a little like a flick release. If your body gets too active, the towel will never release and will fly well over the top of the peg... at a much reduced speed. Again, this is a really effective way to get your true power levers working and to train your ability to fire speed into the golf club.

#3 LINKING THE HANDS (POORLY)

↙ The interlocking grip is used by Jack Nicklaus, Tiger Woods and hundreds of other elite golfers. But every week I find myself having to help golfers who have misinterpreted it – to their considerable cost. Let me explain...

I'm not alright, Jack

Jack Nicklaus famously asserted the interlocking grip was best for golfers with small hands; if he'd spent the last 30 years prising golfers' hands apart, he might have seen things differently! If you have smaller hands, 'overlocking' puts the handle even higher into the palms, making your hold even more powerless and ineffective. If you have smaller hands, you can still interlock; just go more towards the tips of the fingers... and make sure the handle remains in the fingers, not the palms.

'JACK'S ASSERTION THAT THE INTERLOCKING GRIP WAS BEST FOR GOLFERS WITH SMALL HANDS HAS BEEN UNHELPFUL'



Overlock

The interlocking grip allows us to link the hands by sliding the index finger of the lead hand between the ring and little fingers of the trail hand. Most club players understand this, but they overdo it; the index finger slides right in as far as it can go, against the webbing of those two fingers. The interlock becomes an 'overlock'.



Missing link

When the interlock becomes an 'overlock', both hands move too far under the handle. The grip ends up more in the palms than the fingers, limiting our ability to create leverage through a correct cocking of the wrists. The grip's job is to provide a secure and powerful link between us and the club, channelling power and controlling the face; but when we overlock, the link is compromised.



Middle joint lock

This grip clanger may have profound implications, but it remains an easy fix. Simply interlock only down to the middle joint of the fingers. From here your hands can find their rightful place on the handle... which now sits more in the fingers and less in the palms. This hold frees your wrists to hinge and cock. Write your name in the air with the clubhead to feel how much more wieldy the club becomes when it is held in the correct part of the hands.



Perhaps we can blame modern technology for this one, in the form of the many gadgets, monitors and range apps that can now give reasonably accurate mph figures for both ball and club speed. Certainly since this tech has been around, I've seen a dramatic and worrying rise in golfers making a priority out of speed. There's just one problem: searching for speed can kill distance. Here's why...

#4 CRAVING SPEED (UNHEALTHILY)



Unlucky Strike

The problem here is that ball speed is a by-product of solid contact... and for most golfers, the pursuit of speed comes at the cost of solid contact. We know our tour pro heroes swing their driver in excess of 120mph; but they have the skill and technique to control the strike at this pace. The typical club player does not. Do you think you could drive a Formula 1 car at the same speeds as Lewis Hamilton? Because this is effectively what so many of you are trying to do!



Move through the gears

Instead of trying to drive in top gear all the time, work up through the gears. Swing only as fast as you can reasonably expect solid contact. We know that for the average golfer, swinging driver around 97mph, a centered strike delivers up towards 250 yards while a low heel strike flies around 215 – a 15% drop in distance! Look to strike quality – not speed – for your yardage; and look to move up a gear only when your consistency of contact allows.

#5 PURSUING A 'SQUARE' CLUBFACE (WRONGLY)



1. Too square

Rather like the interlocking grip, golfers routinely run into trouble by 'overdoing' the square face. They try to keep the face looking at the target as they swing back from the ball and as they swing through, figuring this will increase their chances of a square blade at impact. But as these images show, it's counterproductive. Trying to keep the face square is at odds with what is ultimately a rotational, circular motion. Movement becomes stilted, poorly timed, arrhythmic and ineffective... and because of this, it actually becomes harder to time a square face for impact.

Almost every golfer understands the ball obeys the clubface... and that if the face is square to the target at impact, the ball will generally go in the right direction, given a reasonable path. But what very few grasp is that the face is only square for a blink of an eye... and again, a misunderstanding leads to frustration.



2. Not square but squaring

In fact, paradoxical though it may sound, a square face is the natural result of an equally natural rotation. Just like a door swinging on its hinges to its 'square', closed position, the clubface must open and close to remain square to its circular path. This arcing chalk line should help you grasp how the face needs to work. Each of those five, bisecting lines is square to the curving path, and the club's face aim will ideally be matching them at every stage, as shown on the right.

- Think of a 'square' clubface as square to the swing path, not the target.
- If you must think about square in terms of the target, consider that as it approaches the ball, the clubface is not so much square as squaring.



SQUARE RULE

Note it well: the clubface rotates while we swing the club around our body. To further illustrate the ideal, rotating nature of the clubface, try taping a ruler to the clubshaft, just below the grip.



At address and impact, with the club held vertically in front of you, the clubface will of course ideally be square to the target – an orientation that keeps the ruler in a horizontal position. While you can set the club in this position from any grip, a neutral hold is your best way of finding it consistently.



From this square starting position, rotate your hands and forearms to tilt the ruler away from the target. Note how the clubface 'opens' in harmony with this forearm rotation. This move effectively mimics the face change we need during the backswing if we are to keep it square to the arcing plane of the swing.



From here, tilt the ruler towards the target. Again, it's a forearm rotation that does the job. The clubface 'closes'. This fundamental opening and closing of the clubface – achieved through rotating forearms – is a great first step for golfers used to trying to hold the blade square to the target.



IF YOU WANT SQUARE... ROTATE!

To golfers accustomed to trying to keep the face square to the target, seeing the face open and close like this may feel scary. Remind yourself the club is only square for a blink of an eye and persevere. The real key to a square clubface is to rotate it. Only then can you start creating the correct mechanics; ones that work in harmony with an arcing, circular motion... which help you square that blade time and time again.

#6 THINKING ADDRESS AND IMPACT ARE THE SAME (THEY'RE NOT)

It's another classic, common misconception that is unfortunately standing the test of time... the belief that our address position forms a sound reference for impact. It does not. Address is a static position; impact is a dynamic one, incorporating the vital elements of shift and twist (torque) we need to generate speed and power. Let's look at this in more detail...

Shift...

Think of any human propelling action, from javelin to hammer throwing to simply skimming a stone. In every motion, we use our legs and hips to shift our weight forwards, into the front foot, to help build speed and momentum. Golf is no different, as these images illustrate. At address with a mid-iron, my belt buckle is opposite the yellow stick (1); by impact it's shifted appreciably forwards (2).



1



2



...and twist

Now let's look at the same two positions from up the target line. At address we will ideally be side-on to the target, with feet, knees, hips and shoulders square to the target line (1). But again, if we want to create the rotational forces needed to hit a golf ball powerfully, we need to rotate through impact, with hips and (to a lesser extent) shoulders open to the target at the point of contact (2).

Returning to address: The problem

When we simply try to return to that square, address-like position for impact, our body impedes our arms and we lose the arc width; we will hit erratic, powerless shots. So forget that idea. It is through the shift and twist detailed here that we develop the powerful pivot that leads to solid, consistent contact. If you want to play better golf, train these two vital, dynamic impact moves.

#7 THINKING YOU CAN HIT YOUR 7-IRON 170 YARDS (BECAUSE YOU DID ONCE)



Again, we can perhaps have a little dig at distance-measuring technology here.

But in recent years golfers have become obsessed with how far they hit their 7-iron. There are two problems with this:

■ Inevitably, the figure they come up with is based on their finest, purest effort. And on the basis of that mythical strike, every other iron is assigned a yardage, plus or minus 10 yards... giving equally unrealistic ambitions through the bag. No wonder coming up short is approaching routine for the nation's golfers.

■ Golfers become accustomed to thinking they hit their 7-iron one distance, and one distance only. The facts are, however, that depending on wind, slope, temperature and your timing on any given day, a 140-yard 7-iron could fly anything from 120 to 160 yards. In many respects, how far you hit your 7-iron has nothing to do with you.



GET REALISTIC, GET FLEXIBLE

The advice here is twofold: 1. By all means get to know your 7-iron distance... but base it on your average, not your best, even if you have to gulp down some pride to do so. 2. Don't let tech turn you into a zombie. Accept that, out in the real world, club distances are massively affected by exterior factors beyond your control... and improve your readiness to adapt.

#8 SWEEPING UP, SQUEEZING DOWN (EXCESSIVELY)



Broadly, when it comes to the angle we attack the ball, we have three options: we can hit down on it, we can hit up through it, or we can deliver a level blow. However, over the years, I've seen more than my fair share of golfers using the wrong attack for the club in their hands. Let me explain...

TOLERANCE

Every club in your bag is designed with face loft... to a greater or lesser degree. This difference in face loft gives each club its own set of tolerances when it comes to attack angle. Let's spell this out through the bag.

Driver: 9-11°

The low-lofted driver performs best with a sweeping, level attack angle.

7-iron: 28-32°

The 7-iron works best with more of a slightly squeezing strike.

Gap wedge: 50-52°

The higher-lofted wedges are arguably the most versatile, able to cope with a level-to-steeper attack angle.

These rules, though, are poorly understood. While most club players may understand the basic concept that you sweep a driver and squeeze an iron, many are either not doing what they think they are doing or they are overdoing what they are trying to do. The result is an unhealthy cocktail of attacks inappropriate for the club being used... creating problems with path, strike and flight.

Driver: Amateurs can be both too steep into the ball OR, if they have been told to hit up, too ascending.

Irons: Again, that intention to squeeze can lead to becoming too steep. Alternatively, we can see golfers swinging upward to assist launch with a club already packed with face loft.



OVERDOING IT

In my experience, golfers try too hard to influence attack angle. This is perhaps due to a misunderstanding of how subtle both an effective downward and upward attack are. See it as a clock face: every minute the minute hand moves is 6° – hardly anything, yet a figure right at the upper end of what we might coach. A second, useful image is of a seaplane, landing or taking off on water. In both cases the angle is subtle; would you want to be in that seaplane if it employed the same angles used by most club golfers?! Golfers who struggle with attack angle would do better to think about making one, staple swing designed to send the ball forward... and controlling attack angle through ball position. This naturally calms excessive attacks, both upward and downward.



Driver

Play the ball opposite the lead instep. With the swing's downward arc describing a circle, the ball further forward (later strike, club ascending) brings a gentle upward attack. This promotes the ideal sweeping, level-to-up attack you need with such a low-lofted tool.



Irons

Play the ball more centrally. Moving it further back (earlier strike, club descending) leads to that more pinched, squeezing contact. This encourages the subtly downwards-to-level strike that these more lofted clubs need.

#9 GOOD SHOT, SH*T SHOT (THEY'RE NOT THAT DIFFERENT)

Here is one thing I've noticed down the years, which if anything is getting worse: the typical club golfer has no idea just how close a 'perfect' shot is to a 'terrible' shot. And although not a technical thing, it has the power to destroy confidence and wreck performance. To make my point, here are two potential contacts:



"Yes! I've got it!"



"That's it, I'm giving up"

In the first instance we label this a great shot, a success. In the second we feel only failure and embarrassment. But what is the difference between the two? Perhaps half the height of a golf ball, 2cm? In any other walk of life we'd label this a tiny, acceptable margin for error, but in golf, it has the power to make us feel like kings or jokers.



Rule of thumb

Let's look at this another way. The sweetspot of a clubface is about the size of a thumbnail. If we miss this tiny target by more than a cm, the consequences for our golf ball and scorecard can be dire. This makes golf, officially, a Very Hard Game. Yet I constantly meet golfers – even inexperienced ones – who are puzzled at their inability to master it, to do what they see more accomplished players do. They cannot understand how they can hit a perfect shot followed by an awful one – even though the two swings they made were practically identical – and because of this confusion, they lose confidence and belief.



There are three payoffs here:

- 1.** Understand the difference between a great and poor shot is almost nothing at all. You didn't suddenly make a poor swing; you simply don't have the skill to apply the clubface in the same place every time. Don't feel bad about that; very, very few golfers do.
- 2.** Use this understanding to manage your expectations, to improve your levels of acceptance. This will help you retain confidence when the ball is misbehaving.
- 3.** Work on developing your skill. Forget that latest, technical YouTube video and instead spend time on the range developing the quality of your strike. Use clubface stickers to monitor your performance. That's what every accomplished golfer has done. Sure, it takes some application; but that's exactly what makes achieving it worthwhile.