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Improve Your Golf Game
Easily & Quickly



Play “In the Zone” with Joan

PRACTICE FOR SCORING EXCELLENCE

All golfers seem to want more consistency in their game. Consistency comes from practice. You have probably heard that *practice makes perfect*. Unfortunately, most golfers don't know how to practice to achieve their best results. When you practice you need to have a plan for what and how you are practicing.

Practice is a way to send to your memory bank the content of what you are practicing. Your subconscious mind where this information is stored doesn't differentiate between “good” and “bad” shots. It takes the content literally and stores it all without change. When you are looking for a “fix” for your golf swing, your mind will bring up the “wrong” swings as well as the “right” ones to satisfy your desire for an answer.

As defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, *practice* is; “to perform or work at repeatedly so as to become proficient” and “systematic exercise for proficiency.” Do your practice sessions fit this definition? Or do you just hit ball after ball hoping to find the “secret?”

Let’s look at the first part -- to become proficient by performing repeatedly. Most golfers don’t practice as if they want to become proficient. Their practice is inconsistent and thus produces inconsistent results. How then can you practice effectively so you can get the consistency you desire on the golf course?

Intention and Attention

Watch good players and learn from them.

Let’s look at how Tiger practices. First he has a specific plan for what he wants to accomplish in every practice session. He comes up with this plan the night before when he is at home swinging a weighted club. On the practice tee he gives his full attention to executing this plan on each shot.. He hits 10-15 balls, and then stops for a minute or two to absorb what he’s working on.

Tiger takes a lot of practice swings. It’s the best way you can “feel” the swing and your timing and tempo. He takes as many practice swings as he needs until he has a clear picture in his mind and can recreate it on the actual shot. He then commits himself 100% to the shot. Then he gives it his full attention and doesn’t let himself get distracted.

Practice swinging to see how hard you can swing and still stay in control of your mechanics. If you can’t swing as hard as you want and execute the shot, then swing at a pace you can control.

What to practice

On the range you will notice that most of the golfers there are practicing their full swings. If golfers want to score better, they need to practice the way they play. For all levels of golfers, full shots from the driver through the wedge are used in only 37% of the total number of shots! The half shots; chipping, pitching, sand, and putting comprise the other 63% of your score.

If you want to score lower, you will practice the game differently from most of the golfers on the range hitting full shots. Put your time and energy into practicing and gaining confidence around the greens in your chipping, pitching, sand shots and putting. Practice half and partial wedge pitch shots into the green as a scoring tool, not just as a recovery club. This is why the professionals carry as many as four wedges in their bags.

Your goal is to get the ball on the green close enough for two putts, or better. Practice until the wedge feels like an old friend you are shaking hands with. Practice until you *feel* like you can get the ball close to the hole. Practice until you know the exact distance you hit your wedges on full and partial shots.

The average golfer can reduce h/her score by 3 to 12 shots per round by practicing the pitch shot and the chip shot. The pitch shot is executed with a pitching wedge or sand wedge and is less than a full shot. The chip shot is executed with any club with the same stroke as a putter. The club used lands the ball on the green near the edge and lets it run to the hole. The axiom is *"less air time, more ground time."*

- Hit balls from various distances. Begin close to the green, moving back until you are almost hitting a full shot. Notice what swing is necessary to achieve the different distances.
- Hit balls from one place to different holes.
- Hit balls scattered so you are hitting from different positions and lengths.
- Hit from different lies, bare lies, fluffy lies, thick grass.
- Hit balls with eyes closed for feel and feedback
- Hit balls alternately with eyes closed and then open for sensual awareness.
- Before you look up after hitting the ball, tell yourself whether the ball was right, left, short or long of your target for target awareness.
- Hit balls to uphill, downhill, side hill, two-tiered greens.
- Have fun creating these shots. Do not put your mind and body on overload by trying to hit a certain number of shots perfectly before you leave.

Julie Inkster intention is to get the ball in the hole, and she never gives up. Her heart is still as competitive as anyone's in golf. Just watching her shows how much she wants to win. She has wonderfully talented hands that still produce one of the best up-and-down games anywhere.

Putting Practice

With his first putt, the average male tour pro doesn't sink more than 20% of his balls from 12 feet. The pros will sink approximately 51% of their first putts from 6 feet. Amateurs of all handicaps will sink between 20%-35% from six feet. The biggest difference between pros and amateurs in putting scoring is from three feet. The pros get their long putts within the three-foot circle and sink 90% from there. Amateurs miss consistently from that length.

How does Tiger make so many long putts to win 50 pro tournaments?

He has the best attitude for putting. He likes to putt! Other pros talk about how hard it is and how difficult the greens are. Tiger is very creative. He has a wonderful touch. He reads the greens well and sticks by his conviction to putt what he reads.

Earl Woods taught Tiger early on to visualize the ball's path to the hole. With this internal representation, he then putts to the picture in his head. On breaking putts he will stand half way between the ball and the hole on the high side of the break. At that spot he will make some short practice strokes, picturing in his mind how the ball will roll to the cup from there. Going back behind the ball, he will add the first part of the read into his mental picture.

For sensory putting practice:

- Practice on different putting greens with different types of grasses and conditions (dry, wet, slow, fast, breaking, bumpy, smooth, side hill, etc.
- Putt to a tee instead of a hole.
- Practice from one place to different targets.
- Putt across the green to the fringe to see how close you can get.
- Putt with your eyes closed.
- Listen for the putt to drop before you look at the hole.
- Putt through your shadow.
- Practice putting 17 inches past the cup.
- Imagine having to make the putt to win.
- Stop practicing after 10-15 minutes to rest and assimilate what you have learned.
- Anchor all putts where you accelerated and put a good roll on the ball.

Sand Shot Practice

The greenside sand shot seems to cause as much fear as any of the shots in golf. To lower your score, it is imperative that you have the confidence to hit out of sand bunkers. To practice efficiently, first learn the mechanics of the swing, practicing without a ball. Then practice in the sand without a ball, then with a ball, and finally hitting a ball to a target.

To gain confidence, practice these situations:

- Practice from different types of sand, fluffy to hard packed
- Practice from different lies, buried, fried egg, uphill, downhill, side hill.
- Practice from wet and dry sand.
- Practice with your eyes closed and *feel* the bounce of the club off the sand.

“Getting in a water hazard is like being in a plane crash –the result is final. Landing in a bunker is similar to an automobile accident – there is a chance of recovery.”
– Bobby Jones

Practice-Play

On the golf course, no two shots are the same. You must be flexible to adjust to the different situations. The best way to practice is to “*practice-play*” which means to hit different shots on the golf course to register feedback instead of score.

Your subconscious mind stores all of your golf experiences as they occur. If your practice sessions are unplanned, hurried, without discipline or purpose, your mind will store that information as you have experienced it. Consequently, your on-course game will reflect that undisciplined learning.

Jack Nicklaus was the best manager of the game. He managed himself and played the ball around the golf course with precise skills learned from the precision of his practice sessions. He has said, "*I have never hit a careless practice shot.*" Every shot he hit had a purpose. Every ball he hit will his full intention and attention to preparation. He didn't look for "fixes," but for his own reliable process. Nicklaus said, "*I attempt to see the completion of every shot before making my swing.*"

Imagine that you only had six balls for your practice session. You would probably give them your full *intention* and *attention* instead of just hitting ball after ball without purpose.

"If I had Jack's mind with my swing, you might never have heard of Nicklaus."

–Tom Weiskopf, *Golf Magazine*

Practice Summary

1. Have a purpose.
2. Warm up your muscles.
3. Define your internal representation of what you want to do.
4. Use your preferred sensory learning system to refine the task.
5. Anchor your success.
6. Let go and dissociate from missed shots.
7. Swing the club and internally replay the shot as you wanted it.
8. Feel the good feeling and anchor it.
9. Be aware of when you get mentally and/or physically tired and take time out.
10. Resume practice when you can sense the shots again.
11. Stop when you have achieved your purpose; feel your success.
12. Replay in your mind all the things you did right; the "good" shots, the good feelings, the state of mind you were in. Anchor this process over and over again to establish it solidly in your memory bank.

"Golf is more how you learn than what you know." –Dean Reinmuth

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