LEARNING THE GOLF SWING AT 50 AND BEYOND

Understanding the How and Why

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Introduction

The wonderful game of golf can also be one of the most frustrating endeavors anyone can choose to undertake. Yet every year thousands of aspiring hopefuls take the plunge and try their luck in some of the most beautiful sporting environments imaginable.

People play golf for many different reasons apart from the mere enjoyment. Some like to play alone, others with friends and business acquaintances, while others play competitively from the high handicapper to the seasoned tour professional. Indeed golf is quite a unique sport in that it can be played competitively by people of all ages, sizes and athletic ability, and both men and women. It is not something though that can easily mastered any more than one can master a musical instrument in a couple of weeks. It takes time, practice, and most particularly understanding. It also requires that a player recognizes his or her particular capabilities in terms of age, size, strength, athletic ability, patience and dedication.

Interestingly many of the newcomers to the game of golf are in their mid forties and beyond. Naturally people of this age will not have the same physical strength and mobility as they may have had when they were younger. It is unfair to expect them for example to be able to swing a golf club like Rory McIlroy, Jason Day or Adam Scott who are not only wonderful golfers but highly skilled athletes in their own right. And yet we are often led to believe that the swing models, positions and power these players generate are what we should be working towards regardless of our age. Unfortunately we sometimes have to face reality. Most of us will never be able learn to swing the like these great players. But that is not to say we cannot have a very effective golf swing that works to the best of our ability given our age and physical condition.

While there are many facets to the game of golf – putting, chipping, pitching, iron play, bunker shots, fairway shots, driving etc. - at the core of golf is the actual golf swing itself. Without a golf swing that works reasonably well golf will rarely deliver the satisfaction necessary for a player to want to continue playing the game. So how should one go about learning a good golf swing, and what in fact is a good golf swing? Golf's popularity has turned the game into a multi billion dollar industry. Many make a very good living out of teaching to beginners and advanced players alike. But there really is no one teaching method that is
universally taught by all golf teachers, and students of the game often find themselves trying different tips and methods from different teachers, even though one thing they learn from one teacher may not be compatible with something they learn from another teacher. This process rarely leads to significant improvement and often works to a golfer's detriment. It might be equated for example to putting a Mercedes Benz component into a Mazda and expecting the car to run at the best of its ability.

For this reason it is advisable that the student of golf stick with the one golf swing taught by a teacher. However to fully get the most from what the teacher is teaching the student should learn ‘the method behind the madness’ and decide if that swing is right for them. Put simply they should understand why for example the instructor teaches a particular takeaway or why they advocate starting a downswing like they do.

It is with this in mind that we should consider what we might refer to as the Essential Features or Principles of a Good or Effective Golf Swing. These principles are universal and apply to all golfers of all ages.

A golf swing model will be presented here that hopefully will enable you, whether young or not so young to play golf to the best of your ability, injury free. This swing has been developed by Australian PGA teaching professional Peter Croker who for the past 45 years has dedicated his life to understanding the great game of golf, first as a touring professional and then as a golf coach. His past students have included prime ministers, golfing greats and multiple PGA Teachers of the Year. Collectively, his past students have won 26 Major Championships, 149 US PGA tour, 106 European Tour and 468 Professional Events worldwide. He has played alongside champions such as Seve Ballesteros, Lee Trevino, Peter Thomson and Greg Norman, and spent time with. Ben Hogan, Tom Tomasello, Moe Norman, Arnold Palmer and many others. Peter has written three books and spent many thousands of hours studying under mentors. He has questioned their methods and delved deeper when needed. Peter is a great believer that the student should become his own teacher and that one should not just mechanically learn a swing but understand why the swing is constructed and works like it does.

With knowledge comes understanding and to completely understand you must always ask how and why.

The golf swing is built on certain fundamentals that hopefully once understood and implemented will enable the learning golfer to not only develop a great functional swing, but a confidence and knowledge to truly “Enjoy the Hit!”
The Essential Features of a Good Golf Swing

There are indeed many different swing models, but an ideal golf swing for golfers of any age should encompass all of these features.

1. It should be **body friendly**

2. It should be **achievable** and not demand that the golfer assume positions that are too difficult for a normal golfer, including high handicappers to achieve.

3. It should enable the golfer to deliver the club to the ball on a down and out path for solid **compression** at impact, with the hands ahead of the ball, and the lead arm in a straight line with the club.

4. It should ensure the golfer can hit the ball with **power** commensurate with body shape, strength and athletic ability.

5. It should enable the golfer to hit the ball with **accuracy**.

6. It should enable the golfer to have **consistency** when hitting golf shots.

7. It should enable the golfer to deliver the club head to the ball on an ‘in-to-out’ **swing path**.

This might be summarized as **BACPACS**

Body Friendly

There is no getting away from the fact the golfers sustain injuries – the most common being lower back pain. Other common complaints include knee pain, shoulder pain, hip pain, elbow pain and foot pain. Injuries for older players especially related to the joint and tendons can also take longer to heal. It is always advisable that golfers stretch and warm up before practicing or playing golf, but a swing model that is as body friendly as possible is advisable for all golfers, especially as we get older.

Achievable

It will always be difficult to assume positions the younger more athletic golfers are able to assume. A full 90 degree body turn, an upper torso would tightly against a firm and stable based, or a swing driven by a very fast hip rotation simply my be too difficult to achieve, let alone consistently replicate for aging golfers. Quite often a larger than desirable body shape will make such things impossible. For an aging golfer a swing model must not only be achievable but comfortable.

Compression

When you see great golfers play you will rarely see two golfers with the same golf swing. There will be features in common but the differences can be quite extreme. Jim Furyk’s backswing for example is something unique to him. Swing planes, takeaways, body shifts, follow throughs can all vary considerably among professional and low handicap golfers. There is however one thing that they all have in common, and it is the one thing that high handicappers usually do not have. It is also something that rarely comes naturally to anyone just starting golf. And it’s something that a golfer needs to learn early in the learning process. Because without this one thing a golfer will never be able to achieve that effortless power the great golfers display with swings that look so easy.

So what is this magic key – this most essential of essentials?

It is the ability to compress the ball at impact where the hands are closer to the target than the club head though the impact zone.

At impact the hands are closer than ball to the target at impact
Power

While we all might want to hit the ball as long as professional golfers, most of us can never expect to be able to do it, especially to older we get. Power when expressed in terms of distance in golf swing is dependent upon a player’s strength and ability to generate club head speed, a down and out inside swing path or line of attack at the golf ball, the ability to compress the ball at impact and a full balanced follow through and finish. While we might never have the strength to generate high club head speed that professionals do, we can have the other aspects of the swing to ensure we are able to generate as much power as our body shape, physical condition and athletic ability will allow.

Accuracy

Ask most golfers if they would rather be able to hit the ball very long but spend most of the time off the fairway in the rough, or hit the ball much shorter but stay on the fairway, and they will probably choose the latter option. Hit the ball straight and you will not only enjoy the game more, but you will also have lower scores, lose less balls and have to waive less players through while you search for your ball in rough.

Consistency

Even the greatest golfers of all time admit that they never play perfect shots all the time. They do however consistently play their desired shots. Our swing should in this respect be as reliable as we can make it. Much of this will depend hand eye co-ordination and practice, but the swing model should also ensure the player can consistently hit the ball to the best of his or her individual ability.

Swing Path

Most golfers have what is commonly referred to as an “over the top” or “out-to-in” swing path which creates lacks of distance, and inevitably results in a big slice or a big hook to the left, which sends the ball further off target the longer the club. Ideally the golf swing should follow an “in

While all of the features above are desirable, there are 2 that are absolutely essential for power, accuracy and consistency – and they are:

1. Being able to deliver the club on an ‘in-to-out” swing path
2. Being able to compress the ball at impact

Failure to achieve these to essentials are the major reasons high handicappers have difficulty significantly lowering their scores.
The Stages of the Golf Swing

The golf swing is usually defined in terms of various stages or components.

- The Grip
- The Stance
- The Takeaway
- The Backswing
- The Transition for Backswing to Downswing
- The Downswing
- The Impact Position
- The Follow Through
- The Finish

While all of these stages are important, the primary purpose of the first 7 stages is to ensure solid compression of the ball at impact. Impact is the moment of truth. The stages that follow Impact, the Follow Through and the Finish, have their primary purpose in completing the dynamics of the Impact position and cannot be separated from it.

Looked at this way the various stages or aspects of an ideal golf swing might be described as

1. Providing an in-to-out swing path to ensure solid compression at impact

2. The ideal body alignment between hands, arms, and club shaft to ensure solid compression at impact

3. An effective way of transition from backswing to downswing to ensure the club is delivered on an in-to-out swing path and with ideal body alignments between hands arms and club shaft to ensure solid impact compression
4. A consistent and effective backswing to the top to ensure the transition to downswing on an in-to-out swing path can be made to ensure solid impact compression

5. A takeaway that enables this backswing position to be achieved

6. A stance and grip that ensures a correct and consistent takeaway, backswing, transition to ensure an in-to-out swing path of the clubhead to the ball, compression of the ball at impact, follow through and finish can be achieved.

7. A follow through from impact to ensure there is continuation of the club head down and out through the ball

8. A balanced finish that results from the correct application of all the aspects that came before.

Since the golf swing is such a dynamic series of movements, rather than examining it in the usual nine stages – grip, stance, takeaway, backswing, transition, downswing, impact, follow through and finish - we will look at it in 3 primary stages -

**The Setup**: Grip and Stance

**The Back Swing**: Takeaway and Backswing,

**The Forward Swing**: Transition, Downswing, Impact, Follow Though and Finish
The Setup – The Grip

Before we can learn how to swing the golf club we must first learn how to hold or grip the golf club. The grip for the golfer is like the steering wheel, the accelerator and the brakes would be to a car driver. It is fair to say the grip you take will affect how the rest of your swing takes shape. This will become more obvious as we consider other aspects of the swing, but the grip should never be ignored or taken for granted. Many golfers, once they have learned the grip, tend to take it for granted and show little concern for it anymore, but this can be a fatal error as many of the problems or barriers a golfer faces come down to the grip. The grip should be constructed and checked to ensure it is correct before every shot.

The way we use our hands are truly quite amazing. Human hands enable us to play music, create art, construct buildings, write novels, play sports, thread needles, perform surgery, juggle balls and a host of other things that make human beings unique.

In golf the hands are the first form of contact with the club and play a crucial and absolutely essential part in all parts of the golf swing. It is far to say that the hands are the source of motion.

So much of the action that occurs in the swing we are learning revolves around pressure points in the hands of an orthodox golf grip. When pressed or pushed in particular ways the hands not only guide the swing but enable the ball to be compressed at impact for strong, powerful, accurate shots.

If you ask someone who has never held a golf club to grip it, it is highly unlikely they will grip it in what might be described as an orthodox golf grip. Most people would normally grip it as they would a baseball bat, cricket bat or hockey stick, - in the palms of their hands. The orthodox golf grip however is taken primarily in the fingers and not the palms.
Left Hand Placement

The grip of the club runs diagonally across the left hand from:

a) The crease in the palm between your little finger and heel pad of your hand (pressure point number 2 in pic) to
b) the second knuckle joint of your index finger.

The club handle should protrude from the back of the left hand by about 1.5 to 2 centimeters or about ¾ of an inch.

The fingers wrap around the grip and the handle wedges under the heel pad of the hand. This enables you to freely uncock wrists to initiate the downswing described later.
When the left hand grip is taken, the **left thumb** is positioned on the **top right hand side of the grip**, and there is a **bend in the wrist** so that the wrist can be **positioned vertically on top of the grip**. (position marked X)

This is an extremely important alignment as it secures the club in the hand without needing to hold the club with muscle tension, while at the same time **aligning the leading edge of the clubface to the wrist**.

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**Right Hand Placement**

The middle fingers wrap around the grip with the second knuckle joints of these fingers positioned directly under the grip.
The little finger of the right hand can either

a) Overlap the left index finger. (pictured below)

b) Interlock with the little finger of the left hand

c) Rest snug up against the little finger of the left hand (baseball grip)

The hollow of the palm of the right hand, along the lifeline is directly behind and over the left thumb

The right thumb is positioned on the top left hand side of the grip.

The hollow of the palm along the lifeline of the right hand sits on the left thumb at the point marked X
When the grip is completed, from the **golfer's perspective**, the **right thumb** is positioned on the **top left hand side** of the grip.

When the stance is taken, the **right hand** on the grip will be a **straight in line with the right arm** while the **left hand is bent**. Note that the right thumb is what is known as a **short thumb** as opposed to a long thumb – meaning that the right thumb is not stretched along the handle of the club. The right thumb is above the first finger or trigger finger.

The pad between the first and second knuckle joint of the **right trigger finger** sits firmly behind the handle. Also be aware that unless you have very long fingers the tips of the right trigger finger and thumb will not touch. There should be **no gaps** between the left and the right hand.
The Setup – The Stance

To take the stance grip the club as described, and stand erect with the weight firmly on the right foot while your left toes touching the ground to maintain your balance.

With the clubshaft parallel to the ground and the handle pointing to the center of the hips, exert pressure by pushing the heel pad of the right hand down against the left thumb. This will cause the elbows to point to the hip sockets. In this position your left arm should be straight and your right arm bent slightly.

While still with the weight on the right leg, bend from the hip with you back straight, and place the clubhead behind the ball. Place your left foot on the ground.

The knees should be slightly bent with the weight balanced evenly in both feet.

Your feet should be shoulder width apart and fanned to about 45 degrees. They should feel heavy in the ground, evenly balanced with the feeling the your heals are coming towards each other and your toward are going more out in the shoes. This gives you the sensation that your feet are really locked into the ground.

Move your left hip ever so slightly to towards the target. When viewed from the front the left leg will appear straighter than the right which will bend inwards slightly.

The straight spine will be tilted slightly to the right and the left shoulder will be higher than the right.

It cannot be over emphasized that many of the problems that occur in the swing emanate from an incorrect grip and stance. Never take them for granted. The world’s top golfers are meticulous in getting the setup right, usually following a pre shot routine, before hitting a shot.

There are 6 essential alignments in the grip and stance the golfer should be aware of and replicate before every standard full swing.
Setup Alignments

**Alignment #1. The Left Wrist to the Club Shaft**

When the left wrist is aligned to the club shaft you can maintain an alignment between the left arm and club shaft through the impact zone and into follow through. If it is not in line everything else becomes a compensation.

**Alignment #2. The Left Wrist to the Clubface**

The left wrist should not be on a different angle to the bottom leading edge of the clubface. When both Alignments 1 and 2 are in place the hands are in line with the club.

**Alignment #3. The Club Shaft to the Body Center of Gravity**

When standing erect the club shaft should be parallel to the ground and pointing to the center of the hips.

**Alignment #4. The Elbows and the Hips**

The elbows should be pointing down towards the hip sockets. By pushing the hands together and down while standing erect with the club still parallel to the ground, the left arm becomes straight while the right arm becomes slightly bent. Both elbows are pointing downward toward the hip sockets.

**Alignment #5. The Spine to the Ground**

The straight spine in the address position should tilt slightly to the right

**Alignment #6. The Club face and Body to the Ball's Target**

The club face, shoulders, hips and feet at address should be aligned and pointing to the ball's target.

*NB. While there are 6 major alignments in the setup, there are 3 more that occur in the actual swing*
Underlying most good swings, is a very important alignment which occurs in the actual swing.

Alignment # 6

For the golfer to build a consistent, repeatable swing, it is important that the hands remain in front of the chest at all times throughout the swing.

Why is this so important? This alignment is very much a part of the geometry of the swing. The golf swing is in effect the movement of the clubhead an inclined arc. And this occurs around the turning body in a movement commonly referred to as the pivot.

To understand why it is so important, consider the sport of hammer throwing. When the hammer thrower is revolving at maximum speed the hammer is directly in front of the chest.

This allows him or her not only to generate maximum centrifugal force and distance, but ensures a balance is maintained while turning at very high speed.

For the golfer, keeping that hands in front of the chest at all times in the swing serves a similar purpose. It enables him or her to be in an ideal impact position to generate maximum power at impact with balanced repeatable and consistent movements, without making swing compensations.
Test Alignment #6 for yourself

When you swing the golf club to the top of the backswing the body turns with it.

1. With preferably a wedge, 8 or 9 iron, take your grip and stance, and swing the club to the top of the backswing, then hold your position.

2. Maintain the position of your arms in the backswing position, but move your hips back to the starting position.

3. Then move your shoulders back to the starting position.

If you have performed the backswing correctly your hands will be directly in front of your chest. Many will find though that their hands are to the right of the center of the chest - most commonly behind the right shoulder. From this position it will be difficult for most people to consistently deliver the clubhead to the ball for power and/or accuracy without making compensations that may be difficult to achieve and replicate.
Why does this problem occur?

The failure to keep their hands in front of their body during the swing commonly occurs when players pull their arms across their body during the backswing, or when they start their takeaway with their hands and arms ahead of the body pivot.

A common takeaway for golfers to use is to cock their wrists at the start of the backswing.

When this “wrist cock start” to the takeaway happens, two major problems often occur:

1. The start to the backswing gets too quick and out of cinque where the hands, arms, and clubhead are at the top of the backswing (transition) well before the body loads into position.

2. The clubhead gets too much to the inside from the start of the backswing, resulting in the hands, arms and club coming in and across the chest. This makes it difficult to swing the clubhead on the correct downswing path.

Another golfer may start the backswing by freely swinging his/her arms across their body moments before the pivot of the body gets into motion.

This will also result in the hands, arms and club getting too deep behind the right shoulder at the top of the backswing.

In this swing model the Takeaway and Backswing for the full swing are designed to ensure the hands, arms, and club at the top of the backswing are in front of the chest when the shoulders are at approximately 90 degrees to the target line - an ideal position to start the club on the correct in-to-out downswing path to ensure solid compression of the ball at impact.

To perform this takeaway and backswing correctly however it is essential the grip and stance are correct. The stance because it is framework or structure around which the swing is performed, and the grip because it drives the whole swing. Indeed a correct grip in the is essential as the hands are the source of motion in this swing model, and the pushing actions that occur to start the swing originate in pressure points of both hands. If for example the grip is too much in the palms, rather than the fingers it will be difficult to provide the correct pressure at the hand’s pressure points.
The Backswing

The swing starts with a forward press to kick start the swing. The forward press is also a miniature impact position that displays or rehearses the body, arms, hands and club head position at impact. The forward press is a technique employed by many great golfers. The man with the longest recorded drive in a game of golf, Mike Austen employed a forward press. The forward press once mastered can be quite subtle and barely perceptible, but it is still a very effective way of firing the swing.

For the right handed golfer to start the forward press, a pressure point in the heal pad of the flat right hand/wrist at address is “pushed” or “pressed” against the bent left hand/wrist so the left hand wrist moves toward flat and the right hand/wrist becomes bent. In this miniature impact position the hands are forward of the club head and the club-shaft has a forward lean with the handle ahead of the club head.

The position of the hands at address and after the forward press

The greater pressure of the right hand over the left causes the hips to rotate slightly forward and the shoulders to tilt with the left shoulder higher than the left. It is this pivoting of the hips and shoulders that transport the hands, arms, and club handle slightly forward.
The Takeaway

Following the **forward press**, the **backswing takeaway** is initiated when the left hand/wrist heal pad and second knuckle joint of the left thumb are “pushed” against the heal pad/upper lifeline area of the bent right hand/wrist.

This will cause the left hand/wrist to become bent as the right hand/wrist moves towards flat. While the right hand moves towards flat it **still resists the pressure of the left hand** somewhat with its own pressure.

From the golfers perspective the clubhead should move **straight back along the target line** until about the point where the line of sight of the **hands are covering the right foot**.

It is also essential that the **club head remains close to the ground and is not picked up**.

Notice that from the start to the finish of the takeaway the hands remain in the yellow box as they move straight back along the target line. They do not pick the club up and are not pulled across the body.
Alignment #7

The takeaway sees the left knee move towards the left toes (Alignment #7), while the right knee remains flexed as it is at address and does not straighten.

The left knee movement allows the golfer’s to maintain the center of balance and prevents putting stress on the knee.

To learn how to correctly perform the takeaway there is a drill called the Table Edge Drill which it is advisable to understand and practice to fully master the takeaway.

Table Edge Drill Part 1

Table Edge Drill Part 2

Table Edge Drill Part 3

By the time the takeaway has been completed - the point where the line of sight of the hands are covering the right foot – the hips will have completed their turn by about 45 degrees to the target line. This is as far as the hips turn in the entire takeaway and the backswing that follows.

VERY IMPORTANT:
The importance of getting the takeaway right must not be under estimated. Unless this is done correctly there is a strong possibility, as mentioned, that the hands will not remain in the center of the body throughout the swing and the player will have trouble consistently delivering the club on the desired downswing path without making compensations.
Creating a 2 Lever System in the Backswing

It is important to understand that the golf swing is a system of levers. The club shaft is one lever and the left arm can add to the one lever of the club shaft. The 3 main level systems the golfers commonly employ. For a golf swing to have significant power a lever system of 2 or levers is required.

1 Lever System

It is virtually impossible in the full swing to employ a 1 lever system as weight of the swinging club will cause the wrist to bend and create at least 1 more lever, however a 1 lever system is commonly used in short chip shots that don’t require power, and where the forward swing commences at the end of the takeaway before the full backswing would start to occur.

2 Lever System

The 2 lever system is by far the most common lever system used by professional and low handicap golfers.

The straight left arm provides one lever and the clubshaft, usually at an angle of at least 90 degrees is the other other. This is the system we will be using in teaching of this swing.
3 Lever System

Two of the levers in this system rely on the golfer having a bent left arm at the end of the back swing. One lever will be the left arm above the elbow, one below the elbow while the third lever will be the clubshaft.

Even though there have been some great golfers who have used and continue to use this system, it requires very good timing and co-ordination, beyond the ability of most high handicappers, to hit consistent and powerful shots.

Many beginner and high handicap golfers nevertheless use a 3 lever system, either because they are unable to straighten their left arm to employ a 2 lever system, or they are unaware of the benefits the 2 lever system offers over the 3 lever system.

The 3 leverage system when employed by beginner and high handicap golfers will more than likely result in over the top shots with big slices and poor distance.

The great Harry Vardon, who invented the modern golf grip, employed a 3 lever system. Note the bend between the upper arm and forearm.
Backswing to the Top

When the takeaway is done correctly, the club head can 'swing back' to an ideal back swing position. During the backswing the left arm rotates clockwise, while the right hand life line area pushes against the left thumb, which in turn causes the right hand to be pushed back. This will also cause the left arm to straighten and provide the second lever for the 2 lever system we want. This action will also cause the left hand to cup.

Aside from providing a second lever to generate power, the straight left arm at the top of the swing will ensure a consistent swing arc, help the golfer to avoid structural collapse and provide a feel for club head awareness.

It is important to understand that when the right hand is pushed backwards it will assume a structure which is maintained into the impact position and beyond. Because of its essential role at impact the right hand is only ever bent back. It should never be ‘cocked up’, a mistake that is easy to make.

Right hand bent back, and left hand cupped, and straight left arm at top of backswing
The Right Hand Bent Drill

To understand the 'feel' or pressure required to achieve the straight left arm and the correct position at the top of the backswing, perform the *right hand bent* drill directly in front of the body, and rotate the body 90 degrees to assume the top of the backswing position as described below.

1. Take your stance and straighten your left arm in front of your body by pushing in the direction of the right forearm. As you straighten the left arm allow it to rotate clockwise, and the left thumb to push the right hand back (like a door opening to about 45 degrees). Exert pressure from the base of the thumb line in the right hand to assist this. When complete your right arm will be noticeably bent, and the back of the left arm and hand will be facing the sky. The left hand will be cupped and your hands will be on a level not far above the navel. The right arm will be bent.

2. Swing your arms into the backswing position and take careful note of the feel in you hands. Note also that the left arm and cupped left arm are facing the sky and the bent right elbow is tucked into the right side of your body.

It is from this position that you will be ready to perform the transition from backswing to the downswing using a “thumbs down” uncocking action.
Learning the Golf Swing

The Forward Swing

The Transition from Backswing to Downswing

Undoubtedly the two greatest problems facing the beginner or high handicap golfer are the ability to:

1. stop slicing the ball
2. compress the golf ball at impact

Most golfers have what is commonly referred to as an “over the top” or “out-to-in” swing path which creates lacks of distance, and inevitably results in a big slice or a big push to the left, and sends the ball further off target the longer the club. Ideally the golf swing should follow an “in-to-out” path which enables the golfer to hit the ball long down the middle.

The Transition from Backswing to Downswing

The second main problem, the inability to compress the ball at impact where the hands need to be ahead of the club head through the impact zone, is the other main reason for a lack of distance.

Both of these problems commonly originate in the transition from the backswing to downswing. When performed correctly the downswing will start below the right forearm of the right handed golfer. Most high handicap golfers however start the downswing path by swinging above the right forearm.

Swinging under the right forearm starts the swing on the correct “in-to-out” swing path, while swinging above the right forearm starts the swing path from “out-to-in”.

Out-to-in Path

Target Line

In-to-Out Path
How do we learn to swing under the right forearm?

By ensuring the club shaft aligns with the left arm for delivery of the club head down and out along the A to B line. (Alignment #9)

In making the Transition from Backswing to Downswing, a 'thumbs down' or 'uncocking' action with the clubshaft aligned with the left arm will start the club head on an ideal in-to-outswing path along what is referred to as the A to B line with

A being the clubhead at the top of the backswing, and B being the ball

The A to B line is a line at angle across the target line.

The A to B Line runs from the club head at the top of the back swing to the ball
To hit the ball straight towards the target the golfer will have to aim across the target line and let the pivot or body turn return the clubhead facing the target line. This is not something that a person hitting a golf ball without instruction would normally do.

Most untutored golfers would try to hit straight down the target line and in the process perform an over the right arm out-to-in swing, which would either cause the ball to slice badly to the right, or be pulled to the left.

It is important to remember that golf is a 2 target game. While one target is the hole, the target where the golfer initially needs to aim for solid compression is the ball via the A to B line or the Hit Line.

Why does the “thumbs down” uncocking of the hands action works to align the club shaft to the left arm and deliver the club head on an in-to-out swing via the A to B line for solid compression of the ball?

To gain a thorough understanding of what happens to your hands and the club when you perform the “thumbs down” uncocking of the hands action, hold your club in the correct grip parallel to the ground about mid chest. Push your thumbs down and see how the club not only aligns with the left arm, but drops to the right of the center line while the right hand bends back and the left hand straightens.

If you lower the club to the ground you will notice that your hands arms and clubface are in a perfect impact position with the straight left arm and club shaft in line and the hands ahead of where the ball would be. This shows that by starting the downswing with the ‘thumbs down’ action the impact position of the hand and arms and clubhead can be effectively set in place at the start of the downswing.

Click for video of the uncocking or thumbs down A to B full swing transition drill
How the swing unfolds

The ‘thumbs down’ action to start the downswing will straighten the left leg allowing the left hip to clear, cause the left shoulder to raise as it points along the A to B line, and position the bent right arm on the right side of the torso in preparation for a powerful extended hit through impact.

While the hip turn may give the impression that it is starting the downswing this is merely an illusion. It starts with the uncocking ‘thumbs down’ action of the hands. In fact the harder you attempt to hit the ball with the ‘thumbs down’ action, the faster the hips will clear.

The straight left arm at the top of the backswing operates as a primary lever, so it important that it is maintained all though the forward swing until at least chest height on the follow through before the arms start to fold over the left shoulder at the finish of the swing.

The side of the uncocked left hand that starts the forward swing leads the way towards the ball, until just before impact when left arm rotates with the pivot so that the back of the straight left hand is facing then the target. This occurs very quickly and it is something you don’t really think about in the course of the swing.

The action of the left hand however during the entire forward swing is very much like a left back hand cross court top spin tennis shot which continues through impact to follow through.

The right hand maintains it’s bent position all the way during the downswing to impact and beyond. This enables it to exert a very forceful pushing action down and out into the ball at impact. In the course of the downswing the right arm will go from bent to straight as it pushes the clubhead via the right hand down and out along the A to B line through the impact position.

During he downswing to impact you will have the sensation of being pushed up a little. If you don’t have this sensation you may not have performed the “thumbs down’ uncocking action sufficiently or correctly.

At impact the hands should be just ahead of the ball with the club shaft and left arm forming a straight line. To ensure the golfer is able to compress the ball, it is essential that the right hand is bent and the back of the uncocked left hand is flat at impact and beyond. With an iron shot, the ball is effectively compressed into the ground by the pushing action of the right hand, with both hands ahead of the ball at impact. At the point of impact the right arm will still be slightly bent and will only completely straighten after impact. The left shoulder will be higher than the right pointing towards the target, while the left hip will have fully cleared on about a 45 degree angle to the target line. This hip clearing though will have occurred when the right hand is bent back during the backswing.
After impact both arms will be straight which allows the golfer to fully extend through the ball. The **right hand** will still remain bent and the **left hand** remain uncocked until the arms bend at the finish of the swing. Also the left hand and arm will continue to rotate after impact into the follow through as **the pivot of the body** during the swing transports the hands through the follow through and into the finish.

The **right hand** however will still remain bent, and **the hands will be in the center** of the body.

**The arms** will also be well extended well into the follow through with the club shaft close to parallel to the ground at chest level before the arms start to fold towards the finish. The longer the golfer can maintain the uncocked ‘thumbs down’ attitude into the follow through, the longer the extension.

At the finish the club will more than likely recoil from the over the shoulder position back in front of the golfer.

Once the arms have recoiled in front of the trunk of the body, the palm of the left hand should be facing upward. This position of the left hand is often referred to as ‘Catching Rain’.

**More on how the hands drive the swing**

The pressure of the left hand against the right in the **takeaway** a will cause the left leg to move. To ensure a stable base and avoid the body swaying to the right, the **left knee should move towards covering the left toes**.

The “thumbs down” uncocking action to start the downswing when performed correctly will assist in causing the **left leg to straighten** while the right leg remains flexed. In reality the left leg will **start to straighten** when the **right hand** is bent back in the backswing. This is what causes the hips to start to move before the backswing is completed, something that is apparent when the swing is viewed in slow motion. The bending back of the right hand in the backswing also causes the **left hip** to clear, the **right elbow** to tuck into the side of the body, and the **left shoulder** to rise.

Keeping the uncocked ‘thumbs down’ attitude for as long as possible in the swing will then cause the **right shoulder** to rise and lengthen the rotation of the swing.

**The following videos explain the working of the left and right hands through the entire swing.**

**Left Hand**  **Video 1**  **Video 2**  **Video 3**  **Right Hand**  **Video 1**  **Video 2**
The body pivot works as the central core of the golf swing. This swing is very much a rotational swing as though ‘turning in a barrel’. There is no hip slide for example, or prominent weight transfer onto the right foot in backswing as you might find in other swing models.

The pivot from the start of the swing to the top of the backswing will centered around the central core of the body. Towards the end of the Impact Zone the weight will have transferred primarily to the left leg and remain primarily on the left leg and foot through follow-through to a balanced finish, at which time the left and right knees will be touching.

The pivot drill

Place your hands on your shoulders, left hand on the right shoulder and left shoulder on the right and take the golf stance, making sure it is exactly as described in the Setup.

The Forward Press
(A Miniature Impact Position)

With your right leg remaining flexed, straighten your left leg slightly. Allow your left hip to move back and clear and your left shoulder to rise in the direction of the target line. This setup can be practised against a flat vertical surface such as post or door, with your left ankle and left hip touching the post or doorway and your spine tilted to the right.

The Backswing

Turn your shoulders approximately 90 degrees. Start this turn with the left shoulder.

During the turn:

There will be an equal balance of weight in your feet, both set firmly on the ground.

Your shoulders remain at an angle of 90 degrees to the spine, and most importantly, they should not dip. At the completion of the turn the chin will be touching the left shoulder.

Your left knee will move towards your left toes. Your right knee will remain flexed at at address.

Your right hip will have turned approximately 45 degrees.
The Body Pivot

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The Backswing

Turn your shoulders approximately 90 degrees. Start this turn with the left shoulder.

During the turn:

There will be an equal balance of weight in your feet, both set firmly on the ground.

Your shoulders remain at an angle of 90 degrees to the spine, and most importantly, they should not dip. At the completion of the turn the chin will be touching the left shoulder.

Your left knee will move towards your left toes. Your right knee will remain flexed at address.

Your right hip will have turned approximately 45 degrees.
The Forward Swing

During the turn:

Your left leg straightens while your right leg remains flexed

Your left hip clears and to about an angle of 45 degrees to the target line

Your left shoulder rises and points in the direction of the A to B line at an angle to the target line.

At the impact position the left shoulder will still be higher than the right but facing the target line, the right leg will be bending slightly towards the straight left leg, and the weight in the feet will still be evenly balanced

After the impact position the weight will move to the straight left leg as the right shoulder rises.

Well into the follow through and into the finish, the right knee touches the right knee, the right shoulder is close to level with the left shoulder and the torso faces just left of the target.

At the finish of the swing the body is balanced over the straight left leg. Only the toes of the right foot will be touching the ground.
The Shoulders

It is very important at this point to understand the position of the shoulder at impact in the chip, pitch and full swing.

The left or lead should shoulder be higher than the right, and they should be in line with the target line.

If they are to the left of the target line it is usually a good indication that the golfer is hitting 'over the top', which would usually cause the ball to be pulled to the left or sliced to the left.

**Shoulder Check Test**

1. Take your set up without a ball.
2. Swing the club back and through but stop at the impact position.

At impact the shoulder should be pointing to the target with the left shoulder higher than the right.

If at impact shoulders are pointing to the left of the target line, there is a good chance the you will have made an over-the-top swing – something you want to avoid.
Address

The club is gripped with an orthodox finger grip with the hands in the center of the body.

The left shoulder is higher than the right with the spine tilted slightly away from the target.

The left side of the body is straighter than the right with the right leg bent in a little.

Weight is balance evenly on both feet.

The left arm is straight and the right arm bent with both elbows pointing to the hip sockets.
The Swing Sequence

Forward Press

For most advanced golfers the forward press is barely perceptible.

Nevertheless the lifeline of the right hand presses against the left thumb to push the hands slightly forward of the ball.

The left leg straightens a little and the left hip moves back while the right should tilts up along the target line.

Apart from kick starting the swing, the forward press replicates a miniature impact position.

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The Swing Sequence

The Takeaway

Pressure from the left heal pad against a resisting right hand lifeline area causes left shoulder and arm and clubhead to move and start the takeaway along the target line.

The right knee starts to move towards the big toe as the right hip starts to turn.

There is no attempt to lift the clubhead off the ground.

The hands are in the center of the chest where they must remain all through the swing.
Takeaway Continues

The clubhead is still close to the ground and no attempt has been made to pick up the club or cock the wrists.

The takeaway will finish when, from the golfers perspective, the hands will be covering the right foot.
The Backswing Begins

The hips have turned a full 45 degrees and the arms are well extended with no attempt at this stage to cock the wrists up.

The left arm is starting to rotate clockwise as the weight of the club head and momentum of the swing is bending back the right hand.

The shoulders are turning flat as opposed to the left shoulder being higher than the right.
The Swing Sequence

Backswing Almost Complete

The momentum of the swinging club and the pressure it experts on the life line of the right hand is increasing the bend in the right hand and causing the left hand cup and to cock, as the clubshaft moves to wards a 90 degree angle with the straight left arm.
The Swing Sequence

**Top of backswing**
*(Start of Transition into Forward Swing)*

The momentum of the swinging club completes the backswing where the club is at least 90 degrees to the left arm.

The clubhead has fanned open and the top of the right arm is close to the side of the torso.

During this transition stage between backswing and swing, when viewed in slow motion, the forward swing may appear to begin before the backswing has completed.
Forward Swing

The ‘thumbs down’ or uncocking action starts the forward swing with very powerful force, as evident by the bending club at 90 degrees to the straight left arm parallel to the ground.

At this stage the left knee will start to straighten and the left hip to clear.

Strange as it may seem the faster you through the club head at the ball along the A to B line the more the lag will increase as the club head tries to catch up with the hands.
Forward Swing with Hands at Hip Level

The left leg has straightened and the left hip cleared as the lag in the club formed a the top of the backswing is maintained.

The bent right arm is close to the right side of the body and the shoulders pointing along the A to B line.

Despite the fact that the right knee has moved closer towards the target line, the weight is still evenly balanced on both feet.
The Swing Sequence

Forward Swing Approaching Impact

Right arm is beginning to straighten as it exerts pushing pressure along the A to B line towards the ball.

At his stage the club head is traveling very fast as the bent right hand pushes the clubhead towards the ball.
Impact
(The Moment of Truth)

The clubhead at impact compresses the ball against the ground for powerfully hit iron shot.

The club shaft and left arm are in line, the right arm is almost full extended, the left leg straight, the left hip cleared, and the left shoulder raised and pointed in the direction of the target line.

The weight is still evenly balance on both feet although the weight on the right foot it is predominantly on the inside.
The Swing Sequence

Post Impact

The right arm has fully straightened while the club shaft is aligned with the straight left arm.

The extended right and left arms form a V shape in front of the chest which will continue to the completion of the follow through.

The weight has transfer almost completely to the straight left leg which now serves as the center of the pivot for the rest of the swing.
The Follow Through

Both arms are fully extended with the weight on the left foot.

The front of the body is still slightly to the right of the target line. The clubhead too is still to the right of the target line, but the club head is pointing to the sky as a result of the rotating left arm and hand.

The right hand is still bent.
Follow Through Continuation

With the hands level with the neck the arms still haven’t started to fold as the swing is pushed through to the finish.

Note that the hands have not been swung across the body but remain in front of the chest.
The Swing Sequence

The Start of the Finish

The club is point to the sky as the left arm starts to fold.

The right arm is still straight.
Close to the Finish

Both arms begin to fold over the left shoulder to complete the finish.

The shoulders are level and there is no pressure on the back.
The Finish

The arms have folded completely over the left shoulder with the chest pointing left of the target line in a well balanced finish.

The left and right knees are touching.
The Swing Sequence

The Finish Recoil

The momentum of the swing will cause the club to recoil back in front of the balance body.

The right hand will still be bent and the palm of the left hand facing the sky. ‘Catching the Rain’.

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The Chip Shot
and why it is so important to learn

Despite the desire of most people to want to learn the full swing straight away, it is generally advisable to learn it in incremental steps. Hopefully by now you have a thorough understanding of the full swing and why its various aspects are so important if it is to work effectively, but putting it into practice takes time and effort. Initially you will find it hard to consistently time the ball or even remember what you are supposed to be doing as you swing the club. That’s why drilling in the various aspects of the swing is so important. Equating learning the golf swing with a musical instrument such as a guitar, the learning process is gradual. To learn the guitar chords you not only have to know the chords but spend hours trying to smoothly change from one chord.

For this reason it is advisable to learn the full swing by starting with a miniature version of the swing, the Chip Shot.

The advantages of learning the Chip Shot are:

1. The chip shot is easier to learn than the full swing, but once learnt makes learning the full swing a lot easier.
2. The full swing pivot is an extension of the chip pivot.
3. The backswing of the full swing is an extension of the chip swing takeaway.
4. It is with the chip shot that you are able to more easily implement the “thumb down” uncocking action and hit along the A to B Line.
5. The chip shot enables you to consistently feel what it is like to compress the ball at impact.
6. The chip shot ‘finish’ teaches you how your left arm must be aligned in a straight line with the club shaft at impact, with your shoulders pointing in the direction of the target with your left shoulder tilted higher than the right.
7. The chip shot teaches you timing and rhythm.

Even without its benefit in learning the full swing, the Chip Shot in itself is an essential shot around the green, and something that you should master to reduce your scoring when playing on the course.
(1) For the chip shot stance the weight is about 60/40 on the left foot, with the hands slightly ahead of the ball. (2) Following the forward press the pressure point and the base of the thumb of the left hand is pushed back against the right hand pressure point at the base of the life line to start the takeaway straight back along the target line without any attempt to pick the club head off the ground. (3) Before the hands start to hinge (4) the thumbs down uncocking action starts the transition from take way to forwards swing, sets the hands behind the target line, causes the left leg to straighten and the left hip to clear.

(5) The club continues on the A to B line towards the ball with the hands well ahead of the club head. (6) At impact the hands are covering the left leg still well ahead of the ball. (7) The thumbs down uncocking action ensures the club shaft is aligned with the left arm. On a short chip shot this is where the shot would finish. (8) Well past the left leg and the thumbs down uncocking action is still evident with the left arm maintaining the left arm club shaft alignment as the club head pushes through the ball. The shoulders are noticeably tilted with the left shoulder higher than the right, as they point along the target line.

View Video of Chip Shot

Chip Transition from Takeaway to Forward Swing
The Pitch Shot
The Miniature Full Swing

Once the Chip Shot has been understood, drilled in a practiced to the point where you are able to consistent compress the ball and hit accurate shots, you will be in a position to extend the shot into a **Pitch Shot**, a shorter version of the full swing.

Unlike the full swing, which is designed to produce power, the Pitch Shot is played from short distances to the green. The with the Pitch Shot intension is to land the ball as close to the hole as possible, with backspin to prevent the ball running through the green.

In the Pitch Shot, once the takeaway has been completed, the left hand and arm rotate clockwise, while the momentum of the swinging club and pressure from the heel pad of the left thumb pushes against the lifeline area of the right hand, to push it back. While this is happening the left hand is cocked up and wound into the right hand slightly. At the end of the backswing, which in a pitch usually finishes when the hands are at about level with the top of the pelvic bone, the **bent back right hand will cause the left leg to straighten** and the **left leg to clear, before the forward swing begins**.

The **transition** will then occur with the same thumbs down or uncocking action explained in the Chip Shot, assisted by the weight of the club head and the force of gravity, which lets the club head almost **fall under the right arm in line with the left arm**. This enables the club head to be delivered along the A to B line for and in-to-out swing.

**Pitch Shot Transistion from Backswing to Forwards Swing Part 1** / **Part 2**

Once the **impact** position described in the chip shot has been reached, with the left arm aligned with the club, the rotating left hand and the pivot will continue the swing with the arms extended to about chest level where the swing will finish.

Most importantly the hands never ‘flip’ across the body and the hands always remain in front of the body.

The **right hand will always remain bent**.
As with the chip shot, the **pitch shot stance** has the weight is about 60/40 on the left foot, with the hands slightly ahead of the ball. (1) The takeaway is the same as the chip, straight back along the target line. but the (2) wrists are allowed to hinge in the **backswing** (3), before the **thumbs down uncocking transition** (4) delivers the club head along the A to B line to **impact** (5) where the hands are well ahead of the ball and the left arm and club shaft are in line. Immediately the lofted pitching wedge compresses the ball into the air.

After **impact** the alignment between the left arm and club shaft continue by keep the thumbs down action (6), with the arms still extended (7) mid chest level. The finish occurs about shoulder level (8).

 Pitch Shot Video
Becoming Your Own Best Teacher

Much of this publication has been devoted to why it is important to do certain things in the swing and not others. Without understanding why we are really floundering in the dark. To master the golf swing it important that we are able to look at ourselves objectively and truly understand the laws of cause and effect. Only then will be able to advance in our attempts to develop a sound golf swing. It is then that we can become our own best teacher.

As a golfer we experience the sensation of hitting a golf ball, but our perception is of course very different from someone observing our swing. Golf teachers and coaches can not only observe our swing, but with their knowledge of the swing, help us improve. Ultimately though this relies on accepting that we are doing what they are telling us we are doing. Fortunately today we have sophisticated cameras built into our everyday devices like mobile phones. It is easy for us to view our own swing for ourselves so that we can see that what we are doing is often not what we thought we were doing. There also computer programs like the V1 Digital Coaching System with which we are able to draw guide lines on videos and stop, start and use slow motion to further analyze our swings.

Such modern technology can be of great assistance to complement our development, and with the correct usage and understanding make the learning process a lot quicker.

It is advisable however to supplement your self learning with the assistance of a trained golf teaching professional. Once you have learnt the grip and stance for example, you cannot expect to get it exactly right straight away, and if per chance you do, you need a teaching professional to assure you it is right. You will need coaching and correction all the way through the learning process. If you think you can get by without professional guidance just remember that the greatest players in the world all have coaches who teach, guide and check their swings continually.

Another important learning channel that has come with the advent of the computer is the development of teaching forums and online lessons. Such forums are a great way to have access to a teacher if you live too far away to have personal lessons and instruction. The PushGolf Master Teaching community is such an example, where for a monthly fee you have access to a full range of teaching videos, weekly Q&A sessions, and online video swing assessments.

One thing you should be careful of when learning the swing is to get too caught up in the many various tips you find can online. It has been mentioned before that no matter what swing model you choose to follow, stick with that model to the exclusion of others. If you don’t like that model it is always best to stop completely and commit to another model rather than trying to integrate parts of one model with another. Similarly you must choose a teaching professional who understands and is capable of teaching the model you are wanting to be taught. Either that or go with the model they want to teach and take time to understand why they are teaching that model. But most importantly you both must be on the same page. That you will have the best chance of developing a sound swing that will really enable you to experience the great game of golf and really enjoy the hit!