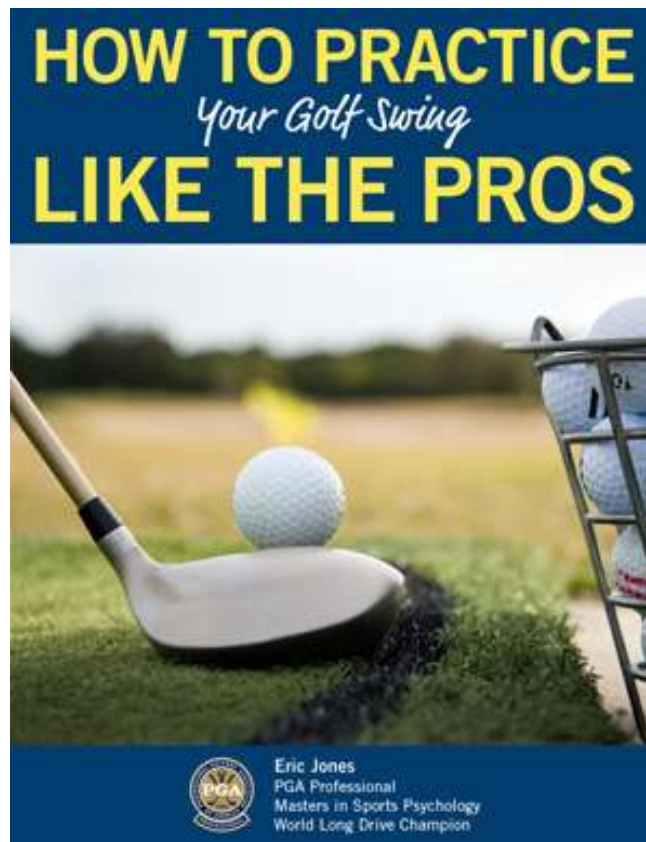


HOW TO PRACTICE *Your Golf Swing* LIKE THE PROS



Eric Jones
PGA Professional
Masters in Sports Psychology
World Long Drive Champion



HOW TO PRACTICE YOUR GOLF SWING LIKE THE PROS

*Simple Techniques You Can Use Today
To Make Practicing Golf Fun and Productive*

by

Eric Jones
PGA Professional
Masters in Sport Psychology
World Long Drive Champion

Birdie Press, Orinda, CA

**For Mom,
Who once held the tips of my ears and said "Now don't move your ears
when you putt." It was a lesson I never forgot.**

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Birdie Press

**21 'C' Orinda Way Suite 236
Orinda, CA 94563**

www.BirdiePress.com

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About the Author



ERIC JONES is a PGA Class "A" Professional who is passionate about the art and science of teaching golf. His innovative books, videos and seminars have helped hundreds of thousands of golfers of all ages and abilities find the answers they need to break through to new levels of performance. His unique teaching style blends competitive success at the highest level with expertise in both the mechanics of the swing and the mental skills of championship athletes to provide insights that are at once simple and profoundly effective. No other golf teacher has his PGA credentials, a World Long Drive Championship title, and a Masters degree in Sport Psychology.

Eric has been playing golf for more than 45 years. His first job at age 14 was at the golf course washing clubs and parking carts. He's been an assistant pro, greens keeper, caddy, golf coach at Stanford University where he also played collegiate golf, 2003 Re/Max World Long Drive Champion, 2004 LDA Long Drive Tour Rookie of the Year, 2006 Players Tour Long Drive Champion, author of more than 100 articles on golf, expert consultant to the PGA, featured Keynote speaker at major golf shows, founder of the Seaver Golf Academy, and author of numerous golf books including "[The 5 Keys To Distance](#)", "[The Practice Effect](#)", and "[Play Strategic Golf](#)". When he can catch his breath he is the proud father of two darling girls who have yet to catch the golf bug.

Eric is passionate about helping people learn about and enjoy the game of golf. He has been recognized as a Top Teacher in Northern California and his groundbreaking Golf Coach Program has received national attention for its innovative approach to teaching and for its effectiveness with students. As a world class athlete he understands what it takes to excel at the highest levels and he revels in using his experience to help students reach their own highest level of ability. He feels strongly that the future of golf instruction lies not just in improving the swing nor in enhancing mental skills, but in the intersection of both disciplines, where the mind and the mechanics work together to maximize performance.

You can reach Eric at info@targetcenteredgolf.com and you can subscribe to his highly informative newsletter at



<http://targetcenteredgolf.com/newsletters/>

Introduction

Do you know how to get to Carnegie Hall? As the old gag goes, the answer is "Practice! Practice! Practice!" Good advice. And the advice is just as true for golfers as it is for musicians.

Practicing is the best way to improve your game. Whatever ultimate goal you have for your golf game – your personal "Carnegie Hall" – the only way to get there is through practice.

But there's practice, and then there's **smart practice**.

- * Smart practice is both highly strategic and highly tactical.
- * Smart practice is practice with a purpose. It is working on the right things for the right reasons.
- * Smart practice is practice with intent. It is working on the right things, the right way.
- * Smart practice incorporates structured practice sessions, with defined objectives.
- * Smart practice narrows your focus and vastly accelerates your learning curve.
- * Smart practice will get you where you want to go, a whole lot faster, with a whole lot more enjoyment.
- * Smart practice puts you in control of your game.

And once you learn the approach, it's easy to do.

How to Practice Your Golf Swing Like The Pros gives you a series of practice insights will help you get the absolute most out of every session on the range. When you practice better your game will get better. It offers strategies for analyzing your game to determine where to focus your time and energy for the biggest return. You'll also find tactical advice and concrete "how to" steps to implement during practice sessions.

When you understand the nature of smart practice and what you are really trying to accomplish, practicing will be fun and extremely rewarding.

The purpose of this book is simple: To show you the very latest advances and techniques in how to acquire and refine your skills so

you can take control of your game and then, ultimately, take your game to whatever level of play you desire.

As much as I respect my colleagues and friends in the PGA, the golf industry is in dire need of an upgrade to its teaching methodology. There are better, smarter, faster ways to for you to address swing issues, refine your skills, and to improve your game. This book will show you techniques adapted from Olympic coaches, world-class trainers, fitness and expert gurus, biomechanical specialists, biologists, business and educational leaders, and the guys who wrote the book on motor learning. You'll learn new and innovative ways to work on your game. You'll learn new strategies to prioritize your efforts.

My mission is to change the way golf is taught. You'll find the answers you need in this book, along with plenty of new ideas you've never heard before, ideas that will fundamentally change the way you approach your game.

Think of this book as an introduction, a primer for advanced learning techniques. It will help you become a more sophisticated learner and give you more control of your own improvement trajectory.

I wish you much success, satisfaction and enjoyment from participating in the greatest game ever invented.

I'll be seeing you ... down the fairway!

Eric Jones
PGA Class A Teaching Professional
Masters in Sport Psychology
World Long Drive Champion

What Is the Real Purpose of Practice?

"If you focus on results, you will never change. If you focus on change, you will get results." Jack Dixon

Let's start with the purpose of practice, the Real purpose of practice.

When you were growing up you probably participated in some form of organized sport like soccer, football, basketball, volleyball, track, etc. You had a coach, and you had organized practices.

When you first started out as a youngster the primary emphasis in practice was on skill acquisition. For example, my 4-year old daughter plays in the local soccer league. She's learning the basic aspects of the sport, like how to kick the ball, the rules, and even simple things like which goal is hers and which goal to kick to. Basic skills! This means practices are organized around basic skill acquisition.

Her older sister, in contrast, continues to work on new skill acquisition, but at the same time she is also learning skill refinement. In other words, she has moved beyond the basic skill of just kicking the ball and is learning to strategically pass it to a teammate to make deliberate progress toward the goal. She is refining her existing kicking skills by learning the ball handling skills that help her settle the ball and control the direction, speed and distance of the ball.

As both girls continue to progress - the process will remain the same: practice will be a combination of new skill acquisition along with skill refinement. However, over time, the mix will change, as will the emphasis in practice.

As more and more basic skills are mastered a greater percentage of time will be spent on skill refinement. If both girls were to go on to stay in the game through high school, college, or a professional career they could expect to spend the great majority of their practice time refining the skills they have mastered, and correspondingly less time on new skill acquisition.

But even professionals continue to learn new skills.

On the PGA Tour the pros routinely share information and insights with each other. It's not uncommon for young Tour players to seek out older or retired players to learn new skills, new shots, new strategies, and new approaches. The young pros learn these new skills, master them, and then set to work refining them.

The key point to remember is that while the mix may change with experience over time, the basic process remains the same: The two real purposes to practice are to acquire new skills and to refine existing skills.

There are two real purposes to practice:
1. To **learn new skills**; and
2. To **refine existing skills**

Learning new skills will give you more options on the golf course. It's part of becoming a better player and shooting lower scores. When you learn new skills you'll be able to handle more situations and circumstances. You'll have more course navigation and game management choices when selecting your shot strategy. When you have the ability to make more strategic decisions you'll play with a lot more confidence.

You should always be learning one new skill as a regular part of your practice.

Part of the joy of golf is the endless variety and level of skills you can develop and use when they really count on the golf course. Part of the joy of practice is the sense of accomplishment and self-esteem you develop when you devote the time to master a skill and you feel yourself making progress.

A new skill could be learning a new shot such as a chip, pitch, or lob shot around the green, developing the ability to work the ball from right to left or left to right, a knock-down shot for playing into the wind, a 3/4 swing with your sand wedge or approach clubs, or dozens of other shots. A new skill could be a mechanical aspect of your swing, like changing your swing plane, learning to release the club to the target, or creating more lag at impact.

It could also be a mental skill like relaxing, focusing on a target, or learning to visualize shots before making the swing. Or it could be a course navigation skill like learning to "read" a golf hole's strengths and weaknesses, so you can make smarter decisions that put you in situations where you can succeed more often.

Refining existing skills is the process of improving the reliability of your results as well as developing and discerning the subtle nuances that lead to feel. Once you master the basic skill, you start working on refining your skill level.

Working on the mechanics of your swing is really the effort of refining your skill level. For example, learning how to hit the golf ball is a basic skill. Once you have mastered the basic skill of hitting the ball, however, you set to work refining that skill to turn it into the skill of shot making.

Refining your skill at shot making involves learning to strike the ball more consistently in the center of the club face, and then gradually mastering the ability to control the direction the ball flies as well as the distance it travels, with the ultimate objective of refining your skill at delivering the ball closer to the target more often.

When you work on "refining" your swing you will find that incremental gains will produce their own intrinsic reward and feelings of accomplishment. Rather than striving for "perfection," the objective becomes "progress." While perfection is unattainable and leads to frustration, even small increments of progress feel like success. They are constant reminders that you are on the right path.

For instance, it is very common for a golfer to go the range with the goal of "fixing" a slice and learning to hit perfectly straight drives. But that is a recipe for frustration.

If, on the other hand, that golfer sets the goal of refining his swing to learn to deliver the club face a little more square at impact, he would feel proud of his progress when he starts seeing the ball slice a little less. That golfer would know he has refined his skill level at getting the club face square at impact. That golfer would have proved to himself that as he gradually refines and improves that skill, his drives will gradually get straighter and straighter as well. Working on incremental gains over time will keep you motivated and provide a feeling of accomplishment.

How Do I "Fix" My Swing?

Unfortunately, somewhere along the line the golf industry lost touch with the purpose of practice. We've succumbed to notions of instant cures and perfect golf shots.

Most golfers think of the range primarily as a place to go to "fix" their swing. It is usually a "problem" that provides the main motivation for golfers to work on their game at all. Then they only take lessons when their swing is so broken they can't fix it on their own.

As a result the thought of practice evokes the feeling of toil and drudgery associated with constantly dealing with problems, rather than the feeling of joy and accomplishment associated with discovery and progress as new skills are learned.

The thought of taking a lesson with the objective of learning a new skill is so rare that of the tens of thousands of lessons I have conducted there have been only a handful of such requests. I am always pleasantly shocked and excited when I get a new skill request from a student instead of a "fix me" request!

One reason for the "fix it" mentality is that there is no equivalent role of "Coach" in the golf industry outside of the school system. Without a Coach to provide the organizing structure and the appropriate mix of skill acquisition and skill refinement, golfers are left to figure it out on their own. And since most golfers don't have the depth of experience or necessary domain knowledge, they are not sure what new skills they should be focusing on developing, and they are not sure they are even addressing their issues the right way in practice. The only thing that leaves them with is focusing on the immediate problem at hand and trying to fix their swing with the latest "hot" tip.

As the saying goes, if you know better, you do better. By the time you have completed reading this book, you'll be able to do better. You'll actually be able to coach yourself. You may still need help from your PGA pro to determine the specific areas of focus and the right mix of new skill development and skill refinement. But you will be able to ask the right questions, and you'll be able to exercise the two different competencies needed to take control of your game: leadership and management.

Although you may not have thought of yourself as applying these two roles to your game, consider this: One of the key aspects of leadership is vision. It's imagining where you want to take your game. Your "Carnegie Hall!" Whether it's shooting a certain score, lowering your index to a specific number, or winning a tournament, vision is about knowing your destination objective. It's your job as the leader of your golf game to create a clear vision for where you want to take your game.

In contrast, management is about efficiently accomplishing your vision. If leadership is the "What," management is the "How."

When it comes time to practice you exercise leadership by deciding what to focus on based on how well that mix of new skill development, plus skill refinement, will move you toward your objectives. You exercise management by structuring your practice and then sticking to the structure by practicing drills and techniques. As management guru Peter Drucker said "Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things."

You are both the Leader and the Manager of your golf game:

1. You "Lead" when you determine the **WHAT**;
2. You "Manage" when you execute on the **HOW**.

So how do you know you've identified the right "What" and "How?"

The vast majority of PGA professionals are capable of far more than just helping a student fix their swing. Fortunately, there is a growing movement of enlightened PGA instructors willing to take on the broader role of Coach with their students. Instead of just acting like a doctor in triage patching up wounded swings, these Coaches are empowering students to both lead and manage their games.

Good golf coaches are like expert guides. They've been over and through the territory you're about to cover, and they can not only validate the vision of your end goal, but advise you about both the hazards ahead and the potential short-cuts to help you manage the journey. They can help you determine the right mix of skill refinement with new skill development. They can help you develop structured

practice plans. And then they can keep you on course as you progress.

You can also get great coaching from resources like this book. One of the reasons I am so appreciative of the global communication channels like the World Wide Web is that it allows information like this to get into the hands of far more golfers than I could possibly reach individually or in my geographic area.

These communication channels are fundamentally changing the way golf is taught and the way golf is learned. The media-rich combination of the written word together with graphics and video is a perfect application for golf. The convenience of anytime-access fits with the ever busier lifestyles we all lead. You can expect to see a lot more high-quality content being developed and delivered in channels that provide ease and convenience for students eager to improve their golf games.

So where does that leave "fixing" your swing?

First, stop thinking in terms of "fixing" and start thinking in terms of "refining." "Fixing" is, after all, merely one aspect of "refining."

Your skill with a particular aspect of your swing or a shot is somewhere on a continuum between the bottom 10% and the top 10% of your maximum ability. Your goal is simply to keep moving up the continuum to a competency level you choose. Once you've reached your target competence level, you pick a new skill and repeat the process.

But understand that it is a process, and it takes time.

Too many golfers still hit the range with the purpose of "fixing" their swing. What they don't realize is that the golf swing is more than a purely mechanical motion. You can't put the club in the right position once, make one good swing, and expect all subsequent swings to follow form.

The golf swing is more like a "habit." Since fixing a swing is actually a subset of skill refinement, and since it takes time to create habits, the process of refining your swing mechanics is the process of creating a different dominant habit.

If you can make the mental switch away from the idea of "fixing" and toward the idea of "refining," you can avoid a lot of the frustration that keeps golfers away from the practice range altogether.

Instead, remind yourself that you are simply in one place on the continuum, moving to another place. Perhaps now you can see the wisdom of the quote leading this section: *"If you focus on results, you will never change. If you focus on change, you will get results."* It is through focusing on the process of change – refining – that you will achieve your results.

Second, make sure you are doing the right thing. Remember, you have a vision you will be turning into a reality. It is only once you are certain that the problem you are addressing is the "right" problem to address that you switch the emphasis to "doing the thing right."

How do you decide what part of your game to work on?

Here's a rule of thumb: prioritize your decisions based on where you can save or pick up the most strokes on the course. In the next section we'll discuss the magic 80/20 rule and how you can use it to prioritize your practice to maximize the impact on your scores.

In the mean time, here are your action items.

ACTION ITEMS

- 1. Pick one new skill to learn and include it as a regular part of your practice**
- 2. Practice Refining existing skills with the intent of moving up your skill level continuum**
- 3. Stop trying to "fix" your swing**

Using the Magic 80/20 Rule For Fast Results

"It's not necessarily the amount of time you spend at practice that counts; it's what you put into practice that makes the difference." Eric Lindros

How do you decide what to work on when you practice? The answer is simple: let your play be your guide.

There's no such thing as a perfect golf swing. There are only swings that are more or less effective. Get this notion through your head and you'll save countless hours on the range working on swing issues that bring little or no reward when it comes to lowering your score.

Your results on the course will tell you what to work on in your practice. For that, you need to employ the 80/20 rule.

The 80/20 Rule, discovered by an Italian economist named Pareto, says that 80% of your results come from 20% of your efforts. Here's how to use the rule, and this may surprise you.

Focus primarily on the bottom 20% and the top 20% of your game.

Why?

The bottom 20% of your game is what is costing you the most strokes. Either you don't have the skills you need in that area or you need to refine some aspect of your swing, mental approach, or strategy to eliminate mistakes and errors so you can save strokes.

But you should also focus on the top 20% of your game.

This idea may come as a surprise to many golfers used to the "fix it" approach. After all, if it ain't broke, why mess with it?

The answer is that even though it's already the best part of your game, you want to continue to refine your strongest skills for one very important reason: **your strongest shots and skills are the ones you want to play to and use most often** on the golf course!

Use the 80/20 Rule to decide where to focus your efforts:

- 1. Improve the bottom 20% to eliminate mistakes or improve skill levels;**
- 2. Make the top 20% even stronger to play to your strengths on the course**

You should plan your course navigation and game management strategies to put yourself in your areas of strength - as often as possible! The more you can play in your areas of strength the more confident you'll be and the better you'll score. So you want to make your best skills as strong as possible.

For example, let's say your favorite approach shot to a green is a 90-yard pitching wedge. From that distance (and with that club) you are able to take a nice, comfortable swing with plenty of confidence because your results are very reliable.

When you think back over your last few rounds you notice that every time you have this shot you get good results. You have proof this shot is one of your strengths. Knowing it is your strength you should then plan your on-course navigation strategy to have this shot as often as appropriate.

Yet too many golfers play with the strategy of "get it as close to the green as possible."

To continue with the example and see how important it is to hit from a position of strength, let's say your lay-up choice is between a 3-wood and a hybrid. The 3-wood would put you at 65 yards from the green, and the hybrid at 90 yards. In the absence of a better strategy the majority of golfers choose the 3-wood. Wrong!

You know from experience that 65 yards is an awkward shot. It's not a full swing and it's not a distance you practice enough to have a good feel for the yardage. The result is that you are going to have uncertainty in your swing. That uncertainty causes you to chunk the ball short or skull it into a hazard.

However, now that you have this book and you know better, the next time you are faced with a similar choice, you can wisely select the hybrid because you know you will be putting yourself in a position of strength on the course. You'll have confidence because you've deliberately practiced one of your strongest shots.

The upshot is that employing the 80/20 rule will shore up your weaknesses and give you even more confidence in the strengths of your game. Here's how to apply the 80/20 rule to your last round or your last few rounds.

First, evaluate your game to see where you lost the most strokes. Keep a few statistics like fairways hit, greens in regulation, number of putts, and up & down saves. Usually one or two areas will jump out as the main focus areas. Decide what you want to learn about with respect to the areas of your game that are costing you the most strokes. Then, select specific drills to give yourself feedback on the progress of your skill refinement efforts.

Second, look at what you did really well. Deliberately track the shots or situations where you had confidence and made the shot you planned to make. Evaluate why you think you were successful in those situations. Then find ways to recreate the circumstances in your practice.

Adopting the 80/20 rule for your practice will improve both the effectiveness and the efficiency of your golf game. In the next section we'll look at the difference between effectiveness vs. efficiency to help you make even better choices when you play and practice.

ACTION ITEMS

- 1. Keep stats on your game: Fairways and greens hit, putts, up & downs, etc.**
- 2. Use stats from recent rounds to determine where the most shots were lost on the course, then create a specific practice plan to refine these most critical skill areas, or to identify new skills to master.**
- 3. Note situations or shots where you were the most comfortable, confident, or made the best shots, then set aside practice time to make those skills even stronger so that you can play from your areas of strength more often on the course.**

Effective vs. Efficient Swings

"The key to any game is to use your strengths and hide your weaknesses" Paul Westphal

The objective of golf is simple: get the ball in the hole in as few strokes as possible.

Your score is a measure of how effectively you can accomplish this goal.

Now that you know the real purpose of practice and have a strategy to help you focus productively on the highest-return parts of your game, let's take a deeper look at what it takes to make your game more effective and how the notion of effectiveness should influence your practice. Once you understand the difference between effectiveness and efficiency, you can have an immediate and positive impact on your game. You'll also understand how to create a more intelligent structure for your practice sessions.

Effectiveness is your ability to get the ball to your target. **Efficiency** is the economy with which you produce the motion that moves the ball to the target. To put it simply, effectiveness is all about scoring, while efficiency is all about mechanics.

EFFECTIVE vs. EFFICIENT Swings:

- 1. EFFECTIVENESS is your skill at getting the ball to your target;**
- 2. EFFICIENCY is the mechanical economy of your swing.**

If you'd like to improve your scores you need to invest time in the **effectiveness of your game**, not just the **efficiency of your golf swing**.

Unfortunately, the majority of golfers spend all their practice time working exclusively on the mechanics of their swing. They spend

little or no time figuring out how to get their ball to a target with the swing they already have.

A key point to remember is that the golf swing is a collection of habits, not just a mechanical motion. The majority of movements you make during your swing are executed automatically and habitually – without conscious thought.

Habits take time to form. It took time and practice to create the habits that constitute your golf swing. Your current golf swing is the result of all the weeks and months and years you've already spent reproducing that collection of movements. Changing your golf swing means overcoming the inertia of all the movements and collections of movements you have turned into habits.

That's one of the challenges of making swing changes, Habits, once formed, don't go away.

That means changing your swing isn't really about *changing* your habits. It's about creating a **New** habit that is more dominant than the old habit.

Here's what happens in the process of making a swing change.

When you focus on refining your swing mechanics you narrow your attention to a small, specific set of movements. Because you are intently focused on those movements you can usually create the effect you want – ***as long as you are narrowly focused on that movement.***

Meanwhile the rest of your swing is happening automatically. As soon as your attention shifts from your narrow mechanical focus to something else, your dominant habits will automatically begin to reappear. If you don't make the effort to maintain focus and practice the mechanical movement you wish to change, it won't become the dominant habit.

You have to consistently apply narrow focus on the specific motion over a period of weeks or months until **IT** becomes the new dominant habit.

This is the problem with tips.

Tips work for a little while because you are consciously and intently focusing your attention on the movement. But as soon as your attention shifts to a different focus, the old, dominant habits take over. Furthermore, once you get out on the golf course and your focus shifts, say to the target, the “magic” of the tip evaporates.

Don't get me wrong: tips can work. A tip may identify exactly what the issue is and what to do about it.

But golfers seldom stay with the tips long enough or practice them effectively enough to turn the tip into a dominant habit. Instead golfers get on what I call the "tip hamster wheel" and fruitlessly run from tip to tip seeking a new solution as soon as the latest one stops working.

So the real solution is to identify the one or two mechanical issues that, if you refined and improved your skill level in that area, would have the biggest impact on your swing, and ultimately, your game. Develop your skill, refine it until it becomes the dominant habit, then move on to the next one or two issues.

But there are two other critical issues you need to be aware of when you are tempted to work exclusively on mechanics in practice.

First, since we know that it takes time to turn a swing change into a new dominant habit, when you attempt to incorporate the swing change into your play on the course, you are trying to use a motion that hasn't been turned into an automatic habit yet. You are essentially trying to play with the swing of the future.

You can't play good golf today with a “new and improved” swing that won't be grooved enough to truly inspire your trust -- until some future point in time.

Second, when you focus on mechanics your attention is internal. Your "inner eye" is attuned to the mechanical motion you are attempting to change, because you can only learn about it and change it when you are focused on it. And while internal focus is a good and proper place for your attention to be when you are on the range, it is **Not** the right place for your attention when you are on the golf course.

On the golf course your attention should be on the target. Period! If you are focused on mechanics during your swing, you will not be as accurate, nor will not be as consistent as you could be if you maintained a target focus.

Remember, the objective is to get the ball in the hole. There is no room on the scorecard to write about how well you did your mechanical thing that day. In the end, the score tells the story.

That's why part of your practice should be focused on making your current swing as effective as possible. The swing you have today is the only one you can play golf with today. You might as well learn how to use what you've got to get your ball to the target.

Keep this in mind: Effectiveness trumps Efficiency.

One of my favorite examples of effective vs. efficient swings is Jim Furyk. Furyk has a big loop in his backswing, and you wouldn't want to purposely emulate a swing with that characteristic. It's not very efficient. But he's marvelously effective with that swing because he's figured out how to effectively get the ball to his target. He's proof that effective swings produce lower scores than efficient swings.

In the end, wouldn't you rather have the most effective swing possible ... particularly if it means lower scores?

So the best practice strategy is to frame your practices to work on a combination of the **effectiveness of your game** (thereby addressing the here and now), and the **efficiency of your swing** (so you are addressing your golf swing and your game in the long run).

Effectiveness Practice Example

A simple way to practice effectiveness is to hit 10 balls at a target. With a driver the target may be a pre-defined section or width of range that defines a fairway. With an iron it will usually be to a specific landmark like a green or a flag. The more advanced your skill level, the tighter your tolerances for error should be.

Note how many times out of 10 you land within your target tolerance. Then practice the skill of hitting to your targets by improving the number of times out of 10 you can hit your target. Practice this way without focusing on mechanics – just a pure target focus.

Here's a practical example.

Let's say you hit a slice with your driver. Slicing would indicate that you have a swing inefficiency, because the club face is open at impact and a slice doesn't maximize the energy transfer at impact, so the ball won't travel as far as it could.

But let's say that you hit the same slice every time and you can land your slice in your imaginary fairway 7 of 10 times.

You may not like your slice, but because you can count on how much the ball will slice you actually wind up putting your ball in the same general area every time. Knowing how much the ball will slice, you can adjust your aim to the left, play the slice, and have the ball end up in the middle of the fairway.

Although that slice may not be very efficient, it **IS** effective because your ball ends up near your target. Because it is dependable, that dependability will allow you to choose strategies leading to better scores on the course. If you're playing today you should adjust for the slice. That's the swing you have. But it is not the shot or swing you want in the future.

So your practice sessions should be structured to refine your skill at squaring up the club face, while simultaneously maintaining the ability to hit targets -- efficiency plus effectiveness.

If you continuously focus on effectiveness while you improve your mechanics, then you will find that as you gradually get the club face more square your ball will start to fly straighter and straighter. As a result, you'll automatically be making less of a left-target adjustment.

ACTION ITEMS

- 1. Effectiveness trumps Efficiency if you want to score well today**
- 2. Limit your mechanical practice to the one or two most important skill refinements that will have the biggest positive impact on your scores.**
- 3. Plan to stick with practicing your mechanical changes until they become the new dominant habit.**
- 4. Match effectiveness training with mechanical changes to maintain a high level of play**

Framing a Productive Practice

***"Excellence is doing ordinary things extraordinarily well."* John Gardner**

Now you know that the real purpose of practice is to develop new skills and refine existing skills. You also know you can apply the 80/20 rule to your game to work on strengths and weaknesses, and that practice should always balance effectiveness with efficiency.

The next step is to organize your practice to make sure you are working on your top priorities for efficiency and effectiveness, so your game is constantly improving. You'll want to frame each practice to work on one aspect of efficiency (mechanics) and one aspect of effectiveness (targets).

Organize your practices using a simple process called framing. Framing is simply deciding what you are going to do in the time you have available. Framing your practice before your start hitting balls will save you time, improve your focus, and make your practice time highly productive. There are just a few steps to framing a practice.

Framing A Practice:

- 1. Framing is a technique for organizing your practice.**
- 2. Decide in advance how much time you will spend and where you will focus your efforts within that time.**
- 3. Determine your learning objective at the beginning of practice, then measure your progress at the end of practice.**

1. First, a good rule of thumb is to frame your practice so half your time is dedicated to target-centered skill refinement, and only half of your time is dedicated to mechanics.

Focusing on target-centered skills will ensure you are getting the most out of your current game by improving your scoring effectiveness. Working on mechanics is a longer term investment in the overall efficiency of your swing.

Determine how much time you have to practice or how many balls you will hit, and split your time in half. Half the time (or half your balls) should be dedicated to effectiveness and target-centered skill refinement. The other half of your time (or half of your balls) is dedicated to efficiency and refining mechanics.

2. Second, for a single practice session pick just one aspect of target-centered skills to focus on and just one aspect of swing mechanics to learn about.

For target practice, work on the skill of staying focused on just the target and on improving one of the elements of shot making – direction, distance control, or shape.

For mechanics work on learning swing efficiencies that will help you get the club face square at impact, create a swing path more square to the line of flight, hit the ball more in the center of the club face, improve your attack angle, or control your swing speed.

Resist the temptation to work on multiple aspects of your swing in one practice or on one swing. Keep it focused to one aspect, and save other aspects of the swing for a different practice session.

3. Third, pick three drills specifically designed to provide feedback and measure your progress. Drills focused on mechanical efficiency should enhance your awareness of a particular aspect of your swing, allowing you to adopt a "learning" focus rather than a "doing" or "outcomes" focus. Drills focused on effectiveness should enhance your ability to maintain a target-centered focus (without mechanical swing thought interference). Then rotate through your 3 drills hitting 5-ball sets with each drill.

That's it! Three simple steps to frame a practice! 1) Prioritize your focus areas based on your play; 2) pick one aspect of scoring skills and mechanics to work on; 3) then finally select three specific drills designed to enhance your feedback and awareness in each given area.

Remember to split your practice time between external target focus and internal swing mechanics. The idea behind practicing target skills is that it will improve your scores immediately, break up the monotony of always working on swing mechanics, and keep a focus on developing the skill of shot-making, which is how you play when you are on the course anyway.

Remember that working on your swing mechanics will produce a gradual improvement over time. However, if the only thing you practice on the range is improving mechanics the only skill you bring to the golf course is a mechanics focus. And we don't play our best golf when we are focused on mechanics!

ACTION ITEMS

"FRAME" your practice to make it effective:

- 1. Split your practice time in half. Focus half your efforts on Effectiveness (targets) and half on Efficiency (mechanics)**
- 2. Pick just one aspect of targets and one of mechanics per practice, for new skill acquisition or skill refinement**
- 3. Pick three drills designed specifically for your learning objectives so you get proper feedback**

Practice Like an Olympian

"Championships are not won on the night of a big event, but years before by athletes who commit themselves daily to championship principles." Muhammad Ali

Now that you've learned the purpose of practice, what to practice, and how to frame your practice, let's turn to maximizing your return on the often-limited amount of time you are able to devote to actually hitting golf balls.

In this section we'll drill right down to the very ground level and focus on the nitty-gritty of actually getting the most out of hitting every golf ball. You'll learn a specific practice technique used to rapidly acquire and refine skills. It's called **Random Block Practice**. I've borrowed the technique from the coaching gurus who train our Olympic athletes and I've adapted it to golf to help you practice smarter and get better faster.

Let's first define what we mean by the terms "random" and "block" and then get right to the application of this technique in your own practice.

BLOCKS: A "block" is defined as a set of 5 golf balls, hit with sole focus on one aspect of the swing effectiveness or swing efficiency.

That means you'll pull 5 golf balls at a time out of your basket. You'll hit each ball, one at a time, focusing exclusively on a single learning objective. That is one block.

The theory behind working in blocks is that it keeps your attention tightly focused on your learning objective. With each drill you focus on learning about only one aspect of the swing. Olympic Athletes and their coaches use random block practice because they know that the higher an athlete's level of focus, the better the athlete's retention rate of any newly acquired skill or skill refinement.

We used to think that endlessly repeating a drill or movement was the best way to learn it. Now we know this is not accurate.

Scientists who study the way we learn new skills report that after about seven repetitions we actually start to lose focus and *performance starts to decline*. The explanation seems to be that when we lose focus, information doesn't get transferred out of short term memory and into long term memory. Information stuck in short term memory is rapidly replaced by the next focus or thought – in the case of the golf swing, the next swing thought or even the outcome of the shot. Without transfer to long term memory, no lasting improvement takes place. The upshot is that when you lose your focus, the information stays in short term memory, where it is ultimately lost.

Let's touch a bit more on "outcomes" focus.

Keep in mind that long-lasting improvement comes from focusing on the process, not on the outcome of your shots. That means your focus should be on the feedback from the drills, not your judgment or assessment about the outcome of the shot.

The moment you start focusing on the results of the shot your inner eye gets distracted by all the visual information and from the value judgment of "good" or "bad" we assign to the outcome. Your capacity to learn is diminished because your attention is split between judging the shot and remembering the feedback from the drill. In the end, the judging thoughts win.

Your goal is to focus on the feedback from the drill. So even though it can be challenging, keep your focus on the feedback, not the outcome. Don't judge your shots. Instead, learn from the feedback.

RANDOMIZING: Randomizing, as we'll use it in this context, means making block practice somewhat irregular in order to deepen learning.

In this specific case it refers to hitting a block set of five balls, doing a couple of different block sets, then coming back to the original block set.

What this means in practical terms is that you'll be practicing in groups of three drills, hitting one 5-ball block set for each drill.

You'll focus on your first drill for a block set of five balls. Then you'll move on to a second drill for another 5-ball block set. Then you'll focus on a third drill for your last 5-ball block set. Once your third drill is complete, you'll start over with the first drill and a new 5-ball block set, and repeat the process through each drill.

The theory behind constantly rotating through related drills (rather than staying with one drill for endless repetitions) is that it forces the brain to engage at a deeper level and treat each drill as brand new.

By the time you've finished the first drill, done two more drills in between, and then returned to the first drill, you've randomized the process (as far as your brain is concerned) and introduced enough irregularity that your brain is effectively forced to "rethink" the first drill and therefore concentrate as if it were the first time performing it.

The net result is that you'll re-focus much more intently the second time you rotate through your drills, and you'll be actively engaging long term memory. That's because "rethinking" the drill transfers the memory of the movement pattern from short term memory to long term memory, and it does so much more deeply and at a much more rapid rate than mere endless repetition.

Random Block Practice:

- 1. A Block is a set of 5 golf balls hit with narrow focus on just one drill, thought, or movement**
- 2. Group three related drills together, rotate through each drill in 5-ball block sets, then repeat**
- 3. Rotating through drills effectively randomizes the learning process**

Practical Application: The most effective way to implement and learn from Random Block Practice is to select three different drills that are related to whatever aspect of your swing you are learning about, and then rotate through your three drills in 5-ball block sets.

For instance, if your goal is to correct your slice, your objective would be to learn how to get the club face square at impact. You

would select three drills designed to give you feedback on how well you are accomplishing your objective.

Let's say (for the sake of argument – everybody's swing is different) that the three issues preventing you from squaring up your club face at impact are (1) not initiating the downswing with a weight shift to the left side; (2) overpowering the swing with your right hand, so you can't release the club; and (3) swinging out of athletic balance.

You would select one drill for each issue that would unequivocally provide feedback about how well you achieved your objective. You hit 5 golf balls and pay attention to the feedback from the drill. Then you switch to the second drill, hit another 5-ball block set, and pay attention to the feedback from that drill. Then you switch to the third drill for another 5-ball block set. Then you start all over with the first drill and repeat the process.

You can use random block practice for your mechanics improvement, your target-based effectiveness practice, and new skill development. Choose three related drills, work your drills in 5-ball sets, and rotate through your drills to keep your focus high to accelerate your progress like an Olympian.

If you wish to learn faster, learn better, and learn at a deeper level, use random block practice.

ACTION ITEMS

Use Random Block Practice every time you practice.

- 1. Frame your practice by choosing a group of three drills related to your learning objective**
- 2. Rotate through your three-drill group in 5-ball block sets**
- 3. Pay attention to the feedback from the drill, rather than the outcome of the shot**

(Author's note: If you're saying to yourself right about now "I sure would like to have a drill to test this out." I have a suggestion for you: The information page I put together to describe my distance training program "[The 5 Keys To Distance](#)" has a drill we call "**Happy Toes**" right in the middle. Visit "[The 5 Keys To Distance](#)", watch the "**Happy**

Toes" drill, and try it out the next time you visit the range. Of course, if you like the drill you should know there are 16 more drills in the 5 Keys program, each chosen to reinforce your ability to refine your skill at the five swing fundamentals that contribute the most to distance: Balance, Leverage, Arc, Speed, and Target. It's an excellent opportunity to put the practice ideas in this book to use, with the added benefit that you'll develop more distance on all your shots plus improve your ball-striking consistency.)

Feeling the Difference: The Art of Distinguishing

"The first rule of focus is this: Wherever you are ... be there." Anon

In the last section we discussed using random block practice to accelerate learning by concentrating on one drill at a time for five shots, and then rotating through a group of three drills. The purpose of random block practice is to sharpen the focus of your attention on the feedback from the drill, so the swing you want to make transfers to your long-term memory and rapidly becomes the dominant habit.

Here's a critical concept to keep in mind before you begin those drills: you need to be able to tell when you are doing the drill correctly and when you are not.

In most cases, a well-designed drill will automatically provide the correct feedback, especially when you are working on mechanical swing refinements. Some skills and some refinements, however, don't lend themselves as well to overt feedback. Target focus skills and mental skills, for example, are subjective and difficult to judge objectively.

Nonetheless, you still need some mechanism that helps you differentiate between correct execution and incorrect execution. In short, you need to be able to tell when you are making the swing you intend to make. And since you can't always see yourself swinging the club, sometimes you have to rely on **feel** to distinguish the difference between the golf swing you want and the swing you are currently making.

One of the big challenges with changing a golf swing is that your perception of what you are doing often does not match reality. You **think** you are doing one thing, but in reality you are doing something else. That's where watching video can help – because it provides objective feedback.

But watching the video only points you toward the area of your swing in which you have not yet developed your awareness. When you can't tell if you are executing correctly it's called a "blind spot."

You have to devise a way to gain insight into your blind spots if you wish to make change.

The truth is, if you can't feel it, you can't change it.

How, then, do you develop feel?

The answer lies in the Art of Distinguishing.

The Art of Distinguishing:

- 1. "Distinguishing" is being able to feel the difference between swings**
- 2. In order to change a swing you must be able to distinguish correct movement from incorrect movement**
- 3. Well-designed drills provide appropriate feedback to help you distinguish**
- 4. All of your attention should be focused on the feedback**

One of the skills you will develop by following the advice of this book is the ability to feel – or distinguish – between swings. Like other skills, the skill of distinguishing is a process. And like other processes the art of distinguishing can be mastered in steps. Distinguishing is a skill, and as is true for any skill you can get better at it with time and practice

The first step in the art of distinguishing is learning how to focus your attention on the specific area of your swing you wish to learn about.

Think of your focus as your "inner eye." When you learn to direct your inner eye to a specific area of your golf swing and keep it there, you'll be amazed at how quickly you can learn about that specific aspect of your swing. Plan to spend some practice time simply learning how to keep focused on your learning objective.

Resist the temptation to switch your focus to the results of the shot. Watching the shot and judging the results are the two biggest roadblocks to the Art of Distinguishing. If you do watch the ball (and

it's exceedingly hard not to), treat the results as just another data point and source of feedback to help you distinguish. Be sure to suspend judgment. Don't apply any notions of good or bad to the results. It's just data.

Once you have learned how to maintain the laser-sharp focus of your inner eye, you can move to the next step: Distinguishing. Distinguishing is simply being able to tell the difference between the motion you would like to make – your swing of the future -- and all other motions.

To distinguish effectively you must have a swing you can use for comparison. This comparison swing is called a control swing or baseline swing. The control swing should be the motion you would like to create, made with as much precision as possible. Because precision is important, control swings are usually practice swings, made at very slow speeds, without hitting a ball.

The objective of consistently creating a precise control swing is to enhance your ability to feel the motion you would like to create. Then you use drills to enhance your ability to distinguish between the baseline control swing and your regular swing.

This is the reason drills are often an exaggeration of the normal swing. The exaggeration provides more feedback. Once you can tell the difference between your control swing and your regular swing, you are on your way to rapidly developing the golf swing (or the scoring skills) you want to create.

To make the absolute most out of your practice time the focus of your inner eye needs to be clearly directed to a single learning objective and a specific focal point of feedback on every shot.

ACTION ITEMS

- 1. Develop your skill at the Art of Distinguishing**
- 2. Keep the focus of your "inner eye" on your learning objective, not the outcome**
- 3. Suspend judgment of the results of your shots**
- 4. Create a baseline control swing**
- 5. Use feedback from drills to enhance your ability to distinguish between swings**

The Secret To Consistent Golf: Baseline Control Swings

"The quality of a person's life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavor." Vince Lombardi

Every golfer dreams of being more consistent. By understanding the simple concept of the baseline control swing you can create the kind of consistency that will help you start shooting lower scores immediately and put you in control of your rate of improvement. The secret to consistency lies in understanding how to create and use baseline control swings.

If you are familiar with concept of The Scientific Process you already know the concept of baseline control swings. To provide an example, let's look at the way new drug therapies are tested.

Once a new drug is developed scientists need to know if the therapy has the desired effect. To test the effect they organize a clinical trial and gather participants. Trial participants are divided into groups: One group gets the new therapy; the other gets a placebo. Results are monitored for both groups throughout the therapy period. Changes in the therapeutic group are constantly compared against the control group to measure differences in patient outcomes.

The same scientific principle can be applied to the golf swing.

The approach is simple. You create a baseline control swing which represents the improved or refined swing you desire. Then you compare that baseline control swing to your current swing. Your goal is to be able to distinguish the difference between the swing you desire and your current swing. Once you can distinguish the difference, you can make adjustments and repeat the process.

1. Create a baseline control swing;
2. Hit a shot with your regular swing;
3. Compare the swings
4. Make adjustments
5. Repeat the process

Over time you will find that as you continually compare and adjust, your regular golf swing will become more and more like your

baseline control swing, and, ultimately, you will have the swing you desire. Moreover, it will be a consistent swing. That's because throughout the entire process the control swing remains consistent.

The trick behind developing an effective baseline control swing is precision.

Baseline Control Swings:

- 1. Your baseline control swing is used to compare and distinguish between all other swings**
- 2. Baseline control swings are precise and often much slower re-creations of the swing you want to develop**
- 3. Through the process of compare and adjust you will develop a consistent swing**

In order to be precise, you'll want to develop just one baseline control swing, because, ultimately, you want only one swing on the golf course.

If you make the common mistake of trying to fix your swing by constantly experimenting with new and different swings, the only thing you'll groove is a hodge-podge of baseline swings. That's the perfect template for inconsistency – the very thing you want to avoid!

This means you'll need to be very precise and deliberate when you execute your baseline control swing. The more precisely you execute your control swing, the easier it will be for you to distinguish that control swing from your regular swing. The easier it is for you to distinguish between swings the easier it will be for you to make adjustments. The more effectively you can adjust your regular swing the sooner your swing will become the swing you are trying to create.

That's why your baseline control swing is normally made without hitting a ball, and executed at "learning speed."

Learning speed is a much-reduced swing speed that allows you to recreate the baseline control swing with precision. Your learning speed swing may be at 75%, 50%, 25%, or only 10% of normal speed!

The speed of your control swing doesn't matter. The focus in baseline control swings is always on precision.

When you are creating your control swing, keep reducing the speed at which you make the swing until you can make it with precision. Create your control swing without hitting a golf ball to avoid the distraction of focusing on results.

The goal is to have your regular swing and your baseline control swing become one and the same. When you are out on the course playing golf you want one swing you can rely on. Even though you never have the same shot twice on the course and will always have variations in circumstances, all your adjustments for lie, stance, terrain, and conditions when you play become ***variations from your baseline swing*** -- not different swings.

Remember, the ultimate goal as always is to develop and refine a swing that gets the ball to the target as efficiently and effectively as possible.

ACTION ITEMS

- 1. Create a baseline control swing you can repeat with precision**
- 2. Make your control swing without hitting a ball, and keep slowing your speed down until you can reliably and accurately reproduce the control swing**
- 3. Compare your baseline control swing to your full-speed swings**
- 4. Feel the difference, make adjustments, repeat**

The Lesson of "Goldilocks"

"If you have fun it changes all the pressure into pleasure"
Ken Griffey, Sr.

Do you remember the story of Goldilocks?

Once upon a time there was a little girl who got lost in the woods. She found the house of the three bears and when she went inside she saw three bowls of porridge on the table. The first bowl of porridge she tried belonged to Papa Bear, and it was too hot. The next bowl she tried belonged to Mama Bear, and it was too cold. But when she tried Baby Bear's porridge it was just right!

There's a lesson in the process Goldilocks used to find the perfect bowl of porridge that will help you improve your golf game.

Whenever you learn a new skill or make a swing change you embark on a learning process. The learning process involves trial and error. It's a completely natural process and one we all have to go through to reach our objectives.

You know what you would like to achieve – a swing that matches your baseline control swing. For Goldilocks it's porridge that is neither too hot nor too cold. You test your swing against the baseline and you make adjustments, usually with feedback from a drill, swing aid, or observant coach. Goldilocks tests the porridge from Papa Bear and Mama Bear before she finds porridge that is "just right."

As you hone in on the golf swing you'd like to develop, you'll go through a similar process of constant adjustment through trial and error to find your "just right" swing. Sometimes you'll make too much of an adjustment ... a Papa Bear swing. Sometimes you won't make enough ... a Mama Bear swing. Eventually you'll get closer to your Baby Bear swing and do so more often. That's because you'll better understand the difference between the "too much," the "too little," and the "just right" golf swings as you incrementally close the gap between your regular swing and your baseline control swing.

Just like Goldilocks, who makes incremental adjustments before settling on the perfect bowl of porridge, you will embark on a process in which you incrementally close the gap between your regular and desired swings, until the swings are virtually one and the same.

"Goldilocksing" Your Swing

- 1. Define your "just right" baseline swing**
- 2. Test alternatives against your baseline**
- 3. Make adjustments**
- 4. Suspend judgment by thinking of your results as simply too much adjustment or too little – Papa Bear and Mama Bear swings.**

Testing and refining is a natural way for us to learn. The lesson from the Goldilocks process is that when you know in advance what to expect from the learning process you'll understand exactly where you are in that process.

More important, you'll come to understand that failing isn't actually failing at all. What you are really doing is hitting Papa Bear and Mama Bear shots, and they are the key to discovering your Baby Bear swing.

When you understand this process, you can stop focusing on judging the outcome of your swings and shots and start paying attention instead to learning about differences that provide necessary feedback.

Hitting a shot and judging the results as "good" or "bad" is an "outcome" focus. When you practice you don't want to worry about hitting "good" shots. That's not the point. What happens to your golf ball after impact is only one more piece of information to help with your feedback and analysis.

Let go of the notion of "good" or "bad" shots. These are value judgments that get in the way of learning.

Focus instead on differences between swings as you engage in the process of error detection and error correction – the Goldilocks

process. As you keep repeating the process, the difference between the baseline control swing you want to groove and other swings becomes smaller and smaller. That's how you turn an otherwise frustrating practice session into an enjoyable experience.

Practicing should be fun. Keeping Goldilocks in mind will help keep it fun and facilitate rapid learning.

Start "Goldilocksing" your practice the next time you hit the range. Being able to identify the times you "Papa Bear" or "Mama Bear" a shot doesn't mean you did it wrong. It means you are one step closer to the swing you want – the just right "Baby Bear" swing.

ACTION ITEMS

- 1. Learn to suspend value judgments of "good" or "bad" shot outcomes.**
- 2. Think instead in terms of Papa Bear or Mama Bear adjustments as you work through the trial and error process.**
- 3. Have fun experimenting.**

How to Train for Scoring Effectiveness

"The formula for success is simple: practice and concentration then more practice and more concentration."
Babe Didrikson Zaharias

I hope you are with me in believing the ultimate reason we practice is to improve scores, not just to make a better swing.

In this section we'll drill down into "effectiveness practice" and provide specific examples of practice methodologies you can incorporate into your sessions immediately. Using effectiveness training in practice is one of the surest ways to bring down your scores in a hurry.

Earlier you learned the difference between **efficient and effective** swings. Keep in mind that if you want to shoot better scores, effectiveness trumps efficiency.

There are significant differences between efficient and effective swings. Efficient swings maximize economy of motion. Effective swings get your ball to the target. Efficient swings focus on mechanics. Effective swings focus on targets. Efficiency produces nice-looking swings. Effectiveness produces nice-looking scores.

Efficient Swings:

- *Maximize Economy of Motion**
- *Focus on Mechanics**
- *Produce Nice-Looking Swings**

Effective Swings:

- *Get Your Ball to the Target**
- *Focus on Targets**
- *Produce Nice-Looking Scores**

The golf swing may be the most exhaustively analyzed human motion on the planet. We know to the umpteenth degree exactly what

we should be doing at all 109 checkpoints of the swing. But even if we execute the mechanics perfectly that still doesn't guarantee effective results. Yet when most golfers hit the range their focus is almost exclusively on mechanics.

Don't get me wrong, mechanics are important and there is a place for maximizing the efficiency of your swing. However, there is too much emphasis on just swing mechanics, often to the complete exclusion of target focus and other strategies that improve scoring abilities. Mechanics practice alone is not enough.

You need a way to practice that will help you score better on the course.

That's where "effectiveness practice" comes in.

"Effectiveness practice" is all about scoring. It's about learning to get the ball to the target. To have really productive practices your sessions should always include some element of scoring practice. In fact, the further you get into your golf season and the closer you get to major tournaments and competitions, the more time you should devote to scoring practice and the less time you should devote to mechanics.

For most Tour pros the off season is the time to work on mechanics and swing changes. During the season their focus is almost exclusively on effectiveness.

Here are three categories of effectiveness training to consider for your practice sessions.

Three categories for Effectiveness Training that will allow you to make the most of your game:

- 1. Target Centered Focus**
- 2. Shot Making**
- 3. Simulated Competition**

Target Focus: With target-centered practice your goal is to focus on the target and *keep* your focus on the target throughout the entire swing. Your measurement of success is how well you know

where the target is, at all times, even when you are not looking directly at the target.

Maintaining a target focus requires an active imagination. When you take a last look at the target before you swing, you need to retain the image and awareness of where the target is located. If you find that your memory of the target location disappears as soon as you look at the ball on the ground (which is quite common at first), practice the simple act of memorizing the target location. Alternate looking at the target and then at the ball, with the intent of retaining the memory of where the target is when you look back at the ball. Keep looking back and forth until you are confident you have memorized the target location.

When you practice target focus you'll have to work hard to eliminate all other mental interference, particularly thoughts of swing mechanics or judgments about the outcome. It is difficult at first, particularly if you are used to practicing exclusively on mechanics. But like any skill it can be learned and refined.

Set up a subjective scoring system and rate your own ability to maintain total target awareness. Use a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being excellent memory of the target location. Develop and refine this skill until you are consistently in the 8 to 10 range on the continuum. Then bring this skill to the golf course as soon as possible.

In the Art of Distinguishing section I mentioned the concept of focusing your "inner eye." When practicing swing mechanics your inner eye is turned inward -- on your body, the feel of the swing, and the kinesthetics of the swing. But when you are practicing your scoring skills, your focus is turned outward -- on the target.

Shot Making: There are only three elements of every shot:

- (1) **Direction Control;**
- (2) **Distance Control;**
- (3) **Shot Shape.**

Practice shot making by mastering each shot element, one at a time, in the order presented. Start with direction. Develop and refine the skill of accurate direction control. Pick a target and establish a width parameter. For short irons your accuracy tolerance should be around 5 yards to either side of the target. For longer irons and

hybrids start with 10 yards and with the driver 15 yards to either side of your target. Use the same tolerances for distance control.

Track your results in 10-ball sets, and seek to continuously improve your ability to hit to defined areas.

For Shot Shape, learn to work the ball four ways: High, low, left-to-right, and right-to-left.

Simulated Competition: Simulated competition is simulated play with the addition of artificial pressure. Simulated play is re-creating imaginary holes and then playing the holes, one shot at a time, using different clubs and targets.

For example, if your first simulated hole is a long par-4 you would tee off with your driver, hit a second lay-up shot with a hybrid, then hit an approach shot with a wedge. If your second hole is a short but tight par-4 you would tee off with a 3-wood, and then hit a mid-iron approach shot.

With simulated play and simulated competition your goal is put yourself in as many different situations as possible to practice as many different shots as possible. The more you can simulate the conditions of actual play on the range, the better you'll actually play on the golf course. This can be a very fun and creative way to practice!

Focusing on effectiveness practice is one of the best ways to develop your feel and to lower your scores on the course.

ACTION ITEMS

- 1. Select one of the effectiveness training categories to include in your next practice**
- 2. The closer you get to tournaments the more your practice should focus on effectiveness training. Frame your practice sessions accordingly.**

(Author's Note: It's very difficult to find quality information on how to properly navigate your way around the golf course, pair the right shot strategy with your capabilities, and maintain the right kind of mental focus throughout the entire round. That is why I've written the

Play Strategic Golf series: Course Navigation, Game Management, and Mental Toughness. These are the three keys to shooting great scores, and understanding how these three keys come together to form your strategy on the course will help you decide what kind of effectiveness training you should use during practice. I invite you to check out [Play Strategic Golf](#) to see how these books can help you play better golf and frame more productive practice sessions.)

The Importance of "Keeping Score"

"The real contest is always between what you've done and what you're capable of doing. You measure yourself against yourself and nobody else." Geoffrey Gaberino

Measurement is an essential ingredient for improving performance. Whatever we measure is what we pay attention to. Plus, if you can't measure it you can't change it.

In golf - as in all sports – your final score provides the measure of performance. That may be one explanation for our obsession with new gear and the latest swing tips: we'll try anything to improve our scores, because that is our performance measurement.

Although keeping score on the course is an obvious measure, most golfers don't normally think about keeping score when they practice on the range. But if measuring something is so important for focusing attention, and we know that the more deeply we focus the faster we learn, then it stands to reason that inventing scoring systems for practice will help us improve much more effectively.

There are two scoring systems that have proven to be successful on the range:

- 1. Objective Measurement; and**
- 2. Subjective Measurement.**

Objective Measurement is straightforward. It's simply a count of how many times you successfully accomplish your goal. Examples include how many putts you make from a set distance, how many chips you can get inside a defined circle, or how many times you can land in a target area with your full swings.

Objective measurement can be applied to any shot-making skills (directional accuracy, distance control, shot shape), target drills, simulated competition, and any other practice where results can be seen or measured.

To use objective measurement just pick an activity and hit a block of 10 shots. That will give you a baseline result. Then set a goal to make a one-shot incremental improvement the next time you repeat the block.

For example, if you are working on your direction skills you would define a target "lane" of a certain width. On most ranges you'll find targets like greens, signs, flag sticks, and even trees or boundary markers in the distance to define a lane. You hit a 10-ball set with one club and record the number of times you hit your lane. Establish your baseline, then set goals to improve by one the next time you repeat your target practice.

Keeping "score" this way will sharpen your attention and add a little performance pressure to the exercise, keeping your practice interesting. In fact, getting used to handling the little bit of extra pressure as you continually try to beat your prior score is excellent training for the pressures you'll find on the golf course. Learning the kinds of adjustments you need to make is one of the keys to performing at your best and one of the best ways to develop mental toughness.

Subjective Measurement is a very useful tool when you are making swing changes and developing mental skills like concentration and focus. Subjective measurement is simply your own interpretation of your performance – usually against a baseline (see baseline control swings).

For example, let's say you want to make a swing change. You practice your baseline control swing at a slow "learning speed" until you can do it perfectly and can give yourself a 10 on a scale of 1 to 10. It's a subjective rating because it's your interpretation of what a "10" swing feels like.

Once you have your perfect feel, though, you have something to use for comparison. So you make your existing golf swing and compare it to the control swing, giving yourself a rating for how close your regular (or existing) swing was to your baseline control swing.

At first you may find that your regular or existing swing is not at all like your baseline control swing. You may only rate your existing swing a 3 or 4 compared to your baseline control swing. But because you have a perfect 10 swing for comparison you can pinpoint where –

and often why -- there were differences. Then you can make adjustments and try again. Gradually you will figure out what adjustments to make to align your existing swing with your baseline control swing.

If you start using measurement systems on the range you'll be pleasantly surprised at how effectively you'll be able to coach yourself toward the swing and game you want.

ACTION ITEMS

- 1. Put a measurement system in place for all your practices**
- 2. Use objective measures when results can be visibly verified**
- 3. Use subjective measures for non-verifiable skills like target focus.**
- 4. Incrementally improve your performance measures until you are reliably in the 8 to 10 range for that skill.**

Mastery - The Ultimate Learning Philosophy

***"You have to apply yourself each day to becoming a little better. By applying yourself to the task of becoming a little better each and every day over a period of time, you will become A Lot better."* John Wooden**

Are you sincerely interested in improving your golf game? You've read this far, so I am assuming you have a resounding "yes" to this question.

Because you are interested in improvement, you have a choice to make - a choice about your approach to learning and your practice philosophy.

At the beginning of this series I included a quote from Jack Dixon: *"If you focus on results, you will never change. If you focus on change, you will get results."*

Here is your choice: Will you focus on the Results or the Process of Change?

Our current golf culture loves the instant-fix and the quick-tip cure. We want to play better **Now!**, as though better golf is a destination rather than a journey.

Instant fixes are seductive, but they do a disservice to golfers because they are a hollow promise.

Throughout this series of practice articles I've been sharing methodologies and approaches that focus on the process of change. It's called a "mastery" approach. I sincerely believe that adopting a mastery approach instead of an outcome focus will lead you to more enjoyment, more satisfaction in your achievements and a permanently improved golf game.

But it's your choice.

You can hit the range and focus on hitting perfect golf shots. You can adopt an outcome-oriented "results" philosophy and suffer the frustration of agonizing over each mishit ball. You can judge the results and get angry and stressed out over your failures. You can

leave the range feeling like your game is in complete disarray and wonder why you even bother to practice at all.

Or you can adopt a "mastery" learning approach and celebrate small victories. You can train yourself to pay attention to the process and feel your confidence improve as you learn to coach yourself. You can teach yourself to maintain the focus of your inner eye on your learning objective and marvel at what you discover. You can experiment with changes and make adjustments with purpose. You can feel like you are in control of your progress – and your game. You can leave the range feeling confident and inspired because you'll know you have made progress in each practice session, and that you are incrementally improving your skill set and consistency.

The Mastery Approach

- 1. Focus on the process, not the outcome**
- 2. Celebrate learning instead of doing**
- 3. Compare yourself to past performance, not to other golfers, and challenge yourself to improve**

A small, but growing number of PGA Professionals are not content with the current golf culture and approach to teaching. "Good enough" isn't good enough any more. They know there is a better way. They are dedicated to helping golfers reach their full potential, not just helping golfers swing the club better. They call themselves "coaches" If you decide to adopt a mastery approach to your game, then I encourage you to find one of a growing number of "golf coaches" to help you on your journey.

ACTION ITEMS

- 1. Adopt a "learning" approach**
- 2. Remind yourself you are after progress, not perfection**

Taking it To The Course

"You cannot always control what goes on outside. But you can always control what goes on inside." Wayne Dyer

It's been said that the longest walk in golf is from the range to the first tee.

Something inexplicable seems to happen. You hit it great while warming up, and then whatever magic you found on the range seems to disappear when you peg it up between the blocks. A very common question from golfers of all levels is this: "how do I take it from the practice tee to the first tee?"

In this part we'll cover the real purpose of warming up prior to a round and help you eliminate first tee jitters for good.

Taking it to the Course

- 1. Warm up to find your rhythm and to see what kind of swing you have that day.**
- 2. Don't practice before a round. Save practice for after you are done playing**
- 3. Pick a specific strategy for the first hole, then practice that shot with your last couple of warm-up shots on the range.**

Warming Up: When you get to the golf course your warm-up routine should have only two purposes:

1. To establish your swing rhythm; and
2. To find out what kind of golf shot you will be playing that day

You are not there to "practice." You are not there to work on your swing or fix a mechanical problem. Save that for practice session after your round.

Immediately before a round, you need to prepare yourself to play the given course as well as you are able on that day to shoot a

good score. And here is an idea that may be new to you: You DON'T need a perfect swing to accomplish that. What you need is a swing you can trust.

Follow these simple recommendations to get off to a great start every time you play.

Step 1: Find your Rhythm First

The swing you can trust is the swing you find when you are warming up that day. The swing you can trust is a swing with a good, consistent rhythm, and your goal is to find that rhythm during your initial warm-up.

Your first 10 balls or so on the range should be dedicated to establishing rhythm. It doesn't matter what club you use or where the ball goes, as long as you feel as if you are developing a tempo that you can feel comfortable using on every shot. That means that your first 10 balls or so represent the tempo of EVERY shot you will be making that day. Keep that in mind as you slowly, methodically, rhythmically make each swing.

Step 2: Observe Your Shot Shape

The next step in your warm-up should be to hit at some targets. This is when you start to pay attention to your shot shape. If you see a tendency to fade or draw, go with it, instead of trying to fix it. Understand and accept that this is the swing you have brought to the course on that day. Instead of fighting it, see how accurate you can be with that shot.

This would also be a good time to also double-check your alignment by placing a club down on the ground pointed at your target (parallel left). You need to explain parallel left.

Step 3: Finish with Full Routine Simulation

Work your way through most of the clubs in your bag or every odd or even club. However, save your last 3 or 4 golf balls to practice hitting the exact shot you will be hitting on the first tee. Use your full routine for each swing, pretending that you are on the first tee. Pick your target, breathe, visualize the ball going to the target, stay in rhythm, and swing tension-free.

I have a section about Tension Free Swings in my 5 Keys To Distance Training Program. To access that program, go here:

Step 4: Have a Plan

The biggest single cause of first tee jitters is indecision. When you are on the range warming up, decide exactly what you will do when you get to the tee -- Where you will tee it up, your precise target, and what shape the ball will take as it travels to the target.

Then commit to your decision. An ounce of commitment is worth a pound of execution. By the time you walk out onto the first tee, you will have a high degree of confidence in your shot.

Use your last three or four range balls to hit the exact same drive you intend to hit on the first tee. Use your full pre-shot routine, anchor in your shot strategy for the first hole, and use your imagination create a solid target focus for the first hole.

Step 5: Evaluate Your Play So You Can Frame Your Practice

When you are done playing you can greatly improve your future practice sessions by taking a few minutes to analyze your round.

If you keep stats, review the number of fairways and greens hit, the number of putts, up & down saves, and any other statistics you keep. If a particular statistic jumps out at you, make a note of it as an area for potential refinement on the range.

When you analyze your round you are looking for the one or two things that cost you the most strokes that day, the bottom 20%. If these areas are consistent from round to round you've identified your top priorities for skill development or enhancement when you practice.

You are also looking for the one or two brightest spots of the round. Clearly identify the circumstances in which you had a great deal of confidence and felt like you were hitting from your area of strength? These are the areas you'll also want to practice, to make them even stronger and more reliable.

ACTION ITEMS

- 1. Use your pre-round warm-up time to establish rhythm and determine that day's shot type.**
- 2. Don't practice when you should be preparing to play**
- 3. Create a specific shot strategy and target for your first tee shot of the day, then practice that shot with your final 3 or 4 warm-up balls using your full pre-shot routine.**
- 4. Analyze your game after the round to find the weakest and strongest parts. If they are consistent across rounds, use that data to determine your top priorities and to frame your practice sessions.**

Next Steps

I hope you have enjoyed this series of practice ideas and methodologies and that you will be able to put them to good use to improve your game. The more I teach the more I realize that giving students good information about their swing is only half the answer.

The real answer is to coach students about their swing and then teach them how to practice in between lessons. That way they can turn Information – which they get in the lesson – into long-lasting knowledge. Teaching students how to play and how to practice empowers them to take control of their game and become their own best coach.

There are a few next steps I'd like to recommend to you:

First, head on out to the range and turn the "information" in this report into "knowledge" by giving it a try and practicing like the pros. Practicing can and should be fun and rewarding. Pick a chapter and make it your focus for a practice. Find out what works best for you. Then pick another chapter and repeat the process. I promise you'll enjoy it.

Second, let your golfing friends know where they can get this book for themselves. They can use it. You can also send your buddies to the link here: [How To Practice Your Golf Swing Like The Pros](#).

Third, pick up a copy of [The Practice Effect: How to Groove a Reliable, Confident Golf Swing You Can Trust](#). John Snopkowski and I have written a detailed and thorough book about practicing and improving that will completely revolutionize the way you approach your practice. It's going to be a game-changer!

Fourth, download some of the practice worksheets available free with your purchase of How To Practice Like The Pros. Click the DOWNLOAD WORKSHEETS link, enter a user name and password, and get free access.

Resources

Here are additional resources to improve your golf game:



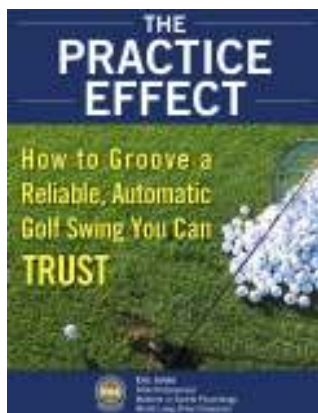
The 5 Keys To Distance: *How To Drive The Golf Ball Farther*, by PGA Professional and World Long Drive Champion Eric Jones

Everybody wants to hit the ball farther. In his quest to win the World Long Drive Championship title Eric Jones discovered the five key swing concepts that contribute the most to distance. He's been teaching these concepts to students and long-drive competitors for years, and has developed a step-by-step program that will help any golfer hit longer, straighter and more consistent shots with the driver and every club in your bag.



Strategic Golf: *The Three Keys To Scoring*

How would you like to take six to ten shots off your score the next time you play ... without changing your swing? The secret to shooting lower scores lies in understanding the three critical aspects of playing golf: Course Navigation, Game Management, and Self Management. When you read this highly informative book you'll realize why it's your strategic decision making that makes all the difference to lowering your scores. Complete with graphics illustrations and examples, Strategic Golf is the first book to link it all up for you in an easy to understand and practical format.



The Practice Effect: *How to Groove a Reliable, Confident Golf Swing You Can Trust*

Coming soon! Get yourself on the early bird notification list. Written by Eric Jones and PGA Teacher of the Year John Snopkowski, The Practice Effect contains cutting-edge ideas and the most advanced techniques for learning faster, focusing your attention more appropriately, and fine-tuning your practice to achieve maximum results. These are the same techniques and methods employed to train Olympic and professional athletes – adapted specifically to golf!

APPENDIX – BONUS PRACTICE WORKSHEETS

These Bonus Worksheets will help you get more out of your practice time by helping you get more specific with your practice objectives and by tracking your progress. Click the link or the image to go to the download page, or visit

www.TargetCenteredGolf.com/Practice-Forms

PRACTICE ORGANIZER

Organize your practice between efficiency drills and effectiveness drills – mechanics and target focus.

This form will help you frame your practice session and track your progress through your drill rotation.

Make notes for your learning objective: New skill development or existing skill refinement.

The key is to stay focused on your top priorities during practice.

SHOT MAKING: Favorite Wedge

Knowing your “favorite” wedge distance into the green is one of the top three most important shots in golf. This form will help you find your ideal approach yardage. Knowing this shot is one of the big “secrets” to better scores.

When you know your wedge distances you'll play with a lot more confidence, and you'll plan your navigation strategy to keep yourself in a position of strength on the course.

SHOT MAKING: Direction, Distance, and Shape

Use these shot-making forms to help you establish a baseline performance level, and then to track improvement in your skill refinement as you progress.

SHOT MAKING #1: DIRECTION

NAME: _____

Record the results of each 10 ball set in the box below - e.g. "N" of 10

Club									
SW									
SW									
SW									
8 iron									
8 iron									
7 iron									
7 iron									
5 iron									
5 iron									
4 iron									
4 iron									
hybrid									
hybrid									
3-wood									
driver									

Notes: In any one practice you'll want to pick just one or two clubs from each of the Scoring, Approach, and Long clubs.

Driver-Wedge game: Challenge yourself with this simulated play game. Hit your driver, then your wedge. If your driver lands in the fairway, you get one point. You get 2 points for a hole in one and the fairway with your driver your "wedge" is a shot at the shorter green. Miss the fairway and you have to shoot for the farther green.

Hit the green and get 1 point, a hole in 2. This for each driver-wedge hole you have a minimum of 2 points (two hits) and a maximum of 4 (two misses). Play 10 holes (20 shots) and count your score. Minimum score 20, maximum 40.

SHOT MAKING #2: DISTANCE

NAME: _____

Record the results of each 10 ball set in the box below - e.g. "N" of 10

Club									
SW									
SW									
SW									
8 iron									
8 iron									
7 iron									
7 iron									
5 iron									
5 iron									
4 iron									
4 iron									
hybrid									
hybrid									
3-wood									
driver									

Notes: In any one practice you'll want to pick just one or two clubs from each of the Scoring, Approach, and Long clubs.

Driver-Wedge game: Challenge yourself with this simulated play game. Hit your driver, then your wedge. If your driver lands in the fairway, you get one point. You get 2 points for a hole in one and the fairway with your driver your "wedge" is a shot at the shorter green. Miss the fairway and you have to shoot for the farther green.

Hit the green and get 1 point, a hole in 2. This for each driver-wedge hole you have a minimum of 2 points (two hits) and a maximum of 4 (two misses). Play 10 holes (20 shots) and count your score. Minimum score 20, maximum 40.

SHOT MAKING #3: SHAPE

NAME: _____

Record the results of each 10 ball set in the box below - e.g. "N" of 10

Club									
High									
Low									
Left-to-Right									
Right-to-Left									

Notes: In any one practice you'll want to pick just one or two clubs from each of the Scoring, Approach, and Long clubs.

Driver-Wedge game: Challenge yourself with this simulated play game. Hit your driver, then your wedge. If your driver lands in the fairway, you get one point. You get 2 points for a hole in one and the fairway with your driver your "wedge" is a shot at the shorter green. Miss the fairway and you have to shoot for the farther green.

Hit the green and get 1 point, a hole in 2. This for each driver-wedge hole you have a minimum of 2 points (two hits) and a maximum of 4 (two misses). Play 10 holes (20 shots) and count your score. Minimum score 20, maximum 40.

Your feedback is always welcome. Visit www.TargetCenteredGolf.com and leave a comment any time.