

HOW TO MAKE EVERYTHING

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While it often seems as though the world's best putters wield a magic wand on the greens there is no evidence of voodoo or dark arts in the requisite skills necessary to hole more putts. No, if you want to be a wizard with the putter there is no substitute for practice – and the following drills are guaranteed to accelerate improvement.

In teeing up this compendium of putting art, AimPoint founder Mark Sweeney (above) outlined the basics of the green-reading system that is today trusted by a growing number of international tour players – the basis of a technique that eliminates guesswork and enables you to get a quick and reliable read on every putt. Lydia Ko made it all look very easy and I'm going to share with you now a number of further drills that will help to reinforce the principles of AimPoint while at the same time providing a fun set of practice games to play. Of course, if your name happens to be Harry Potter, you do have a distinct edge...



The 3-coin drill is the perfect warm-up exercise, taking your focus off the hole and dialling in your sense of touch and speed from this critical 10-15 foot distance. When you then go on to putt to a hole, you'll find you are better attuned to pace, roll and line

THE 3-COIN TRICK LOOSE CHANGE BUYS YOU IMPROVED TOUCH & FEEL

As Mark was quick to point out earlier, speed control is perhaps the *single* most important element in putting. Yes, identifying the correct starting line is key, but unless you have control of the speed at which you roll the ball off the putter face you will never have absolute control of putting.

Whenever the issue of pace control is raised it is invariably in the context of putts over 25 feet or so – the 'lag' putts that you hope to roll dead to the hole. But how often do you practise the art of speed control on those key scoring putts of, say, between eight and 20 feet? The genuine opportunities to single putt? Rarely do I see golfers working on this skill from this distance.

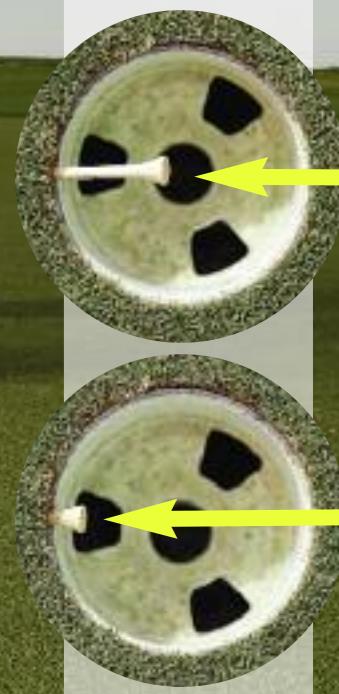
The 3-Coin Drill (pictured left) offers up the perfect warm-up challenge to improve this aspect of your putting, taking the hole out of the equation and leaving you to focus on 'clustering' putts within a defined area.

Find a flat area of the putting green and place your 3 coins like so to form an equilateral triangle with 12" long sides. Then place a tee in the green some 6-8 feet away leaving yourself a dead-straight putt. The challenge is then to roll three successive putts into the confines of that triangle – when you hit three in a row, move the tee back to 10 feet. Repeat the process, increasing the distance of the putt by a foot or so every time you are successful. How far away can you get in 30 minutes? It's a lot harder than you might think!

You can make the drill tougher still by adding side slope, introducing an element of break, and you can further test yourself working uphill and then downhill. Set personal targets – make a note of them, and try to beat them next time.



To work on 'drop-in' pace, insert the tee only gently, leaving just enough room for the ball to fall in; when you want to be more aggressive, press the tee in and try to hit it with the ball rolling at a more determined pace!





STEP IT UP WITH THE LADDER DRILL CHALLENGE YOUR PACE CONTROL ONE RUNG AT A TIME...

Here's another terrific exercise that will enhance your feel for speed – in this case by gradually increasing the distance you roll the ball while at the same time getting good visual feedback on break values and the behaviour of the ball on the green as you observe the line and build the ladder.

Find an area of green that allows you a clear run of up to 30 or 40 feet, and then start by simply stroking a putt to a mark 10 feet in front of you. That's the first rung in the ladder, and the challenge is to lay each subsequent putt three feet beyond the one you have just hit. Your starting line remains consistent – it's only the speed of the roll that varies. Repeat this with 10 balls to create a ladder like the one you see here.

Once you have hit all 10 putts, take a look at the line of balls from side on to see how effective your distance control has been – you are looking for even, consistent gaps of three feet all down the line.

As you get better at doing this you can turn up the heat by reducing the distance between each ball by a foot until you have the ball passing the last by approximately 12", which is the perfect 'capture speed' – i.e. the speed at which a putt has the best chance of holding its line and being 'captured' by the entire width of the hole (running 12 inches past the cup should it miss).

You can jazz things up further still working across side-slopes and alternating between putting uphill and downhill – in fact there's no better way to learn about the relationship between line and pace.

How's your touch? Regular use of the ladder drill will fine-tune your ability to visualise and then roll the ball a specific distance – one of the characteristics of all great putters



5 MINUTES TO TEE-TIME? GIVE IT A SWIRL! A RANDOM TEST OF READ, PACE AND – ULTIMATELY – NERVE

Here's a fun exercise that makes for a great warm-up challenge before heading to the 1st tee. Find a hole that is cut on a gentle slope and start by placing a ball three feet from the hole, anywhere you like. Then, gradually work away from the hole dropping a ball with every step you take in an ever-expanding circle until you end up with a swirl pattern that looks something like this. Each and every putt has its own break value, and so every single putt is unique. Some are uphill, some downhill and most of them will involve slope of

some degree. It's up to you to figure them all out and knock 'em in.

Starting with the shortest, read the putt (using the principles of AimPoint, feeling slope through your feet) and then try and hole it. Then move on to the next. Very quickly a pattern will emerge as to which putts you are good at making and those which you are failing to read and execute – valuable information that tells you where to focus your time and effort. You will also learn to recognise which putts you can be aggressive with and those you need to treat

with respect – the curling fast cross-slopers that can easily get away from you.

This is the sort of exercise tour players spend a lot of time on in preparation for a tournament to get used to the speed. The faster the putt, the more the ball will want to break (simple laws of physics, gravity etc.); by the same token, downhill putts will break more than uphill putts, while you can obviously be more aggressive putting uphill to the hole. As you take all of this information on board, so you will fine-tune your instincts and skills as a putter.

THE FOUR-STAR CHALLENGE

THE ULTIMATE TEST FOR HOLING OUT

Tour players spend a lot of time working on this length of putt – the 'must-make' four to five-footers that are critical to scoring. And this is the perfect drill: not only are you testing the accuracy of your stroke but your ability to read the line and trust the break at each point around the hole.

Place four balls at the points of a compass, as you see here, and then go through your process on each of them in turn (start out on a fairly level area with just a moderate slope and then look for sections of green with more slope to increase difficulty).

Go through the principles of the AimPoint green-read on each putt, standing astride the line to feel the slope through your feet. Which foot feels lower? Is there more pressure on your left foot or right foot, or do they feel even (in which case it's a straight putt). If you experience more pressure on your left foot then you are looking at a right-to-left breaking putt; more pressure on the right foot and the putt is left-to-right. How severe is the slope? Is it a 1%, 2% (unless the greenkeeper is having a bad day it's unlikely ever to be more than 2% given your proximity to the hole).

Here, the uphill putt feels even to me – i.e. it's a dead straight four-footer. A great place to start; I know I can be aggressive and run the ball into the back of the hole. Moving in a clockwise direction, the next putt is a left-to-right putt and I have assigned it a value of 1%. I use one finger to read the putt and in this case it's on the left edge of the hole at medium pace. The next putt is also a 1% read but it's now downhill, and extremely fast (which increases the break as you trickle the ball at capture speed). The final putt is again a 1%, this time from right to left.

You get the gist of the exercise. The question is, how many of these crunch putts can you make in succession, working through your routine and trusting the break?

The stats tell us that 62% of all pro or amateur putts are inside 10 feet. And the principles of AimPoint remind us that from this range there is likely to be more break than you expect when you roll the ball at the desired pace.

So go out and use this drill as often as you can, from anywhere between three and 10 feet of the hole. All the while you will be developing your awareness for slope and speed – and with that your confidence grows.

The more often you rehearse this type of holing-out drill the faster you will develop the instinct to feel slope and assign a value to it before tackling each putt. With this repetition comes familiarity and, ultimately, confidence.





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ELEVATED STRINGLINE & GATE DRILL

A TEST OF YOUR AIM & ABILITY TO START THE BALL ON LINE

Once you have a good read, aiming the putter face squarely and starting the ball on that specific start line at the optimum pace are the other key ingredients to good putting.

This drill is a 'must' for every player as it really challenges your ability to aim and start the ball on your chosen line. To get started, you need to find a straight putt of around 10 feet or so from below the hole. Straddle the line until your feet feel even and then stick a tee in the green to mark the spot. Roll a couple of balls to check the line and when you're happy you've found a dead-straight putt run the stringline two feet behind the ball extending right over the middle of the cup.

The idea then is that you create a 'gate' about two feet in front of the ball you are going to play (here I'm using AimPoint gates that are available at the website but you can achieve the same effect using a couple of tee pegs to create your 'gate', leaving just enough room for the ball to pass through.

The challenge is now laid out in front of you: we know the putt is straight and the string gives us a terrific visual of the line all the way to the hole – but can you aim the putter squarely and return the face at impact to have the ball pass through the gate successfully on its way to the hole?

If you hit one peg more than the other adjust to try and start the ball nearer the other, once you have success in starting between the pegs you can see how that launch direction feels to you.

STRINGLINE REVEALS TRUE BREAK AND IT'S OFTEN MORE THAN YOU THINK

As Mark explained earlier, probably 90% of the putts you will face out on the course are rated a one, that's a 1% slope. Using AimPoint, when you hold out 1 finger on a read such as I'm doing on this 10-footer (right), you discover the true starting line is actually a lot more outside the hole than you might otherwise have imagined.

Using the stringline in practice further helps to illustrate this point. The string provides a visual reference for what is a straight line into the hole, while placing a tee on your aim point serves to confirm the line upon which you need to start the ball to have it roll – at perfect capture speed – into the hole.

Practising with the elevated string will help you to trust the true read – giving you the confidence to do the same on the course.



Feel the slope through your feet and apply the AimPoint technique to identify your true aim point – the starting line for every breaking putt