

Bounce the Putter to Locate the Ground

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[ZipTip: SETUP & STROKE: Bounce the Putter to Locate the Ground](#)

To stabilize your stroke and make sure your putterhead returns to impact in a vertical orientation for a solid roll, set the length of your putting system from pivot to turf by tapping the putterhead lightly at address and keep the pivot stable in your stroke.

You've seen Greg Norman gently tapping his putterhead up and down behind the ball just before he pulls the trigger. He says it relaxes him and makes the takeaway smoother. That may well be useful, if you have trouble with a smooth takeaway move. Here's an independent reason for doing this: it tells your body exactly where the ground is! Yes, you can see the ground, but tapping it with the putter communicates to your body more and better perceptions about your setup, so that when you make your stroke, the putterhead glides into impact just above the surface, skimming the tops of the short-mown grass blades. Tap the putter to sharpen up your stroke.

Some Theory.

Jack Nicklaus, Arnold Palmer and many other pros have long preached the absolute necessity of keeping your head still during the putting stroke. The usual explanation is that you do this to PREVENT early peeking, which moves the shoulders out of square and throws the stroke off line. Well, there are at least two POSITIVE reasons that are probably more important than that one: keeping your head still aids your visual management of impact between the putterface and the ball by keeping visual attention and focus where you need it and also aids your physical management of impact by keeping your stroke pivot from bobbing up or down, changing the length of your putting system, or twisting out of plane as in peeking.

The point about visual attention and focus is perhaps self-evident but it bears emphasizing that your putting accuracy vitally depends on solid contact with the back of the ball by a putterhead trajectory moving the putter sweetspot through the ball's sweetspot along the start line of the putt with the face surface squarely oriented to this line. If you are looking somewhere other than at the back of the ball when impact is occurring, you seriously diminish your chances of making this happen.

The point about the length of your stroke system ought to sound relatively novel. When you address a putt, the vertical length of the putter is effectively fixed because your grip does not move higher or lower once applied and you should not be changing the lie angle of the putter during the stroke. This means the only thing that can change to alter the length of your system is your body: you can bend lower, stand taller, or let your arms out farther in the stroke, and any of these will change the total length of your system.

An optimal putting stroke is not only one that can be repeated, but one that best promotes sound physics for predictable, controllable, and repeatable performance. An optimum stroke is usually said to be one that is moving pretty level and low through impact, with solid contact and a square face moving on line. The biomechanics that approaches this ideal with the greatest degree of stability is a shoulders-only stroke. But the key to a truly effective and reliable shoulders-only stroke is to make sure that the length of the total system does not vary during the stroke.

What to Do.

In assuming the address position, you should NOT hold the putter grip before you have set your eyes. This is putting the cart before the horse, since your head and eye positioning determines how low your arms will hang below the shoulders. If you hold the putter when assuming the address, you will likely hold the putter too high on the grip with the result that you fail to bend over correctly and your eyes are inside the ball with a downward gaze out of your face -- not at all optimal. Set up first, and then grip the putter based on where your arms hang. You wag the putter; not the other way around!

When you take hold of the putter, keep a watch on your elbows. When the arms hang properly, there's not much crook left in the elbows and so there is little chance the arm length will increase. So get your arms hanging ALL THE WAY out of the sockets before taking hold of the putter. There's about one to two inches of excess play here for everyone.

After you have taken hold of the putter, you will probably see that the putter sole is resting, perhaps even pressed, into the ground. This presents a danger of a jerky takeaway, a loss of focus, and a stubbed downstroke.

There are four ways to remedy this. First, you can inhale. This will raise your torso (and head) ever so slightly, and you can let the putter get pulled up as your torso lifts your arms and hands a bit. Again, watch the elbows. If they cave inward, your putter will stay down. A second way is to lift a little of the bend out of your knees. A third way is to straighten up the back a bit, raising the pivot of the putt in your neck area, along with the shoulder sockets. Finally, the fourth way is to BOUNCE the putterhead lightly on the ground and CATCH IT in your hands on the up-bounce. Personally, I like to combine the inhaling and the bouncing-putter catch.

What Good Is It?

When you tap the putter and bounce it lightly, it has several beneficial effects. First, you get a definite knowledge of the position of your arms and hands in the setup. This makes your "triangle" a more definite system that you can control better.

Second, you get a knowledge of the location of the bottom of the stroke both as an absolute spot and as a distance from your stroke pivot point in your neck. This helps your arms find their way away and back to impact with better precision and also makes you conscious of not altering the location of your stroke pivot during the putt. Keeping stock of your pivot will practically eliminate unwanted head movement.

Third, you get a little help in knowing the weight of your putter, especially the putterhead. This helps on distance control.

Finally, when you know where the bottom of your stroke system is in relation to the ground, and you plan on avoiding any lengthening of the system during the stroke, you

are freed from any concern of stubbing the putt. This makes you more positive on the through-stroke and also has the effect of cutting down on those odd occasions when out of fear you raise the putterhead too much and top the putt! Ugh!

Make This Part of Your Game.

On the practice green, or whenever you get ready to putt, stop worrying about peeking ... instead, make a positive effort to keep your system the same length during the stroke. Adopt your setup before taking hold of the putter; hang your arms fully out of the sockets and relax away the excess play in bent elbows; hold the putter lightly and inhale to raise your system a touch, and then play catch the lightly bouncing putter. Even if you choose not to tap the putter this way, make sure your pivot point stays pretty much where it is when you start the stroke until after you have managed the impact with precision. That is the fundamental part, and applies whether your stroke is a shoulders-only move or something else.

For more tips and information on putting, including a free 10,000+ database of putting lore and the Web's only newsletter on putting (also free), visit Geoff's website at <http://www.puttingzone.com>, or email him directly at geoff@puttingzone.com.