

Gaze Dead Straight for Dead Aim

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[ZipTip: TARGETING / AIM: Gaze Dead Straight for Dead Aim](#)

Setting the eyes "above" the ball is not enough for optimal targeting because a gaze direction angled down the face as if reading (with forehead higher than chin at address) makes the hole appear off to the inside, whereas a gaze straight out of the face requires setting the forehead and chin at the same height above the surface, and this gaze is the only one that allows you to scan along the putt path from ball to target on the real line with optimal sensing of spatial relations in the putt.

How many times have you heard or read: "it's best to position your eyes directly above the ball"? This is a faulty statement, because there are two variables that require "squaring up" here: the head, and the eyes-in-head. If you truly want to use your eyes to full advantage:

1. It is NOT sufficient to get your "eyes directly over the ball." There's more to it than that!
2. You should also have the direction of gaze of both eyes straight out of your face and aligned vertically in the plane of the putt.

This aligns your "plane of vision" with the vertical plane arising from the start line of the putt and allows optimal targeting, with a rich assortment of perceptual cues that avoid misperceiving the target's location, that allow checking or monitoring for true aim, and that provide cues to enhance aiming otherwise not available.

[The Missing Ingredient -- A Dead Straight Gaze.](#)

All the gurus say it is best to have your eyes over the ball, pointing out that if you have your eyes inside the ball, your vision's line of sight will look right of the target / hole, and if you get your eyes outside the ball your vision's line of sight will look left of the target / hole. These same teachers also say having the eyes inside the ball a bit is okay (one or two even say it is preferable), but all teachers agree that having the eyes outside the ball should be avoided. All but a tiny minority of golf pros leave the matter right there. Well, here's some news for you:

Even if you position your eyes vertically above the ball, **BUT YOUR GAZE IS TILTED DOWN YOUR FACE INSTEAD OF STRAIGHT OUT AHEAD**, your head turn to the target will **STILL** deliver your vision's line of sight to the inside of the target / hole and you will misperceive the location unless you compensate.

To check this, bend over slightly as if at address but with your forehead higher up than your chin, hang a stick or shaft off your cheek tilted down like your direction of gaze, and then swivel your head without changing the location of the top center of your head.

(Lightly place your free hand's index fingertip on this spot on the top of your head to make sure it stays put.) To get the same check, make a slender tube with your fist and look down your cheek at a line in your floor with your dominant eye while closing the other eye. Then pivot the head-neck axis towards a target out along the floor line and watch your "spotlight" of vision curl off the line as your turn progresses. You will see that your line of sight points well to the left / inside of a target as close as four or five feet, EVEN THOUGH you had your eyes directly above the ball.

In contrast, if your head is positioned so the forehead and chin are both at the same height, with the face horizontal and the eyes gazing straight out of the face vertically down at the ball, this problem does not occur. You can swivel your head to the target and the head carries your line of sight in a straight line along the ground to the target. The eyeballs stay put in the gaze; the gaze stays the same; and your head turns in the plane of the putt.

What Does it Matter?

First, with poor gaze control during putting, you cause unnecessary and variable head and eye-gaze motion to compensate for the effect as you look at the target. The movement changes with the length of the putt, so the sensory cues differ from putt to putt.

As your head turn progresses to the target, you can sense unconsciously that your vision is curling off line and this causes you to either end up off to the side of the hole (believing the hole is there too) or else you shift your gaze (upward) to recenter the targeting focus. Another way to recover is to have a funny head cocking so that the top of your head curls back a bit as you try to keep your sighting eye moving straight. Usually, it's some unreliably variable combination of these two compensations.

Eyes-in-plane and head-turn-in-plane is the ONLY PHYSICAL WAY to look toward the target without necessitating a change in either the direction of gaze or the plane of the head. (While it is true a gaze straight out of the face but with the head tilted back so the eyes are inside the ball and the plane of vision is tilted and not vertical can also deliver the line of sight in a straight line, this posture is not optimal for toher reasons.) And these changes vary in extent with the length of the putts, and the combination of compensations is not regularized and reliable for targeting. A "regular" head turn, staying in the vertical plane of the putt, has no variability at all from one putt to the next.

Second, you deprive yourself of valuable visual and body-movement knowledge that can otherwise accurately help you target and prepare the stroke, and instead your procedure creates handicaps to accurate targeting. When the eyes are gazing in plane with the putt, a head turn that stays in the same plane delivers the eyesight not only reliably to the target (at whatever length of putt) but also does so along the very same straight line you need to look at.

Perhaps even more importantly, such an in-plane turn of the head and eyes establishes a reference movement for the shoulders and arms to mimic in making the stroke itself shortly after the turn to and from the hole. The neck-turn on a fixed shoulderframe establishes a plane in the neck that parallels the visual plane and the putt plane. Your head turns on this "plate" in the neck to and then from the target. The stroke is on the same neck "plate," but this time with the head fixed as the shoulderframe turns back and then through in making the stroke movement.

This template effect of the head-turn has a tremendous benefit in terms of keeping the stroke straight to the target, especially when combined with one or two other visual cues for controlling the starting direction of the putt.

Knowing Good Head and Eye Cues Lets You Monitor Your Aiming.

An in-plane head-turn with a fixed, straight gaze is especially valuable because it allows you to monitor whether you are doing it correctly, and this allows you to use your head-turn and vision to assess whether your setup is truly square and your stroke aimed straight. So what cues do you look for?

The "look" of a straight-out gaze in your field of view. It is normal for the eyes to gaze downward a bit. When we read, we look down about 30 degrees. When we walk, we watch the ground two or three steps ahead of us by gazing down about the same. When we gaze idly in a daydream, our eyes often drop the gaze a bit. And the inner ear that assesses head position is so oriented that it is not level unless the head is nodded forward a bit. In fact, looking straight out of your head in a straight and level gaze takes some work and attention! You have to mean business to get it right. Your posture has to be good, your body squared to the direction straight ahead, and your head not nodded forward or back but simply upright and also not tilted sideways.

The best way I know is to think of standing on the shore gazing straight out to sea, so that the ocean's horizon line cuts straight across both eyes, transecting both pupils and the bridge of the nose. When you do this and imagine yourself wearing glasses, your dominant eye is peering through one and only one spot on the lens, and you can paint that spot with a red magic marker dot. This dot is about one inch inside the bridge of your nose, since most pupils are just a touch over two inches apart in the face.

The "aim" spot fixed on the back of the ball. When at address you look down at the ball, if your gaze does not look through this spot so that the spot coincides with the ball, you are NOT looking straight and level out of your head. If you see too much eyebrow, your gaze is too much upward. If you see too much cheek, your gaze is too much downward.

The "horizon line" across both eyes matching the start line of the putt. The horizontal line across your eyes should coincide with the putt's start line or stroke line. If you drew a red magic marker stripe horizontally across your glasses and then looked down at a ball on a chalkline, the glasses line should match the chalkline in both lenses. And the frame's side-pieces back to your ears would look vertical, too (and perhaps the bill of your visor or cap depending on how you wear it).

A flat back of the head. From this eye orientation, you should find your forehead and chin are both about the same height above the ground. This gets the back of the head flat and the back of your neck at the base of your skull is not angled up, either. Look at pictures of Palmer, Locke, Casper, Archer, and many other great putters to see what a flat head should look like.

The chin's constant distance from the square shoulderframe during a "regular" head turn. When the head swivels in plane, the top of the head doesn't change location and the chin maintains a constant distance from the shoulderframe as you turn. The natural move is for the chin to trend inward toward the shoulder, as this is the way we usually look to the side with a head turn. It takes some practice to get the chin move constant.

The "regular" head turn as a way to check if your body is square. Once the eyes are properly set, you can square up your feet, hips, and shoulderframe to the vertical plane of

the putt. With this setup, you can turn the head to the target in plane, with the chin staying the same distance from the square shoulderframe the whole time in the turn. This presents the real line to your unmoving eyes without any compensations. In fact, if you turn correctly towards the hole (without moving your eyes to "anticipate" arriving on target) but your vision arrives to the side of the target, your setup is not square! Adjust and start over.

"Ferris wheel" eyes when gazing at the target. Another benefit of this is that once you are gazing in-plane at the target, your topmost eye is vertically above your lower eye, like two gondolas on a Ferris wheel. If the view you have does not have this vertical relationship between the two views of your two eyes, then you have cocked your head in the turn out of plane, so again you KNOW you aren't aimed square.

"Clear channel" focusing along the line. A similar benefit is what you see along the way from the ball to the hole: with eyes in plane, you get a differential focusing -- the gaze is clearly focused along the line itself, but above / outside the line and below / inside the line your vision is only peripheral and not clearly focused. Done properly, you can sense or see this clear channel effect as you scan from ball to hole. This sort of perceptive cue helps set the stroke in plane and on line. If your eyes are not in the putt plane as you scan, it's like drawing with a piece of chalk dragged flat sideways rather than drawing with the tip -- not a clear channel but a vague trough.

The neck-shoulderframe relation in the head movement as a guide for the shoulderframe movement in the stroke. And of course the head-turn in plane to and from the target shows the shoulders and arms the line of the stroke, in a kinetic, "feel" manner. If you are a shoulders-only, hands-below-sockets putter, the head turn also shows you the plane of shoulder stroke motion, twice, just at the right time.

[Make This Part of Your Game.](#)

Before assuming your address position, get your posture squared up and your gaze straight out to sea, then bend from the hips and top of your back to "set" this gaze plane straight vertically down and in alignment with the putt's startline vertical plane. Then square your body to this line, and take hold of the putter with arms hanging properly down. In the head turn, swivel in plane and guide your gaze straight along the surface of the green over the grass your ball needs to roll over. Monitor your targeting for squareness. Let the neck turn establish a guide for the stroke.

At home, you can practice noting this "spot" for targeting by squaring up to a wall or mirror and looking straight out at a spot on the wall or mirror that is the same height as your pupil. You can also practice setting up above a tile floor over an intersection in the tiles and then sighting along the line on the floor to see the visual and head-neck cues of a proper turn. If you would like a set of photographs of pros illustrating these points, email me and I'll send them to you.

When you get used to this technique, you'll know why instincts alone are not good enough! The next time someone tells you it's best to position your eyes directly above the ball, you'll think yes, and . . .

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