



## Game-like Practice

We all remember the Alan Iverson rant about “Practice – not a game – Practice.” If you want to shoot lower scores you need to listen to Alan and make your practice more like the game. A game has a score, a game has a winner. The best golfers all quantify their practice sessions and keep stats in their practice that they can then also track when they play.

### Block Practice

There are two main forms of practice, Block and Random. Block would be best for learning a new skill or technique. Hitting a bag of balls to the same target from the same spot thinking about the swing changes you are making would be block practice. This is how you should practice if you just took a lesson and want to implement the skills you learned from your coach.

Last week I traveled to my local public course to practice short game with my son. The driving range was filled with people slashing away at buckets of balls. The chipping green was quiet, just one older man hitting a shag bag of balls to one flag. When he was done, he picked up the balls and then went to the same spot and dumped out the balls and hit to the flag again. This form of practice does not transfer to the actual playing

situations as well as random practice. Does this sound like your practice? Whether you are the person on the range that walked by the short game area on the way or the one hitting his shag bag over and over. You will get better faster and would not have to practice as much if you randomized your practice when working on your game.

### Random Practice

This forces the golfer to be more actively and cognitively engaged in the task. In random practice you build more lasting memories of the different shots and will also lead to less confusion on the course of play. Random practice means not hitting the same shot twice in a row, hitting to different holes from different positions and potentially with different clubs. Even if the results are not as good as the block version of practice, you will get better faster with the random form. Attention should be paid to each shot; you should treat it just like you would a shot in a round of golf. Look at where you want to land the ball, take a practice swing to replicate the shot you want to hit, then hit the shot. Take a second to watch the ball land and roll out. You want your brain to commit this to memory. If the shot was unsuccessful. Take a post-shot practice swing for improvement,

and then move on to a different shot. Every shot in practice should have an intention.

### Make It A Game

Confidence comes from knowing that you are improving. One way to do this is to measure and test your practice sessions. Do a drill that has a score that you can track. I have hundreds of different drills that I ask my students to do. They keep their results in their phone or post them to a private social media platform that I can see. This helps me to know they are practicing, and I can see what they are doing on their own.

One easy drill to start with is a 10-ball chipping or pitching drill. Here is how it works: spread 10 balls out in an area randomly; I like to put some in the rough and some in the fairway. Then hit each ball to one of two different flags on the green. You can't hit to the same flag twice in a row. When all 10 balls are hit, go up and putt them all out. You will then have a score of all the shots taken. For my high handicappers, we start with a score of 30 being the goal. That means one chip and two putts for all 10 balls. If they beat 30, the next goal is whatever they scored. Say they did the drill in 28 shots; then the next time they have to better 28 and set a new personal best.

You cannot leave until you beat your previous score. This helps to add an element of stress to the practice, which is often hard to produce but shows up all the time on the course. If you have two balls left to putt to break your score and you need to make two to four footers to do so, you will feel a little stress. When you are playing a match with your friends and have a putt to win the hole, you can recall the practice and have more confidence on the course. With my lower handicappers the target score will be 25; make 5 up and downs and 5 in 3 shots.

The more you practice this form, the better you will get. It doesn't just apply to chipping – you can do games with the driver and irons as well. I encourage you to make up your own games and ways to practice where you can quantify what you are doing. Keep a journal of your different drills and scores. When you play golf and struggle in one area of your game, make a game to work on that. If you come to the range with a thought-out practice schedule, your game will improve faster!

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Random Practice



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