



Shouldering the Blame

As a golf coach with thousands of lessons given, there is one constant area that stands out and needs to be checked for players of all levels: setup. An improper setup can lead to a host of problems including slices, loss of distance, and poor and inconsistent contact.

Furthermore, the body will always try to compensate mid-swing to find the ball. If you start in a bad position, your brain forces a cascade of adjustments that completely wrecks consistency.

The common problem is that most players tend to set up with their shoulders far too open. "Open" shoulders means that we are set up with the shoulders pointed to the left for a right-handed golfer. It makes sense though; the target is to our left, the ball needs to go to our

left, and we want to watch the ball after we flush it right?

But here is the issue:

An open setup generally restricts your backswing turn, making it a lot harder to create a full turn and generate the power we need for the golf swing. This reduced turn can also make it harder to sequence the body properly through impact, making timing difficult. Above all else, open shoulders set the club to travel on an out-to-in path. This can cause slices, pulls, and thin or heavy contact. In short: poor shoulder alignment creates a poor swing plane and poorer results.

Setting your shoulders square, or slightly closed relative to the target, creates an athletic starting position. It encourages a fuller, more powerful turn

on the backswing and sets the club on a more neutral or slightly inside takeaway. From there, it's easier to deliver the club on an in-to-out path that promotes solid contact and straighter, more powerful shots (or even a draw).

To address this, we will start by setting up with an alignment stick (or golf club) on the ground, then lay your club across your shoulders to see where they are pointed. Try to aim the club more toward the target, or even slightly right of the target to exaggerate the feel.

The next way to check our shoulders at setup would be to use a camera or mirror to check. Set up a camera directly down the target line. When you address the ball, a correct setup will reveal a small portion of the lead forearm from this view. If you can't see any of the lead forearm, your shoulders are too open.

Don't have a camera? No problem. Just ensure that your left arm is higher than the right at address. Turn your hips *and* shoulders (without moving your feet) so both seem to aim to 'right centerfield'.

As always, the most important part of the entire process is to find out what works best for you. Start by over exaggerating and getting the shoulders too closed. If it works, we're done. If we over-did it and our club path moves too much from the inside, we can always back it off. Good luck, and play well!



Born and raised in Schaumburg, Patrick Malloy is a PGA Associate and full-time golf instructor based in Chicago. Patrick has taught thousands of lessons to golfers of every skill level, from beginners to touring professionals. His experience gives him a unique understanding of how swing technique and equipment work together to improve performance. He currently coaches at Five Iron Golf in Chicago, where he is passionate about making the game approachable, enjoyable, and rewarding for every student. His goal is to help golfers make consistent, lasting progress through clear instruction and a personalized coaching approach. Find him on instagram at @patrickmalloygolf.

