

My Beginner's Guide to Golf. * by [REInvestor](#)

I think it's been too long for [/r/golf](#) to not have a good beginners guide for new golfers, and given the lower numbers of new golf players as of late, I decided to make an easy-to-use guide. I hope it helps you enjoy golf as much as I do.

There are going to be a few elements in this guide that are more opinion than fact, but I believe the few opinions will be generally uncontroversial and reflect the majority opinion. If you disagree with anything in the guide, if you find a typo, have comments, or found that this guide was helpful, please feel free to comment or PM me. Thanks for reading.

Ok so you're interested in playing golf or you want to know how to improve? That's awesome. Golf is a very rewarding game. For many of us, it doesn't get better than spending a sunny day with friends out on the course. Plus, there's usually beer.

This guide is going to cover almost all of the information you're going to need to effectively get up and running with golf while avoiding a lot of common mistakes.

Basics

- [Golf terminology](#). There's lots of lingo you'll need to learn.
- **Rules of Golf**. There are a lot of [rules in golf](#), many that are not so obvious. Unless you're in a tournament or playing for money, most of them aren't terribly important IMO. I play to have fun, but YMMV. You will want to read up on what to do with lost balls though. Check out [these threads](#) for more on rules.
- **What to Wear**. Most courses require collared shirts (polos) for men, but have eased up that requirement for women. Shorts, pants, or a skirt are just fine. I'd recommend a hat, sunglasses, and sun-tan lotion as well.

Golf Etiquette

There are a number of faux pas that you can commit on the golf course, so be sure to read this [full list](#) before going out. Some common mistakes include:

- **Not repairing your pitch marks**. When the ball lands on the green, it can sometimes leave an indent which will screw up putts. If you don't repair it properly, you can destroy the root. Watch [this video](#) to learn how to repair your pitch marks. Also fix your divots and rake sand traps.
- **Not keeping up with the pace of play**. Be ready to take your shot when it's your turn.
- **Talking while people are taking their shot**. Or talking loud enough that people putting or teeing off on other holes can hear you. Just be considerate.
- **Not picking up your tees**. If it's not broken, you can reuse it. If it is broken, just toss it in the garbage. If you're on a par 3, you can consider leaving the top of the tee for someone else to use.
- **Giving unsolicited advice**. I almost never give advice on the course unless I'm with a friend who I know would appreciate and use it. And when I do give it, it's only for high-visibility, easily correctable mistakes, plus I'll start by asking if they want advice. Giving people unsolicited advice is in poor form and you might even hurt their game by making them think too much which can throw off their swing.
- **Hitting your ball near other people**. If they could be in range, just wait. If you accidentally hit it near them, yell "Fore!" or something to warn them.
- **Not letting people play through**. If your group is slower and the group behind you has to wait a lot for you to finish, let them play the next hole first.
- **Parking the golf cart or pull cart on the green**. Greens are super sensitive and very expensive to repair so don't risk damaging them.
- **Standing very close to the cup**. The ground around the cup is not going to be very strong so if you stand near very close to the lip of the cup, you risk damaging it.
- **Walking or casting a shadow on people's putting lines**. Putting is hard enough as it is without other players distracting you.

- **Standing too close to a player swinging his club.** Some people apparently need to learn this lesson the hard way.

Getting Golf Clubs

Starting out, your clubs will not matter very much. You're not going to be hitting consistently and \$1,000 irons are going to be completely wasted upon you. A lot of people will start golf by just using friends' clubs or renting them from the golf course. That way you can decide if you like it enough to invest money in your own set.

If you're ready to buy, then I think your safest bet is going to be buying a used set on Craigslist or buying used clubs piecemeal. Buying a nice set of a clubs that are a few years old is a great way to get good stuff at a reasonable price.

I think many would recommend not buying a new beginner's set as they are not generally considered to be of the best quality, and when you improve, you'll definitely want to upgrade. So long term, you're spending more than you would otherwise. And buying new, really nice clubs is not going to be the best use of money at this point.

Take the money you save by buying used and invest it in golf lessons, range time, and actual golf. That will serve you much better. Here's a [post](#) with some good info on buying clubs.

Other Golf Gear You'll Need

After you get clubs, here are some more things you'll need:

- **Golf bag.** Getting one that stands up automatically and has backpack straps is worth it IMO.
- **Golf balls.** For a beginner, I would just use whatever is cheapest. Buying [used balls online](#) or in the \$.50 bin at your course is fine. You're probably going to be losing a lot of balls initially, so cheaper is better IMO. I've bought balls from Craigslist for pennies on the dollar.
- **Tees.** I bought a bag of 500 a few years back for \$10 which will last me practically forever.
- **Divot Repair Tool.** You'll occasionally need this to repair greens when your ball makes a divot upon landing.
- **Ball marker.** You can use a coin, but at least have something small and flat to mark where your ball is on the green.
- **Two towels.** One for your clubs and balls, and one for your face. Anticipate getting sweaty.
- **Golf shoes.** Very optional. They definitely help when the grass is wet, but unless traction is an issue, you don't really need them. When you do get them, make sure to get ones with plastic, not metal spikes as a lot of courses don't allow metal spikes anymore.
- **Golf glove.** I don't personally use one. They do provide extra grip if your hand gets very sweaty and protect your hand from getting calluses. Many gloves tend to wear out quickly, and since sweat and calluses aren't an issue for me, I don't bother. If you do go for a glove, don't cheap out. It'll wear out sooner and you'll spend more money in the long run. There's also some good comments about gloves below this post.

Approaching Golf the Right way

One of the biggest high-level problems I see is people approaching golf with unrealistic expectations. Unless you're [Kim Il Sung](#), you're not gonna be shooting a perfect game of golf (18 hole in ones), nor are you going to be shooting anywhere near par every hole. It's just not gonna happen anytime soon. Even the pros regularly hit well over par and they have tens of thousands of hours into this game while you probably have close to zero. Remember that on TV, they only show you the leaders in the tournament and then highlights from other golfers. They're only showing you the best of the best of the best.

Read [this article](#) to get an idea of how unrealistic many golfers' expectations are. With putting, even the pros are missing around 5% of the time from 5 feet and their success percentage decreases exponentially from there.

So many of my friends get so upset when their putt from 20 feet was off by like 6". That shot has like a 1% chance of success even for the pros so you should be stoked, not angry!

This is a [worthy read](#) of an older guy who regrets not enjoying the game while he could.

I am not trying to get you down; you just need to understand two things:

- *Golf is not a game of perfect.*

- *You cannot win golf.*

I and many others have observed people playing golf with the idea that every shot should be perfect, and getting angry and frustrated when that doesn't happen. I think it leads people to love/hate the game, rather than just enjoying the process even if the end result isn't a great score.

Golf Sucks at First

Golf is really not very fun when you're whiffing 80%+ of your shots. I'm not talking about when the ball doesn't go exactly where you want. I'm talking when you completely screw your swing up and hit the ball who-the-heck-knows-where, or when you top it and it goes 10 feet, or when you just completely miss the ball. That's just not fun.

But...it does get better. You're just going to have to suffer through some of that, but once you start hitting that ball with a nice loft and distance...oh man. Feels good, brah. With this guide and conscious practice, I believe you'll minimize the shitty period.

Remember: Sucking at something is the first step to being sort of good at something.

Swing Basics

All right, let's finally start talking about actually playing golf. Here are the basic first steps for establishing a swing. There are LOTS of videos on golf out there, so don't feel like you only need to go by these:

- [The Grip.](#)
- [The Setup & Common Mistakes at Setup.](#)
- [How to Swing.](#)
- [How to Putt.](#)
- [How to Chip.](#)
- [How to play out of a bunker.](#)

From there, the sky's the limit both when it comes to improving your swing and the resources available for doing so.

You Should Almost Definitely Take a Lesson

Taking a lesson from a golf pro is *highly recommended*. Having someone show you in-person the basics makes a big difference. Expect to pay \$50-100 per hour, but private lessons can go to \$500+ (You don't need a lesson from Tiger to learn the basics). I think almost all golfers would agree that an initial lesson or two is well worth the money and will offer an extremely high return on investment. It's better to pay a little now to get good habits ingrained than pay a lot later to try to fix a bad habit.

One or more of your local courses will almost assuredly offer lessons. Once you've got a basic swing down, you can consider having your [swing analyzed online via video](#) (there are lots of online coaches, mind you) for 25-75% cheaper or even posting it to [/r/golf](#) for analysis.

YouTube Coaches

There are many more out there, but these guys are pretty great:

- [Shawn Clement.](#)
- [Mark Crossfield.](#)
- [Rickard Strongert.](#)
- [Paul Wilson.](#)

Common Beginner Mistakes

- **Lifting your head too early.** If you're not watching the ball, you aren't gonna hit it. This is without a doubt, the biggest problem beginners have. Keep watching that ball until your body naturally pulls it up.
- **Straightening your legs.** If you're topping the ball, one of the main causes is standing up all the way which will naturally raise the club head's path.
- **Not aiming properly.** Aiming is actually a lot harder to do intuitively than you'd think. Your feet, thighs, and shoulders should all be lined up at your target. To verify aim, get exactly set up as if you're

about to hit and then hold your club across your shoulders and look where it's pointed. Adjust as needed. Even my friends who are almost scratch players check their aim occasionally so don't be afraid to as a beginner. Far better to spend a few seconds checking aim than a few minutes finding a ball in the woods!

- **Swinging too fast/hard.** Slow your swing down. Ego is the enemy in golf. I know you want to murder the ball, but your swing is not good enough to handle those speeds yet. Bring the club back slowly, pause slightly when fully rotated, and have a nice, smooth release and follow through. I can basically guarantee you that you will hit the ball farther with more accuracy and way more consistency than you will if you always try to hammer it. *Consistency & Accuracy>>>>>>Distance.*
- **Not relaxing.** A proper golf swing is very fluid and smooth. If your body is tense and tight, you will not be able to get a good whipping action on the club head which will reduce your distances and also hurt your aim. Try just relaxing with a nice slow swing and see how much easier and better your shots are and body feels. Thanks Champagne Floozy.
- **Not hitting down on the ball.** This is a counter intuitive point, but go with me on this. In an optimal golf swing, the club head will impact the ball while it is still on its downward arc. It will be almost at the bottom, but you are in fact, not scooping the ball into the air. Here's [Tiger demonstrating it](#). The ball gets into the air by the loft of the club, not by you lifting it off the ground. The benefits of this are increased backspin and speed from your club not being slowed down by the grass. To learn this method, try looking an inch or two ahead of the ball and/or adjusting the location of the ball in your stance so the ball is just before your divot starts. Here's a [video on this](#).

Common Beginner Mistakes Continued

- **Playing too hard of a course.** There is no need to make golf any more frustrating by introducing narrow fairways and lots of hazards. Consider starting on a short course with few hazards while you're learning the basics.
- **Playing from the wrong tee box.** There is no shame in not teeing off from the pro tee boxes. Unless you're a low handicapper, don't abuse yourself by pushing your limits too early. See this [thread](#) for more.
- **Losing your stuff.** When you go to putt, you'll often lay your wedge down off the green and forget it when you finish up. [This is a great tip](#) that will save you major headaches in the future. If I don't lay it on the flag, I'll be sure to drop my wedge highly visibly on a line between the hole and the cart.

Improving at Golf

- **Course Management (Strategy).** Instead of "going for it" every time, set yourself up for shots that have a high-percentage chance of landing properly. So, go for the fat parts of the fairway, the middle of the greens, easy tee shots, and safer approach shots. Conservative golf is good golf, and is guaranteed to improve your game as a high handicapper.
- **Track Your Stats.** How will you know if you're improving if you don't keep track of how you've done? There are lots of [phone apps](#) that include stat tracking and more. If you want to use a computer, try out [OOBGolf.com](#). The more detailed you get, the more you'll know what areas you need to work on. Also consider just tracking the number of good shots you make in a round (shots where you made good contact and the ball basically did what you wanted it to). That will help prove to yourself that you are improving over time even if your scores are still pretty bad.
- **Be Honest with Yourself.** A continuation of the track your stats tip is to maintain honest stats. So, SO many people don't properly count strokes and penalties, allow themselves mulligans, and take gimmies all day long. Inevitably their scores are way lower than their real scores. If you're not playing me for money, it's no skin off my back, but if you're looking to improve, lying to yourself about your score is only robbing your future self of satisfaction. As you improve, you will legitimately hit those lower scores, but you won't experience the satisfaction that you would have since you already allowed yourself to say you earned that score artificially. Make sense?
- **Range Routine.** Going to the range without a plan for practice is going to be mostly a waste of time. Check out these threads ([link](#), [Link](#), [Zelda](#)).

- **Improve Your Short Game.** About 50-75% of your shots are going to be pitching, chipping, and putting. The big shots look cool, but if you really want to improve, you're going to have to practice your short game a lot. Here is [one helpful](#) thread but there are LOTS of good videos out there. Consider watching [Phil Mickelson's Secrets of the Short Game](#) which is an excellent resource. Here's a short video of his on the [Hinge & Hold chipping method](#).
- **Fixing Problems in Your Swing.** If you're slicing, shanking, hooking, and so on, just Google your particular problem. There are so many golf instructional videos online that will help you cure these problems, it's ridiculous. And if you can afford it, an hour with a coach can be very beneficial.

Saving Money

Golf is an expensive hobby. Here are some ways to make it less so. Thanks to Aco- and [TheGhostRedditor](#) with this section.

- **Use Discount Tee-Time Sites.** Sites like [Golfnow.com](#), [EZLinks.com](#), and [Golf18Network.com](#) offer discounts anywhere from 10-80% off normal retail rates. They're a godsend. And be sure to search Google for coupons too (and if you're so inclined, create more accounts to use the coupons multiple times).
- **Get a Course Membership.** Many courses will offer annual memberships that offer significant discounts for the regular player. Some offer unlimited play for \$150-200/mo. Definitely worth looking into.
- **Play During Slow/Twilight Hours.** Most courses offer discounts during their slow times.
- **Walk with a Push-Cart.** Invest \$150 in a three-wheeled caddy and you'll never need to spend \$15 on cart fees again. Plus you get more exercise. Many people swear it's a whole new game after getting a push-cart.
- **Buy Discounted/Used Gear.** If you hang out on [/r/golf](#), you'll see pretty much daily thrift store/craigslist hauls where the person got a crazy good deal. But you can also buy discounted stuff online at [RockBottomGolf.com](#) and used balls at [LostGolfBalls.com](#).
- **Get a Ball Retriever.** If you lost your ball in a water hazard, you may be able to snag it with a retriever. Some courses frown on these and be sure to not slow the pace of play.
- **Get Golf Clothes at Marshalls or Costco.** Last year's clothes end up at Marshalls and Costco sells good synthetic polos for \$15-20.
- **Daily Deal Threads on /r/Golf.** There is thread posted every day by Golpher (manually mind you) with some good deals. Also check out [FatWallet's Golf Deals](#) and [Sport.Woot.com](#) has the occasional deal.
- **Play By Yourself.** If you're off work, but your buddies aren't, play a round by yourself when it's cheap. Many people, including me, find it to be very relaxing. Consider playing two balls for extra practice.

Recommended Reading/Watching

- [Ben Hogan's Five Fundamentals of Modern Golf.](#) A timeless classic covering all stages of the golf swing.
- [Dave Pelz's Short Game Bible.](#) An absolutely essential read IMO. I guarantee it will dramatically improve your scoring at almost any level.
- [Golf is Not a Game of Perfect.](#) Getting your head in the right place.
- [Advice for Beginners from a Pro.](#) Very good Q&A worth reading.
- [Golf Digest's Beginner's Guide.](#) A lot of basic info, some of which may not be covered here.