6 Steps To Better Golf

How to ‘Chunk’ Your Swing For Great Ballstriking
Learn how chunking practice will make you a better ballstriker

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During my lifelong quest to help people play better golf, I’ve observed that the majority of golfers struggle to develop sound swing fundamentals. This limits their ability for improvement and obviously their enjoyment of this great game. Yet there are others who can grasp it rather quickly. Are some people just born with greater talent, or is the secret found in a simple process called “chunking”?

**HOW BEST TO EAT AN ELEPHANT? ONE BITE AT A TIME!**

According to Daniel Coyle, author of *The Talent Code*, world-class trainers, athletes, musicians, artists, actors, the military and many other skill-developed activities benefit from chunking. The most fertile learning environment is one in which teachers and coaches take the complex and break it down for micro study and practice. Scientifically proven and simplistically explained, when a human is challenged and struggles doing a unique task, the myelin, a milky substance in the brain, wraps around the newly formed synapses, and with every repetition, the myelin insulation channels the energy faster and with more precision, resulting in greater skill development.

So how exactly does a golfer “chunk”? In slow motion and with absolute precision, think and feel one chunk (or “segment”) of the golf swing at a time, until that chunk can be executed flawlessly. This is how you develop your talent, or what neuroscientists refer to as myelination.

Their hypothesis stands that talent is developed best and fastest in an environment that chunks the action with conscious, deliberate slower speed than the action attempted in full speed.

My affinity for the legend Ben Hogan and his powerful repeatable rotary golf swing began in 1979 after reading his book, *Modern Fundamentals of Golf*. The pages of this treasured reference are now worn and torn from my numerous thumbing and earmarking over the years, and I’m not alone, as many instructors and golfers continue to study his masterpiece swinging motion. Even Coyle used the master Hogan as an example, sharing a YouTube clip entitled ‘Hogan Super Slow Motion,’ showing Ben practicing at the Seminole Golf Club in Jupiter, Florida. He demonstrates a precise, super-slow practice swing, and if it wasn’t for the waves rolling onto the shore in the background in real time, you would have just thought someone turned the speed of the film down to 1/10th of the actual swing speed. It’s a must-see if you’re considering chunking as a method to perfecting your golf swing.

Breaking down the golf swing into key positions for study isn’t new to teaching golf, as others have taught as many as nine and 11 swing segments. The success experienced by my students convinced me that “less is more” for feeling momentum flowing from one balance point to another.

**POSITION 1: GAP**

GAP is an acronym for Grip, Aim and Posture. Using a mirror for feedback, check your positions for correctness. Great players through history have shown us that there’s more than one way to grip the golf club successfully. Hogan had a weak grip position, with the antithesis being Paul Azinger or Zach Johnson, with very strong grips. The key is to place the hands on the handle so your wrists will work without restriction, and that whatever your choice, weak or strong, it’s done consistently. A deal breaker would be one hand stronger or weaker than the other.

Aiming the club, make sure your focus takes into consideration the entire club. Most players will aim with the face, but be very inconsistent with where the handle aligns. One time it leans forward and the next it’s leaning back. This can cause inconsistency with the bottom of your swing arc and ballflight trajectory.

Aiming the body is best done with parallel feet, hips and shoulders to the desired target line going through the ball. But, here, again, there have been several great players who either set up open or slightly closed to the target. Hogan typically hit a drop fade, and with his driver, he would drop his right foot back a few inches, opening up his gate for a fuller turn. It’s a matter of defining your desired pattern and then checking with alignment rods and/or viewing in the mirror that your aim is consistently being accomplished.

The final aim is the relationship of the ball in your stance. The further back of center in the stance, the more the downward swinging push will be promoted, and the further forward of center, the more potential for an upward-swinging pull shot. Hogan and Arnold Palmer both set up with the ball 2 inches off their target-side instep. Then they would change the width of the stance, narrowing and slightly opening their stance as they progressed into the lower irons. The more aggressive one’s lower body motion, the further forward the bottom of one’s swing arc. If you’re a relatively flat-footer through impact, then playing the ball more toward center with your irons will improve your ability to strike the ball and bottom out in front of the ball. If you have fast hip rotation like Rory McIlroy, then move the ball more forward.

Posture with Hogan was very precise and one that created balance and a connection of his arms to his core—elbows pointed down, inward and close together from the start to the finish of his swing. This allows the club and center to move together, increasing one’s ability to stay on plane and in balance throughout the entire golf swing.

The key angle I observe with golfers is the spine angle. Tilting forward from the hips and maintaining your neutral S-curve will allow the arms to hang from the shoulders and have room to swing when the torso and shoulders turn away. Many golfers make the mistake of keeping the hips under them and then rounding forward from the neck and shoulders. This arc limits range of motion and often causes lifting out of the original starting position. Slight flex releasing the knees with the feeling of engaged hamstrings is the goal. A common mistake is to overflex the knees, locking in your hips and thus limiting your ability to turn. Stand tall with the legs and flexed slightly in the knees, with a good spine angle tilt from the hips and hanging arms, will place the balance of your weight on the balls of your feet, not the heels or toes. If in balance, you should be able to lift your heels slightly and bounce on the balls of your feet. Checking posture in the mirror from both front-on and a side view prior to hitting balls or playing is highly recommended in the development and management of your best golf swing.
Ben Hogan’s rotary golf swing is my favorite because it rotates away with the shoulders and chest, causing a slight lag, drag and load of the club right from the start. Swinging away with connection, the shoulders turning around the spine angle and supple wrists will sling the arms into orbit, hinging the wrist and setting the club upright and into its first dynamic balance point, commonly referred to as “The L”. What makes it balanced?

Done correctly, the clubhead feels light at this point. If it was over-rotated with the hands and forearms and you stopped the swing at this point to observe, you’d feel heaviness that often causes counteracting faults, like coming out of posture with excessive head movement. If you swing back too slow and tight with the hands, the wrists won’t set without physical assistance. If you shove away straight back or lift with the hands only, there’s a loss of the arms to chest connection, as well as rotary motion. Either fault causes a great amount of inconsistent timing to regain balance before impact. Notice with Hogan how his right arm is still above the left. This is a key point of reference when rehearsing and reviewing at this point in the swing—the arms maintain extension, and the club, though hinged vertical, is still in alignment with the center of the chest.

Practice this move away with a kitchen broom, feeling the body pivot, and sling the arms and hinging the wrists into this “L” position. The heaviness of the broom head will provide instant feedback for you.

Continuing to finish off the shoulder and hip turn loads the golfer completely into the brace of the right leg. At this point, if done correctly, the majority of weight has loaded into the inside of the right heel and the left shoulder has turned under the chin, behind the ball and over the right knee. I like to see short arms and a full turn, as illustrated in my Hogan painting. The look of the right leg is one of support and leaning slightly inward from the tight pivot. The left knee should have moved inward toward the ball. If the heel lifts slightly as a by-product of rotation, that’s very acceptable and also found in many great golf swings. I’ll add that posting this position is beneficial for developing a fully loaded potential golf swing. However, in the dynamics of the swing, I prefer the feeling of no stop at the top and of continuing back as the lower body begins forward, creating a perfect transition and ideal lag into the downswing for smooth and rhythmic acceleration.
A common denominator found in all great ballstrikers is the ability to deliver the club into what’s commonly referred to by better players as the slot. I see golfers trying to do this incorrectly in a variety of ways. One of the most common is to pull the handle down with the hands. This not only is incorrect, but causes your spine angle to tilt back, lowering your right side too much with a jammed arm swing and the low point of your swing way behind the ball. Yes, the handle does get pulled, but it’s due to a chain reaction from the ground up.

When practicing this position correctly, feel as though someone is holding your arms and hands at the top and then begin to slowly roll the feet and knees, and turn the hips toward the target, feeling your weight shifting forward. The result of this action will cause the reaction of the delivery position.

Make sure that you train yourself to passively hold the wrist cock; the hands are just holding on and not adding to the acceleration of the golf club at this point. Yes, the right elbow will lower and touch the side, but, here, again, I stress that this is a reaction and not an action.
Here, we have the moment of truth, when the by-product of the clubface and the ball turns into a telltale ballflight. When chunking practice from Position 4 to Position 5, you must understand that, at impact, you’re not fully released, but in left-side extension due to hip rotation and weight transfer. Notice the right wrist and arm in the Hogan illustration; they’re still extended. Most golfers, in an attempt to cure their slice, will attempt to rotate the hands over. This not only breaks down the kinetic chain, but compromises the orbit of the club, creating loss of face control and power. Notice the forward shaft lean and how forward Hogan’s hands are over the left thigh at impact. Clearing the left hip and maintaining wrist cock allow the body pivot to be the workhorse instead of the hands and forearms. If done correctly, the hands and forearms get a free ride.

I make a distinct differentiation between the upper arms and forearms because the upper arms are certainly part of the rotational process in order to maintain connection. If your body is attempting to turn in one direction and the arms are attempting to swing in another, it stalls the swing and also causes a change from the original bottom of the swing arc. This is why it’s key to trust the rotational forces and allow centrifugal force to accelerate the club instead of the hands and forearm swatting. That may be good for killing flies, but not for driving it 300 yards down a fairway.

POSITION 5: IMPACT
POSITION 6: FINISH

Why did I select purple gray as the color for Hogan’s finish position? Because purple is the color of royalty and, certainly, Hogan’s finish position is worthy of a royal depiction. In fact, all the colors were chosen with thought and purpose: green for grass-roots foundation; yellow for mindfulness; orange for physical energy; blue for calm, patient hands; and red for action.

When I asked my mentor, Arnold Palmer, what his number-one forwardswing thought was, he said, “Acceleration, and accelerate through to your finish.” So, when chunking and practicing your finish position, start at Position 5 and then turn the hips and chest through until facing in the direction of the target, allowing your hands and club to get dragged through to an extended position of a regal finish.

THE SIX-POSITION WARM-UP DRILL

Warming up in golf should be like other sports, but it’s usually not. Baseball has the on-deck circle and the pitcher’s bullpen. If you observe their rituals, it begins with a heavy bat and with slow methodical pitches, each before a full-speed motion. We tend to warm up by hitting balls at real-time speed to a designated target. This can cause a loss of confidence if you’re not mentally and physically in the right space. I suggest that you warm up by executing your core foundational feelings by practicing the Six-Position Drill.

Find a mirror or use a window in the clubhouse to see your reflection. Get into a good address position and review it, saying to yourself one, then move smoothly to Position 2, saying two, progressing to Positions 3, 4, 5 and 6. Do this deliberately 10 times before hitting a single ball, and you’ll have better swing awareness and balance just like the best players in the world.

Until next time, happy golfing!

Brad Brewer, PGA, runs the Brad Brewer Golf Academy at Rosen Shingle Creek in Orlando, Florida. To learn more, visit www.bradbrewergolfacademy.com. Signed prints of Brad Brewer’s Hogan Chunking can be ordered by emailing contact@bradbrewer.com.

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