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Aiming to Please

By Mark Favell with Al Barkow

Because golfers stand at the side of the ball and look at their target with a kind of sidelong glance, precise aiming can be a little confusing. But if you follow the routine to be outlined here, the process becomes very simple and removes all doubt in this essential step to executing a successful golf shot.

The essential characteristic of your stance at the ball in respect to correct aiming (and producing your most effective swing) is the railroad track. An imaginary line through your shoulders, chest, hips, knees and the heels of your shoes are the left-side rail. An imaginary line through your ball to your target is the right-side rail. They are parallel to each other, with the club the tie between them. That's how you want to position yourself, and you do it with a set series of actions that are repeated for every shot you play, from the driver to the putter.



© The Basic Routine

Start from behind the ball, looking directly at your target. Hold the club upright in front of you and set the clubface vertically, with its toe pointing straight up (the face will be square.) Next, move to the side of the ball and set your right foot perpendicular to the target line, with the instep of the foot on a line with the front edge of the ball. At the same time, place the clubface behind the ball and square it at an object or a mark on the grass as close to your ball as possible and in a direct line with your target.

Move your left foot into position even with your right foot, and then move it to the left. This move determines where you will play the ball in your stance, so how far you move it depends on the club you're using. With a 6-iron in this instance, the ball is about in the middle of the stance.

The Ideal Setup

First, stand directly behind the ball while facing your target. This is the time when you should also envision the shot you want to hit, but here we will concentrate only on the process of aiming. At this stage, hold the club vertically in front of you and form your grip on the handle. Too many golfers will only finalize their grip when they are beside the ball, but that detracts from the more important elements in setting up to aim properly. It's better to take your grip while behind the ball and get it out of the way.

At the same time, square the clubface. It is in a good position for you to see that it is square — the leading edge is exactly vertical.

Next, move around to the side of the ball and approach it at a 90-degree angle. Make sure your clubface and right foot are exactly perpendicular to the target line. The club is still held up vertically in front of you.

Now, place the club behind the ball with the clubface aimed directly at, or square to, the target. However, because it is difficult to relate the clubface to a target 100 yards away, and even harder the farther away it is, pick a spot on the ground on the line to the target as close to your ball as possible. It should

be anywhere from 5 to 10 feet ahead. It could be a bit of brown grass, an old divot, a leaf or a small branch. If there is nothing that close, keep going out until you find something you can relate the clubface to. Whatever it is, square the clubface to that spot.

It is absolutely essential that the first step in what amounts to a two-step process is putting the clubface behind the ball and square to the target. Golfers get into trouble when they try to align their body first, especially their feet, which are the least important element. You see them fiddling with the clubface after they've set their body, but have trouble getting it square. If the first thing you do is set the clubface down behind the ball and square it to the target, you have that out of the way and can more readily and efficiently set your body in the proper alignment.

Next, put your right foot in place first so the instep is even with or directly in line with the inside of the ball. The foot is exactly perpendicular to the target line. Its position is the very same as the clubface in relation to its angle. The foot does not flare out to the right. That comes later, if you wish it to. At this point, the left foot is held back.

Following the right foot move, set the left foot in place at the same distance



© The Fade/Draw Alignment

To hit a fade, you should aim the shoulders and chest to a point left of the target where you want to start the ball, but keep your clubface square to the target. This shot shape occurs because your arms will swing the club along the line of your chest and shoulders, while the angle of the clubface puts the spin on the ball that creates the curvature of flight. To hit a draw (right), aim your shoulders and chest right of the target, still keeping the clubface square to the target.



© The Classic Railroad Alignment

This is the classic railroad alignment, illustrated with yellow lines. An imaginary line runs through your shoulders, chest, hips, knees and heels to make the left-side rail, while the line through the ball that extends to the target is the right-side rail. Note that the heels are exactly on a line with each other, while the toes of the feet are angled slightly. Use the heels to assure that you are square with the ball.



from the target line as the right foot and close beside it. Now, the left foot is the foot by which you determine where you will play the ball in your stance. For the short irons, it will be moved 4 or so inches to the left so the ball is approximately in the middle of your stance or perhaps a bit right of center. For middle irons and long irons, move it about 2 inches. For the fairway woods and driver, move it about an inch so the ball is off the instep of the left foot.

After the left foot is positioned, move the right foot to the right as far as the width of stance you prefer. The wider the stance, of course, the farther to the right you move the foot. By following this procedure, you will always have an easy guide to ball position in your stance, and the ball will always be somewhere in between your feet.

Now is the time in the setup to flare or angle the left foot to the left. Better players flare the foot some 20 to 25 degrees, which allows a freer and fuller turn of the left side in the downswing and a balanced



◎ Chipping & Pitching

The same routine for woods and irons is followed for chips and pitches. The only difference is that the shoulder/chest line is slightly more left to allow for the clearance of the arms and club in the follow-through. Play the ball off the instep of the right foot. This helps assure you catch the ball first.

finish. Keeping the left foot perpendicular to the target line blocks that movement.

This is also the time when you want to flare the right foot to the right, if you wish to do so. Not all golfers do this, and some don't have to. It is recommended for older golfers or those who are lacking flexibility, because in this case, it allows

the hips to turn more freely in the backswing. More flexible golfers will keep the right foot perpendicular to avoid swaying to the right in the backswing.

By flaring the feet out at this point, not before, you retain your parallel position to the target line and the ball position in your stance. If you flare first, you can lose

perspective and position yourself poorly to the ball, or not end up square to it.

Also, because the flaring of your feet can produce a misleading perspective, you can be unsure if your feet are either square (toes even with each other) or in a closed or open position — one foot a little farther back from the target line than the other (the right foot when closed, the left foot when open). So the thing to do is align your feet with your heels, not your toes.

Variations On The Normal Setup

If you follow the procedure described here, your shoulders, chest and hips will be square to the target line and form the left side of the railroad track. Your feet may also be parallel, but if they are not, it is not vital. Too much stress is put on the feet being the aiming element in the setup. Ben Hogan used to have a slightly closed stance with his driver, a square stance with his middle irons and an open stance with his short irons. Even if your feet are closed or open, as long as your shoulders and chest are squared to the target line, you are square to the ball at address, and that's the important thing.

All the above is meant to address the ball and aim it for your standard shot and swing. If you want to hit a draw or fade, there is a slightly different technique involved.

To hit a draw, you use the very same routine for the standard shot except you align your shoulders, chest and feet to the right of the actual target and aim

the clubface at the target itself. In other words, align your chest where you want the ball to start out, and your clubface where you want it to end up.

To hit a fade, reverse this. Aim your chest and shoulders to the left of the target, and aim the clubface at the target itself.

As you can see, the railroad-track image still applies. The only difference is the angle of the clubface at address. To hit a draw or fade, you are closing or opening the clubface in relation to your

is aimed at the target, and your shoulders and chest should be parallel to the target line as with regular, full-swing shots. If you open your shoulders and chest (or aim them to the left), you are going to pull the ball left of the target because the club will almost invariably follow the alignment of your shoulders in the swing.

In chipping situations, once again the initial routine is the same, but in this case you do not move the right foot to the right to complete your stance. You want to play these shots off the right instep to make sure you hit the ball first and solidly.

Putting follows the same procedure, but now you move your right foot to the right and the left foot to the left to find the ball position in your stance that accommodates your stroke and the way you like to strike the ball. Ideal ball placement is 2 inches left of center. Golfers who like to sweep putts or catch them as the putter begins to swing upward will position the ball more off the left heel. Those who like a somewhat downward strike on the ball will play it more toward the center of their stance.

The Last Piece

Finally, there is another part to aiming that has nothing to do with mechanics. It involves the connection between your eyes and your mind. Once you have mastered the mechanics of getting into the proper position at address to be correctly aimed, you have to switch your focus to the target itself. You want to envision the ball in the air, its height, the curve it will take and how it will behave on the ground.

Aiming, as we've described it, is just checkpoints. You go through the process and are done with it. Then you concentrate solely on where you want the ball to go and how. In this way, you imbue yourself with the sense of distance you need, and that in turn affects how hard or soft you are going to hit the ball and the shape of its flight. **GI**

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Short-Game Setup Solutions

body alignment.

For pitch shots, the same routine is required but with one adjustment or exception. Now you want your left foot drawn back from the target line or "open," so you can move your body rhythmically through the swing. Contrary to what you may think, the pitch shot is not an arms-only action. However, the clubface

Putting

Follow your routine again to set up for a putt. The only difference in a putt is that you lean forward enough so that your eyes are directly over the ball. This, however, is not absolute. Many good putters have their eyes just inside the ball, but because there is no tilt to the right or left with the head, the eyes are still parallel.

