

CHIPPING

1. Chipping is done around the perimeter of the green. The theory of chipping is to achieve minimum carry and maximum roll with your shot. Typically, you want to use the least amount of loft possible, land the ball on the front of the green and let it run the rest of the way to the hole, regardless of how far away the hole is.
2. As in putting, you must stay still with both your body and your head. To keep the body still place 95% of your weight on your front foot and keep it there. To keep your head still, look for the grass underneath the ball as you complete the stroke.
3. Position the ball towards the back of your stance, where the rear toe is pointed at the ball. Your stance should be slightly open with your feet a approximately one club width apart and most all your weight on your front foot. This will help to eliminate weight transfer, which is the cause of body movement. Movement in chipping, as in putting, is your enemy. As you get closer to the hole, the issue becomes one of consistency and accuracy more than distance, so you don't need weight transfer to add power.
4. Hold the club near the bottom of the grip. This forces you to bend over where your chest will be facing the ground where you can get close to your work. It allows you to make a nice pendulum motion up and down with the shoulders, which are the engine of the stroke.
5. Your hands lead and the club head follows. There should be no flip with the hands. A flip means the shoulders have stopped their forward motion. "When the shoulders quit, the hands will hit." That's not what you want.
6. With the basic chipping stroke the front arm starts at six o'clock (at the ball), moves back to five o'clock and finishes at seven o'clock. It doesn't take much of a swing to get the desired result.
7. For consistency, create one technique and change your club selection depending on the shot. Different clubs have different lofts. Different lofts create different carry-to-roll ratios. A sand wedge, which is your highest-lofted iron, typically produces the most carry with the least roll, around 75 percent carry and 25 percent roll. A nine iron has a ratio of around 50-50, while a seven iron is around 25 percent carry and 75 percent roll. For pins on the front of the green, you want to use your most lofted club. For pins in the middle one-third of the green, use a nine iron. For pins on back of the green, use a seven iron.
8. In order to create consistency, you must develop a solid pre-shot routine. Start behind ball on your target line, evaluate the situation, determine the necessary carry-to-roll ratio, determine the break, pick an intermediary target (an object a within a foot or two ahead

of the ball on the target line to help align your club head to the target), set your grip, step up to the ball align your club head with the intermediary target and build your stance around the club.

Minervino's take:

All my previous thoughts on chipping were tossed out the window with this lesson. I was of the belief that chipping meant using whatever wedge you had in your bag no matter what, and varying your stroke depending on where the hole was in relation to the ball. Perhaps this is why in my few previous forays onto the golf course, those shots from just off the green generally proved most worrisome — I knew I just had to hit the ball a little way, but I could never seem to find the proper stroke. The ball would either sail well past the mark or fall far short.

Mayer explained that some successful golfers will find one club and “marry it” for all their chipping duties, but he doesn't recommend it. He said altering clubs creates more versatility, which will lead to success in the long run. It takes a while to figure out the carry-to-roll ratios, but by using the same stroke for each club — whether the pin is right in front of you or way across the green — it is easier to build confidence and consistency in your chipping, as you can learn and become comfortable with a singular motion.

I was amazed by how simple and gentle the chipping stroke is. It's all in the shoulders. The important part for me (and the part I seemed to screw up most frequently) is keeping my head still and staying focused on the ball. Then it's just back to five o'clock and through to seven o'clock.

To demonstrate the reasoning behind the open stance, Mayer told me to toss a golf ball onto the green. When both my feet were aligned parallel to the hole, I was tossing across my body, my arm not able to make a natural, fluid motion. It's the same with a chip. If the feet are parallel to the ball, the front hip gets in the way of the stroke. By opening up slightly, the hip is no longer an obstacle. The chip becomes a simple toss done with the club.

To practice chipping, Mayer set up a trough, with two long irons set down parallel to one another (about two feet apart) with their club heads facing backward. He set another club down with its club head touching the head of the near iron, but with the grip end extending at an angle to ten o'clock. The ball goes in the middle of the trough. For the proper open stance, the feet should be lined up with the angled club.

Using the trough, I felt comfortable. I knew where my feet needed to be. All I had to concentrate on was the five-to-seven swing and watching the grass underneath the ball as I made solid contact. The results weren't too shabby. Some balls strayed right (when I made the mistake of rotating my wrists) but many stayed pretty straight. Once out of my comfort zone, the results weren't so good.

Out at the local pitch-and-putt course the other day, I missed my chipping trough. I was so worried about getting my feet at the proper angle that I forgot about the other factors

of a successful chip. The next thing I knew, my head is flying up before I even hit the ball, my wrists are flipping, I'm brining the club back to nine o'clock, and my shots are sailing all over the place.

I've got a lot of work to do on my chipping game. But at least I have a basic framework to build on. I can go to the range, set up my trough and just swing, five to seven. If I notice my shots are trailing to the right, I know what I need to do to correct the next one. I've accepted the fact that I will not become Tiger Woods, or even Phil Mickelson, overnight. In fact, I'll probably even stay off the pitch-and-putt until I can chip **sans** trough with a little bit of consistency.

Up next week: approach shots.

Scott Mayer is the teaching pro at Nonesuch River Golf Club in Scarborough. He was named Maine PGA Golf Teacher of the Year in 2004. He runs Mayer's School of Golf, which offers individual and group lessons to all ages and abilities. For more information, visit www.mayerschoolofgolf.com or call Scott at (207)-838-5731.