Welcome to The Weekend Warrior's Practice Manual!

Read this First

Since this E-book is interactive, you will be asked to write down a few things pertaining to your golf game. Although this can easily be done on a blank sheet of paper, I would advise you to click the link in green below to download the supplementary worksheet that goes along with this guide.

Tip: Since clicking on the links will redirect you to an external resource and cause you to lose your place in this E-Book, I suggest you right click, select “open link in a new tab.” This will allow you to keep your place in the E-Book!

>> Supplementary Worksheet <<

Introduction

One of my favorite golf movies of all time is “The Greatest Game Ever Played.” As with most inspiring sports movies, you really connect with the main character, Francis Ouimet.

Francis is a poor boy who grew up caddying at his local golf club, watching the wealthy members enjoy a life of leisure. For the years that he watched these golfers, Francis had a dream to one day be like them, and become a reputable golfer. When the U.S. Open came to his home club, this dream further solidified in his mind. After lots of hard work, grit, and setbacks, Francis eventually becomes the first amateur to ever win a U.S. Open. Nobody has ever accomplished this feat again.

The reason that I bring this analogy up is because most golfers can relate to the struggles that Francis went through.

Not everyone has the luxury to play golf all day, and not everyone has access to a state-of-the-art practice facility.

One of my favorite scenes in this movie is when they show Francis practicing his putting on the uneven hardwood floor in his room.

I love this scene because it shows that sometimes your circumstances might not be ideal for serious game improvement, but if you are determined enough, and take the right steps, you can overcome these obstacles.

The truth is, you don’t need a state-of-the-art practice facility to improve your golf game. You also don’t need all day to practice.

If you practice the right things, and practice them with laser focus, you can improve your golf game with just a few hours of practice a week.

The majority of golfers looking to improve their games don’t have the time, money, or facilities that they would like to have, and that is what this practice manual is about. This manual will teach you how to practice with limited time, money, and proper facilities. It will require a little grunt work on your part initially, but the payoff in the end will surely make up for it!
Who is this Guide For?

I created this guide for intelligent, busy golfers who want to increase their practice efficiency, and get better results on the course.

If you struggle with any of the following things, this guide can surely help you out:

- You don’t have the time that you think you need to develop the proper muscle memory to play golf better
- You have priorities that keep you from practicing golf consistently
- You don’t have any distinct practice routine, and become frustrated because you don’t know what to work on when you make it to the range/course
- You struggle with expectations, because you expect to play good, but know that you haven’t practiced enough for your current expectations

How Much of This Guide Should You Read?

Since this guide is more of a cumulative process than a list of unrelated strategies, it is advisable to read it in the order it is written. Once you have read it once, you can reference back to the parts that you found useful.

The only way that you will get real results is if you go through this guide with the intention of making use of its strategies. If you decide to skip a part of the guide because it requires “too much work” on your part, then I don’t know how much it is going to help. There is nothing overly complicated, so the exercises provided throughout the guide are totally doable for any golfer. The key is to commit yourself.

If you commit yourself to implementing the strategies in this guide, I can confidently guarantee that your golf game will significantly improve within a few weeks of using the strategies.

These are strategies used by the best players in the world.

How do I know the best players in the world use these strategies?

Because I learned nearly everything in this guide from the best players in the world through instructional videos and books.

I wish you the best of luck, and would love to hear what you think so that I can continue to revise and improve this practice manual!!
Chapter I - What's Your Goal?

"A goal without a plan is just a wish"

In all walks of life, goals and visions are what help us move forward. You've most likely set goals, either intentionally, or naturally.

Since this guide is meant to be a practice manual, I will not give a long lecture on why goals are so important, but I will give you a framework to work with in order to turn your goal into a reality. As one of the great French writers Antoine de Saint-Exupery said: "A goal without a plan is just a wish." He may have said this a century ago, but this is still a very true statement.

I'm going to keep things simple, and give you an exact template for setting a goal that will help you see real improvement in your golf game. The goal setting will take just a few minutes, but will be an essential step to improving your game.

The Why

The first part in setting a goal is to determine your "why."

On the worksheet provided at the beginning of this E-Book, or on a blank sheet of paper, write down the exact reason that you want to improve your golf game.

Below is my "why"

I want to prove to myself that I am capable of overcoming self doubt, and prove to myself that I have what it takes to be successful in something that I set my mind to.
The What

Once you have determined the reason why you are setting your goal, you need to determine what exactly your goal is. Your goal needs to be very specific, measurable, and reasonable.

Below is my "what"

My goal is to shoot 3 tournament rounds under par in a row. This is very specific, I can measure it based on my scores, and it is attainable since I have already shot under par during one competitive round before.

The When

Next, you must determine "when" you’re going to achieve this goal.

Ever notice how most of your work happens in the last few hours before an important deadline?

Well, golf goals are the same. If you just state that you want to drop your handicap from 20 to 10 so that you can beat your usual foursome, chances are, it will never happen.

The reason you probably won’t achieve this goal is because you haven’t set a deadline. By setting a clear deadline, you’ll be much more likely to successfully get to that 10 handicap.

A better way to state this goal: “I want to get from a 20 handicap to a 10 handicap in the next 365 days, so that I can impress my friends and beat them.”

Below is my "when"

I want to achieve my goal by the end of the 2016 season (Roughly October 2016 - Will update when I know)

The How

Now this is the part that we’ve been waiting for! Knowing HOW to achieve your goal is the single most important part, yet the last thing that you need to think about doing. In the remainder of this E-Book, I will show you how to achieve this goal, even if you don’t have much time each week to practice golf.

In order for the "how" to be effective, you must make this goal a part of you.

If you’ve set your goal correctly, and really ingrained the "why" into your mind, you will be 99% more likely to achieve it. If you find yourself daydreaming about your goal every day at work, then you know you’re on the right track.

Sometimes it helps to document your goal. A journal is a great way to do so. If you are interested in learning about how to keep a golf journal, click the link below.

>> Golf Journal Post <<
Chapter 2 - Take Inventory of Your Game

"Know Thyself"
- Socrates -

Although Socrates was no golfer (as I'm aware of), he stresses the idea of knowing oneself. Just like in life, we must know our golf game. In order to get to know our golf game, we need to conduct a self game analysis.

This is the very first step in finding the "how" of your goal, and will set the foundation for the remainder of this E-Book.

When was the last time you sat down and really took a look at all the moving parts in your golf game? If you're like most weekend warriors, you probably have never done a full game assessment. Who has time for such an elaborate process anyways?

When I first thought about doing a full game analysis, I was overwhelmed trying to figure out where to start. Over the course of the last 2 years, I have been doing an ongoing personal game assessment, and in this practice manual, I've broken down the process I've come up with in the last two years into precise, actionable steps.

Now, you can just follow along, and find the areas of your game that truly need work, so that you have an idea where to focus your practice.

The main focus with a game analysis is taking inventory of where each part of your game is at, so you have a long term vision, which will allow you to set necessary goals, and practice plans.
What is a Game Analysis?

I know a game analysis seems like a laborious first step for the overbooked golfer.

Since we don’t all have four hours to practice each day, I’m giving you permission to forego an entire week of practice to complete this game analysis. You’ll be so glad that you did it, because afterwards, you’ll have the focus and clarity to improve your game in the areas that matter the most.

It’s easy to go to the course and throw balls down on the putting green, hit a few 20 footers, and call it a day. But if you are like most of my readers, you don’t see the benefit in taking shortcuts. Game improvement is a commitment, and you’re all in!

If you don’t complete this game analysis, I don’t know how much the rest of this guide will help you. It’s your choice, but if I were you, I’d take a few days off from golf to complete this absolutely essential step.

So are you ready?

In order to complete a full game analysis, we must break the golf game into five distinct parts: Physical State, Equipment, Mental Game, Swing, and Course Management.

Physical State of Your Game

You may be wondering why I’m starting with the most dreadful part of the game analysis?!

Well, let’s face the reality. If you’re not in good physical condition, your golf game will have some limitations. I’m not here to tell you that you can’t play well being out of shape, but it is important to recognize some of your limitations.

Ever wonder why the pros get that straight left arm at the top of their swing? Believe it or not, it doesn’t have to do with skill as much as it does their prime physical state!

Because physical condition is beyond the scope of this manual, I won’t spend a whole lot of time on it. I did want to point you to a resource that I have used and that is used often on the PGA Tour to measure the physical capabilities of a golfer. It is called the My TPI Screening. It consists of 16 different assessment exercises that a golfer can go through to find which parts of his/her physical being needs work. If you are interested in assessing your physical state, you can follow the link below to the Titleist Performance Institute.

>> My TPI Screening <<

Equipment

Hold on, I thought you were going to tell me how to practice golf?!

Before you start hitting the range every day, it is important to assess your current equipment. Believe it or not, some equipment can lead to bad habits in your swing, and various compensations that I don’t think you want to deal with.
Why is equipment so important?

Having the right equipment prevents swing compensations
Imagine that I handed you a driver that was the length of your sand wedge. Now, I challenge you to hit it as far as possible. What are you to do?! Well, you'd have to get closer to the ball, widen your stance, bend your knees more, and dramatically shift your weight throughout the swing. Can you see how this wouldn't work well for you in the long term? I think your back might get a bit sore after a while!

Although this is a dramatic example, having equipment that fits is important for developing a proper setup and swing.

Having the right equipment gives you confidence
You know that feeling that you get when you walk out of a golf store with a new putter? "I'm going to make everything with this thing!" Well, this confidence may be temporary, but it is confidence.

Let's get real. It's not always the player.

Sometimes a new driver can be all that it takes to regain your confidence off the tee. Although this confidence off the tee may only last a few weeks, it has surely gotten you out of the rut that you were previously in, and moved your game to a higher level in the long term.

How to Get a Killer Set of Golf Clubs
I'm not a certified clubfitter, but I've been to several, and spent my fair share of pocket change on good and bad golf clubs.

I've purchased broken clubs from the used rack of my local golf store, misrepresented clubs off Ebay, and off friends who didn't exactly take care of their clubs.

I've also been fitted for clubs, and researched my butt off to find myself a set that would help me shoot lower scores.

If you're not in the position to go out and drop $3000 on a set of clubs, I have written a complete guide to buying a set of golf clubs on my blog. You can go to it by clicking the link at the bottom of the page. It takes you through each club in the bag, and gives you my best ideas on how to find something that works for you. That way, you can start replacing your clubs one at a time.

If I had any tip to get you started, I would say you need to get a great driver. A good driver with a properly fit shaft in it can make a world of difference in a golf game! Also, finding a good lob wedge might be your second step.

>> Your Complete Guide to Buying a Killer Set of Golf Clubs <<
Let's Take a Look at your Mental Game

You’re doing great! You’ve gotten through the first two parts of the game analysis. Now, we need to take a step away from the physical aspects of golf, and take a deeper look into your mind.

Since golf is 90% mental, or 80% mental, or 50% mental, or whatever that number actually is, it is important that we not neglect it. Regardless of what the number is, we can all agree that the mental game plays an important role in our golf scores.

You might say that you’re swing and skills are not good enough to worry about mental game. You might say that you don’t have time to work on your mental game. I’m going to prove to you that both of these are untrue!

Before I get too far into this, let me write out MY definition of the mental game of golf:

\[
\text{Mental Game of golf} = \text{"ANY thought that you have about golf on AND off the course"}
\]

Here are a few examples by this definition that I am using:

- How do you make decisions on the course? (Course management- talked about later in this guide)
- How good do you believe you are? (don't lie to yourself)
- Do you think positively or negatively after a bad hole or shot?
- Can you withstand significant amounts of pressure? How do you cope with this pressure?
- Do you have a plan for each round?
- Do you complain about bad greens?
- Can you turn a bad round around?

Of course, there are many more examples to come up with, but I wanted to briefly give you an idea where I’m coming from.

Why should I care about my mental game?

- Having the right equipment gives you confidence

I don't care what skill level you are, your mind is a huge factor in the scores that you shoot. If you don't feel like your swing is good enough to perform, then let me ask you: What can you do on the course to make up for your lack of developed skill? Surely, you could improve your pre-shot routine. Surely you could come up with responses to your most common negative thoughts on the golf course! Nobody is immune to the mental game of golf. With a developed mental game, you can control your destiny on the golf course more often.
You may not realize that certain thoughts are damaging

Did you ever realize that how you talk to people in casual conversation about your golf game significantly affects your results on the course? If someone asks you how you like the course, and you say: “It's hard, and the greens are a bit bumpy,” then you're setting yourself up for failure!

Instead, you might say: “I love it! The bumpy greens will make this course much more challenging, and I can't wait to see what I can do!” It's not always the cliché parts of your mental game that will trip you up. You've got to be aware of everything!

Improving your mental game is a quick way to drop strokes off your score

By changing the way you think about even one tiny aspect of golf, you can significantly lower your scores without doing anything else! I'd say it's worth looking into.

Some practical ways to improve your mental game

Spend 10 minutes writing down negative thoughts that you often have about golf

Using the supplementary worksheet you've downloaded, write some of your most common negative thoughts down. Nothing that you write down is wrong!

Pick the 3 thoughts that come up most often, and plan a response to each

On the list of negative thoughts that you just made, find the three thoughts that either come up most often, or bother you the most. After you have decided on three of them, take some time to figure out how you want to respond to them when they occur on or off the golf course. I know, it's tough to face your golfing fears, but it is a must!

Below I have listed three thoughts that I have often, and that usually end up ruining my rounds if I let them get the best of me. For each thought, I have written out how I prepare to respond to that particular thought:

Thought

"You don't have the confidence that he has"

Planned Response

"I'm going to read golf books, and practice harder than him so that I gain the confidence that I'm lacking right now"
Thought

"Don't 3-putt"

Planned Response

"If I have this thought in the middle of my putting routine, I will step off the ball, start 
my routine over again, and the second time through, I will repeat to myself over and over 
that I will 2 putt."

Thought

"Don't hit it in the water"

Planned Response

"If this thought pops up while I am teeing off or hitting an approach shot, I will step 
off the ball, and verbalize to myself what I want the ball to do. If I want to hit a draw, 
I will say out loud that I want to hit a draw starting at the big oak tree and drawing 
back to the bridge just beyond the middle of the fairway"

Read mental game golf books

On my site, I have a list of mental game books that I like, and I encourage you to 
check them out.

Personally, I don’t have time to sit down and read a golf book front to back, so I just 
use these books to give me something to focus on for the day, week, or month.

For example, if my chipping confidence is low, I'll read a chapter or two of The 
Unstoppable Golfer by Dr. Bob Rotella. Instead of trying to read the entire book, I'll 
just work with the chapter or two that I have read, and try and apply the principles 
taught during those chapters for an entire week, or even month of practice!

If you want an extensive list of my favorite mental game books, click the "Book Club" 
link below:

>> Mental Game Golf Books <<
Course Management

One of the biggest differences between a pro and the average golfer is the ability to make good decisions on the course. A pro knows when to take a risk, and when to take his/her medicine. Obviously, pros have a wider variety of shots they can hit, therefore more options in each situation.

If this is true, the average golfer shouldn’t have that hard of a time with course management! But the truth is, most golfers struggle tremendously with this aspect of the game.

As with the mental game, I want to provide you with MY definition of course management, as an extension of the mental game

Course management = "The decisions that you make before you actually hit the golf shot"

- How much will the wind affect my ball?
- What type of shot should I hit?
- Where’s my target?
- Should I take this risk?
- Will the cold weather affect my distances?

These are all things that we must think about before actually standing over the ball to hit it. There are several benefits to improving your course management.

Benefits of having good course management

- Being able to recognize certain stimuli that cause bad decisions

  If you know that certain situations naturally cause you to make irrational decisions, you can plan for that. For me, I tend to make poor decisions after hitting a drive into a group of trees. I plan for this by always punching out to the fairway unless I think I can pull the shot off 9/10 times on the range.

- Having better course management can eliminate your fear of certain holes

  Have you ever been to a course, and a single hole on that course just kept popping into your mind, bringing you fear? Have you found yourself wondering what you’re going to do on hole 5 when you’re still on hole 1? What if you implemented a different strategy on hole 5 this round? What if you played this par 4 as a par 5?

  There is no correct way to play a golf hole, and I think we all feel the pressure to play the hole as we think we should. By being confident in your course management, you can resist the urge to listen to your buddies giving you a hard time for laying up on a par 4, and eliminate your fear of certain holes!
How to improve your course management

Set rules for yourself

Like I mentioned above, I set a rule for myself whenever I hit it into the trees. This prevents me from making a bad decision when I’m not thinking clearly.

You can make rules for yourself too, no matter what your skill level. If you’re a high handicapper struggling with your driver, you might make a rule that you’ll only hit driver on certain holes.

If you’re a low handicapper struggling with your flop shots from the rough around the green, you might make a rule that you’ll only try a flop shot if you just made par or better on the last hole.

The last thing you want to do is make a double or triple after making a bogey on the last hole! Get creative, I’m sure you can come up with some great guidelines for your next golf round.

Learn your distances

A big part in course management is knowing how far you hit each club, because how are you going to pick a shot and a club without this knowledge?

You must know how much further your 7-iron draw goes than a 7-iron fade. You must know how rain and cold affects your golf ball with each club. It’s even helpful to know how far you fly your driver and 3-wood so you have an idea which bunkers you can carry from the tee.

If you are unsure of your distances, I recommend an application called Game Golf. You can purchase the full system, or just use the app (free), and record all of your golf shots from each round of golf. This will give you a much better idea how far you hit each club. The app will show you the distance you hit every single shot for your entire round through GPS tracking. It’s an awesome application!

Last, I wanted to provide a link to a page on my site that outlines how wind, temperature, and elevation affect your distances. Just click the link below:

>> Wind, Temperature, Elevation Effects <<
Your Swing

You’re almost done with the game analysis! The last step is to take a look at your swing. This step can be fun, but also a real eye-opener. If you don’t video your swing regularly, you might find that your swing looks a lot different than it feels.

Why should I do a swing analysis?

➤ A swing analysis allows you to translate between visual and kinesthetic

What your swing feels like is totally different from what it looks like in most cases. If you want to be able to fix things in your swing, it’s important to know the difference between seeing and feeling.

➤ A swing analysis helps you determine what type of practice you should be doing

You can find the problem areas of your swing, and come up with drills, practice aids, or feels to fix these areas in the future.

➤ Knowing what your swing looks like allows for better communication with an instructor

If you have a swing instructor, one of the biggest challenges is communicating, thanks to the disparity between seeing and feeling. Your instructor might tell you to “feel” this or “feel” that. The problem is, his/her “feels” are probably different than yours! Knowing what your swing looks like can help you conquer those feels, and get more done each lesson.

➤ Being able to analyze your swing gives you freedom and independence to work on your game alone

One of the biggest mistakes I’ve made in the past is working on my swing without an instructor, training aid, or video. I think that having at least one of these forms of feedback is necessary when working on a swing. If you know how to analyze your swing, you can video your swing alone, and keep an eye on your progress during practice.

How to do a swing analysis

➤ Read the blog post that I have written

Below is the link to the extensive guide that I wrote about a self swing analysis. When you have done the analysis of your swing, write some areas that you need to improve on the worksheet that you downloaded.

>> How to Analyze Your Swing Post <<
Chapter 3 - Understanding Practice

"The harder I practice, the luckier I get"

- Gary Player -

Now that you have an understanding of your game, and all the areas that need work, it is time to understand what practice really means. Practice comes in many forms, and not many golfers truly understand the different forms of practice.

In this section, I will be explaining the four types of practice, and how you can apply them at various practice locations.

As I’ve talked about in my blog post: “How to Get Your Game from the Range to the Course,” there are four types of practice in golf: Repetition, Maintenance, Realistic, and Preparation practice.

Each area of practice is distinctly different, and are used in different situations. Before I get into this complexity, let me define each type of practice for you:

**Repetition practice**

This is the type of practice we use to make small and big changes in our swings. Essentially, every time we try and form new “muscle memory,” we are using repetition practice. This practice comes in high quantities, and requires a clear purpose. Repetition practice is most effective on the range when you don’t have any obligation to play a round of golf soon.

During repetition practice, you are likely going to hit some ugly shots, as you are trying to conquer a “new” feeling. This type of practice feels weird, and does not adequately prepare you for a round of golf. Repetition practice is a long term commitment. If you really want to improve your golf game, you will have to partake in this form of practice regularly.

If you want to learn more about repetition practice, and how to make a swing change effectively, you can click the link below to go to a post I’ve written about this topic.

How to Make a Swing Change Effectively

The Weekend Warrior’s Practice Manual

By: The DIY Golfer
Maintenance practice

This type of practice is used to monitor different aspects of the swing, or chipping/putting motions.

For most golfers, there is always something to be improved in their swing. If you happen to be Jason Day or Adam Scott, you might not need to constantly work on changing your swing. It's already pretty damn good!

Or, you could be approaching an important round of golf, and might want to avoid swing changes for the time being. Maintenance practice is the type of practice we use to make sure that our swings don't get too out of line, and to further ingrain the good habits that we already have.

This type of practice will often involve lots of visual training aids, physical training aids, and video analysis. The main goal is to focus in on a swing characteristic, and keep it exactly the way that it is.

The problem that we face as golfers (and in life for that matter) is that our swings never stay the same.

They may look and feel similar over time, but there are small changes that take place every single time you practice. If you went to the range for three days in a row, and practiced one motion the entire three days, your swing WILL be slightly different than when you started, often in unintended ways.

That is why maintenance practice is so important. In golf, you are either improving, or getting worse. There is no middle ground.

That is why we must maintain the parts of our game that we are satisfied with, and use repetition practice to work on the parts of the game that we are not satisfied with.

Here is an example of maintenance practice in action:

After a swing analysis, I noticed that my backswing was struggling, but my alignment, posture, grip, and tempo were all really good. I want to improve my backswing, but in the process, I don't want to mess up any of the positive aspects of my swing.

In order to do so, I may commit to spending the first 10 minutes and last 10 minutes of each practice session (on the range) to maintenance practice. During those 20 minutes, my sole focus is to make sure that all of these positive qualities of my swing stay where they are at.

I often will use a video camera to check. During this time, don't worry about what everything feels like. If you are setting up with your weight too far on your heels, making the slight adjustment to feel more on your toes will feel awkward, but it is necessary to make the adjustment for long term success.

The purpose of maintenance practice is to make sure that nothing gets too far out of hand. The last thing we want is to spend an entire week working on our backswing, and later find out that we are aiming 20 yards right of the target, and our ball position is a foot away from where it is supposed to be!
Realistic practice

This type of practice is one of the two types of practice that is used in the days before an important golf round, and should be used at some point during every practice session.

Realistic practice is the type of practice that prepares you to actually play golf shots, rather than work on your swing. During realistic practice, regardless of where you actually are, you are trying to emulate all the different aspects of a real round of golf.

This type of practice is a great way to practice if you have a tournament or important golf round coming up in the next few days. During realistic practice, you are going through your full routine on every shot (if you don’t have a routine, I suggest you read about it here), you’re picking a specific target on every shot, and you are focusing on hitting quality golf shots.

A great form of realistic practice is “playing holes” on the range, the putting green, or the chipping green. You could drop one golf ball on the putting green and make an imaginary 9 hole course. Or use the trees at the end of the range to outline imaginary fairways of your favorite golf course. During realistic practice, you will set little goals, and try to achieve them.

Here is an example of realistic practice:

I have worked on my swing for the first half of my range session, and I want to get some realistic practice in. I pick my favorite golf course, and start making up imaginary outlines of each hole on the range. I go through my full routine on each shot, and I don’t leave the range until I’ve hit 12/14 fairways, and 15/18 greens.

Your goals may be different, but this format can be used for any golfer. If I’m being completely honest, I generally don’t play more than 9 holes of imaginary golf on the range, but that’s just a personal preference.

Preparation practice

This type of practice is an EXTENSION of realistic practice. Preparation practice is specific to the golf course that you are preparing to play on in the near future.

Everything that I talked about regarding realistic practice stays the same, but in this case, you are hitting the shots that you plan to hit at the golf course you’re about to play. If you don’t know how to hit a certain golf shot that you might need for a specific golf course, you might have to include a little bit of repetition practice in order to learn this shot.

For example:

Say I’m about to play St. Andrews. I know that this course is unlike the American courses, and I will be dealing with lots of wind, and wet conditions. To prepare for this, I might play 9 imaginary holes on the range, but only hit low draws off the tee. Another form of preparation practice might just include practicing a certain shot that you think is necessary for a course. In the St. Andrews example, you will obviously need a “go-to” wind shot. If you don’t know how to hit the ball low, or hit a ¾ shot, you might want to dedicate a few practice sessions to those specific shots.
Summary

Okay! So you now know the four basic forms of practicing. Although I used examples specific to the driving range and full swing, these four forms of practice can be implemented in all parts of the game.

On the chipping green, you might throw golf balls in random locations, and practice getting them up and down, going through your full routine on each shot. This is realistic practice. Or maybe you go to the putting green, and challenge a friend to a putting competition. This is also realistic practice. Or maybe you just want to work on your putting alignment, so you pull out your favorite putting alignment training aid, and spend 20 minutes working with it. This is maintenance practice.

As a general rule, no matter where you are, you will ALWAYS be implementing one of these types of practice.

But certainly there are practice locations that are better for each type of practice than others? Of course!

If you are on the golf course, you are not going to be doing repetition or maintenance practice. If you are in your basement practicing your putting, you will most likely be using repetition or maintenance practice, because it would be awfully hard to make basement putting practice super realistic (not every putt is completely flat like the ones in your basement!).

So how do we know where to use these forms of practice, and where these forms of practice are most effective?

In the following few pages, I will be outlining the various places that you can practice, the things you can work on at each location, and the types of practice that are most effective in each location.

Although I’m sure you have found other places to practice your game, here are the 5 primary locations that I am aware of:

Driving Range, Putting Green, Golf Course, Chipping Green, and at home.

The practice facility(s) available to you may or may not have all of these locations, so it is important to know which types of practice are optimal at each location so that you can better plan out your practice schedule.

Driving Range

By far the most common area that most golfer’s will go to when they want to practice their game.

You’ve probably heard many teaching professionals preach that short game is what we should really practice, but it is a truth that you still need to spend time on your full swing.

Sure, practicing short game will lower your scores faster than practicing your full swing, but most of us don’t find as much satisfaction in making putts as we do hitting the ball pure. What these teaching pros say is by all means true, but doesn’t resonate with most golfers. The range can be an extremely effective place to practice if used correctly.
The beauty of the driving range is we can implement all four types of practice. We can play imaginary holes (realistic), practice our low wind shots (preparation), work on our fundamentals in a mirror (maintenance), and work on our golf swing (repetition).

**Putting Green**

Another essential practice location, the putting green allows you to implement three of the four types of practice.

The one that I’m leaving out is preparation practice. While on the putting green (unless you are at the course you will be playing), it is hard to simulate greens from other golf courses. If you’re going to a course with fast greens soon, you might start practicing dying the ball into the hole, but other than that, preparation practice is going to be limited on your standard practice putting green.

The other three types of practice are easily implemented on the practice putting green of any course. You can make up a 9 hole course, and try to 2 putt every single hole (realistic), you can work with a training aid to check your eyeline and alignment (maintenance), and you can also use training aids to alter your stroke.

I prefer to stick to realistic and maintenance practice on the putting green, because I find that I do my best repetition putting practice at home where there isn’t the temptation to putt at a hole. When working on changing a putting stroke (probably shouldn’t be doing too often), it is important to eliminate the thought of a target. Your goal isn’t to make the putt, it is to change your stroke. That is why this practice might be most effective at home.

**Chipping Green**

Although a good majority of public golf courses don’t have a quality chipping green to practice on, it is still worth mentioning.

The chipping green is a great place to practice because you can incorporate all four types of practice at the chipping green.

For realistic practice, you might have a competition with a friend (or yourself) to see who can get 9 shots up and down in a row. If you aren’t allowed to putt on the chipping green, you could just challenge yourself to get 9 shots within a 3-foot circle around the flag.

For maintenance practice, you might check that your weight distribution is good for each type of short game shot (ex: on a chip, you should have over 50% of your weight on your front foot). For repetition practice, you could use a training aid to ingrain a certain feel into your chipping motion. My favorite type of repetition practice around the chipping green is to hit about 50 balls in a row to a landing spot with tees tucked under my armpits. I feel that this helps me feel like I’m using my bigger muscles to hit my short game shots rather than getting extremely “handsy.”

Finally, for preparation practice, let’s go back to the St. Andrews example. At St. Andrews, you will have to hit a lot of low, running chip shots. At the chipping green, you would prepare by practicing landing the ball in one spot with different clubs, and seeing how far the ball travels with each club. This will develop the feel you need to play a course like St. Andrews.
Golf Course

Often the most misunderstood practice area, the golf course (if it’s not too busy) can be a wonderful place to sharpen your skills. It is obviously great for realistic practice (no explanation needed), but can also be a nice place to prepare and maintain your game.

I never ever ever do any sort of repetition practice on the course. I don’t ever want to get into the habit of thinking about different positions of my swing on the golf course.

It isn’t a bad idea to implement some sort of maintenance practice though! Often when we play golf, we become unaware of our alignment, our ball position, grip, etc. If you are going out to practice on the golf course, this could be a great time to check and see how your alignment or ball position is. More often than not, how you line up on the golf course will be slightly different than how you line up on the range.

For example, when I come to a par 4 that doglegs to the right, I have the tendency to aim further left than I realize, because naturally, the shape of the hole tells my brain that I need to hit a fade. Even if I do want to hit a fade, I know that I’ll have to aim slightly further right than my body tells me.

Lastly, the golf course is a great way to implement preparation practice. Even if you are playing a slightly competitive round of golf, you could still test yourself to see if you can hit the shots that are necessary for the course that you will be playing competitively soon.

Once again, let’s go back to the St. Andrews example. If you know that you’ll have to hit low shots there, you might try hitting some low shots in your next round of golf. Every time you pull off the shot on an actual golf course, your confidence will increase! If you can’t seem to hit the shots you’re trying to hit, don’t force it. You probably just need some more time to practice that shot on the range.

At Home

Since there is not a whole lot of information out there about practicing golf at home, I have created an entire post about this very topic. You can go to it by clicking the link at the bottom of this page.

When practicing from home, as I mention in the post, you want to have a lot of feedback. You won’t be able to do a lot of preparation practice or realistic practice, but the garage/basement can be a great place to get the repetitions in or check your fundamentals (maintenance) if you have the right tools.

If you live in a cold climate, I would highly recommend checking out this post!

>> How to Practice at Home Post <<
Chapter 4 - Develop a Practice Plan

"To achieve great things, two things are needed; a plan, and not quite enough time."
- Leonard Bernstein -

Leonard Bernstein, the great American Composer and Conductor said it best: "To achieve great things, two things are needed; a plan, and not quite enough time."

What if I told you that 80% of the time that you have spent on your golf game is not making you any better? The truth is, golf is not about how much you practice, but what you practice. If you’re smart about it, you can use your busy schedule as an advantage in golf. Instead of having all the time in the world to practice, you only have an hour or two each day. You must be selective in what you practice.

Jack Nicklaus does a wonderful job explaining this in his book:

"As an amateur there were times when I believed that if only I didn’t have to clean up my room, or get an education, or earn a living, I would be able to hone my game to the point of absolute perfection and then hold it there permanently."

Even Jack, one of the most accomplished professionals in the sport admits to not being able to perfect the game, regardless of how much time he had to practice.

In other words, time is not the deciding factor of how good you can become at golf.

Obviously, you can’t expect to become the next Jack Nicklaus by practicing 1 hour a day, but you surely could become a single digit handicap devoting an hour a day for an extended period of time, assuming that you are applying the principles laid out in this guide!

If you want to reach another level with your golf game, it is crucial to write out a practice plan, or at least strategize about your practice.

Having a practice plan is extremely important because without one, we end up at the course with no focus. I hate to say it, but merely showing up to the course for some late evening practice won’t always make you better.
Step 1 - Identify your Practice Personality

Something that isn't talked about very often in golf books or instructional videos is how to determine your "practice personality."

What do I mean by this?

Well, every golfer has a different preference when it comes to how much time they are spending in different practice areas.

For example, Rickie Fowler and Bubba Watson spend a lot of their practice time on the golf course, and little time on the driving range. On the other hand, guys like Tiger Woods and Adam Scott spend a majority of their time on the driving range, putting green, and chipping green. If a guy like Tiger Woods constantly played golf without practicing, he would not play to his potential.

Personally, I like to spend my time off of the golf course. If I play for several days in a row, I become anxious about different parts of my swing, chipping technique, etc. It is extremely important for me to get at least two or three solid off-course practice sessions a week. If this was a perfect world, I would spend 70% of my time practicing golf, and 30% of the time actually playing golf.

You might be the exact opposite, but it is important to find out!

If you've been playing golf for a considerable amount of time, you probably have an idea what your preference is, but just in case, I have created a short quiz on my site that will help you in determining your practice personality. Just click the link below to go to the quiz:

>> Practice Personality Quiz <<

Step 2 - Identify your Optimal Practice-Play Ratio

Determining your practice personality is not the only thing that will determine where you spend your time practicing.

There are actually several factors that will help determine this, and as you'll find out later, it is smart to have different practice routines to fit different circumstances.

When dividing up your time for a practice session, it is important to understand that your optimal practice ratio will be different for varying situations. Below are several factors that might affect your optimal practice/play ratio:

Skill Level

For example, if you are just starting off with golf, regardless of your preference, you will probably want to spend most of your time at the driving range getting the muscle memory that you need for the course.
Time of Year

As I talk about in my winter practice blog post, there is only so much you can do as far as practice goes. Obviously, you won’t be able to spend much time on the course if you live in a cold climate.

Goals

Your practice/play ratio also depends on your goals as a golfer.

Jack Nicklaus said it best in his book How I Play Golf: “And you want to get better yet at golf? Well, the answer has to be plain: Just accelerate your rate of practice by going to the driving range a little more and the course a little bit less.”

You may not want to listen to me, but surely you’ll take the advice of an 18 time major champion! If you are looking to lower your handicap, you might want to dedicate a little more time to skills development rather than playing golf all the time.

Tournament Schedule

If you’re one who plays tournaments frequently, you will have to know what works best for you coming into a tournament. For some guys, all they do the days before a tournament is play golf. Other guys (like me) will mix between play and practice the days leading up to a tournament.

The common factor?...

You should probably play at least a little bit each day leading up to a tournament. There is no better way to get into a rhythm than hitting shots on a real golf course. On your off weeks, that is the time to hit the range, putting green, and chipping green for skills development.

Summary

All this is a lot to take in, so here are some rules of thumb to go by when determining your practice/play ratio for any given week/practice session:

- Leading up to a tournament, increase the amount of time you spend actually playing golf
- If your fundamentals and mechanical skills are not where you would like, spend more time at the range/putting green/chipping green, and less time on the course
- If you are just starting golf, stick to the range, chipping green, and putting green.
Step 3 - Identify the Practice Facilities Available to You

So we’ve talked a lot about practice/play ratios, types of practice, where to practice, and much more, but we haven’t yet considered your PERSONAL situation.

What if you live far from any golf course, and the only thing available to you is a driving range?

What if your home golf course doesn’t have a driving range?

Regardless of what your preference is, sometimes you’ll have to make due with what you’ve got. I grew up mainly going to the driving range, because playing golf all the time was really expensive! I bought a range membership each year, and hit thousands and thousands of golf balls, working on my swing. I also spent a lot of time at one of my local golf courses that had a nice putting and chipping green, which were free to use.

It might be a “chicken or the egg” scenario, because I turned out to prefer practice over play. But did I accumulate this preference solely because it was my only option?

Maybe, maybe not, but knowing your options is an essential part to determining how and where you are going to most effectively practice!

So now, let’s talk about YOU.

If you are someone who prefers playing, it might be a good idea to buy a membership to a local golf course, or even negotiate a rate. You’d be surprised how many golf courses will work out a deal if your circumstances don’t allow you to utilize the golf course very often, but you still want to play there.

If you want to practice, I’d Google golf courses in your area, and pick one that has a smooth putting green, a quality chipping green, and a driving range.

The most important thing for you is to narrow your options down to just a few places. If you’ve got five different golf courses that you go to, this makes your decision whether or not to go practice just that much harder. We want to make it as convenient as possible to drive to a facility and get some good practice in. The best way to do so is find one or two places that you go to consistently.
Step 4 - Identify your Strengths and Weaknesses from Part I of this guide

It is now time to bring everything that you’ve done to this point together! If you haven’t already, take a few minutes to write out 1 or 2 weaknesses in the four main areas of your game (physical, mental, course management, and swing). This is where the guide gets interactive, so if you haven’t already downloaded and printed off the supplementary worksheet, just click the link below:

>> PDF Worksheet Download <<

Now that you have listed your biggest weaknesses as a golfer, you must determine some practice exercises, training aids, or knowledge (from a mentor or golf books) that will help you improve on your weaknesses.

Each of you will have very different circumstances, and there is no way for me to cover all of the faults/fixes in this short E-Book.

Instead, I’ve created a few Pinterest Boards filled with instructional videos that you might want to glance over. On these boards, I have compiled all of the instructional videos that I have found helpful over the years, and that I trust as being “good advice.” The links to mental game advice and physical fitness link to my book club and the Titleist Performance institute respectively (I have mentioned both of these resources previously in this guide).

For chipping/pitching instruction, click here

For putting instruction, click here

For full swing instruction, click here

For golf fitness instruction, click here

For mental game instruction, click here

For PGA Tour clinics, click here

As I said, this guide is not meant to teach you how to swing a golf club, how to workout for golf, or how to make a decision whether to go for the green or not.

Instead, this guide is supposed to give you the tools and resources that you need in order to learn these things. I want YOU to do the leg work, but I also want you to know where to go for instruction!

My best suggestion is to bookmark the links on this page in your browser, and come back to them as often as needed in the future. Don’t spend an hour reading this guide and then never come back to it! It was never meant for that type of casual reading. I want you to go out and apply what you’ve learned! Knowledge is only power to you if you actually apply it!
Step 5 - Make Your Practice Plan(s)

Alright! You’ve made it to the end of the E-book! It’s now time to bring everything you’ve learned together, and create a few personalized practice plans.

Having a few practice plans written out is going to be an indispensable tool for you, because it will completely eliminate any confusion about what you’re supposed to be working on.

With a few written practice plans, you can go to the course/range and KNOW that you are going to get better. You won’t wonder if you’re practicing the right things anymore!

There is nothing that brings me more confidence on the course than KNOWING I have practiced effectively and consistently. You’d be surprised how much 30 minutes/hour a day will pay off for you if you do it consistently.

The only way to show up to practice consistently when you’ve got a thousand other priorities is to have a practice plan that you can implement without having to think about it. The last thing you need after a day at work is the burden of trying to figure out where to go, what to practice, and how to practice it!

But you’re probably wondering how to make a practice plan? Where to start?

Unfortunately, there is no foolproof way to create a practice plan. If you are new to this, you will do several weeks/months of refining your practice plan to fit your personal needs as a golfer. The key is to get a basic framework that you can work off of, and more importantly, to get started!

Below, I have linked to an excel document where I have outlined a few sample practice plans for you to model off of if you feel lost:

>> Sample Practice Plans <<

Conclusion

Unless you are just skimming through the E-Book to see what it’s about, I want to congratulate you for finishing this guide! If you are part of the 4% of people who actually read the guide cover to cover, you’re surely on your way to success!

You might be wondering where to go next though...

The best part about golf is the never ending challenge that it presents us with. Sure, you can use this guide and achieve a golfing goal that you’ve always wanted to, but what are you going to do after? Quit golf?

I don’t think so…

Instead of letting this be the end of your golf improvement, maybe you ought to commit to reading golf books and guides like this for the remainder of your golf career? Imagine how good you could be if you consistently made an intentional effort to improve?

I’m here to help you do just that! If you’re interested in more free resources like this guide, super useful blog posts covering the most relevant golf improvement topics, and much more, be sure to add my email (zach@thediygolfer.com) to your contacts list! I’ll be looking forward to getting to know you!