

How to Shoot Your Best Scores Ever: 7 Biggest Mistakes You're Probably Making

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Golf is a crazy sport. Some days you have it all working. You can't miss off the tee, you're hitting greens, and making putts. Life makes sense.

Other days, you can't find a good swing or positive thought if your life depended on it. Golf is ridiculously hard but the pursuit of greatness is what makes golfers continue to show up, even after a career worst round.

Golf is part mental and part physical. Most amateurs forget about the fundamentals and instead try for band-aid fixes. But golf, like any sport, is all about mastering the fundamentals. This is both your skills and your mental game. Here are the biggest ways most amateur golfers sabotage their chance of becoming successful.

Start changing these and watch your game take off to new levels!

7 Biggest Mistakes Amateurs Make

1. Forgetting About The Fundamentals

Golf has so many aspects to it that sometimes it can feel overwhelming when you're trying to improve. Maybe you want to try a new chip shot you saw this weekend. Or a new tip from your buddy to hit it longer. Or a new putting drill to start draining more three footers.

It's easy to get the shiny object syndrome with your golf game. But to improve your game you need to figure out *what's working and what's not working*. Then, make a plan to improve each part and not get distracted by the next tip for add 10 yards to your driver.

The best way to do this is to record your swing, chip, putt or any other shot you want to improve in action. Otherwise, you're just making educated guesses based on how the ball is reacting to a specific shot.

This doesn't always work as the divot can lie and your buddies aren't qualified instructors.

Once you film your specific shot that you're working on, focus on the fundamentals. For example, if you're slicing drivers start with the basic setup before looking at your swing. *How is your grip, posture, and alignment at setup?*

Putting is no different. If you're missing putts and not sure why, have a friend use the slow-motion feature on most smartphones to see how your stroke is looking.

Then, compare it with the fundamentals. *How is your path? Is your head staying down long enough? Are you gripping it light enough?*

Always start with the fundamentals like posture, grip, and your alignment. So many problems happen *before* you ever swing. As legendary coach John Wooden said, "*Champions are brilliant at the basics.*"

2. Not Taking Enough Club

Ask yourself, when you miss the green do you tend to miss short or long?

Most amateur golfers miss short when it comes to hitting approach shots. And course designers understand know that as well as anyone. Look at almost any track in your area and you will see that most of the trouble is short of the green.

Instead of trying to muscle up everything, take the testosterone away every once in a while and focus on choosing a club that will get you to the middle of the green. Don't try to always kill it as this can lead to all kinds of swing and tempo problems.

On the range or when you're playing a casual round, get to know your distances. The more you know your distances the better chance you'll hit more greens (and make more birdies).

Also, when it comes to your approach shots, know your limits. If you haven't broken a 100 yet don't try to attack every (or any) flag. This will lead you to being short sided more often which results in higher scores.

Here's a quick guide on how you should approach each flag based on your game:

- **100's shooter:** Unless the pin is in the middle of the green, don't aim for the flag. Ignore the flag, aim for the fat part of the green, and watch yourself break 100 easily.
- **90's shooter:** If you're trying to break 90, you need to go after some flags but only with short irons and wedges. Otherwise, aim for the center of the green to give yourself more birdie chances.

- **80's shooter:** If you're close to breaking 80 you're getting good -- congrats! At this level you can aim at more pins as you understand your distances but also know where the best miss is to avoid a big number.

3. Pitching Instead of Putting

You're not Phil Mickelson, let me repeat, you aren't the wedge wizard Philly Mick. Instead of trying to flop everything, start saving shots around the green by choosing to putt or use a bump and run *instead* of pitching

Pitching increases your chances of not even getting on the green or even the dreaded double chip. If you want to shoot lower scores, keep the ball lower around the greens. Sure, your buddies might give you grief but you'll be the one scoring around the greens.

A general rule → If you can putt it, do it!

If you can't putt it, chip it, if you can't chip then you can pitch it with a square clubface.

Only if you really need to open the wedge to get a significant amount of loft is it a good idea as an amateur.

4. Trying to Lag it Close

How many times have you or your buddies said, *"I just want to two-putt this one"* or *"I want to lag it up there."* **You've already lost before you've even attempted your first putt.**

Golf is all about managing your misses. If you miss with your driver, you want it to still find the fairway or just off into the rough. If you miss an iron, you want it on the fringe or a miss that leaves you a chip with plenty of green to work with.

Managing your misses leads to the best scores. The same goes for your putting.

Unfortunately, most amateur golfers outside of 30 feet "try to lag it up" and don't select any targets as a result.

Instead, pretend you are Bradley Cooper in American Sniper. Use his motto, *"Aim small, miss small."* Instead of trying *not* to three-putt, try to make every single putt!

Now, before you go bashing 50 footers 10 feet by the hole just to say I told you so, keep reading. This "make it" mentality will help you commit to the line and actually pick a target that can allow the ball to go in the hole. Plus, it's better to be confident than scared even if it's the wrong read.

When you're reading longer putts, find the apex, imagine how the ball will travel, and try to make it. Even if you miss you'll miss closer than if you're simply trying to lag it to three feet and end up with six feet.

5. Practicing the Wrong Way (Or Not at All)

Golf is arguably the hardest sport out there yet all golfers want to be great -- regardless of the amount of time they actually practice. *Sound familiar?*

But if you want to improve your game, you have to commit to improving the parts of your game that actually need the work, not improving what's already working. By using tip #1 (filming your shots) you can begin to learn *how* to practice and *what* you need to practice.

Another huge mistake most amateur golfers make is practicing the long game only. This is a recipe for disaster. Sure, it's more fun to bang drivers at the range than work on your bump-n-runs but most likely you'll have higher scores.

Don't believe me?

Track a few of your rounds when you're in the 19th hole grabbing a cold one with your friends. I can almost guarantee that at least 60-70% of all of your shots are within 100 yards of the green (or closer).

For example, if you have 90 minutes to practice split it into three 30 minute chunks. 30 minutes on the putting green (both long and short putts), 30 minutes for short game, and 30 minutes at the range.

A 2:1 ratio of short game to long game will help you score better over time, no question about it.

Lastly, make sure to practice with a purpose. Don't go out there and mindlessly hit a jumbo bucket. This usually ingrains bad habits and can be counterproductive. Focus on the quality of your practice, not the quantity of it.

6. Don't Forget The Mental Side

Speaking of quality practice, *how much do you actually work on the mental side of your game?* As the famous Jack Nicklaus said, *"Golf is 80% mental, 10% ability, and 10% luck."*

If you want to improve your game start by working on the six inches between your ears. The mind has ruined so many golfers if you don't know how to control it. But, if you learn how to use it to your advantage (a la Tiger Woods), you can become extraordinary.

Here are two easy ways to do this without meditation, golf journaling or a mental coach to improve your mental game.

Have Short-Term Memory

Every golfer hits bad shots, just watch Ian Poulter most Sundays. Even though he's on the PGA Tour he still routinely finds a way to shank it enough to make a highlight reel on Youtube.

But unlike amateur golfers, Ian can come back with an immaculate recovery shot because of his positive attitude. He knows it's a horrible shot but he leaves it in the past and focuses on the next shot. You should do the same!

You'll likely only hit 10-15 shots really pure throughout the round. The rest of the time you're dealing with misses. *The pros don't hit every shot great, why should you?*

Adjust your attitude and have a short-term memory. Keep breathing, laugh it off, and focus on the next shot.

Watch Your Self Talk

Golf is hard enough, the last thing you need is a negative inner critic to make it worse. Instead, use words of encouragement to yourself and your playing partners. Remember, golf is supposed to be fun, not a 5-hour misery.

Change the way you react to bad shots and watch your scores drop. And unsurprisingly, you'll have 100x more fun.

7. Lacking a Routine

As top sports psychologist (and avid golfer), Dr. Bob Rotella said, *"Your routine is your wingman. It's your best friend on the course."*

It's true in other sports too. NBA players on the free throw line, pitchers in the MLB, and tennis players before the serve. Routines separate the pros from the amateurs.

Routines will help you build consistency and trust in your game. They will help you go unconscious and not think mechanics before or during your swing. Routines will help you eliminate first tee jitters and focus on one thing only -- the target.

Build a pre-shot routine that gives you confidence and don't try to copy anyone else. Make it your own and practice it on the range like you do everything else. Effective practice makes a permanent change!

Final Thoughts

Golf is one of those few sports that requires as much from your mental game as it does your mind. Use these tips to play more strategic, minimize the big numbers, and strengthen your mind to shoot lower scores.

As legendary coach John wooden said, "It's the little details that are vital. Little things make big things happen." Stay consistent and persistent in pursuit of playing your best golf ever. Avoid these mistakes and I can nearly guarantee you'll score better and have much more fun on the links.