



2020 GOLF SEASON TIPS WEEKLY COLUMN BY ILLINOIS PGA PROFESSIONALS

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How Are You Practicing?

The most common question we receive from our students is “How can I get the most out of my practice?” The answer is “quality over quantity.” When you break it down, most people are asking how to be more consistent in their fairway hits, more greens in regulation, and fewer putts. Ideally, that is the main goal of every student looking to improve their golf game. Think about what you are practicing to improve these areas of your game and how you are doing it.

The most common scenario we see as PGA Professionals is a player at the range with a full bucket of balls. Most players begin without a warmup and pull out their driver and start taking swings at full speed. That large bucket of balls, which is roughly one hundred balls, will be empty in less than thirty minutes with only a handful of clubs being hit. Majority of people practicing at the range are hitting balls with the same club, to the same target, from the same lie.

A Tour Professional or collegiate player comes to the golf course with a completely different approach to their practice time. They come to each session with a purpose of what they need to work on even before they walk on to the range. Many golfers are constrained by a lack of time and cannot devote hours to practicing. With that being said, a more focused, purposeful approach would be more effective than the rake-and-hit method.

There are two types of practice: **block practice** and **random practice**. **Block practice** is doing the same thing over and over for a large percentage of your repetitions. **Random practice** is mixing things up. Both types of practice are beneficial to your overall success, but it will depend on the state of your game when deciding which type of practice you should focus on.

If you are a beginner golfer, or a golfer going through a swing change, **block practice** would be the most beneficial way to practice. This tends to be useful in the beginning stages of learning something new and creating movement patterns. When repeating the same skill over and over, we are helping our body and brain create a more consistent technique. We can get lots of feedback in our practice session by using slow motion or exaggerated swings to tell us if the move we are trying to create is correct. If the move is not correct, you can adjust on the spot or use a training aid to show when the move was right or wrong (See picture one with a training station that will provide feedback). Block practice can also be a good confidence boost as our performance improves throughout the session. Remember, skills improve with repetition and skill change takes time.

Random practice is a lot more difficult than block practice and requires more discipline. This type of practice is often neglected by most amateurs due to the fact that it needs more effort and skill to accomplish. Random practice can involve using a different club or target as well as a different shot shape. You may have to get a little more creative, but it will have a greater impact on improving your game long term. Because it is more difficult, the likelihood of these skills transferring to the golf course is much greater because the practice is more course realistic. Performance during random practice sessions may decline so lower your expectation level but know that your retention of learning is increased. (See picture two of changing clubs every two to three swings)

The final and most important piece to improving practice is being able to monitor how you are improving. The best players in the world will quantify their practice in some way. Quantifying practice is measuring what you do to give you a benchmark for future practice sessions. For example, if you are practicing a fifty-yard shot and you hit the green four out of ten times, that will be your benchmark for your next practice sessions. Quantifying practice enables you to set goals, see your progress, and helps find the strengths and weaknesses in your game. Quantifying your practice sessions will allow you to practice less and still help improve your skill level.

Changing how you practice can be overwhelming, but vital to the improvement of your game. Make small changes each time you practice and know it will take time and patience. Remember there are local PGA Professionals to help design a practice plan that is just right for you. Practice might not make you perfect, but it will help improve your game if implemented correctly.