



***BEHAVIORAL
GOLF
INSTRUCTION
BOOKLET
FOR
TEACHERS***

By Ed Feeney

For use on all lessons, all students and all content

CONTENTS

BEHAVIORAL GOLF INSTRUCTION FOR TEACHERS BOOKLET

<i>General Concepts and Benefits, Objectives</i>	1
Section 1: Steps Before the Lesson	5
<i>1. Observe Student's Full/Part Round Before the Lesson</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>2. Always Record Data When You Observe The Student</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>3. Calculate Area of Highest Potential for Stroke Reduction</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>4. Send Instruction to Study in Advance and Charge For It</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>5. Empower Student to Obtain and Apply a Better Lesson</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>6. Give the Student a Short Test for Physical Fitness</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>7. Student's Decision: Buy Lessons or Buy New Clubs</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Summary of Benefits Before the Lesson</i>	<i>16</i>
Section 2: During and After the Lesson	17
<i>1.State a Measurable Goal For the Lesson</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>2. Student Learning Styles</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>3. Student Note Taking</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>4. Decide on What Part of the Game and Swing to Start Lessons</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>5. How Golfers Learn or Fail to Learn.</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>6.. Break the Swing Into Easy, Small-Advance Shaping Steps</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>7. Self-Correcting Feedback</i>	<i>39</i>
<i>8. Positive Reinforcement</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>9. The Mental Side of Golf</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>10. Detailed Written Practice Plans</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>11. Display Publicly Graphs/Tables Showing Student Improvement</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>Summary of Section 2 During and After the Lesson</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Closing Comments</i>	<i>56</i>

BEHAVIORAL GOLF INSTRUCTION

GENERAL CONCEPTS AND BENEFITS

Behavioral Golf Instruction is a process [teachers should use to give lessons](#) and [students should use to take, practice and apply the lessons](#). All golf teachers should use Behavioral Golf Instruction with [all](#) students and for transmitting [all](#) types of golf content. The process fixes the many problems I found in my extensive research on the giving, taking and applying of golf lessons.

I base the process on [scientific behavioral procedures](#) found to be effective in thousands of experiments and wide applications in business, education and personal behavior change projects.

When golfers first hear the word "behavioral," [they initially think it means only the mental side of golf, usually the control of the emotions](#). It is far broader than that: [Behavior deals with every physical movement and thought you have in learning, playing and analyzing the game](#).

Much of the golf instruction empire focuses on transmitting [knowledge](#). Behavioral Golf Instruction focuses on producing and sustaining [performance](#). In short, I am interested not just in what teachers and students [know](#), but what their students [do](#) or [fail to do](#). A simple example. Most golfers [know](#) they should align their feet and shoulders parallel to the target line. What do they [do](#)? Most golfers [misalign](#) their feet and shoulders in [directions they neither want nor realize](#). The cause is what virtually all students and teachers fail to do. For answers on aim and alignment, visit by web site [ApplyGolfLessons.com](#).

A few brief words on who Ed Feeney is and why you can have confidence in my tested and proven recommendations. I am an expert in [applying behavior modification to improve business and golf performance](#). In business, I had over 50,000 case histories of measurable improvement in human performance in almost every type of company you can imagine. I appear in a featured role in the film [Business, Behaviorism and the Bottom Line](#) along with Professor B. F. Skinner, who discovered the behavior modification principles through experiments. My web site [ApplyGolfLessons.com](#) offers [free and extensive help to golfers and teachers](#). I give workshops for golf teachers and students in conjunction with the leading golf teaching organizations.

OBJECTIVES FOR BEHAVIORAL GOLF INSTRUCTION

Deciding what the *objectives* are for Behavioral Golf Instruction is similar to deciding what your *destination* is for a vacation.

Then you plan on *how* you will get there and *when*.

Once I set the objectives for Behavioral Golf Instruction, I *worked backwards to define exactly what the teacher and student have to do to meet those golf objectives*. Here are the objectives for Behavioral Golf Instruction:

1. Lower the student's average score.
2. Improve *every* student.
3. Improve the student's performance *immediately*.
4. Sustain the improvement *long term*.

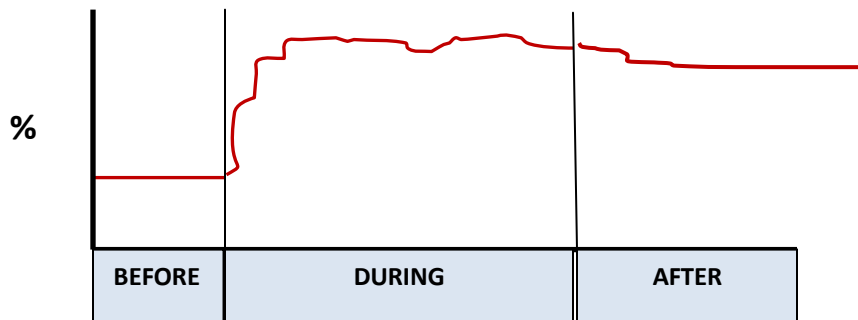
Suppose the stated lesson objective is *not* to lower the average score but to cause the student to hit the ball longer, swing "better," improve results with one club or improve something vague, such as improving "confidence." If the *student's score thereafter remains the same or rises*, you had *better refocus on the objective of lowering average score*.

THE BENEFITS OF BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION

I first encountered Behavior Modification in a workshop conducted at the University of Michigan for people in business. For me, it was *an epiphany*. Everything about the process appealed to me. You could state with greater precision *what behavior change you wanted to initiate, increase, decrease or stop*. You could *measure precisely how often the targeted behavior occurred* before the program started and how much it changed due to the intervention. You could implement the procedures and *measure how often the behavior was occurring on the job* and how much and how soon the behavior increased or decreased, depending on your objective. You learned how often the behavior should be followed by a positive reinforcement and what it took to sustain it long term.

It applied to *all* companies, *all* employees and *all* types of behavior. In almost all cases, *it produced the desired change rapidly, usually immediately, and sustained the behavior for years*. It was understandable and teachable to the average person. But most of all, it *worked virtually everywhere I applied it*. Most of the changes involved giving the other person positive consequences for exhibiting the targeted behavior. Everyone likes rewarding consequences of some type. Even better, it made golf instruction much more effective.

Here is the basic model of many behavior change interventions:



MEASURING TEACHERS IMPACT ON A STUDENT: A “ONE STROKE YEAR”

I would like golf teachers to [judge their effectiveness not in terms of what *they* do or know, but instead on how much their students *measurably* improve](#). There is no better measurement of how much the students improve than [a reduction in average score](#), how [rapidly](#) that occurs and [how long the reduction in score lasts](#).

I believe it is fairer to judge the teacher based on [how his or her students as a group scored after the lessons, how rapidly they improved and how long the improvement lasted versus how the students scored before the lessons](#). There would be [adjustments](#) for differences in age, sex, prior golf experience and the hours of instruction time.

Those are more useful measurements than judging teachers based on [how many books and articles they wrote or how many Cable and TV appearances they made](#). Less useful than measuring a reduction in average score, but very worthwhile, would be the [before-and-after measurements of how a large number of shots stopped in relation to the target during golf rounds](#) when distances and shot conditions were the same.

Thus, the teacher should receive credit for both [how many strokes the students reduced average score, how quickly the students reduced average score and how long the students maintained those reduced scores](#). One measure I came up with to measure this was a “stroke year.” If the student improves by two strokes for one year, I would award the teacher *two stroke years*. If the student lowers score by four shots but only for one quarter of a year (three months), the teacher earns *one stroke year* (4 multiplied by $3/12^{\text{th}}$, or $1/4$ of a year).

“Stroke Year” has a number of [benefits](#) as a measuring tool. It requires the teacher to seek data on the student’s score before the lesson and after it and obtain feedback on the student’s progress for a longer period. It emphasizes the [duration](#) of score reduction, which teachers

rarely, if ever, discuss. It would cause them to suggest methods to [sustain improvement long term](#) in golf instruction articles, book, video and web sites. And it would [increase the amount of contact](#) between the student and the teacher *after* the lessons, which would lead to more lessons, a benefit to both of them.

A leading golf magazine offered recently the best golf tips it offered over many decades, a valuable contribution. However, they did *not* base the selection and ranking on any direct measurement of the improvement in a golfer's score or shots who applied the instruction, as they should have. Instead, they had famous teachers choose the best tips based on such subjective criteria as "[presentation, originality, author prominence, and effectiveness](#)," the latter apparently being a *general* perception, rather than a measured reduction in average score.

BEHAVIORAL GOLF INSTRUCTION

SECTION 1: STEPS BEFORE THE LESSON

I present the Behavioral Golf Instruction steps the teacher and the student should use in two sections. Section 1 lists the steps to take [Before the Lesson](#). Section 2 lists the steps to take [During and After the Lesson](#).

If teachers are to produce maximum effectiveness, they should follow [all](#) the steps in the two sections. That does *not* mean they have to start by using all the steps at once in learning and applying Behavioral Golf Instruction. Every step you use will improve your performance as a teacher and your student's results. To get started, [choose the step you need or like the most and add steps gradually](#).

The first section [Before the Lesson](#) presents [steps you use only on the first lesson](#). Thus, it does *not apply* to students who have taken multiple lessons from you. Nor will most of the steps in the first section apply to students who walk up and want a lesson now.

1. OBSERVE STUDENT'S FULL/PART ROUND BEFORE THE LESSON

I urge teachers to [observe the student playing all or part of a round on the course prior to the first lesson](#). This is in contrast to observing the student hitting shots only in the artificial world of the practice area. The exceptions would be for [beginners](#) and those in [large group lessons](#).



Such on-course observation now occurs prior to the first lesson on about [2% of the targeted students](#). So adopting this procedure will distinguish you in the eyes of your students immediately.

If you are interested in reducing the student's average score, you should [see the problems the student has in scoring](#). You can study the student's real-world scoring problems on the conditions found [on the course, not in a practice area](#). The [practice area typically does not have](#) various lengths of rough and slopes in all directions for the lie. Neither does it have trees, bushes, rocks, water hazards or out of bounds markers. In many cases, it lacks sand bunkers and raised greens with challenging slopes. On the practice range at any given hour, the wind blows in the same general direction, but on the course, it often changes from hole to hole.

We all expect a football coach to be at *every game* his team plays to analyze, instruct and motivate his players. Is it too much to expect a golf instructor to observe the student play *a part of one round once* to analyze where the student can improve?

In practice, the student tends to hit [repetitive shots](#) to the same target, but not on the course. On the course, the student has to [hole out after a bad shot](#), which can lead to frustration, but that is usually absent in practice. Normally, you do not get accurate measurements of distance hit on full shots in the practice area. You [do not see club selection](#). In practice, you may be [hitting off a mat, or hitting indoors without wind or hazards](#).

[2. ALWAYS RECORD DATA WHEN YOU OBSERVE THE STUDENT](#)

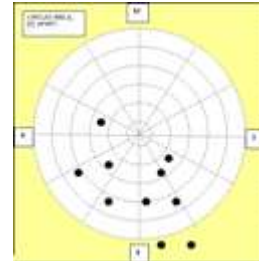
When you observe a student on the course and record data on the student's performance (the next step), the student will typically say, "[You know my game better than I do. No teacher ever took me on the course to see what my game was. I like your approach.](#)" That gives you a strong selling difference over your tradition-bound competitors.

Another reason is that when you see the student fails to score well on the course because of [short-game problems](#), you are more apt to start with lessons on the short game. That will give you another big edge versus your competitors, because [as a group they give 500% more lessons on the long game than on the short game](#). That is ridiculous, because the short game represents 50% or so of the total shots and is the easiest to learn versus the long game.

While on the course, observe the student and [record data on each shot](#). [Do not play golf yourself during the round](#). You will have more than enough to occupy you in observing the student and recording data. However, if [not playing](#) is so punishing for you that it would [cause you not to go on the course, then play](#).

If you **do not have the time** to observe the student playing on the course, or if the student **cannot pay** for your time observing on the course, **use one of these alternatives for observing the student and recording data listed below.** The first two would involve a small fee paid by the student.

1. Have an **assistant** in the pro shop do it.
2. Train a **paid junior or retired senior** to do it.
3. Instruct the **student** how to measure and record data playing one or more rounds.



while

For **free, blank recording forms** (there are **16 different forms**), instruction on how to fill out the form and a **booklet, "How to Measure and Record Golf Performance,"** see my web site ApplyGolfLessons.com. Click on **"Recording Forms"** and on **"Booklet."**

Aside from what the recording forms on my web site, **the reports students normally gather are almost useless.** None of the following tells you anything about how far the student hit the shot, where it landed, how far it stopped from the target and in what clock-hour direction from it and what the directions of ball flight were. **Those virtually useless measurements are** Fairways Hit, Greens hit, Number of Putts Taken, Number of Three-Putt Greens Hit, The Percentage of Up and downs in One Putt from around the green or, separately, from Greenside Sand Bunkers. They may tell you there is a problem, but **not one of them tells you** where the ball stopped on each shot and in what direction from the target, nor in what directions the ball flew or rolled (for a putt) and how far it was hit. Here is what you and the student should record:

SHOT CONDITIONS

- **Starting Distance** to the target.
- **Lie Conditions:** slope directions, type of lie.
- **Target Conditions:** height, slope.
- **Obstacles and Hazards** near the target or ball flight or roll of the ball, such as: water, out-of-bounds area, trees, bushes, rocks, cart paths and roads.
- **Wind:** direction and speed.

GOLF BALL STOPPING POINT

- [Distance](#) from the target.
- [Clock-hour location](#) from the target.

For [free, blank Ball Stopping Point Forms](#), [Ball Flight Direction Forms](#), a filled-out example and an explanation, open my web site ApplyGolfLessons.com, and click on "[Recording Forms](#)" and [Form #9](#).

BALL- FLIGHT DIRECTIONS

- The [initial direction](#) of [ball flight](#).
- The [direction of any later curvature](#) from the initial direction of flight.
- The [right or left](#) direction of the [landing spot in relation to](#) the line from the ball to the target.

For free [Ball Flight forms](#), [a filled-out example and an explanation](#) of it, open my web site ApplyGolfLessons.com, click on "[Recording Forms](#) and [Form #2](#).

On putts, you should record all of most of the following. (Remember, it takes about four hours to play a round, but only ten minutes to hit the shots, so you have far more waiting time to record data on one player's game than you will ever need).

1. PUTTS

PUTT CONDITIONS

- Distance to cup.
- Slope directions to the cup.
- Wind direction and speed direction.
- Speed of greens: Very fast, fast, medium, slow.
- Direction of grain.



PUTT RESULTS

- Sunk **Y** (for yes), or **N** (for no).
 - Missed **A** (Above the curve) or **B** (Below the curve).
 - Missed **R** (right), **L** (left), **O** (on-line).
 - Missed **L** (long), **S** (short), **E** (exactly even distance to the cup).
- As a group, neither the teachers nor the students usually suggest **that lessons focus initially on the part of the game where the student has the largest potential for stroke reduction**. Students typically exhibit a large loss of shots playing **short-game shots**. Short game shots represent at least 50% or more of the shots a player takes. On short-game shots, unlike long game shots, all students can hit the ball far enough. This makes teaching short-game shots more productive than teaching the average player how to hit long shots.

In spite of these facts, long game lessons are **500% more prevalent than short game lessons**. Such a lopsided imbalance is absurd. There are several reasons for this imbalance:

- **Neither the students nor the teachers usually have any useful data** on the student's performance on the course, and the **teachers often have never seen the students play a round on the course**.
- Neither the students nor the teachers have any **data, or the calculation methods** to determine where the **biggest potential is in the student's game for stroke reduction**.
- The students are usually **not accurate in analyzing where the largest potential is** for lowering their average score. They usually choose to try to lengthen their long shots.
- The teachers usually **have the students meet them on the driving range**. **One reason is that is** where they often place valuable video equipment, practice aids and other devices, which they may have to move if they go to the practice putting and chipping greens.

- I recently began to choose a list of the best golf books I have read, which I intend to list on my web site. I suddenly realized that *most of them had no instruction on putting and some not on chipping or hitting sand shots.*

3. CALCULATE HIGHEST POTENTIAL FOR STROKE REDUCTION

It is very important that the teacher guide the student's analysis of what part of the game the student needs to improve to lower average score the most. The reason is that my research shows that few students have either the statistics or the analytical methods to determine which part of the game to improve that will lower their average score the most. The student may have an *opinion* of what will lower score the most, but it is usually wrong.

All golfers want to shoot lower scores and do it consistently. Average score or handicap, and relative scores during competition are the most important and accurate measure of the golfer's performance. It is more important than the increasing the average distance hit with a given club, the accuracy of shots in one part of the game or a pleasing swing form.

The problem is that the student often does not state that lowering score is that important. Quite often, they will ask to hit the ball longer. Woman students, particularly beginners may state, "I just want to have fun and not embarrass myself in front of my (boyfriend/ husband or female friends). An excellent teacher did not want to put pressure on her students who were beginners by discussing score. However, when some of those students attended a workshop I gave, the teacher was surprised at how excited they got when I asked them to set a goal for lowering their average score through instruction.

If a person comes to a pharmacist asking for help with an upset stomach, the pharmacist will offer suggestions. If that same person goes to a doctor with that complaint, the doctor may conduct tests to find that the problem is due to the heart, not the stomach. The doctor produces better results and receives far higher pay.

Here are the questions an instructor should ask every existing golfer:

- What is your average score, handicap or handicap index?
- Considering how much you can play and practice, what would you like your average score to be?

- On your last round, what was your score?
 - How many fairways did you hit?
 - Once you were on the green, how many total putts did you take?
 - (Subtract the total number of putts from the 18-hole score.) So you took 48 shots to get on the 18 greens.
 - How many three-putt greens did you have?
 - How many shots less than 50 yards did you have from off the green? How many of those did you sink with one putt or less?

THE FIRST BEHAVIORAL GOLF INSTRUCTION TEACHER, STUDENT AND RESULTS

Here is an interesting example from Wellington, FL of the first professional teacher, and the first student of that teacher that I worked with in testing and applying Behavioral Golf Instruction. The student asked for help. She said she wanted to reduce the amount of curve to the left she got in hitting four-iron shots. I asked her what her handicap was. She said 22. She proceeded to hit shot after shot about 175 yards with a slight curve to the left and with consistency.

I said to her, “We can help you a bit in hitting those four-iron shots straighter, but you are hitting shots extremely well for a player with a 22 handicap. How is your short game?”

I suspected the answer. She said, “Terrible.”

“If we helped you improve your four-iron shots and, for other reasons, your average score *increased*, would you be happy?” (This “If question, is powerful.)



She said, “No.”

I asked, “Since lowering score is more important to you than hitting better four-iron shots, what do you say to the idea of going to the practice putting and chipping greens and improving your short game?.”

She said, "Great."

When we got there, she hit each chip shot with too short of a backswing and left almost all of her shots far short of the cup. She did the same with putts, the blade going back only a few inches before she began the forward stroke. I suggested she take the club back in proportion to the distance, slope direction and condition of the green. I demonstrated it and moved her putter and arms. Her shot results in chipping and putting improved immediately.

Afterwards, the bright teacher said to me in a tone of admiration, "I would have never have said to her what you did in switching her from a lesson on the irons to the short game." (I found out later, that many teachers would not do this either, even though it improves the student's score. Some teachers believe they should give the student exactly what they ask for, not what would help the most in lowering average score.)

The student lowered her handicap six strokes immediately.

Ten years later, I was giving a workshop for the LPGA in the Northeast Section. In the first row was this same teacher that I had not seen since our work together. I asked her if she remembered the first student we worked with. I told her that I had met the student ten years later when I went in to practice at Bink's Forest, another course in Wellington, FL. The student I formerly taught approached along with seven other golfers, called out my name and announced, "This is Mr. Feeney. He is a wonderful teacher." (It is the *process* that makes this successful, not the teacher, but it is nice to hear a compliment).

She turned to me and said, "I wanted to tell you I am now the *woman's club champion here*."

In summary:

- Attempt to get the student to take a lesson in the area of the game now costing the largest number of extra strokes.
- Do not automatically give the student what they ask for every time. Give them what will lower their score and make them far happier with their game and with you.
- Try to reduce the lopsided industry practice of giving about 500% of the lessons on the long game. In addition, there are 500% more students practicing their long game than practice their short game shots around the practice green.

- Do not assume the student knows what part of the game represents the largest potential for stroke reduction. Most students exaggerate innocently how far they hit shots, so why assume they know where they can reduce their score the most.
- To find out what part of the game represents the largest potential for average score, record data on the student's game that we recommend in the previous section. In addition, ask pointed questions about the number of greens hit, the percentage of ups and downs from under 40 yards, the number of three-putt greens, "two-chips" where the student takes two chips to get on a given green, sand shots that stay in the bunker or fly over it and the number of penalty shots.

If a patient comes to a pharmacist complaining of stomach problems, there will normally be a suggestion to take some simple medicine to alleviate the symptoms. The highly paid doctor, however, has learned not to blindly follow what the patient suggests and may run tests to find that the problem is of a cardiac nature. The doctor is paid more and is worth it. Be a doctor.

4. SEND INSTRUCTION TO STUDY IN ADVANCE & CHARGE FOR IT

Give the student instruction to study in advance of the lesson, or send it via email or package delivery. By doing so, the lesson **improves** because you can spend more time **applying it than teaching it**.

It makes you stand out from your competition. In addition, **you can charge, say, \$5 or \$10** for providing it and handling the transaction.

If you give 500 lessons a year, the extra revenue adds up.



You get this material from a variety of sources. As one source, you can use my web site ApplyGolfLessons.com. It is free. You can refer to [other web sites](#), [magazine articles](#), [books and videos](#) or lesson notes you or others wrote.

As a consultant, I sent out a [sales training course in advance to students](#) that was about three inches thick, big enough to choke a horse. I sent the students a list of [120 potential questions that might be in the test](#), some with a dozen answers each. I told the students their [score would go into their personnel files](#). The [test was in the first half hour of the three-day class](#). Before I sent the material out to study in advance, the class used to take 4.5 days to complete. Now it takes 3.0 days. After sending the training material in advance to study, some students who had never made a sales call in their lives would come in with a score of 100 on the test. [FedEx Ground Service used the sales training program for 25 years](#).

Applying this study-in-advance method to golf, I wrote out a [20-page protocol on how to hit a running chip shot](#). It had everything in it. [How to measure your pre-instruction performance](#) with the supplied [recording forms](#). [How to take your stance](#). [What clubs to hit](#). [Where the club should be held in the grip](#). [How to brush the grass](#) with the clubhead. [How to take the backswing](#). [How to make the forward stroke](#). [How to freeze the club just past impact](#) to see if the back of the leading wrist was straight - the preferred position, rather than bent forward, toward the target. [What the reasons are](#) for each swing behavior. How the student can obtain [self-correcting feedback](#) for each address and swing behavior.

I tried it on [10 students taking individual lessons](#). To my surprise, they [read all of it](#). Not only did they read it, they made [written notes on it](#). Many of them [practiced the swings in their homes in advance of the lesson](#). Others not involved in the lesson would tell me how much their playing partners had improved their chipping by reading the protocol and taking the lesson.

5. EMPOWER STUDENT TO OBTAIN AND APPLY A BETTER LESSON

Golf teachers complain at times about their students. They do not recall the instruction. They do not practice correctly. They expect too much improvement too soon. There are many more unstated problems.

Here is a way to [empower the student](#) by having them read in advance what to say, ask and do to obtain a better lesson. Just go to my web site [ApplyGolfLessons.com](#) and click on "[Written Solutions](#)" and "[Empowerment](#)."

The first teacher I gave it to read the article silently. He put it down and said, "[I wish every student of mine would ask every question you have in Empowerment at every lesson. This ought to be in the PGA of America's Instructor Manual.](#)"

The Empowerment article gives the student the questions to ask and the statements to make to the teacher that makes the lesson far more effective.

For example, the student asks, "[How could we measure my performance before the lesson](#) so we both will know how much I improve with these lessons?"

"[How do I get self-correcting feedback](#) so I can correct my mistakes when you are not with me?"

And many more.

6. GIVE THE STUDENT A SHORT TEST FOR PHYSICAL FITNESS

You may find many students have a physical fitness problem that prevents them, in their present condition from applying your instruction correctly. I suggest you obtain and give each **new student** or **untested existing student** a **short physical fitness test** to give to students to let them discover if they have a problem in making certain swing movements. A sound physical fitness program that you or a physical fitness expert can provide will **make you look like a better teacher to your student and a valuable resource**.



If they cannot afford to pay a physical fitness expert, you can recommend a web site, a video or book that will help provide strength and stretching exercises.

Incidentally, one well-designed experiment that won a \$10,000 prize from a golf association found that seniors increased club speed more by lifting weights, than by stretching. When I read the report of the experiment, I said, "The person who designed this study must have graduated from the U. of Kansas, which has an excellent Psychology department with a strong behavioral bent." Sure enough, he did.

7. BUY LESSONS BEFORE BUYING NEW CLUBS

The question arises as to whether a golfer should purchase new golf clubs. Golf needs to increase the number of players. Therefore, I do not want the projected cost of new clubs to be the barrier that causes a golfing prospect to decide not to play. If the student is a beginner and does not have abundant funds, a new set or even a full set of clubs is not necessary. A few clubs are all that is necessary to begin to learn to play the game.

For example, the student could purchase six or fewer clubs: a putter, a pitching wedge, a seven iron, a five iron, a 5-wood and a driver. Used sets are always available to purchase at low prices. There have been star golfers born into poverty who learned to hit the only club they owned in all sorts of creative ways as a youth.

Here is my advice to an experienced golfer. If you must choose between paying for golf lessons and paying for new golf clubs, always choose lessons.

During a golf lesson, I have seen many students dramatically and immediately improve where their shots fly, roll and stop in relation to the target. I do not recall anyone improving as much or as suddenly by switching to a new club. I have not recorded data on a group of golfers

hitting shots with newly purchased clubs on the range or on the course and compared it to what they did before. Therefore, it is possible that I underestimate the effects of new clubs, but I seriously doubt it.

Because the performance of most golfers does vary widely from round to round, it is possible they could hit a new club farther or closer to the target for a day or more. However, on a longer-term trend basis, I do not see any reduction in average score of consequences for golfers as a group for the last several decades. Meanwhile, golf clubs have improved in design and quality considerably and the number of new clubs golfers purchased over two decades is substantial.

Do new golf clubs improve a student's performance? If an expert fits the clubs to the golfer's stance and swing while using a device such as a Trackman, and the golfer bought the present clubs a long time ago without fitting, the golfer's shots and long game should improve.

New golf clubs can help. For example, I had considerable difficulty trying to avoid a big draw (to the left) with a five-wood I played with several years ago. The clubface looked to the left, which invited a curve to the left. When I bought a new one that setup with a square face, the big draw vanished immediately and rarely emerges.

SUMMARY OF STEPS TO TAKE BEFORE THE LESSON AND THE BENEFITS

Here is a summary of the steps you and the student takes [before the instruction begins](#) and [how it benefits both](#).

1. OBSERVE THE STUDENT'S PART/ FULL ROUND BEFORE THE LESSON

You should [see a student you have never taught before play on the course before the lesson starts, unless they have never played before](#). Your teaching competitors rarely do this. Your competitor has to rely on the student's descriptions of the golfing problems, which are often vague and inaccurate. The student will comment favorably on you looking at his or her performance on the course. You do not need to observe student playing on the course that has never played golf round before. If football, baseball and basketball coaches observe their players at every game, golf coaches can hardly object to seeing their players perform during *one* game, or a part of one.

2. ALWAYS RECORD DATA WHEN YOU OBSERVE THE STUDENT

You have not only observed the student playing a round on the course, you have [recorded precise and accurate data on the student's performance on the course](#) and, later, during the

lesson. This gives you a more accurate picture of the problems. Once again, your teaching competitor has not done this. You have precise data on the student's performance on ball-stopping direction and clock-hour position from the target, ball-flight directions, scoring problems and the shot and target conditions that cause the student to take extra shots.

3. CALCULATE THE HIGHEST POTENTIAL FOR STROKE REDUCTION

You [calculate the highest potential for shot reduction](#). The benefit is that you are then much more likely to work on the area of the game that has the largest potential for reducing average score. Score determines who wins, not distance of drives, or swing form. Long game lessons now are 500% more frequent than short game lessons, which is an absurd ratio.

4. SEND INSTRUCTION TO STUDY IN ADVANCE AND CHARGE FOR IT

You [send the student instruction material to read and/or view in advance of the lesson](#). You charge a small amount for providing the content and for the handling. The result is a better lesson because the student spends the lesson time *applying* the content, not *learning* what the instructional content is. Once again, you gain the respect of your students and stand out from your competition. In addition, you make some extra money.

5. EMPOWER STUDENT TO OBTAIN AND APPLY A BETTER LESSON

In advance of the lesson, give or [send the student my article on Empowerment](#). This tells your student how to ask questions and make statements that result in a better lesson. Once again, your teaching skills stand out from those of your competitors.

6. GIVE THE STUDENT A SHORT TEST FOR PHYSICAL FITNESS

[Give the student a quick physical fitness test before the first lesson](#). This identifies in advance a physical problem that an [expert can modify or correct](#). That change can be a [pivotal factor in the success of your instruction](#).

7. BUY LESSONS BEFORE BUYING NEW CLUBS

To give the student the largest and fastest return on the dollar, encourage the student to spend more money on lessons than on new clubs. Used clubs are fine for a beginner who cannot afford both lessons and new club expenditures. Club fitting with a device like Trackman does produce improved performance.

BEHAVIORAL GOLF INSTRUCTION

SECTION 2 –DURING AND AFTER THE LESSON

1. STATE A MEASURABLE GOAL FOR THE LESSON

There is abundant research proving that students who state a measurable goal for a lesson produce more progress than students who do not state a goal. Such a goal motivates both the student and the teacher. It forces both parties to analyze in advance what specifically they intend to improve, by how much, how soon and with what resources.

Because you and the student state the goal in measurable, observable and objective terms, you can measure progress, which is also motivating and correctional. It should contain average score (or handicap index) as a key measure. If score increases, it is an indication that you may not be focused on what is causing the most extra strokes, or it may be that the instruction is not clear, not recalled or not being transferred onto the course.

The goal should state a timetable. It should include what the student is to input, such as the number of lessons the student will take, the number of practice balls the student will hit and the number of rounds the student will play within a given time period.

The problem is that I rarely heard any legitimate goals stated in the hundreds of lessons I observed teachers give. Here are some typical word-for-word examples I heard:

- "Just give me something to work on." (This is as vague as it gets).
- "I have lost all confidence in hitting a three-wood from the fairway." (You cannot measure confidence directly, "Congratulations, your confidence rose 6.7 %.")
- "I am not hitting my longer irons very well." (Not specific as to what the performance is now or what it will be and when or what the student will do to improve it).
- "My putting is terrible." (In this student's statement, there is no data presented on the percentage of putts sunk by distance versus a measurable standard. There is no information on the shot conditions the golfer faced on the putts missed, such as distance, direction of slopes or wind conditions. There is no information on the percentage of putts left short or missed more right or left and above or below the curve to the cup).

2. STUDENT LEARNING STYLES

The PGA and the LPGA both urge their teachers in advance of the lesson to ask the students how they best learn. Once the teachers [know how the students best learn, the teachers present the lesson using that mode of instruction](#). It seems such a simple and logical way to improve instruction.

Alas, there are several problems.

Golfers, like all human beings, are [inaccurate observers of their own performance](#). If they are inaccurate in their impressions about how they *play* golf and their cumulative performance on specific type of shots, why would they be accurate in stating how they *learn* the game?

To ask someone who has a 30 handicap, has played golf for 30 years, has taken 30 lessons, read 30 golf books and has watched 300 golf tournaments on TV and Cable how he best learns is an oxymoron. That golfer has learned little, if anything.

[Professor Daniel Willingham](#), Professor of Psychology at the University of Virginia, [researches the effectiveness of educational programs](#). He is the author of the book, "Why Kids Hate School." He writes that there is [no scientific evidence that learning increases when the students receive instruction in their preferred format](#), as opposed to receiving instruction in a number of other formats.

Golf teachers are probably not surprised that their students do not *really* know what the best format is for them in learning golf instruction, though the students often state their opinion. For example, all golf instructors know [students typically exaggerate how far they hit a particular club, often by 20 yards or more](#). They are inaccurate in [observing on a cumulative basis where their shots stop in relation to a target](#). They do not realize what a high percentage of their putts they [miss on the low side of the curve](#) to the cup.

I have asked golf superstars what their performance is in the absence of receiving accurate feedback. [When they do not receive timely and accurate feedback, the superstars are terribly inaccurate](#), which is probably a surprise to all of their fans. It is not a surprise to me, because I asked thousands of people what their performance was in business when they did not receive speedometer-type feedback. [Eighty percent would innocently overestimate their performance, often wildly so](#).

My consultants and I have about 50,000 case histories in business alone. We commonly asked people what they thought their performance was after we had gathered the performance data and we knew exactly what it was. The amount of their innocent, but exaggerated, estimates is amazing and amusing.

For another reason, golfers, with the rarest exceptions, have [never been involved in any educational experiment to test scientifically which educational format causes them to learn more](#).

Because I had to design and install extensive training programs in many large corporations, I was a walking encyclopedia of how people learned or failed to learn. The reason that I had a huge amount of data was that [I had measurable objectives for what the student was to learn](#). Then I had written proof of what they did or did not learn. I would work long hours on some simple training matter and think I had the instruction clearly presented, but when I tested it, as I always did, [I found they some had not learned](#). [I had to redo it until everyone got the answer right](#).

Here is some of what I learned about how people learn in business, but mostly in learning to play golf. They learn by [reading](#). They learn by [observing](#). They learn by trying something and [obtaining immediate and accurate feedback](#). They learn when they make a correct or improved response and a positive consequence follows immediately. In golf, they learn when someone [guides their club and body](#) movements. There is virtually no one, other than those with a sensory problem, who have failed to learn at least some of the time by [all](#) of those methods.

[Does it hurt to ask how the students prefer to learn?](#) [No](#). It makes the students a bit [more comfortable](#) in receiving instruction in the format they personally prefer. [However, does it increase how much they learn?](#) [No](#).

3. STUDENT NOTE TAKING

This section concerns itself with the research on [how much the student forgets of the lesson content as early as the end of the lesson](#). Then it gives you a process that [increases the student's retention](#) of the lesson content at the end of the lesson [by 2 to 10 times as much as the student normally recalls and increases the long-term retention by even greater ratios](#). [This one process alone](#) in Behavioral Golf Instruction [can sharply increase your impact](#) on the student's performance.

This section also improves [what](#) you communicate, [when](#) you communicate it and [how well](#), as measured by student comprehension and by student performance.

My research reveals that [as early as the end of the lesson, the students cannot recall 50% to 90% of the lesson content](#). Please [reread and remember](#) that last sentence. As each week passes, the students [forget a higher percentage](#) of the content. If the students cannot recall the bulk of the content, they will be [unable to apply](#) the content during practice and rounds played. That is like pulling an SUV up to a gas tank and spilling 30 gallons on the ground.



About 18% of the [teachers write lesson notes](#) at the [end of the lesson](#) and give them to the students. That sounds like it would be a solution to the student forgetting the content. It definitely is better than neither party writing lesson notes, but is not as effective as the student taking immediate written notes during the lesson. There were [three reasons why I found this to be true](#):

1. Because the teachers write the notes [at the end of the lesson](#), they [forget](#) they delivered much of the content.
2. Many teachers [want to make their instruction seem simpler](#) than it is. Thus, they [knowingly omit](#) much of the details in their notes.
3. Some of the teachers [use such a small piece of paper](#), such as a very [small post-it note](#) that they cannot enter anything but a few words from a lesson, which often is an hour in length. One teacher I observed [wrote only the following words](#) after the lesson, "Remember: grip, stance, aim and alignment." What the student should do in each of those four areas of the address position is not evident.

Student note taking is a solution which has worked well for over seven years. I designed, tested and proved its ability to [increase sharply the amount of content the student recalled](#) and, more importantly, [applied over many years](#) to improve the student's game.

Here is [how student note taking works](#) that causes the student to recall virtually all of the lesson content for many years:

[PROVIDE THE STUDENT WITH A NOTEPAD, PEN AND ZIP LOCK BAG](#)

- Just moments before the instruction starts, the teacher provides the student with [a sturdily bound notepad, a pen and a zip lock bag](#). (You want a sturdily bound notepad to prevent the wind from tearing off a soon-disappearing page.)
- As the teacher hands the package to the student, the [teacher says](#) something like this, "Research by Ed Feeney reveals that [students do not recall 50% to 90% of the lesson content as early as the end of the lesson](#) and the student forgets even more content later. [That is like pulling an SUV up to a gas tank and spilling 30 gallons on the ground.](#)"
- "I urge you to drop your club and [write lesson notes within 60 seconds of me](#) stating instruction, demonstrating it or positioning and moving your club or body. Also make golf notes of what you think, feel and hear."

[THE STUDENT TAKES NOTES](#)

- To [prompt](#) the student to start writing the notes [the first three times the teacher initiates a small amount of instruction](#), the teacher picks up the pad and [hands it to the student](#). "I believe this is a good time to make written notes."

- The teacher says, “It is better to **write full sentences** than only write **key words** now. That is because you might remember the missing words now, but in a few days it is easy to forget them. (Students have a tendency to skip writing words they recall *then*, but forget *later*.)
- State the notes **as s...l...o...w...l...y** as you might write them. Most teachers **talk much faster than students write**, which leads to **omissions** in the notes.

THE STUDENT REPEATS NOTES FOR YOU TO ADD, CORRECT AND DELETE

- The **teacher needs feedback** that the student **wrote the notes correctly and completely**. The teacher says after the **first**, early note, “**Please repeat back only the words you wrote. It is better not to adlib words not on the page. That is because students might remember the missing words now, but in a month it is easy to forget them.**”
- In most such interchanges, the teacher adds more notes, corrects his or her statement of instruction, and/or causes the student to delete certain words or phrases.
- The teacher **praises the student** for any of these three behaviors (a) **picking up the pad** to take notes **without prompting**, (b) **repeating back only the words on the page**, (c) writing **the content correctly and** (d) **making any favorable comment** on taking notes. The **purpose** of frequent and specific praise **is to increase those behaviors in the future**.
- The teacher should say, “By taking notes, **we will hit fewer shots during the lesson**. However, it is **better to take the notes now and recall all of the content for years**, than to hit a few more practice shots **now** and be **unable to recall** big chunks of the content **for the rest of your career**.”

STORE LESSON NOTES IN THE GOLF BAG

- At the end of the lesson, the teacher should say, “**Let us put the notes in your golf bag now** so they will be available every time you practice and play a round of golf.” The teacher **should see the student put the notes in the golf bag**. When the student puts the notes in the golf bag, the teacher should **praise that behavior**.

REREAD LESSON NOTES BEFORE PRACTICE AND ROUNDS

- At the end of the lesson, the teacher should prompt the student, “At the next lesson, I will ask you whether you read the notes before and during practice sessions and rounds played. If so, what, if anything, did it help you to recall.” This makes it more likely that the student will read the notes.

- The teacher then asks at the next lesson whether the student read the notes before or during practicing and playing. If the student did read the notes, the teacher praises that behavior.

4. DECIDE ON WHAT PART OF THE GAME TO START LESSONS

Many instructors start the first lesson with beginners on the practice range hitting full shots, usually with more lofted irons. Another alternative is for the teacher to start by explaining the swing in a sequence-of-swing process: grip, address stance, takeaway, cocking of the wrists, move to the top of the swing, start of the downswing, impact, past impact with the club horizontal to the ground and the finish of the swing. The teacher may ask the student to emulate each part of the swing, one at a time, and string it on the end of the last partial sequence.

If the teacher is giving a lesson to a more experienced golfer, the lesson often starts with the golfer hitting the club the student that is causing problems. If the player is having problems with ball flight on iron shots, the traditional teacher often starts with full shots.

A number of teachers start beginners differently, on putting or chipping.

MY RECOMMENDATIONS OF WHAT TYPE OF SHOT TO HIT FIRST

Here is where I urge teachers to start the lesson, depending on the experience of the golfer and the expressed problem or need of the student:

RANK BEGINNERS

- For rank beginners, I urge all teachers to begin the first lesson with one-foot putts, meet a measurable standard for putts sunk by distance and work backwards very gradually on putts as to distance up to about 60 feet. Then, present short putts with curves, and move to longer putts as the student meets measurable standards for putts sunk by distance. The reason is that the student is likely to knock the short putt in the hole, which is enormously useful in building confidence of a player who has no idea of whether he possesses the needed skills.

EXPERIENCED GOLFERS

- For more experienced players, I believe the teacher should work on the area of the game offering that player the largest potential for reducing average score. That is because any reduction in average score that occurs quickly is a strong motivation for the student to take more lessons. Ideally, that should be based not on what the

[student says](#) is the biggest problem, but on [data collected](#) on [observing the student playing one or more rounds](#).

As teachers know so well, [students' impressions of what the largest potential is for reducing the most strokes](#) in the average round [is suspect](#). Students often overestimate how far they hit each club by wide margins. Many students are inaccurate in even telling the teacher what their predominant ball-flight pattern is. As for a few other examples, they have no records of the percentage of putts they sink by distance or how many curving putts miss on the high side or the low side of the cup.

- Whether the problem is lack of distance, an errant ball-flight pattern or inconsistency, the teacher should [start the first lesson with the student hitting short shots](#), such as 20- to 30- yard chip or pitch shots. That, of course, assumes the largest potential for shot reduction problem is not putting.
- There are two reasons for hitting 20 to 30-yard chip or pitch shots. One, based on the three problems described, the student has to be hitting the ball at impact incorrectly. Two, students learn little if anything, or they hit too many bad shots before they improve - if they improve at all, [by taking a full swing at full speed on a long shot](#).

TEACH IMPACT FIRST

Regardless of what shot the teacher and student decide to hit first, the teacher must ask internally, "On that type of shot, what do [I teach first](#)?" What is most important in every shot? The [impact of club and ball is the most important element](#).

The [slightest](#) variation in any of these elements affects the ball

- The [direction the clubface faces at impact](#).
- The [path of the clubhead at impact as would be seen by someone looking down directly over the ball](#).
- The [speed of the clubhead at impact](#).
- The [impact point of the ball in relation to the so-called "sweet spot" on the clubface](#).
- The [effective loft angle of the club](#), which is a combination of the manufactured angle of the clubface and the change in angle of that clubface caused by where the grip is to the clubface at impact and the bending of the shaft at impact.



flight:

In contrast, [there can be considerable variation](#) in the grip, stance, takeaway, downswing and finish position [and still have the ball fly to the same spot](#).

START THE INSTRUCTION FOR EVERY SHOT AT IMPACT

Therefore, I urge teachers to **start** the instruction by explaining and demonstrating impact, *even for a beginner*, by **stating and demonstrating where the clubface and clubhead should be moving at impact** in relation to the ball, ground and body.

When I ask a student what caused the ball to fly to where it did, almost all of them will mention some movement, or lack of it, in the **body**. They **rarely mention the only element that hits the ball – the clubhead**. Yet the student improves faster by focusing on what the ball flight was, or the roll of a putt, and analyzing backwards to the cause: the movement of the clubface and clubhead at impact.

That is why it is valuable to **start** the first lesson by demonstrating and describing where the club should move at impact with the ball. The main emphasis should be on the **club movement at impact, not the body movement**.

Once the students know **where the club should move at impact, they automatically assume many of the desired body movements without any instruction, or less instruction**.

Evidence shows that in the post-shot analysis, such students **analyze more carefully the direction(s) of ball flight in relation to a narrow target**. They **apply ball flight laws to tell them where the club movement was at impact**. They then decide immediately **to continue or change the direction of the clubhead at impact**. **Thus, they do not concern themselves overly with hundreds of body movements, which usually have minimum effect on ball flight**. They report on how much **simpler the game is by focusing on club movement at impact**. More importantly, they demonstrate **straighter and more on-target ball flight**.

TEACH AND PROMPT STUDENTS TO OBSERVE, DIAGNOSE AND CORRECT BALL FLIGHT

All players should **observe where the ball goes in relation to a narrow target**. They should know what movement of the club at impact caused the ball to fly or roll where it did. They should **have a correct plan for changing or continuing that clubhead movement at impact on the next swing**. It is the **most important process in the game**.

Unfortunately, my research shows that **only 10% of golfers at the driving range of golf courses told me accurately what caused their ball flight to go where it did on five consecutive shots**. That is like a school bus driver not knowing the bus turns right when they turn the steering wheel in a clockwise direction.

If it is that important and the industry has not gotten this across to golfers with the crescendo of instruction media at our disposal, I believe we should **start the instruction with both beginners and existing golfers on this impact process**. This applies to **lessons on putts, chips shots and full shots**.

Here is a key point: You cannot just *tell* the students the rules of ball flight and *hope* they recall the rules and apply them. Instead, the student's responses applying them tell you if the student knows ball-flight rules.

We must have all students *apply* the process *on every shot hit in the lesson*. We will know they are *applying the process correctly or not* by having the *students state aloud after every shot what they saw, concluded and planned in club movement at impact for the next shot*. We will know whether it is working by *five* pieces of *feedback*.

1. Was the *direction they said their shot started and later curved* in relation to the *narrow target correct?* (Initially, they are often incorrect as to where they say they saw the ball fly and will need considerable feedback on this to observe accurately.)
2. After mentally applying ball flight laws, was their statement correct as to *where their clubface was looking at impact and in what direction the clubhead was moving at impact?*
3. In relation to the intended ball flight directions *on the next shot*, were they *accurate* in stating *where they intended the clubface to look at impact and the direction they wanted the clubhead to move at impact?*
4. Were they able to hit each basic type of ball flight in the direction they called for in advance of the shot? (There are *nine* basic ball-flight directions. Three starting directions: left, straight and right. Then, three curves on each of those three starting directions, curve left, right or go straight on each of the three starting directions.
5. After the shot, did they state the reason for the ball flight as a movement of the *body* (*which is not the direct cause and, in most cases, is either incorrect or a weak reason for it*), or, *as desired*, as a movement of the club*face* and club*head* at impact?

As soon as the *beginner starts hitting short putts, chip shots or full shots*, there is nothing more important than teaching the beginner how to *observe* the roll or flight of the ball, *diagnose* what caused the ball to go where it did and *correct* any problems on the next shot(s).

The teacher should tell the student to:

- *Select a narrow target* of a *foot or less* for observing ball flight direction. Do this for every shot hit during *lessons, practice sessions and rounds*. (The landing target can be wider).
- *Observe and state aloud the direction of every shot's initial flight and later curvature in relation to the narrow target*. During the lesson, the student state this *aloud* to give the

teacher feedback. (Many students are initially inaccurate in their observations of ball flight directions in relation to the narrow target.)

- [Apply ball flight laws](#) to determine the direction the clubface was looking at impact and the direction of the clubface at impact.
- [State aloud after every shot](#) in the lesson, and silently during practice sessions and rounds, what change, if any, to make in the direction of the clubface and clubhead at impact.
- [Repeat the process on the following shot.](#)

The emphasis should be on the student assessing in what direction the clubface and clubhead were moving [at impact](#), [not what the body is, or is not, doing at impact](#). This greatly [simplifies](#) what the student has to [think about](#) and leads to much [faster and more accurate correction](#) than when the student is thinking about hundreds of combinations of body movements.

The teacher's role is to:

- Tell the student to [observe, analyze and correct ball flight on every shot in practice sessions and rounds played.](#)
- Should the student stop doing it [during the lesson, the teacher prompts the student to resume.](#)
- Provide accurate feedback if the student does not observe, analyze or plan the movement of the clubhead correctly on the next shot.
- [When the student does the following, praise:](#)
 - Chooses a [narrow target](#).
 - [Observes ball flight correctly.](#)
 - Applies [ball flight laws correctly.](#)
 - Correctly states the [plan of correction for the next shot.](#)
 - [Actually improves ball flight](#) on the next shots.

CLUB-AND-INSTINCT INSTRUCTION

Here is a great way to have the students exhibit correct or nearly correct body positions and movements instinctively and immediately– with little instruction on where the parts of the body should move or position themselves. I named this “***Club-and-Instinct***” Instruction

The key concepts are these:

IT IS THE CLUBFACE, NOT THE BODY

- The clubface is the only element in the swing that impacts the ball. With the same ball, club, lie and weather conditions, the slightest variation in club movement, speed, angle of attack and impact point on the club produces a different ball flight.
- In contrast, there can be considerable variations in body movements and still have the same ball flight. Golf teachers do not agree on what the best body movements are. Star golfers vary in their body movements. Therefore, the club movement at impact is far more important than body movement.
- Golf instruction focuses far too much on body movements and not enough on club movement. Therefore, instruction should focus immediately on club movement at impact and far less on body movement.
- When I ask golfers on a practice range to tell me what caused the last shot to fly where it did, they usually mention some body movement they think they made or failed to make. They infrequently mention the only element in the system that hit the ball - club movement at impact.

INSTINCTIVE MOVEMENTS

If I drop something accidentally, I am amazed at how often my hand catches the object in midair before it falls to the ground. It happens so fast that I am unable to think about what to do; I just do it. The other day, an object on the way down bounced against my hand about four times and behind me, at an angle that I could not see it. Yet I caught it. This is a common experience with most people. Could we harness the instinctive and lightning fast mind and body to simplify golf instruction and produce better and faster improvement in students?

CLUB-AND-INSTINCT INSTRUCTION EXAMPLES

I tried what I call “***Club-and-Instinct***” instruction with excellent results with students. Here are some examples:

IMPACT

For example, you could start the instruction, even with a beginner, with the impact position of the club. You hold the grip end of the club ahead of the ball and with the

bottom grove of the club at right angles to the intended starting line. Call the attention of the student to the position of the grip being ahead of the ball and the blade square. Then, the student will instinctively puts his hands on the club with no forward bend in the leading wrist, the weight is on the left leg, the hips are turned, the right shoulder is below the left. All this occurs without instruction.

- I call these positions “[approximations.](#)” They are usually close approximations of what you want and some will be perfect.
- Praise the student strongly and in very specific terms for every position or movement that is perfect or a close approximation of what you want. Do not tell the student what he may have done incorrectly. Instead, tell him to make specific minor adjustments or, more effectively, move his body in the specific direction you communicate verbally or by positioning his body.

PAST IMPACT

Hold the club in midair past the intended impact spot with the shaft horizontal to the ground and parallel to the intended starting line. The clubface points up and at the distance the student should extend it straight to the target. Ask the student to grasp the club while you also hold the student’s right shoulder down and back.

The student’s right arm immediately extends straight. The right shoulder is well below the left shoulder. The hips are turned. The weight is on the left leg. If you pull the club toward the target while holding the student’s right shoulder back, the student feels the pull of his right arm and the club, a correct feeling. These are all excellent body positions and they occur immediately or quickly, with little if any instruction.

When you ask the student to replicate this, they immediately position the club in the correct position and their body seems to fall into correct or nearly correct positions. There is little if any instruction, either verbally or by positioning the student’s body.

Very quickly, [the student extends his right arm horizontal to the ground, straight and extended](#) considerably. In a few trials, the student is making this move through impact that resembles more closely a Tour player than a beginner. It is once again, the benefits of positioning the club where it should be and letting the student automatically move the body correctly with minimum or no “body” instruction.

BENEFITS OF CLUB-AND-INSTINCT INSTRUCTION

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The benefits are as follows:

- It produces more student improvement per lesson hour.

- It reduces the amount of instruction the student must remember.
- It enables the student to self-correct faster and more accurately and reduces the percentage of golfers who “could not take it to the course.”
- It causes a decline in students who quit the game or reduce the amount of rounds they play due to their belief that “The game is too hard to learn.” It also reduces the students who quit because they mistakenly think they have no talent for the game.
- The golfers report that the game seems simpler.
- The instructor develops more business from referrals of satisfied golfers.
- In a post-shot analysis, they only have to look at the ball flight in relation to a narrow target, which tells them where at impact the clubface was and where the clubhead path was. Traditional students have to speculate on what body movements caused the shot to go where it did, and they are usually wrong.
- When you ask traditional golfers to tell you where the clubface was looking at impact and what direction the clubhead was moving at impact, 10% can tell you accurately. We teach and have the student apply ball flight laws after each shot to check the accuracy of their observation and analysis. As a result, they become very accurate in stating what direction the clubface was looking at impact and the direction of the clubhead was moving at impact. More important, their shots fly straighter.

START AT THE POINT WHERE THE SWING CHANGE BEGINS

Before the instruction starts, decide on the *exact point where the targeted change in the student's swing begins*. You want to identify that *precise starting point* so that you can *begin the demonstration there*. This is the starting place where you begin to *move the student's body and club* in a different direction or sequence. Communicating the *exact* starting point for the swing change helps the student to *see and feel* when it occurs and to emulate it sooner and more precisely. This *works far better than demonstrating a complete swing* and hoping or assuming the student will see where the change begins and ends.

For example, you might want to demonstrate to the student in ultra slow motion that the *starting point of the downswing with a driver is a move of the left hip an inch or two to the left* while the club is still going back to the top of the backswing. Then, you begin the rotation of the left hip around with no more movement of the hips forward.

5. HOW GOLFERS LEARN OR FAIL TO LEARN

I list here how golfers learn or fail to learn. I do not say all of the ways golfers learn are equally effective.

- Golfers learn a new position or movement **fastest when the teacher positions and moves the student's club and body.**
- They also learn **when a practice aid positions or moves their club or body**, though a little less so than when the teacher does it, because of an inability to communicate.
- Golfers learn by observing the instructor in person make a demonstration of the swing or position, especially if;
 - The demonstration is in **ultra slow motion (more than ten seconds for the complete swing)**.
 - The teacher **simultaneously verbalizes** the change.
 - The teacher **repeats the same process several times**.
 - The demonstration **starts where the change in the swing begins** and ends where any change ends, say from the top of the downswing to impact.
- Golfers learn by **hearing a swing change described or reading the instruction** when:
 - The teacher explains the instruction clearly, avoiding **golf jargon, vague words, subjective rating scales (faster, more, better, etc.)**.
 - Photographs and diagrams accompany the explanation.



However, this process usually lacks any individual self-correcting feedback system, which greatly weakens its usefulness.

- Golfers learn by **contrasting right from wrong**, when the teacher highlights the difference and contrasts the difference **in close proximity in terms of location and/or time**.
- Golfers learn by **attempting to apply it and having some device or person tell them whether and to what degree they are doing it correctly**. **They learn far more when they can provide this feedback accurately themselves**.
- Golfers learn by making an active response the instruction suggests, rather than passively watching or listening. I have seen a few instructors talk for 30 to 60 minutes without asking the student to do anything but listen passively. Their body language indicated they were probably bored. Since they made no golf response, there was no proof of any learning.

- They learn more when the same or similar on-course stimuli situations found on the course are presented in the lesson, especially for shots costing the player extra strokes (e.g., a four-inch height of grass where the ball lies and a 60-foot-wide body of water in front of the green).
- Golfers learn more when the teacher breaks the change into [small shaping steps](#) of improvement and the students are to master those steps one at a time.
- Golfers learn from receiving timely and accurate data on their cumulative performance on where their shots with a certain club or from a given distance range stop in relation to the target. In the case of putts, they learn from data showing where their cumulative missed putts from a given distance rolled and stopped in relation to the cup.
- Golfers learn when they record data on their performance and compare it to past performance or a measurable standard.
- Golfers learn by writing immediate instruction notes as soon as the teacher provides new instruction and re-reading them *often* before and during practice and rounds played.
- Golf web sites offer videos to view, many of them without charge. That potentially is a great resource. However, in most videos you see [only one person on the video](#) - either a highly rated teacher on the video explaining how to hit the shot or a star golfer. It is the "[Missing Persons Golf instruction](#)." Who is [the missing person? The student!](#) It is as if the [only variable is the information on how to swing](#). How to get the student to [understand, recall, apply and sustain](#) the instruction correctly is totally missing and those are the critical, more difficult and more time-consuming elements. It is like the one-way communication in a golf book or magazine.
- My research shows that golfers learn very little – most learn nothing - looking at a great player swing in person, or from a photograph or video of that golfer. That is because (a) [they do not know what to look for](#) in the club or body movement, (b) they do not know how to describe in measurable, observable and objective terms what little they do observe and (c) they do not have a system for recalling it long term.

I took a large, color photograph of Tiger Woods when his club was past impact and horizontal to the ground after a long iron shot. I used a photograph, because, unlike a video, they would all be looking at the same image of the swing at one point in the swing.

With only one golfer in the room at any one time, I asked 25 golfers of a typical range of handicaps [what they saw in Tiger's swing](#). [Their comments were almost all vague](#): "That is a powerful swing." "That is a good swing."

Rarely would a golfer mention a particular part of the body, its angular relationship to another body part, to the ground or to the ball position before impact. I do not recall anyone stating what the angle of one part of the body was to another. There was a slight tendency for the lower handicap golfers to mention more of what they saw and to be a bit more specific.

Hearing what they said, I could not imagine what, if anything, they would try to emulate or how they could do it being so vague. It is no wonder that golfers have seen stars swing tens of thousands of times on TV, often in slow motion, and yet when the student goes to swing, they fall all over themselves trying and failing to emulate anything remotely close to how the stars swing.

- Golfers learn from trial and error, but usually slowly. There are so many variables in the swing and they are often unaware of whether, and to what degree, the variables changed in a swing. The result is they frequently cannot link accurately the results of a shot to the variable(s) that caused it.
- Golfers do not learn much from looking at their ball flight because only 10% of the golfers on a practice range can tell me accurately for five consecutive shots where the clubface direction was at impact or where the direction of the clubhead was. The great majority do not know what the ball flight laws are that are the cause of ball flight.
- They learn to repeat a swing change when a positive consequence occurs repeatedly when they exhibit that swing correctly. Those positive consequences can be a longer or straighter shot, a better ball flight, shots stopping consistently closer to the cup, a better feel of impact or its sound, favorable comments by their teacher or playing companions, a lower score, winning a match, or positive measurement from a practice aid.

WHAT VIDEO CAN AND CANNOT DO

Many golfers say they learn a lot about their swing on video. What they learn is that they have a specific problem, which they may not have known before. The teacher often gains credibility in the student's mind because the teacher may have told them about the problem before, but the student could not see or feel it. In addition, video offers benefits because the teacher can identify swing problems by watching them in ultra slow motion or in stop action that would be difficult to detect when watching a full, fast swing without video.

However, I am not impressed with how much desired *swing change* occurs *and* how much the golfer sustains because of video. Here is why.

- One, the video now is *two dimensional*, though it will change in the future to be three-dimensional.
- Two, the viewpoint of the camera is *what an observer would see, not what the student sees as he or she makes the swing, which would be instructive.*
- Three, *during the lesson, I observe the teacher viewing the video, or both of them, for long periods. The best teaching occurs when the teacher is moving and positioning the student's club and body.*
- Four, *students cannot easily view the video when they practice and play a round, which is when they most often need it.*
- Five, *it is hard to find the exact spot on the video when the teacher mentions a key point, where written notes are more quickly scanned.*
- Six, *many students tell me they have never viewed a video a golf teacher gave them or did so only once, which is not enough to create or sustain change.*

6. BREAK CHANGE INTO SMALL-ADVANCE SHAPING STEPS

A behavior-change process called “*shaping*” has magical effects for the improving the student, whether a beginner, experienced golfer or superstar.

- Shaping gets all students to apply a targeted golf behavior accurately, sooner and long term.
- It also helps the student *restore* the desired golf behavior should it temporarily deteriorate later.
- It also reduces a lot of frustration students experience in trying to apply a new swing behavior, because the student usually sees improvement much sooner when the teacher uses shaping techniques.
- It improves every student, no matter how seemingly hopeless their previous teachers thought they were.

When you see animals, such as dolphins, due complex tricks, the technique used is a combination of specifying precisely what the change is to be, using small-step behavioral shaping techniques and applying positive reinforcement (more on that later).

Shaping a student's golf swing is similar to what a sculptor does in creating a bust of someone's head. The sculptor starts with a glob of clay and slowly begins to shape, say, the person's forehead, then, the top of the head. Then, the sculptor continues on the right side of the face, followed by the left side. A nose gradually appears, followed by the eyes. Then the mouth and so on.

For golf beginners, I urge the teachers and students to start always with one-foot putts and without any curve in the green at that point. The student is likely to see putts go immediately into the hole. They always exhibit a big smile. First impressions have a big effect. The beginner or teacher should never start by trying to hit full shots with any club, even a short-distance club like a wedge.

SHAPING THE STUDENT'S BALL FLIGHT

What does a golf teacher do to shape a student's behavior? Here are the key steps, which I have applied to an example of correcting ball flight, probably the biggest problem in golf. The golfer always improves ball flight with this approach, unless someone skips essential steps.

Most golfers have various, and often chronic, ball-flight problems. The ball curves in all directions or persistently in one direction too much. The ball does not get up into the air and rolls on the ground all of the way. The ball shanks way to the right at a sharp angle. The golfer is hitting the ground behind the ball. The ball goes in all sorts of directions, with no consistency.

For all of those ball-flight problems, the direct cause is in the clubhead and clubface movement at impact. The focus should be on the club movement at impact, not the body positions and movements.

- The clubface at impact is not looking directly at the line the golfer wants to start the shot.
- The clubhead at impact is not moving on the line you want to start the shot.
- The clubhead is making impact too high on the ball, causing the ball to roll on the ground.
- The clubhead is hitting the ground before impact with the ball.

The clubhead movement is far more important in affecting ball flight than body movement. There can be considerable variation in body movement and still produce the same ball flight. In contrast, the slightest variation of the clubhead movement at impact – only one mile an hour difference in clubhead speed or one degree of difference in face angle - produces a different ball flight.

Yet after observing an undesired ball flight on their last shot, my research reveals almost all golfers speculate that the cause of the problem was some *body movement they did or did not make*. They fail to mention the only *direct cause* – an incorrect direction of the clubface at impact or, a lesser problem, the misdirection of the clubhead at impact.

If the problem in your ball flight is due to the direction at impact of the clubface and the clubhead, *how do you change their movements at impact?* Most golf students and many teachers often have the student try to change ball flight by *swinging a long club, such as a driver, at full speed and at full motion*. That usually does not work, or if it does, only after the student has to watch a very large number of shots fly in all directions. That experience causes some golfers to stop playing golf or change teachers.

The reason is at the top of the swing the clubhead momentarily stops. In just one-fifth of a second, the clubhead is going 80 to 115 miles per hour at impact. That is *20 times faster than a Ferrari can accelerate*. At such extreme clubhead speeds at impact, *students cannot feel, control, evaluate or change the clubface and clubhead direction*. If they do, they are unusual indeed.

THE SHAPING STEPS IN CHANGING BALL FLIGHT

The *answer to correcting ball-flight problems* with every golfer is to use behavioral shaping procedures. Here are the *shaping steps*:

1. Tell the student that the ball curves in the direction the clubface is looking at impact. The direction the clubhead is moving at impact affects the direction the ball starts. However, the clubface direction at impact has about twice the effect on initial direction as the clubhead direction has.
2. Break the one swing change into *multiple, small shaping steps* of improvement.
3. Make the *first shaping step so easy* to perform that the student is almost certain to do it correctly and immediately, or quite soon.
4. State a *measurable standard for each shaping step*, such as having five shots in a row land within a right or left deviation equal to 10% of the original distance to the target.

Example: On a 20-yard chip shot, the ball must land within 10% of the total distance, either right or left of the target line, which would be two (2) yards either right or left.

5. Tell the student to meet or exceed the measurable standard [in order to advance to the second shaping step](#) and each successive one.
6. [Make each shaping step only a small advance](#) from the last one that this student is virtually sure to meet or exceed. (If the student meets the standard at 20, 40, and 60 yards, discourage the student from jumping shaping steps by trying to hit the driver to a target 250 or more yards away. With rare exceptions, [that big jump in target distance never works](#)).
7. Suppose the student [fails](#) to meet the standards after hitting three sets of five shots each. Do [not](#) have the student hit five more shots at the same target distance. Instead, break the shaping step into a [smaller advance, such as hitting to a target 15 yards away](#). [As an option, have the student go](#) back to the [last shaping step](#) the student executed correctly and have the student [repeat it](#). Meet the standard and resume the one-step-at-a-time increase in shaping steps.
8. After another errant shot, the student is likely to [speculate again that a body movement caused the ball-flight problem](#), while omitting any comments about club movement at impact. Just redirect the student's focus back to analyzing and correcting club movement at impact.
9. Provide and [highlight positive consequences](#) for each new or continued improvement. That includes the student observing – and noticing - straighter ball flight, hearing better contact, seeing the ball stop closer to the target and noting greater consistency. If there is an improvement, the teacher should ask the student how the shot compares to past shots on some specified basis of evaluation. The reason is that the [student may not be paying attention to the improvement](#) on the shot while thinking of some body movement to make.
 - a. The teacher should praise the student often and in *specific* terms as to what is improving. [Teachers are specific in their praise on only 10% of such statements](#). This sometimes causes the students to think some movement of their body that

they unknowingly performed incorrectly was the behavior the teacher praised.
They then tend to repeat the wrong swing behavior.

- b. The teacher should garnish this [praise with an enthusiastic voice and gestures](#). The purpose is to [increase whatever behavior](#) the teacher reinforces. If the teacher understands behavior change, the teacher has a right to be enthusiastic – the slightest improvement often means the student is more than halfway home to producing a targeted result.

10. Urge the student to [use shaping steps during practice sessions](#). [Start with the easiest shaping step](#), such as hitting 20-yard chipping shots, [meeting measurable standards](#) and advancing to the next step only when he does.

With this process, [golfers hit the ball within the standard](#) for right-left landing deviation, at least for shorter distances, quickly, [always during the first lesson](#). The distance of the target increases as they meet or exceed the measurable standard for sets of five consecutive shots.

[SHAPING A BEGINNER'S RUNNING CHIP SHOTS](#)

The student had played only a few rounds. On every shot, the student bent his left wrist forward, toward the target. Not one chip of 20 from 40 feet away stopped within 10 feet of the pin and most of the shots were sculls stopping well over the green.

In [shaping the low-running chip shot](#) techniques for a beginner (a video is on my web site), I started with the positioning of the ball off the student's back foot. Then I worked on getting the grip placed ahead of the ball at address. Next, I demonstrated the sound of the [club scuffing the grass](#) (the student had a strong tendency to bring the clubface into the ball so high that it never got into the air and rolled much too far over the green). The student was to [scuff the grass and both hear and feel](#) the correct amount of contact with the grass and ground.

The student at impact was [bending his leading wrist forward toward the cup](#), an undesired swing movement and a common problem players display for many years. I demonstrated the correct position of the back of the left hand at impact and gave the student a self-correcting feedback system to detect and correct the bending-of-the-left-wrist error without the teacher being present.

Prior to the lesson, the beginner was unable to get any chip of 20 shots hit from 40 feet of the cup to stop within 10 feet of the cup. Thirteen of the shots were sculled more than 10 feet over the green and seven blooped up in the air and came down like soft ice cream about 20 feet from the cup. [On every shot, the student bent the left wrist forward at impact](#).

During the lesson, the student did not scull any shots over the green and stopped 15 of the shots closer to the cup than in the pre-lesson test. On 20 chip shots, the student did not bend the left wrist forward at impact even once.

7. SELF-CORRECTING FEEDBACK

Golf teachers in personal lessons, golf magazines, books, videos and web sites tell the students in detail how to take certain address positions and make specific swing movements. However, they **rarely** tell the students how to obtain **self-correcting feedback** for each of those golf behaviors. The students need to determine whether and to what degree they are executing key swing behaviors correctly. They then must self-correct immediately, or at least quickly, when the teacher is not present during practice sessions and rounds played.

For example, a winner of multiple U.S. Opens is famous for hitting fairway woods accurately and his instruction on using these clubs is worth reading, saving and applying. In a golf magazine article, he suggested **43 separate swing behaviors**, as I count them. I found in many years in fixing performance problems in large organizations that no one performs well in the absence of receiving self-correcting feedback. Therefore, I was aware more than the average teacher or student that **he did not suggest a single self-correcting feedback system for any one of the 43 swing behaviors**. However, that is an extremely common omission in instruction articles.

Golfers need feedback on whether and to what degree they are exhibiting a correct position or golf movement and producing the shot results they want. It is **easy to monitor results**, such as winning or losing a match and a student's scoring trends. Other results such as the average distance you hit a certain club or how far away your 125-yard shots stop from the pin require you to record data, accumulate it and do a bit of calculation, possibly with a computer.

Obtaining feedback on whether and to what degree you are executing certain critical swing movements and positions is more difficult. Of course, if you are wealthy enough you could hire a teacher and pay that person to be with you all the time you practice and play a golf round. Good luck with that solution.

Is it essential to have self-correcting feedback on whether or not you are executing each key swing behavior correctly? **Yes, if you do not obtain accurate and timely feedback, you cannot perform well, not at all.** The problem with **golf instruction is** that it is chock full of information on how to swing and **often devoid on telling the golfer how to obtain self-correcting feedback.** In that case, that golfer is **not going to perform well** unless the golfer can invent or discover some method of getting accurate and timely feedback.

A student may swing correctly when the teacher is standing there stating what corrections to make. However, when the student is practicing or playing a round without the teacher, the student often finds it impossible to replicate the success found in the lesson. The problem is that the student does not have, or is not using, a self-correcting feedback system.

Information on your game does not become feedback unless it causes you to self-correct accurately and rapidly, preferably immediately. The feedback should be immediate, that is *during the swing*. Immediate feedback is not the teacher's comment *after* the swing, nor a video of the swing watched two minutes later.

PUTTS MISSING ON THE LOW SIDE OF THE CURVE TO THE CUP

Take data collected on your cumulative putting results. Suppose you record data on how many of your missed putts that reach the distance of the cup missed on the low side of the curve. In those cases, gravity must carry the ball further away from the cup. You find that putts that reach the distance of the cup but fail to fall into the cup miss on the low side of the cup on 76% of such putts. If that data causes you to plan for more curve than you did in the past and the percentage of putts missing on the low side of the cup declines, then that data serves as feedback – you improved. If there is no improvement, the data is only *information, not feedback*.

AIM AND ALIGNMENT

Another case is aim and alignment. Almost all golfers misalign their body in directions they neither want nor perceive. The reason is that they do not have a system for getting frequent and accurate feedback on where they align their shoulders and feet. On my web site ApplyGolfLessons.com, in "Written Solutions" and "Aim and Alignment," I tell you how golfers should obtain such self-correcting feedback.

To check alignment, every golfer should ask his or her partner, caddy, playing companion or an observer, to place a club touching the front of the golfer's shoulders multiple times during every practice session or round. The golfer then steps away from the club and walks directly behind the club to see where the shoulder alignment club points in relation to the intended starting line. The student should repeat this procedure frequently, especially if shoulder and foot alignment is considerably misaligned and ball flight is errant. Not one golfer in 10,000 does this. And that is why almost all golfers aim and align inaccurately and the golfers do not know it.

At present, golfers almost never seek the feedback I suggest here. Teachers need to (a) tell every student how and why they should seek feedback, as I suggest here, (b) ask later whether the student did it and (c) praise any stated intent to do so or any feedback obtained as suggested here.

BIOLOGICAL SELF-CORRECTING FEEDBACK: WHAT THE STUDENT SEES, FEELS AND HEARS

Once the alignment becomes more accurate, the teacher should suggest how the student should obtain what I call “biological feedback.” This is what the student *sees, feels and*, in some cases, other than alignment, *hears* when the desired golf behavior occurs or does not occur. For example, the teacher may say to the student in a stance position, “At this moment, your shoulder alignment is perfect. Where do you now *feel* your shoulders are aligned in relation to the target?”

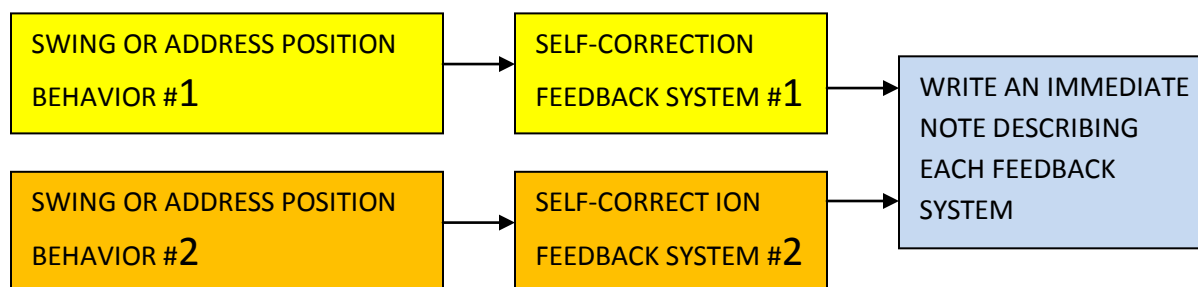
Students have said, “When I align my shoulders accurately, I *feel* my shoulders are *aligning 15 yards to the right* at a target 200 yards away.” The teacher should say, “Good. That is *biological feedback*. Try to *have the feeling your shoulders are aligning 15 yards to the right on all shots at that distance.*”

In addition, you should *train the student to fill out a recording form on aim and alignment checks*. You can copy as many of these forms on Aim and Alignment free of charge as you need *by going to my web site ApplyGolfLessons.com*. Click on “Recording Forms” and on the “Aim and Alignment Form.” Recording data over many alignment checks makes the student much more aware of where the misalignment occurs, either right or left of the alignment line and by how many estimated yards.

FOR SWING AND ADDRESS BEHAVIOR: MATCHING SELF-CORRECTING FEEDBACK SYSTEM

This is the key question teachers should ask themselves, “For each swing behavior, what kind of feedback system can I suggest to the student that will allow the student to self-correct when I am not with the student during practice and rounds played?”

Once the teacher gives the student *a self-correcting feedback system or the student invents one*, the student should *make an immediate written note, stash it in the golf bag and re-read it often*. The student should routinely and randomly check to see if he is performing the behaviors correctly.



Ideally, the *student*, not the teacher, should be *the source of feedback on each swing during the lesson*. *The teacher’s role is to describe or demonstrate to the student the self-correcting*

system for each key swing behavior or to prompt the student to discover it. Then the teacher prompts the student to state aloud the self-correcting feedback for that last swing. The teacher praises the student for stating the feedback without any prompting and for stating the feedback correctly. This prepares the student for obtaining self-correcting feedback when the teacher is absent during practice sessions and rounds played.

8. POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

Here is a powerful tool for golf teachers found in hundreds of thousands of behavioral experiments. If the consequences that follow a desired behavior are positive, frequent and certain, that behavior tends to occur more often in that same situation in the future. Therefore, if you want a golf student to exhibit some targeted behavior because of your instruction, you had better (a) engineer shot conditions so that the student hits improved shots quickly and (b) express with words and gestures your pleasure in seeing the specifically named shot results and swing behaviors that produced them.

WHAT ARE POSITIVE CONSEQUENCES

Let us say you have a student who is attempting to correct a life-long slice. You should try to arrange shot conditions, such as hitting to an extremely short target, to make it highly probable that the student will see the first shot hit in the lesson fly straight or straighter. Seeing that shot fly straight is a positive consequence, assuming that is the objective.

If your verbal reaction and your gestures to that shot are highly positive and enthusiastic, they act as strong positive consequences. If the student makes a favorable comment about the shot (“That felt better”), you want to reinforce it by saying with a big smile, “I’ll bet it was. That was excellent. A perfectly straight shot.”

Some other positive consequences are:

- The feel of a squarer hit.
- A crisper sound of the club hitting the ball.
- The sight of the ball stopped close to the hole.
- A lower score on that hole.
- A data report showing an improvement (such as my Ball Flight Form).
- Compliments received from playing companions.

You can make the student more aware of these positive consequences by asking such questions as:

- “Did you notice any difference in the feel of the club hitting the ball?”
- “Where did the shot land in relation to your target line?”
- “How close to the hole was that shot versus your distance we measured before the lesson?”

With those positive consequences, that fragile new swing behavior, *like a new flower in the springtime, is likely to take root and blossom.*

The main objective with positive reinforcement is *not* to make the student *feel better*, though it will. The *main objective is to increase the probability the student will repeat the swing* that produced a straighter shot.

Behavioral experts call this “*positive reinforcement.*” The word “reinforcement” simply means to make stronger. To reinforce (to make stronger) a behavior, means to make it *reoccur more often or for a longer period.* Suppose you praised a student for stating aloud after a shot where the clubface was looking at impact. If the student then did the same analysis after the next four shots, your praise reinforced that behavior. Suppose you praised the student and the student did not repeat the post-shot, ball- flight analysis after the next shot. That praise, at least in this case, was not reinforcement.

WHAT SHOULD GOLF TEACHERS DO TO APPLY POSITIVE CONSEQUENCES

The above comments on positive reinforcement probably makes sense to you. So what can golf teachers *do to use* these techniques more often and to *avoid situations where the student experiences negative consequences, sometimes on every shot in making a swing change?*

Many golf teachers introduce almost *certain negative consequences* by having the student swing a *driver with a full motion and at full speed while trying to apply a new swing behavior.* The student is very likely to see the ball moving constantly in some wild, erratic and undesired directions. Those errant ball flights are negative consequences, which at some point tends to cause students to abandon your swing process. The student is *less likely to use that swing change* once he leaves the lesson tee. The student is *less likely to return for more lessons, continue to play golf and provide referrals.*

Here are some *powerful rules* to follow in using positive consequences and avoiding negative consequences:

1. *Never tell the student what she did wrong,* “At impact, you fell back on your right leg.” There are several *reasons why* telling the student what she did wrong is not productive.
 - *It does not tell her what she should do right on the next swing- and doing it correctly is the objective.*
 - *Telling the student what was wrong on the last swing puts that negative thought in the student's mind just seconds before the next swing.* Instead, you should remind her of *what is the right way* to move her club or body on the *next* swing.
 - Three, every student *reacts negatively* to being told what was wrong on the last swing. *They may hide it and you may not notice the adverse reaction,* because

you are probably not a trained expert in behavior change, at least not yet. Students exhibit these common reactions to the teacher telling them what they did wrong. The students do not smile. The students make [fewer remarks](#), especially positive remarks. The [students complain](#) of how difficult the swing change is. The students may [disagree more often](#) with your instruction. The students ask to rest. The students leave early.

Kevin Compare, the Master Professional who teaches at the Breakers East invited me to address the South Florida PGA Workshop. A PGA professional teacher at the meeting asked, "How do you reply when the student asks, 'What did I do wrong on the last shot?'" Kevin came up with a marvelous answer he heard Manuel de La Torre, an All Time Top Teacher give, "Why do you ask? *Did you want to do it again?*"

2. If you have to create a desirable change, tell the student [what to do correctly on the next swing](#). Here is why [the positive approach more effective](#) than telling the student what was wrong on the last swing:
 - [The student has never made a mistake in the future](#), so she does not object to you telling her what to do correctly on the next swing.
 - It [reminds](#) the student [what to do correctly](#).
 - The student is much [more likely to perform better on the next swing](#).
 - The student is [more apt to apply the swing change](#) during solo practice sessions, during rounds played and over the long term.
 - The student speaks more positively, such as making a favorable comment about the swing change, commenting on how helpful you are, or stating how eager she is to apply the change during a round.

3. In starting the swing change, set up shot conditions during the lesson that makes it [more likely - to almost certain - that the student will hit better shots](#).
 - In starting a swing change, [never, ever](#) have any player [use a driver and make a full swing at full speed and motion](#). In fact, [do not make a full swing at full speed with any club](#) to start a swing change. I said before that from the top of the swing to impact takes only 1/5th of a second, while the clubhead of a driver is moving about 20 times as fast as a Ferrari sports car can accelerate.
 - To start the swing change, [select a very short target, say, 20 or 30 yards](#), so that the student is making a short back swing and at super-slow speeds.

- Have the student make [partial, super-slow swings without hitting a ball](#) to let the student learn where to move the club and body. This makes the first swing at a ball more likely to be successful.
 - For beginners, start the first lesson with [straight putts of one foot in length](#) and move back in length only after the student meets a measurable standard for sinking putts at that previous length. For more experienced golfers with putting problems, start them at a short distance from the cup, perhaps [two or three feet away](#).
4. In praising a student, [be specific as to what exact result or behavior you are reinforcing](#). The reason is that the swing consists of hundreds of small behaviors. In any swing, some of those behaviors are performed [well](#), some [badly](#) and some [not at all](#). Unless you are specific, the [student is likely to guess wrong as to which behavior you are praising](#). In that case, [the bad behavior is likely to increase in frequency](#).

I recently counted how many times a top-rated teacher commented favorably to the student and how many times the teacher was specific. The teacher commented favorably 24 times. The number of times those [comments were specific was zero \(0\)](#). As a group, when teachers reinforce, they are specific on 10% of their positive comments. Therefore, if *you state what your student did well in specific terms* you will have one more tool in your kit to outperform your competitors.

5. Some teachers focus so much on what the student is doing wrong that [they do not recognize new or slightly improved behaviors when they occur, even when they occur frequently](#). As a result, they do not comment favorably to the student.

For example, suppose a student is shanking 20% of her shots hit with a pitching-wedge and does not know the reason why it occurs. You tell her it is because she impacts the ball with the hosel of the club (the curved section that connects the shaft with the clubface). Three shots later, when she hits another shank, she says, "I hit that ball in the hosel again." It is still a shank, however. What do you say? This would be useful, "That is right. Very good. Recalling *what* caused it –hitting the ball with the hosel- is the important first step to correcting it."

6. When you deliver positive consequences, do so [immediately](#). The faster you deliver the reinforcement, [the more the student remembers](#) what the improved swing change was and felt like that should reoccur. A positive comments the teacher delivers [ten minutes later finds the student with less recall of the feel of that shot](#). [The delay weakens](#) the power of the reinforcement.

7. When you praise the student, try not to sound and act as if you were greeting President Lincoln's widow after the assassination." [Make your voice sound pleased and excited](#) by the appearance of that named behavior, as you should be. In addition, [use positive gestures](#), such as thumbs up as a sign of approval, a pat on the back a shake of the student's hand and, of course, flashing a big smile.
8. The [frequency of your reinforcement](#) is also important. If the golf behavior is to occur on every swing and the student hits 5,000 shots on the course and in practice combined in a year, [one bit of praise is extremely unlikely to cause the behavior to occur often](#). So [praise often](#). As the student's targeted behavior increases, you can [gradually reduce the praise, but do not stop it abruptly](#).
9. You may say to yourself, "The student is [doing nothing right](#). There is nothing to praise." This should be a [strong signal that you are overlooking positive behavior](#), probably plenty of it. Here is a question a teacher can ask that helps identify previously unrecognized positive student behaviors, "[What could the student have done that would have been worse?](#)"

9. IMPROVING THE MENTAL SIDE OF GOLF

When you observe and listen to students on the course, during lessons and in practice sessions, you come away with ideas on what is going through their mind. They may stand much too long at the ball before hitting, an indication, but not proof, that they are thinking too much. They may complain of first tee jitters, not playing well under tournament or normal match game pressure and hitting bad shots at the end of what could be a career round.

They may become angry and swear after hitting bad shots, or, in extreme cases, throw a club. They may complain too much about their game and shots. They could express negative thoughts about their prospects for improving. They could be doubtful about every change you wish to make. They could expect miracles in their games without doing much to cause improvement.

These are indications that they need to improve the mental side of their game. You may want to read my booklets on [The Mental Side of Golf](#) for ideas on how they can improve what they think and feel. You may want them to read it in advance of a lesson when you will discuss it with them and have them practice using the mental procedures. Just go to my web site [ApplyGolfLessons.com](#) and click on "Booklet." There are [three booklets](#) on The Mental Side of Golf.

Many books and articles on the mental part of the golf game are what I call touchy-feely or fictional. You know the type. The 80-year old caddy appears out of the mist, whispers some magical nonsense in your ear, disappears and you suddenly shoot the lowest score of your life.

One author advocated that golfers whistle while they putt. His evidence was that he once whistled on a 70-foot putt and he sank it. I wrote to him asking if he had any data on how many times he whistled on a 70-foot putt and three- or four-putted. He did not reply, probably because he was whistling too much.

In the *Mental Side of Golf*, I give you practical advice in three steps. One, here is a common golf problem. Two, here is the specific mental solution. Three, here are the measurable results. Since I am certain of only what *one* person is thinking, I give you many examples of mental procedures that I applied successfully. Though I was not born with any more confidence than anyone else was, I learned how to delete negative thoughts and substitute positive ones in preparing to play under pressure and then doing so during the round. As a result, I won 17 of 19 extra-hole matches in competition. Some of those ideas came from many sources, such as books Bobby Jones wrote, and from my own inventions.

You can learn to change a negative picture in your mind *instantly* and train your students to do so. You can learn to sink a higher percent of match-ending putts. You can learn to play your best under pressure. It is all just behavior and you can change behavior.

10. DETAILED, WRITTEN PRACTICE PLANS

Teachers have many complaints about their students' practice habits. Most students do not practice enough, teachers say. They seldom practice the short game. They do not practice the trouble shots. They do not use practice aids. They do not use the swing changes the teacher advocated. They do not practice at home enough.

As a behavioral expert who has studied golfers practicing extensively, let me add to the list. They have no measurable goal for that practice session. Only 1.5% of golfers have a club on the ground to aid aim and alignment. They do not choose a narrow target for their aiming line or any target. They do not ask someone to check their shoulder alignment. They do not attempt to simulate playing the holes on that course in sequence, switching clubs on each shot. Instead, they hit multiple shots with the same club. Golfers do not record any data on their shots hit in practice. They do not re-read any lesson notes (or have none, or the notes are skimpy). They do not use multiple, small advance, easy-to-perform shaping techniques in learning a new swing or correcting an old one. They do not observe accurately the directions of ball flight and apply ball-flight laws to each shot to determine where their clubface was looking at impact or the direction of clubhead at impact. There are more, but that is enough.

What is the solution for improved practice sessions?

1. First, teachers should spell out exactly what shots the student should hit and what practice behaviors to use.
2. The teachers should give these practices behaviors to the student in writing.

3. The teacher should ask the student to report at the start of the next lesson or via email on all the practice behaviors used as listed in the written notes.
4. The teachers should praise the student for every suggested practice behavior used and learn of any improved results or maintenance of them.

<p>1.</p> <p>USE MY WRITTEN CHECKLIST. GIVE THE STUDENT IN WRITING A <u>SPECIFIC, CUSTOMIZED LIST OF PRACTICE BEHAVIORS</u> TO USE AT THE RANGE AND AT HOME.</p>	<p>2.</p> <p>PROMPT THE STUDENT AT THE END OF THE LESSON TO REPORT AT THE NEXT LESSON ON PRACTICE BEHAVIOR.</p>	<p>3.</p> <p>AT THE NEXT LESSON, ASK FOR SPECIFIC DATA ON PREVIOUS PRACTICE BEHAVIOR</p>	<p>4.</p> <p>PRAISE THE STUDENT FOR ANY REPORT OF PRACTICE BEHAVIOR USED AND FOR HONEST REPORTING OF NON USE.</p>
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BETTER THAN A 150-TO-1 PAYOFF

Usually a lesson lasts no more than an hour. If the teacher can greatly improve **every practice session the active student has in a year when the student is alone**, it could mean the student improves on as many as **150 times as many hours per year as it took to give this lesson**. A **150-to-1 leverage is sizeable**. Whatever the ratio, it is **worthwhile for the teacher to have the student hit fewer balls** in the lesson and use a bit of the lesson time to describe, demonstrate and make written notes on effective practice habits.

WHAT DO TEACHERS NEED TO DO TO IMPROVE STUDENT PRACTICE HABITS

1. A few teachers I observed, probably less than 4%, spelled out detailed practice plans in writing and gave the student a copy. All teachers should do so on *all* lessons.

The teacher should have two articles to give the student on practice behaviors. The first is a *standard list* of practice behaviors *all* students should use. The second is a *customized list* this particular student should use. To compile this second list, you will find my Practice Checklist of value as a mental prompt.

For those students with time constraints, the teacher should tell the student **how to practice at home and in the office** at lunch or on a rest break, whenever conditions permit. For people who are busier still, the teacher should recommend practicing detailed **visualization techniques of specified golf behaviors** while traveling, sitting or working at home.

2. In advance, the teacher should prompt the student to [report later on which procedures the student used in practice](#) sessions that follow this lesson. This can occur when the student returns for another lesson or at any time via email or phone call.
3. At the start of the next lesson, the teacher should initiate the request for a report on the use of the recommended practice behaviors.
4. The teacher should [praise the student](#) for every recommended practice technique the student used and for honesty in reporting that he did not use all of them.

[SHOULD THE STUDENT PRACTICE BEFORE THE ROUND](#)

There is not a lot of data on whether practice before the round improves performance during the round that follows. Personally, I have rounds where I not only did not practice, but I traveled four hours in a car, had only a few hours sleep, and shot the best round of my life. Yet, my friends and competitors know me as a golfer who practices a lot in relation to how little I play. For years, that was due to a heavy dose of business travel most of my life.

I believe this question is actually several questions. One, does warm up before the round improve performance, on average, during the immediate round that follows that day? Two, does cumulative practice time lower average score over a longer time, but not necessarily the score that day? Three, should the student's primary objective in practicing be to [warm up the muscles](#) for the round that day or to [improve some shot\(s\) that are causing the golfer to take extras strokes](#)?

Some researchers find that [world-class performers](#) in all sorts of fields excel because of how many cumulative hours they have practiced, with [10,000 hours of lifetime practice being the threshold](#).

Many star golfers are famous for how much they practiced, Ben Hogan, Lee Trevino and V. J. Singh come to mind as examples.

One bit of research on warm-up impressed me when I attended the last World Congress of Golf, held every four years and brilliantly spearheaded by Dr. Debbie Crews, Ph.D. of Arizona State Univ. About half the attendees were PhD's, who presented well-researched findings. One group of researchers observed, categorized and measured golfer's exercise activities on the practice range prior to hitting shots. Afterwards, they interviewed the golfers to obtain a history of their injuries. Those that exercised the most in the practice area prior to practice had the fewest back injuries. Such exercises as running in place that got the blood temperature up prior to hitting shots was especially useful in preventing injuries.

As a result, when you see Ed Feeney on the practice range just before he hits shots, you will notice he jogs in place, as if he was getting in shape to outrun the sheriff. But so far, I have not had any back problems since I started to jog in place on the range, and no sheriffs appeared in the rear-view mirror.

STUDENTS DO NOT PRACTICE ENOUGH OR WISELY

If you are interested in having certain students *practice* golf more, here are several successful ideas you can borrow from a different field that increased how much people *exercised*. These are methods discovered by measuring the before-and-after effectiveness of the procedures in research studies conducted by Stanford University. I have more far more confidence in a recommendation based on *data*, than I do from an idea based only on *opinion* or, certainly, from an advertisement. Here are the two procedures that increased how much people exercised:

- A trained person phoned once every three weeks for a year to encourage the participant to exercise more and to give reinforcement for any reports of such activity. That step **increased exercise by 78%**. That is simple enough. They did not even have to talk to the participant. They also used a computer-generated phone call system with a voice recording, which asked questions, recorded replies and reinforced any exercise. That **doubled exercise activity**. Email was also successful. Some golf teacher might want to apply this to golf and measure results. Let me know what happens.
- Two, the researchers encouraged participants to exercise with partners. That worked to increase the amount of exercise, though about 60% of the people prefer to exercise alone.

WRITTEN PLAN FOR PRACTICE

Write the specific practice suggestions for these prompts and give it to the student:

1. Before practice, the student should re-read all **and practice notes** the teacher or the student
2. (Circle:) **The General Objective at this practice session is to:** (a) Measurably improve or (b) Up,
3. **Specific Objectives:**

- Hit **these clubs and shots first:**
- **Go to the circled practice area first:** putting, chipping and pitching, sand bunker, driving range.



lesson wrote.

Warm

- Choose these distance targets:
- [Number of putts](#) to hit:
- [Number of putts to hit by distance](#) target:
- [Off-green putts](#) to hit:
- [Clubs to use in chipping and pitching](#):
- [Type of off-green short shots to hit and with what lie and target conditions](#):
- [Record the accumulated performance for shot-stopping locations on short shots](#).
- Make practice notes on results and on thoughts and physical feelings that occur while swinging.
- [Record data on Ball flight directions by shot hit \(see Form 2\)](#)
- Type of lies and distances to practice [sand shots](#):
- [Curving Putt Drill](#): Place a coin on the green to mark the starting point for a putt that will curve. Estimate the amount the putt will curve. Determine the line on which the putt is to *start*. Put two tees in the green four inches apart and two feet ahead of the ball. These act as goal posts through which the ball should roll. If your stroke is off, the putt it will hit the goal posts or go around them.

As a distance target, place a long tee in the green 17 inches behind the cup (the ideal distance to hit putts, according to Dave Pelz) and on the line the putt is to *start on*. Observe whether the missed putts that rolled at least the distance to the cup curved below or above the cup. If necessary, readjust the three tees and note the direction of readjustments (more curve, or less curve).

- [Distance Putting Drill](#): Select distances 10 feet apart at distances of 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 and 60 feet and not all on the same line. Putt four balls and count how many feet your balls stop from the target tee. Record the data by the group for that distance. Calculate the average and try to beat it the next say you putt.
- [Short Putt Drill](#): Put six balls around a cup as if they were at the 12, 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 o'clock on the dial. [Putt](#) starting with all six balls starting at the same distance from the cup at 2, 4, 6, 8 and 10 feet. Count and record how many you sink and store the record in your golf bag. Try to beat or tie your best record.



- Practice these drills [at home and office](#):
- [Visualize these golf techniques for improving your swing and/or for controlling](#) your mind and emotions during pressure matches:



11. DISPLAY GRAPHS/TABLES OF STUDENT IMPROVEMENT

If you can prove to others that you are an outstanding teacher, it helps to attract more students and more lessons from existing students. A powerful piece of such proof is for you to display data in graphs or tables showing before-and-after improvement in specific students over a given time period.

The evidence alone that you *measure* performance of your students before the first lesson, during the lessons and after the lessons makes you stand out from your teacher competitors who rarely measure performance.

Second, you know exactly how much the students improve, data most other teachers do not possess.

Third, you can show how rapidly you create that improvement.

[Display these charts and graphs in a public place](#) in or near your golf facility or outdoors on a portable bulletin board.

These data displays appeal particularly to people [in business who agree](#), “[If you don’t measure it, you can’t manage it.](#)”

Become the “Measurement Teacher” in your golfing community.

SUMMARY OF SECTION 2 –BEHAVIORAL GOLF INSTRUCTION

DURING AND AFTER THE LESSON

Here are the key steps in Behavioral Golf Instruction **during and after the lesson**:

1. STATE A MEASURABLE GOAL FOR THE LESSON

State a measurable goal the student and teacher can agree on. Research shows students who set goals with their instructor perform better. Focus on changing average score, particularly in tournaments. State the ultimate goal, interim goals, the pre-lesson performance, the performance the student wishes to achieve, the timetable and the student's inputs – the number of lessons, practice shots and rounds per time period. Describe performance in measurable, observable and objective terms.

2. STUDENT LEARNING STYLES

Students learn a number of ways. While students prefer some styles of learning, there is no evidence from educational research experiments that the student learns more when the style the teacher uses is their preferred format. It does no harm to ask the student what their preferred style is. Presenting the instruction in their favorite format may make them happier. It evidently does not increase their learning.

3. STUDENT NOTE TAKING

Give the student a notepad, pen and zip lock bag at the start of the lesson. Prompt the student to take immediate written notes within 60 seconds of the teacher presenting instruction. Ask the student to repeat it back for additions, corrections and deletions. Prompt the student to put the note in the golf bag. Observe it and praise the student for placing it there. The student is to reread the notes before every practice session and round until completely recalled and review periodically after that. Students five years or more later rave about its value.

4. DECIDE ON WHAT PART OF THE GAME TO START LESSONS

Start instruction on whatever will reduce average score the most for this student. To determine that, base it on data someone collects observing the student play a round on the course, rather than in the practice area, with its artificial lies, targets and absence of hazards. It is better to rely on hard data collected on the course by the teacher, the student (after some instruction on collecting data), an assistant or a paid senior or junior. On all shots, start the instruction on impact, the most important element in the swing. Work on the movement of the club, especially at impact, as opposed to body movements, which can have many variations without affecting ball flight.

5. HOW GOLFERS LEARN, OR FAIL TO LEARN

Golfers learn in so many ways and fail to learn in so many ways. Moving the student's club or body slowly and precisely is probably the best way to teach. Obtaining accurate and immediate feedback is essential. Writing notes immediately during the lesson, repeating them back for additions, deletions and corrections and re-reading frequently at future practice sessions and rounds is a powerful tool.

6. BREAK CHANGE INTO SMALL SMALL-ADVANCE SHAPING STEPS

The teacher should break any instruction that has the slightest complexity into multiple steps of improvement that are small advances and easy to achieve. The student should pass a measurable, observable and objective standard at each step before advancing. Never, ever, have a student attempt a swing change by making a full swing at full speed. From the top of the swing into impact, the clubhead moves 20 times faster than a Ferrari can accelerate.

7. SELF-CORRECTING FEEDBACK

Feedback is information that causes the student to self-correct quickly and accurately. The student must receive from the teacher or invent a self-correcting feedback system for every key swing behavior. If not, the student cannot take the swing change to the practice range or course and make it work. Golf instruction focuses on telling the student how to swing, but quite often omits any mention of any matching feedback system for each key swing behavior. Any teacher who decides to provide a feedback system for each important swing behavior will excel versus instructional competitors.

8. POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

Positive reinforcement is any action that causes a student to use a desired swing behavior more often. That can come from primarily from improved shot results and the positive words and gestures of the teacher. The teacher should select shot conditions that are most likely to produce immediate improvement. In most cases, that means making the lie for the shot easy and the target. Very short targets and short, slow swings are more likely to produce better results. The teacher should be specific in naming what behavior is receiving the reinforcement. The frequency and timing of the reinforcement is important. When the student starts making a swing change, it is vital that positive consequences occur quickly for the new swing behavior to survive and increase. Never tell the student what was wrong on the last swing. It is past history and unchangeable. Instead, tell the student what to do correctly on the next swing.

9. IMPROVING THE MENTAL SIDE OF GOLF

Golfers need instruction on the mental side of golf. The teacher should observe the student and probe the student for the internal thoughts and feelings the student experiences in playing, especially in competition. The teacher can create changes in the student's mental thoughts and feelings. One source for ideas on how to do this is in the

“Mental Side of Golf” on my web site ApplyGolfLessons.com, click on “Booklets.” As one example, prompt the student on the practice range or course to visualize in detail an excellent shot. Praise the student if she says she visualized a better shot, especially if more of the shots improve.

10. WRITTEN PRACTICE PLANS

Many students practice a high multiple of hours per year as compared to their hours of instruction. I could be a 150-to-1 ratio. Most students practice badly, compared to what Behavioral Golf Instruction suggests the student do. At the end of the lesson, use my practice checklist to write what the student should do in every practice session. Tell the student you will ask for a report at the next lesson. Then ask for it. Praise any action the student took to practice more effectively. If you get influence the student’s practice behavior, you can work wonders.

In general, the more golfers practice, the better they perform in the long run, though not necessarily that day. All golfers should exercise to get their blood warm, such as by running in place, and by stretching. Data shows such golfers have fewer back injuries. Urge the student to conduct warm-up exercises at the course before practicing and playing to reduce injuries. Golfers as a group do not practice effectively, which I address in the next section.

11. DISPLAY CHARTS AND GRAPHS PUBLICLY SHOWING STUDENT IMPROVEMENT

Teachers should display charts and graphs showing how much individual students improved within a time period. It attracts more students, more lessons, higher fees and job security. Once again, you will stand above your instructional competitors who do not do this.

CLOSING COMMENTS

If you have read all or even part of this document, I want to [congratulate you](#). You clearly want to improve how you teach others and perhaps improve how you play. The material in this missile works and is tested. The key is to change your behavior as a teacher to change the behavior of your students. This will cause you to leap ahead of almost all other teachers. Here are a few suggestions:

1. [Start by implementing whichever step in Behavioral Golf Instruction that appeals to you the most](#) or that you feel will have the largest impact on improving your students.
2. [Apply it as quickly as possible](#). Do not waste time trying to pick the *one* student you feel will most benefit from this. The process works with *all* students.
3. If possible, [measure the student's performance before the lesson starts](#), during the lesson and after the lesson. That way you will know exactly how much the student improved.
4. [Decide to apply more of the steps](#) in Behavioral Golf Instruction.
5. Let me know with [email \(edfeeneyva@aol.com\)](mailto:edfeeneyva@aol.com), a phone call or a personal visit what you are doing.
6. If you want me to [coach you](#), just ask me. If at all possible, I will try to help you.
7. Please [spread the word about Behavioral Golf Instruction](#) to other teachers and students.