

This is  with Coach Karl

Introduction to Golf for Absolute Beginners



"It's like paint-by-numbers for golf; follow the steps and create something cool!" –

Coach Karl

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Introduction

Welcome to the Introduction to Golf for Absolute Beginners. My name is “Coach Karl” Doller and my goal is to help as many new and struggling golfers learn to play and love the game!

I am a life-long golfer. My dad introduced me to the game when I was five or six years old; he wanted to share something with me that he loved. And so, in the winter months we played golf on Saturday mornings, and in the summer months he watched me play cricket.

I started in the gulf industry in 2007, and in 2015 started coaching gold full time. Since then, I have taught 10,000 lessons and helped players of all ability learn to enjoy the game more, and to play it better. Most of the students that I've worked with started playing golf on their own. And while I admired their independent spirit, all of them learned bad habits that we had to first unlearn and then replace with good ones. Sometimes this took months or even years to correct.

I don't want you to have that experience. You don't need to deal with the mess that comes from trying to go it alone. You don't have to start golf with bad habits. You don't have to waste time and money to unlearn things you should never have learned.

So, I congratulate you on seeking out some help as you start your golf journey. You are already way ahead of your fellow new golfers who choose instead the way of pain (going it alone).

All the links to videos in this book are owned by me and are safe to click on. If a link isn't working/won't let you click on it, you can copy and paste it into a new browser window and access the videos that way. There is a link in this book to Sub 70, a golf club company that I trust and recommend. There are also a few links to the USGA website that will help understand some of the rules of golf.

As a participant in *This is Golf Gold* you have access to a supportive and encouraging community. I hope that you will engage with us and join in our live weekly online events.

Golf is a game you play forever. I'm excited to help you take your first steps into this wonderful world!

"Where beginners come to learn golf."

Chapter 1: Why Golf?

I think it's a fair question to ask as we get to know each other: Why golf?

My "why" was my dad wanting to share something with me -- his time, and something he enjoyed doing. We played golf together during the winter months, and during the summer he would watch me play cricket.

What's your why? The motivation to start playing what we like to call the greatest game ever invented? It did, after all, it came from the Scotts, and everything they give us is wonderful (we'll forgive them for haggis and blood pudding). If you are looking for a way to connect with friends, enjoy time with family, get some extra time with your spouse, or find a way to add some exercise into your weekly routine, golf is the way to do it.

Send me a message through Facebook and share your "why" for starting golf. (Search for This is Golf Gold or CoachKarlTX and drop me a message.) To learn more about me and what I do, you can visit www.thisisgolfgold.com

Golf is a remarkable game, one that challenges all who have ever attempted it, and one that has thrilled them all as well.

It is a game for all ages. It's the game that other athletes turn to when they can no longer run, jump, catch, or throw. It is a social event. It's an emotional release. It is a lifetime pursuit. It is a source of personal satisfaction as well as irrational frustration. Golf is without compare.

What follows is a series of lessons that I've called an Introduction to Golf for Absolute Beginners.

This book is the companion to a lesson series designed for the absolute novice. If you don't know what a Pro V1 is, think Jack and Arnie is probably a cocktail, have had teatime but never a tee time, and can only think of Miss Daisy when you hear the word "driving," then...

... This is for you!

"Where beginners come to learn golf."

Here you will find what you need to get you started. You will not find everything you need to play golf. But you will find everything you need to build a solid foundation for playing golf.

As you look at the table of contents, you will see that there is some, but not much, instruction about making a golf swing and hitting a golf ball. And, my new golfing friend, I did that intentionally.

You need to go on a step-by-step, milk before meat journey here. Golf is its own world, with its own language, norms, rules, etc. and this series will help you navigate a successful entry into that world. There's no fast-track, no jumping the line, no skipping to the final chapter. Let this collection of lessons be your stepping-stones into this new and rewarding adventure.

And as your coach, I will hold your hand all along the way, just like I've done for hundreds of students already.

So, let me introduce myself and answer the question: Who is Coach Karl?

- Life-long golfer
- Worked in golf since 2009, started in facility management
- Full Time coach since 2015
- 10,000 lessons
- 934 students
- I've coached junior state champions and,
- A State senior amateur champion
- I've had my students report hundreds of personal best scores -- often multiple times in a season
- I have found my home in coaching helping people enjoy the game



"Coach Karl" Doller, your personal golf coach.

"Where beginners come to learn golf."

Chapter 2: Public vs Private Courses

It's hard to know exactly where to start you off. Learning about golf isn't like learning the alphabet, or the notes on a piano scale. The beginning is not so easy to pinpoint.

A good a place as any to start is with the types of golf facilities. Golf courses can be either private or public. Or they can be a hybrid of the two. Let's learn more...

As the name suggests, a public golf course is open to anybody if there's an available tee time. Public courses might also have food options, like a snack-bar, a small restaurant, or vending machines. What you pay to play at a public course varies a lot based on the location of the course, how well known it is, and what time of the year it is. Public courses have practice facilities that anyone can use as well. You can use the practice greens for free, and you can use the driving range if you purchase range balls from the pro shop.

Private golf courses require membership fees and are only open to their members and their guests.

Private courses, also sometimes called Country Clubs, charge an initiation fee to join the club, and then monthly membership fees as well. These monthly fees are usually charged in the form of dining fees the member must use or lose each month. Amenities at a club will often include things like locker rooms, spa services, swimming pool, tennis courts, pickleball courts, and a nice restaurant.

For some players, the private club is their preference. They enjoy the sense of togetherness with the other members, the ownership/equity that comes from being a member, and the ease of having all their golfing needs satisfied in one location.

Some players prefer the public option because they like to use their golf budget playing many different courses, they are part of a larger group of players and playing public courses are more practical for them to play together, or they are price-conscious, and the public option is better for them.

To find what golf courses are close to you, a Google search will show you what's in your area and a quick visit to their website will tell you if they are public or private.

Chapter 3: Setting Up a Tee Time

One of the most basic things you need to learn is how to set up a tee time. A tee time is a reservation to play. Think of it like a reservation at your favorite restaurant; by getting that reservation you can eat at your preferred day and time. Making a tee time is your way to play at your preferred day and time as well. And while not always required, it's best to make that reservation to play.

Many golf courses are moving to online booking for tee times, and some courses are now exclusively accepting tee times through their website or mobile app. There will be a link on their web page to a scheduling app where you choose the day, time, and the number of players in your group, and the computer will match your available times. Some courses now require payment at the time that you schedule your tee time online.

Here are some things about tee times to know:

- If you are playing on your own, known as being a “single,” then some courses will not let you make a tee time online. If that happens, you will need to call the course or make that tee time in person. It is probable that as a single you will be paired with another group or another single.
- Four players, called a foursome, is usually the maximum number of players you can make a single tee time for. If you have more than 4 players, you will need multiple tee times to accommodate your group.
- If you do not want to play with strangers (and that's okay if you don't) then it's best to book your tee time with friends.
- Don't be alarmed if the available tee times seem kind of random. A lot of courses run on 8-minute tee times, meaning that their tee times are spaced 8 mins apart. If you're the first one out for the day, and their first tee time is seven o'clock, then you will have a 7:00AM tee time. If you are the third group out that morning, and they run 8 minutes, then your time will be 7:16AM. There is no rule or standard for how courses run their tee times. Some might go at 7-minute intervals, others might go at 12. Just roll with whatever they are doing.
- You can make a tee time for either 9- or 18-holes, depending on your preference. Be sure to indicate that preference when signing up online, or when talking to a golf course employee.
- It's considered poor form to arrive at the course at the same time as your tee time. Get the course with enough time to pay for your round, use the restroom, hit some warmup balls, and still be at the first tee 5 minutes before your scheduled tee time.

Some courses still allow you to schedule a tee time either in person or over the telephone. To do a phone tee time, simply call up the pro shop and when somebody answers the phone, ask them what they're available tee times are for the day you want to play. They will give you the options and ask for how many players will be joining you. Usually, you do not need to prepay for a tee time that is made over the phone.

If you want to make a tee time in person, visit the pro shop of the golf course you wish to play. There will be somebody behind a counter where the cash register is, and you can ask them for the available times on the day that you wish to play. Like making a tee time over the phone, you do not necessarily need to prepay for a tee time that you make in person.

Most golf courses also now will have a system whereby you will receive an email or a text message reminding you of your tee time. So, expect the golf course to ask you for an email address and/or a phone number as a part of your making a tee time with them.

While it is possible to arrive at a course and get an immediate tee time (this is called being a “walk on”), it’s best to book one ahead of time.

Here is a simple script to follow when you are calling the pro shop:

Them (hopefully they are polite, not always guaranteed): Hello, this is the pro shop

You: Hi, I would like to make a tee time for Thursday morning, please

Them: Okay, I’ve got 9:04 or 10:28

You: I’ll take the 10:28

Them: How many (they are asking about the number of people in your group)

You: There’ll be two of us (or tell them however many players you have)

Them: 9 or 18 (they are asking how many holes you want to play)

You: 18

Them: Okay, I’ve got your down for Thursday

You: Thank you

You can also use this script (or some variation of it) if you are at the pro shop talking with the attendant.

Chapter 4: Fees

It is important to know that there are two separate fees to pay when you either pay for your tee time online, or when you pay at the counter in the pro shop.

There is a “greens fee” which is the fee that everyone pays to play at that course.

And there is a “cart fee” that you pay if you are renting one of the course’s motorized golf cars (called “golf carts”). Cart fees are charged per person. If you are the only player in the cart, you pay the cart fee. If you are the passenger, you also pay the cart fee.

At most courses, paying for a cart and driving rather than walking is optional. If you prefer to walk the course when you play it, then you will pay the greens fee only.

Sometimes these two fees cause confusion because golfers, especially new golfers, assume that the greens fee includes the cart fee. You do not want to make that assumption. When you check in at the pro shop, and if you intend to ride on a golf cart, then you need to explicitly tell the pro shop employee so that they charge you the cart fee.

Caddie fee. If the course offers a caddie service (this is not very common anymore), and you want that service, then you will pay a set fee to have a caddie for your round. (A caddie is someone who helps you during your round by carrying your bag, helping you locate your golf ball, raking bunkers after you use them, and giving you advice on how to play the course. If you’ve watched golf on TV, then you’ve seen caddies in action.) In addition to the caddie fee set by the course, you are expected to tip your caddie for their services at the end of the round.

Range balls. You will pay at the pro shop or at the ball vending machine for your range balls. You do not own these balls when you pay for them -- you are paying for the opportunity to use those balls on that course’s driving range so that you can work on your game.

Chapter 5: Arriving at the Course

When you arrive at the golf course there are a few things that are common at most golf courses.

There will be a parking lot near the pro shop. Some courses will have a designated area called a “bag drop” area. This allows you to drive up to that area and drop off your golf bag(s) and then go find a parking spot. This saves you having to schlep your bag from the parking lot to the pro shop. I suggest only using a bag drop area if it is monitored by a golf course employee. I have heard too many stories of bags being stolen from bag drops, and I personally do not trust them unless it is watched constantly.

My recommendation for you when you arrive at the golf course is to leave your golf clubs in your vehicle while you check in at the pro shop, especially if you will be using a rented golf car (called a “golf cart”). Most courses will let you drive the golf cart back to your car where you can load your bag(s).

When you walk into the pro shop, go to the employee behind the counter, and tell them your name and the time of your scheduled tee time. They will then look you up and handle the transaction for paying for your tee time if that has not already been done online.

Most golf courses will let you drive the golf cart from the pro shop staging area to the parking lot where you can then load up your golf clubs. If not, you will need to retrieve your clubs from your vehicle and then load them onto the golf cart in the staging area.

Golfers tend to be protective of their tee times. What I mean by that is that golfers want to tee off at their tee time, or earlier if possible. Golfers do not like to tee off late. So, we try to be respectful of each other and show up to the golf course early enough so that we can check in, do whatever else we need to, and be waiting at the tee box 5 minutes before our designated tee time. This helps to ensure that the tee times run according to schedule. If you are going to be late then call the golf course ahead of time to let them know and ask if they can still accommodate you. There will be times of day or perhaps times of the year when a last-minute change cannot be accommodated due to how busy the golf course is.

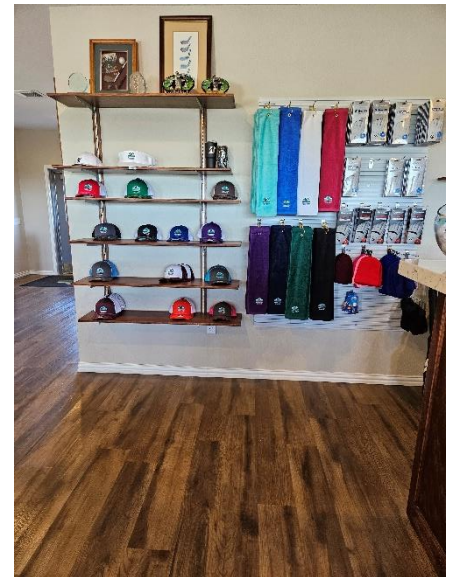
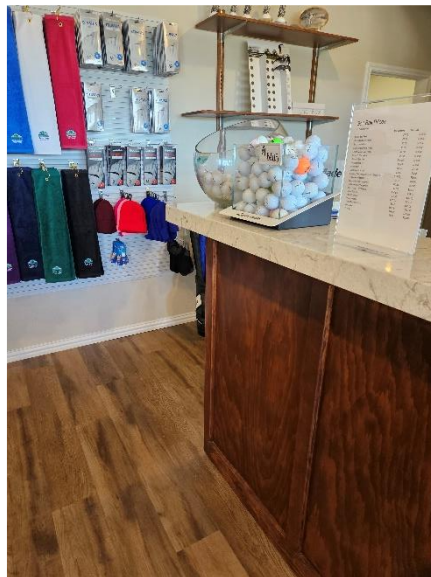
Many golf courses will have an employee waiting at or very close to the first tee who is designated as the “starter.” The starter will help ensure that you tee off on time. If there is no starter, and when you get to the t-box you discover that there are no players in the fairway in front of you, then you are cleared to play. However, trying to tee off early, or jumping in front of other tee times, is never considered appropriate.

Chapter 6: Pro shops

Pro shops are retail areas of the golf course that have employees who will help you check in for your tee time. Inside the pro shop you can find items that relate to that golf course. If you would like a logoed souvenir from that golf course, the pro shop is usually where you will purchase that from. Hats, shirts, sweaters, jackets, pullovers, towels, balls, and ball markers are all usually logoed and make good souvenirs. You can also buy golf balls, tees and even golf clubs from a pro shop. (However, the wise way to purchase golf clubs is after a club fitting session with a professional fitter. More on that later).

Sometimes you can purchase food and beverages from the pro shop. Most golf courses will have a designated restaurant or snack shop where you can get drinks and food for your round. In almost all instances it is illegal to bring your own alcohol onto a golf course.

The person behind the counter will be knowledgeable about the facility so that if you have a question about the restaurant or where the putting green is or where the driving range is, they can help.



Inside a pro shop where check-in prior to your round, and where you can find merchandise and souvenirs

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Chapter 7: Range Balls

At the pro shop you can also get range balls for practice or for warm-up purposes.

Range balls are the property of the golf course and should not be removed from their facility.

If you want to use a driving range, you will need to check in at the pro shop and they will tell you how you can get range balls. Typically, they are sold to you in baskets (called buckets), sometimes canvas draw-string bags, that you then take to the driving range where you can use them for your warmup or practice session. Often there is a ball dispensing machine outside the pro shop where the balls are stored, and the pro shop will give you either a physical token or a numeric code to use to dispense your golf balls.



Place your “bucket” in the dispensing area before you trigger the release of the range balls.

As the pro shop attendant at my local course always says: “Friendly reminder, put the bucket down first where the balls come out before using your token to get the balls.” I guess she’s seen her fair share of golf balls across the patio.

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Range balls are marked with the word “practice” on them to differentiate them from the balls you will use to play your round with. Range balls should be used only on the range, and not taken and used as golf balls during a round.



Range balls are often yellow and are stamped with lines or the word “Range” or “Practice” to distinguish them from balls you use when you play on the golf course.

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Chapter 8: Practice Areas at a Golf Course

Golf courses have different areas designated for different types of practice.

Most golf courses will have a driving range, which is a large area of ground where players can hit golf balls as they either practice or get warmed up for their upcoming round. At a driving range, players arrange themselves in a line so that they are not in any danger of being hit by a player who is in the position next to them. The picture here will help you understand where to stand when using a driving range.



Players on the range are positioned so they are hitting in the same direction, and so they won't hit towards another player.

Most golf courses will also have an area where you can practice putting, chipping, and pitching. These areas are called practice greens. Some golf courses may have multiple practice greens where one is designated as putting only, while the other can be used to practice chipping and pitching.

The practice areas that are designated for practicing very short shots will often include a practice bunker (sometimes called a "sand trap").

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Hitting out of a bunker is a higher-level skill, and one that as a new golfer you need to try to tackle right away. You will learn how to hit from the bunker later in your golf development. For now, all you need to know about the practice bunker is that it's not for you and that you will get to it later.

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Aerial view of a practice area showing bunkers as well as putting/chipping greens. There is also a pond on the right of this picture; bodies of water are called "penalty areas." Everything in this picture that is not a bunker, a green, or a penalty area is called the "general area."

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Chapter 9: Parts of the Course

The golf course is made up of specific areas built for specific purposes. In the following chapters we will discuss what these parts of the course are. You already know most of these areas from the previous chapter where I explained the practice areas you can find at a course. In that chapter I identified: the general area, bunkers, penalty areas, and putting areas. The next chapter will add one more area of the course: the Teeing Area.

As I share more information with you about each of these areas, I will also give you commonly accepted good practices for when you are playing from each of these areas.

Most golf courses are built to be 18 “holes”, although nine-hole designs are also common.

A “hole” starts at a teeing area and ends at the putting area (commonly called a “green”) where there is an actual hole cut into the grass. A flagstick shows where on the putting area the hole that is cut into the green is located. Your goal is to get your ball from the teeing area and into the hole in the green in the fewest hits (known as shots or strokes) possible.

You start your round on the teeing area of “hole 1” or “the 1st hole.” That 1st hole ends after your ball comes to rest in the bottom of the hole cut into the first green. Then, you move on and play the 2nd hole, then the 3rd hole, and so on until you finish your round.

Look at the aerial photos of a golf course on the next page and see if you can identify the areas of the course:

- Teeing area
- Putting Area
- Bunkers
- Penalty Area
- The General Area



Aerial views of a golf course that shows Teeing Areas, Putting Areas, Bunkers, Penalty Areas, the General Area. Anything inside the boundaries of the course that is not a teeing area, putting area, penalty area, or a bunker, is the general area.



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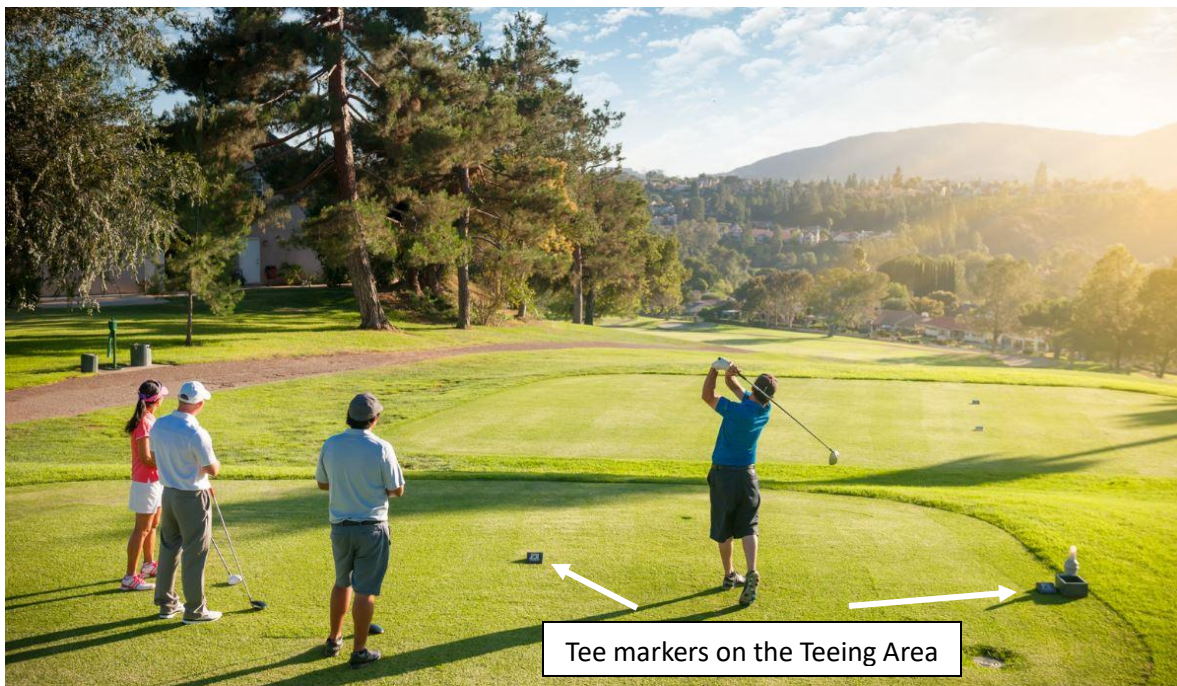
Chapter 10: Teeing Area

The teeing area is a well-manicured part of the golf course that is easily recognizable. These are flat areas and there are tee markers pushed into the ground. There are tee markers of different colors, and these colors tell you which tee marker is closer to, or farther from, the green.

The closer the markers are to the green, the shorter that hole will play, and it is the player's responsibility to choose the teeing area that best matches their skill level.

For a long time, the tee markers that were the most forward (the ones closest to the green) were referred to as the ladies' tees. However, today it is more common to hear them referred to as the forward tees.

Use the picture below to help you identify what a teeing area looks like. This area is recognizable because the grass is mowed shorter, and there are pairs of markers of different colors on the ground to show you where you hit from.



The Teeing Areas of the golf course is designated by colored tee markers, and grass that is carefully mowed.

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Chapter 11: Putting Area, or the Green

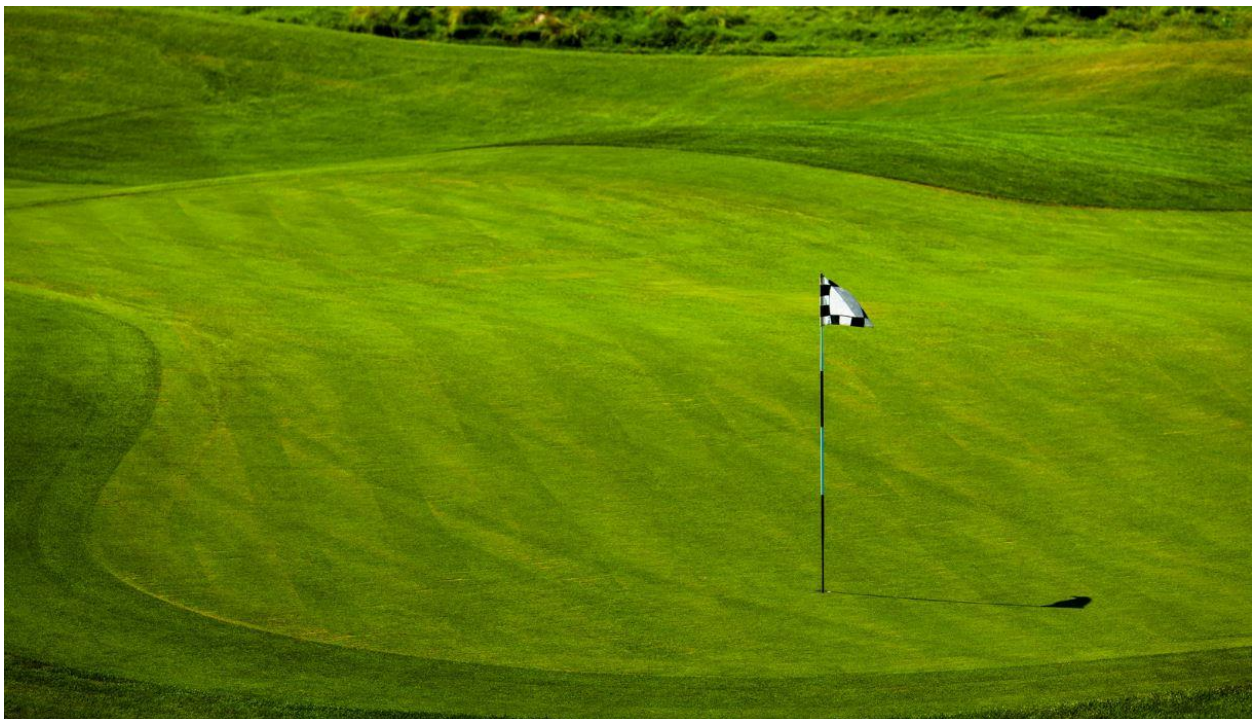
The next area that we will talk about is the putting area, which is commonly referred to as simply the “green”.

This can be confusing because most of the golf course is green. However, the “green”, or a “green”, is the area of the course where the grass is mowed the shortest and the ball can roll the easiest. Somewhere on the green there is a hole cut into the ground and a flagstick is inserted into that hole.

Players take great care to look after the grass on the green. They will take time to repair any dents that their golf ball, shoes, or golf club makes on the green.

When you are playing on a green, the club you will use is your putter. The object of putting is to roll your golf ball on the smooth grass of the green into the hole.

Greens come in all shapes and sizes and are also not perfectly flat. There are changes in the terrain (bumps, slopes, mounds) that are intended to engage your imagination as you try and guess how much the ball will curve based on those undulations.



The Putting Areas of the golf course are mowed the shortest so the ball can roll smoothly. A flagstick shows where the hole is.

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Chapter 12: Bunkers

Bunkers are nothing more than areas of the course that are filled with sand. They are usually clearly recognizable because of how they are groomed/maintained by the grounds staff.

Bunkers that are close to the putting area are called “greenside” bunkers (bunkers close to a green).

Bunkers that are not close to the putting area are called “fairway” bunkers since it’s most likely that they are located in, or next to, a fairway.

Some bunkers are intended to make the golf course more difficult. Hitting from a bunker is a high-level golf skill, and many players therefore fear and try to avoid bunkers. If you hit your ball into a bunker, here are some things to keep in mind:

- You do not need to play from the bunker. With a 1-stroke penalty, you can declare your ball unplayable and follow the rules to drop your ball outside the bunker.
- If you choose to play your ball out of the bunker, then by rule your clubhead is not allowed to touch the sand until impact.
- You can remove rock, sticks etc. (called “impediments”) around your ball in the bunker; just use your hands and pick those things away from your ball.
- Here is the link to the USGA rules website where you can learn about all things bunkers:
<https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/rules/rules-2019/rules-of-golf/rule-12.html>

As an absolute beginner, you should not try and hit from a bunker, whether that is a practice bunker or one out on the course. (As an absolute beginner you should not be playing on a golf course yet; you need some skill, general golf knowledge, and an understanding of golf etiquette before you do that.)

Go back and look at the photos on pages 16 and 18. In these photos you can clearly see the bunkers (the sand-filled areas).

Chapter 13: Penalty Area

Penalty areas are water areas of the course. These can be rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, or even the ocean.

Penalty areas are designated either “red” or “yellow” and the rules are different for each designation.

Here’s the link to the USGA rules website for penalty areas: <https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/rules-hub/topics/penalty-areas.html>

Like other sports, you want to avoid penalties when you’re playing golf.

Penalty areas are there to make the course more challenging, and to make it more beautiful. Many lakes and ponds also serve the practical purpose of being reservoirs for irrigation water for the course.



Penalty areas are water related hazards that make the course more challenging, while also adding natural beauty.

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Chapter 14: The General Area

All of the area inside the boundary of the golf course that is not a teeing area, putting area, penalty area, or bunker is called the “General Area.”

Here’s the link to the USGA website for the General Area: <https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/rules-hub/topics/general-area.html>

The general area includes the well-manicured fairways as well as all the other kinds/lengths of grass on the course.

Unless designated as a penalty area by red or yellow stakes or paint, all desert areas, treed areas, bush, gorse, long grass, etc. is all part of the general area and you must play your ball where you find it. (If you cannot play a shot because of where the ball is in the general area – in the root area of a tree for example – then you must declare your ball unplayable and follow the rule accordingly. Here’s a link to the USGA rules website for a ball that is unplayable: <https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/rules-hub/topics/unplayable-ball.html>

In the picture below, can you identify the General Area? That patch of desert-looking ground is part of the general area, and that’s not a good spot to be. So, just because your ball is in the general area, it doesn’t mean that your ball is in a good spot.

The General Area is all parts of the course that are not a teeing area, putting area, penalty area, or bunker.



Including this desert area here

Sometimes the general area can be difficult or impossible to play from. Follow the "unplayable" rules if you are in this kind of a situation.

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Chapter 15: Intro to Clubs and Equipment

The world of golf equipment is daunting even for an experienced player. Do not feel ashamed or embarrassed that you do not understand what the clubs are called and/or what they are used for. That's what this book and my lesson series is for – to help you learn.

Golf Clubs are divided into the following categories:

- Putters
- Wedges
- Irons
- Hybrids
- Fairways and
- Drivers

Here's link to a quick video where I talk you through the different categories of golf clubs:

<https://tinyurl.com/4ej8rmkd>

Other items of golf equipment are:

- Bags
- Gloves
- Balls

Some terms/words that you need to know about golf clubs before you read any further:

- Not all clubs are the same **length**. As a general rule, and by design, longer clubs help you hit the ball further than shorter clubs do. This is an important fact to remember.
- Every club head (the part of the club that actually makes contact with the ball) has some amount of **loft**. Loft helps you hit the ball into the air.
- The club with the least amount of loft is your putter – it's designed to help you roll the ball.
- All your other clubs have some amount of loft, from around 10 degrees to 60 degrees.
- This means that your clubs help you get the ball airborne. This is important to remember when you start to learn to hit a ball.

Each club is built with some amount of loft to help you get your ball airborne.



These pictures show golf clubs lined up next to each other. As you look at these clubs, can you see which ones would help you hit the ball the highest initial launch angle? These are the clubs with the most amount of loft.



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Chapter 16: Putters

Let's start with putters.

Before I do that, let's back up for a moment and discuss the ultimate purpose that you have as a golfer. Your purpose, simply stated, is to control your golf ball. For now, "control" is defined as controlling the distance the ball goes and the direction that it goes in. (There are other forms of control that more skilled players will work on, trajectory and curve being two important ones), but as a brand-new golfer, think of controlling your golf ball only in terms of distance and direction.

We use a putter when we are on, or very close to being on, the part of the golf course that is known as a putting area, or "green". We can also use it if we are relatively close to being on the green and it is beneficial to simply roll the ball up onto the green towards the hole using your putter.

Your putter has the least amount of loft built into it. This means that your putter is not intended to launch the ball into the air; in fact, putting can be equated with rolling. Your putter is designed to help you roll the ball along the ground towards the hole. I will tell you how to use your putter to control distance and direction in a different lesson.

Putter facts to remember:

- Has very little loft
- Is used when you are on the green, or very close to it
- Is designed to help you roll the ball along the ground towards the hole

Getting fitted for a putter is as important as getting fitted for any other club that you buy. Your professional fitter will help you cut through all the marketing "noise" and will set you up with the putter that is best for you.

You don't want to buy any equipment that you have not been fitted for. Getting clubs that are fit for you is the quickest way to learn how to play golf. Don't believe anyone who tells you that because you are a total beginner that you don't need fitted clubs. Being a total beginner makes it more important that you start correctly.

Here's a link to a highly rated putter that is great for beginners: <https://tinyurl.com/2p88cekt>

Chapter 17: Wedges

Wedges are the next category of golf equipment that we will talk about.

Why are wedges next? Because we are going to work our way backwards from the putting green to the tee box. Meaning we will first talk about the clubs that you use to make the ball go the least distance (your putter) and work our way up to the club that makes the ball go the furthest (your driver).

Here are the characteristics of wedges:

- After your putter, they are the shortest clubs in your bag.
- You use wedges when you don't need the ball to travel a far distance.
- They have the most amount of loft and are designed to help you hit the ball higher.

Most golfers play with 5 wedges that are separated by 4 degrees of loft. A common set of wedges, for example, starting with the most-lofted wedge, is 60 degrees, 56, 52, 48, and 44 degrees. These differences in loft, called "gaps" or "gapping" allows the player to choose the club with the best loft of the shot at hand.

Your professional club fitter will determine how many wedges you need, and at what lofts they will be.

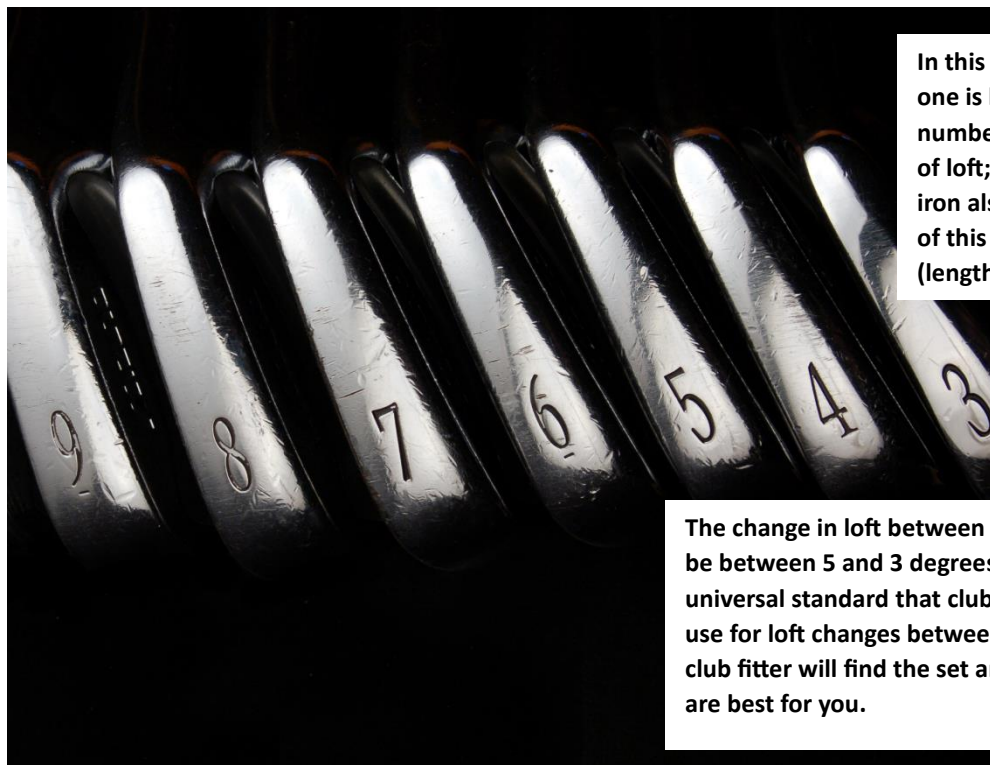
Remember: Your purpose is to control the golf ball, and for now we have defined "control" in terms of distance and direction. The further you are from the green the less lofted club you will use; said the opposite way, the closer you are to the green, the more lofted club you will use. Following this logic, you will use your wedges when you are close to the green.

Chapter 18: Irons

Next up: Irons.

Your irons are built so that each individual club has a complementary loft to the one that precedes it as well as the one that comes after it. Go back and look at the picture of clubs on page 26. You can see from these pictures that the change in loft from one club to the next is rather small; but when you look at the clubs on the opposite ends of the set, you will see a large loft difference in those clubs.

Unlike your wedges that are named by their degrees of loft, irons are simply designated by a number. The smaller the number means the less loft that it has. Said the opposite way, the more loft the club has the higher the number it will have.



In this set of clubs, you can see that each one is labeled or designated with a number. The 9-iron has the most amount of loft; the 3-iron the least amount. The 9-iron also is the shortest (length in inches) of this set, and the 3-iron is the longest (length in inches).

The change in loft between each iron will be between 5 and 3 degrees. There is no universal standard that club manufacturers use for loft changes between clubs. Your club fitter will find the set and lofts that are best for you.

Your most lofted iron is around 42 degrees, this is your 9-iron and is the first iron following your wedge. Most sets of irons today will have the following irons: 9, 8, 7, 6, and maybe a 5-iron. (Up until about 5 or 6 years ago, it was common for iron sets to include a 4- and 3-iron, like the set in the picture above;

however, those clubs have been replaced by hybrids, which you will learn more about in the next chapter.)

There's a lot of "geeking out" you do with iron lofts, but let's keep things simple here. Remember:

- A club with more loft launches the ball with a higher initial launch angle.
- When you use a more lofted club, your ball will not go as far as when you use a club with less loft.
- Accordingly, the closer you get to the green, you will use clubs with more loft.

This means that if you had two irons in your hand and one was stamped with a 7 and the other was stamped with a 9, the 7 has less loft than the 9, and you would use the 7 from a greater distance away from the green than you would the 9.

One of golf's weirdnesses: Calling a certain group of clubs "irons" can be confusing because all clubs are made using some kind of metal. This naming convention goes back many decades to when club heads were either made of wood or of metal (iron). It's from those days that we got the designation of "woods" and "irons."

Chapter 19: Hybrids

Historically, low-lofted irons are very difficult for most non-professional golfers to use. The “Hybrid” club category was born from the need for a club with low loft but one that was easier to use.

Hybrids have a design that is wider than an iron. They are also hollow, and this is a key part of their design. Golf equipment engineers are obsessed with where the mass of the clubhead is. And if they can move that mass to the perimeter of the club, and further from the face of the club, then they can design clubs that cause the ball to launch higher with more speed. When the clubhead is hollow, the engineers can also get the face of the club to be very thin which acts like a trampoline when the ball contacts it. This combination of relocating the mass of the clubhead and a thin face make hybrid clubs easier to hit than traditional long irons, even though they have the same amount of loft.

Hybrids can be designated by number, and common numbers are 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. But they can also be designated by the degrees of loft the club head has, and usually with 3 degrees of change between each club. So, that means your hybrids could be labeled something like this: 18, 21, 24, 27, 30.

In recent years, club manufacturers have started to label their hybrids with both the number of the club as well as the degrees of loft.

I’ve mentioned a few times now the need to get your first set of clubs from a professional fitter. I hope that you are starting to see why that is. With so many options and variables, you will drive yourself crazy if you try and figure it all out on your own. The best players in the world use fitters for their clubs.

If you are not ready for a complete, in-person club fitting (use GOLFTEC if you are), then here’s a super option for an online fitting for excellent, price-conscious, golf clubs:

<https://www.golfsub70.com/?cmid=SXVzbkpUbGtyRWM9&afid=RkJGSkNvOWNyVW89&ats=YWh4em9CMUVDVvk9>

Chapter 20: Fairways

The next designation or group of golf clubs are called fairways.

Fairways are larger than hybrids and they also have less loft than hybrids do. Larger clubs mean mass can be moved even further from the face and added to the perimeter, which means these clubs are meant to help you get the ball airborne even though they have relatively little loft. Assuming a good hit, fairways will let you hit your ball further distances than a hybrid will.

In years gone by these clubs were made from wood. And so (along with the driver) this group of clubs were commonly referred to as “woods.” Or more specifically, fairway woods. You may still hear that term used today when golfers or commentators on TV talk about clubs, even though no clubs are made from wood anymore. Accordingly, you may hear golfers refer to their fairway clubs as fairway metals because they are trying to show that they know their fairways are not made of wood :)

Chapter 21: Drivers

Finally, the driver.

The driver has the largest head of all clubs. Like your hybrids and your fairways, drivers are hollow in design and the engineers do creative and amazing things to make flexible club faces, and to move mass to where it's most optimal.

Golf club manufacturers use multiple materials in driver design (they do this with fairways and hybrids too). The most common materials are carbon fiber, titanium, aluminum, and steel.

Driver technology has advanced a lot in the last 15 years. Drivers today have movable weights and adjustable hosels to help club fitters (and therefore you) optimize how the club launches the golf ball.

Drivers are the longest clubs and have less loft than fairways do. Drivers are designed to hit a ball off a tee and are used to hit the ball the farthest distance.

Chapter 22: Distance Measuring Devices

Do you remember back to our discussion of what the purpose of golf is? We defined that in terms of controlling distance and direction. It makes sense, then, that you will want a device that measures the distance between you and your target. There are two kinds of distance measuring devices: GPS based, and laser devices.

GPS Devices

GPS devices are simple to use, and they display a map of the hole you are playing with corresponding distances to areas of interest. If you are on the tee box, the GPS will show you how far away bunkers, trees, water hazards, etc. are. As you get closer to the green, it will show you distances to the front, middle, and back of the green. Some GPS devices are stand-alone devices. Many are simply an app on your phone. The benefits of GPS devices are the maps of the hole, yardages are immediately available, most will let you keep score on the device (or app) so you can track your stats, and they conveniently are on your phone. GPS units can be less accurate than laser devices, but only by a couple feet at most.

Laser Devices

Laser devices are pin-point accurate. You hold the device up to your eye and “shoot” the distance to your target. These require line-of-sight, which can be a big problem. These devices can also adjust distances based on any elevation changes between where you are and where the target is. Some can also give you distances adjusted for atmospheric conditions (yes, this is a thing, and yes, it’s awesome). These advanced adjustment features are not legal in tournament play, just an FYI for if/when you start to play tournament golf.

Chapter 23: Golf Balls

Often new golfers, and unfortunately too often experienced golfers, do not give much thought to the golf ball they are using. This is a tragic mistake.

If you want to learn to control your golf ball, then you need to understand how it will react after you hit it. You can only understand this if you use the same ball every time you play.

When I ask my students what golf ball they play, most often they say that they play a multitude of different balls. Ones they found, ones their parent/spouse/friend gave them, ones they won in a tournament, and so on. Very few students tell me that they use one ball, but when they do I give them a very enthusiastic high five.

I want you to be the student that gets a high five from your coach. So, you're going to choose one ball and play with it, exclusively, until your coach or fitter gives you a recommendation.

The problem is that all golf balls all look the same. Some might have different colors, but otherwise a golf ball looks like a golf ball. When you go to a pro shop, or a sporting goods store, or you are shopping online, and you look at all golf ball options, how do you know which one is right for you? My recommendation is to use the most expensive golf ball you are comfortable using.

But coach, I'm just going to lose them in the water or the trees.

Yes, there is that possibility (less of a possibility because you're starting your foray into golf with me at your side, and I'm going to help you learn to hit the ball straight). My suggestion is to choose the most expensive ball that you are comfortable using. If that's the Kirkland ball from Costco (which, for the price of around \$30 for 2 dozen, is a pretty amazing ball), then do that. Or if you go with balls that are \$50 or \$60 a dozen, that's awesome too. Just use that ball and only that ball.

If you want to geek-out on golf balls, the helpful consumer-facing folks at mygolfspy.com have some top-shelf information that they publish from what they call their Ball Lab. Hop over to their site if you want the in-depth on all things golf balls.

The shorter version for you non-geek types is this:

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- Golf ball manufacturers all make a handful of golf balls that have different names.
- Think of this like automobile manufacturers making multiple models of vehicle.
- Toyota or Ford have multiple models of vehicle, and then within those models they have multiple styles where the options and the features and performance are all different.
- Golf balls are the same.
- If you use a Titleist golf ball, you assume that all Titleist golf balls are going to react the same way, because they don't. Their different "models" with different "options" will all perform differently. And if you want to learn to control your ball, you must use the same ball all the time.
- Using a Pinnacle golf ball today and a TP5x golf ball tomorrow is like driving a Pinto today and a Mustang tomorrow, but then expecting them to both perform the same.

Do not get caught in the trap of playing different golf balls every time you play, or every time you (gasp!) lose a ball.

Remove one variable from your game right now: Pick one ball, use only that one ball, and don't change unless directed to do so by your coach or your club fitter.

Chapter 24: Bags

Most golfers choose a bag that they think looks nice. Or because it was cheap. And then afterwards find that it doesn't meet their needs. Let's make sure you don't make that mistake.

Golf bag manufacturers make different kinds of bags based on the wants and needs of the golfer. Here are common features to consider when buying a bag:

- Weight
- Pockets
- Club organization
- Legs or no legs

Weight.

Some bags are made for golfers who want to walk when they play. These bags are light weight, have special straps (like a backpack), and have legs that extend when you put the bag down (these bags are often called stand bags).

Some bags are made to fit onto the back of a motorized golf car (called a golf cart). No surprise, but these bags are called cart bags. Cart bags are heavier than stand bags and have more pockets for more stuff.

Pockets.

Pockets are important. Most bags have the following pockets at minimum: ball pocket, tees pocket, valuables pocket (which is also waterproof), and a larger side pocket for rain gear. Cart bags will have additional pockets that will let you pack water bottles, towels, snacks, tech tools, or whatever else you want to bring with you.

Club Organization.

This option refers to the top opening of the bag, where you put your clubs into. This opening can have different dividers to help you group your clubs. Some bags will have individual dividers for each club, and others will have other configurations. The photos here will help you see the different divider options.

Legs or No Legs?

Cart bags do not have legs. Carry/stand bags do. Cart bags are designed to stand upright when placed on a flat surface, stand bags are more stable on uneven surfaces.

Which one to choose? That depends on if you plan to walk or ride. Walkers use carry bags; cart bags are for riders. If you are a walker but you plan to use a pushcart, you are better off with a carry/stand bag because they are lighter.

If you choose to walk, remember that it's bad form to put your bag or your pushcart on the green. Leave your bag 3 or 4 feet off the green.

Staff bags are the biggest form of golf bag and are most commonly seen toted around the golf course by a caddie of a player on a professional golf tour. These bags are the size they are to accommodate advertising. It is not necessary to have a staff bag. Although, they are pretty darn cool!

Sunday bags are very small and lightweight carry bags that are not intended to carry all 14 clubs, and only have one or two small pockets for tees and balls. You can fit about 8 clubs in a Sunday bag and are the lightest weight of all golf bags.

Chapter 25: Shoes

Golf shoes have evolved over the past decades. Modern golf shoes fit like sneakers and are very comfortable to wear. Some golf shoes that have plastic cleats on the sole to assist with traction as you are walking and playing. Other golf shoes simply have a sole that's textured or made of small rubber knobs that help with grip.

In recent years shoe manufacturers have pushed the limits of form and function and have created a wide variety of golf shoes. You can get high-top golf shoes or, on the opposite end of the shoe spectrum, you can get cleated sandals.

As a general rule, avoid the cheapest shoes that are manufactured in the current calendar year. Instead, if you are looking for inexpensive shoes, look for new-in-the-box shoes that were manufactured a season or two previous. You can get high quality golf shoes at a good price shopping them on sale. Using cleated or cleat-less shoes is a matter of preference, your main priority when selecting a golf shoe is comfort. My experience has been that golf shoes often run small, so be wary when purchasing golf shoes online without trying them on first.

Chapter 26: Gloves

Most golfers wear a glove on their non-dominant hand. So, if you are right handed, you will have a glove on your left hand because that is the hand that is closest to the very top of the handle of your golf club.

Wearing a glove is not a requirement to playing good golf, however there are studies that show that using a golf glove helps you to control your club face. And we are all looking for more control, right?

Golf gloves are designed to fit snugly, almost like an outer layer of skin, so if you choose to play with a glove do not purchase one that is loose. It needs to be tight.

Some players opt to wear two golf gloves, one on each hand. There are also golf gloves that are designed to help players who suffer from arthritis. For players with long fingernails, there are even gloves that are cut off to accommodate those.

A golf glove is not just an accessory, it can be an important piece of equipment.

Chapter 27: Skills

If you have watched golf on television, you may think that this is an easy game. Because those guys and gals on TV make it look so easy.

While golf is a simple game, hitting a ball from one area of the golf course to another so that it ends up in a hole, it is not easy.

Let's take some time to discuss the skills necessary to play golf. We'll start with the smallest shots you will make and work our way up to the longest shots.

Chapter 28: Putting: “Read” the Green

Putting is the part of the game where you use your putter to roll the ball along the ground towards the hole. Putts can range in distance from a few inches to 40 or 50 feet. Putting has often been called the game within the game because of the intricacies involved in being a player who putts well.

Putts are not big and powerful movements. Usually, you are trying to roll the ball 30 feet or less, and so you aren’t trying to “hit” the ball at all. Let’s look at the three things you need to do to become a good putter:

- You need to learn to “read” the green
- You need to start your ball in a straight line
- You need to control the distance your ball rolls

What does it mean to “read” the green?

This is a simple concept to understand, but now always as simple to apply. “Reading” the green means that you can look at the ground, see the changes in the terrain, then estimate how your ball will roll along that terrain. You are trying to see/feel how the ball will roll based on the sloping, mounding, and elevation changes of the green. Things to consider would be if you are putting uphill, downhill, or sidehill.

You will learn to read the green by being out on the practice green, and then when you’re on the course as well. This is a learned skill that you can improve with purposeful practice.

Chapter 29: Putting: Direction

Remember, there are three things you need to do to become a good putter:

- You need to learn to “read” the green
- You need to start your ball in a straight line
- You need to control the distance your ball rolls

We discussed reading the green in the previous chapter.

Now, you need to be able to start your ball rolling in a straight line.

Using your putter to roll the ball in a straight line is an often seemingly unattainable skill for many golfers. However, this is a skill that anyone can learn with good practice drills.

To start learning this, go to a practice green and find a hole that has a 3 or 4 foot straight up that is slightly uphill. Practice rolling golf balls into the hole from that distance.

Chapter 30: Putting: Speed/Distance

Remember, there are three things you need to do to become a good putter:

- You need to learn to “read” the green
- You need to start your ball in a straight line
- You need to control the distance your ball rolls

Perhaps the most important thing about golf is controlling your ball.

This includes when you are putting. You need to know how to control how far the ball rolls. If you are 8 ft away from a hole but the stroke you make rolls the ball 20 ft then you will never be able to get the ball into the hole. The opposite also applies. If you are 8 ft away from the hole but only hit the ball 2 ft, you will have to hit the ball four times before it gets into the hole. Controlling distance, like controlling direction, is the result of careful practice.

Here’s the link to the video explanation of how to do this: <https://tinyurl.com/3pv47byu>

This is the best putting drill I know to help you control distance when you’re putting.

Chapter 31: Learning to Hit a Golf Ball

Let's progress from putting to longer shots. We will look at the 50-yard shot. I start with these distance because it will give you a good foundation for all future shots you will learn.

Once you're able to hit a golf ball in a straight line that goes 50 yards, then we can more easily scale your skills to longer or shorter distances. So, put in the work to get really good at hitting the 50-yard shot (how to do that in the next lesson).

If you can hit a golf ball in a relatively straight line to a distance of 50 yards, then you are well on your way to developing the skills that will let you truly enjoy golf.

Chapter 32: 50 yards

Being able to make the ball go 50 yards in front of you in a straight line is an invaluable skill. And it's one that you should learn as quickly as you can.

50 yards is not a very far distance. I mention that because to get the ball to go 50 yards you will not need to use all your force or power. But you will be making more movement than you did with pitching.

This is how you are going to learn this shot:

- You are going to learn to make small golf swings while keeping your arms as straight as you possibly can.
- You are going to make short golf swings where you feel like there is no bending or hinging of your elbow or wrist joints whatsoever.
- Remember, we are only trying to get that ball to go 50 yards and so these swings are intentionally small/short (not complete) golf swings.
- This 50-yard shot will not require you to swing anywhere close to full speed.

I suggest beginning to learn this exercise using your 9 – or 8-iron. You will do this exercise on a driving range, and you will use a target, or an area, in front of you that is 50 yards away. If there is no target there already, and it is not safe to set up your own target, then your best guess at what 50 yards in front of you will be good enough.

As you work on this exercise, you may find that the golf ball goes further than 50 yards using your 8-iron. If that is the case, then start using a 9-iron or a pitching wedge. Keep experimenting until you find the golf club that gives you 50 yards total distance – that's the distance the ball goes through the air (called "carry") as well as how much it rolls. The carry and roll needs to be 50 yards total.

Chapter 33: Carts

Golf carts have become so common that almost every golf course offers them as a service and uses them to generate revenue for the club.

As noted in an earlier chapter, your cart fee is separate from your green fee.

When driving a golf cart there are specific rules to follow, some of which may be explained on your scorecard, and others which are included in what might be termed the “unwritten law of things.”

If the golf course has paved golf cart paths, then it is your responsibility to keep the golf cart on the cart path as much as possible. Doing this reduces the wear and tear from the cart on the grass.

It is never okay to drive your golf cart onto a putting green. (That said, there are modified carts with special tires for disabled players and those can be driven onto a golf green.)

As a general rule, keep your golf cart 30 ft away from any putting surface.

Golf carts are functional at low speeds. Drive carefully. Using a golf cart on wet grass can become hazardous very quickly.

Chapter 34: Walking

Walking seems to be gaining popularity in the last few years, thanks mainly to modern pushcarts, some of which are motorized and follow you as you walk.

The major benefit of walking is exercise. Other benefits also include a longer period of time before you play your next shot, which can increase your ability to focus when it is your time to play.

Another option for walking when you play is to have a caddie who carries your bag, offers insight into the conditions of the course, help you read the greens, and generally try and help you have an enjoyable round. Unfortunately, caddies are not offered at many courses. If you get the chance, I suggest playing golf at least once using a professional caddie – it's a wonderful playing experience.

Chapter 35: Scorecards

Golf courses will give you a free scorecard (and a pencil) so that you can track your strokes/score. Scorecards are available in the pro shop and very often at the first teeing area inside something that looks like a mailbox.

The scorecard is a simple grid that lets you write a number inside the box that corresponds with the hole that you just played. There is space to record the scores for four players.

There's also other valuable information on the scorecard. There is usually a basic map of the golf course to help you understand where each hole is, and to give you an overview of what each hole looks like. Local rules and/or other information the course wants you to know will also be on the scorecard.

On the scorecard you can find the total number of yards for each nine, and for the entire 18 holes. That number is important because it helps you to identify the correct tee boxes you should be playing. As a beginner, you may not play from a designated teeing area yet. You will find a spot in the fairway that's 100 yards away from the center of the green, and you will hit your 50-yard shot twice. And then you will putt.

The scorecard will also give you information relative to rating and slope. These two numbers are an indication of the relative difficulty of the golf course. The higher the rating and slope, the more difficult the course.

Finally, the scorecard will also rank all the holes on the golf course according to their difficulty. These ranking numbers are done using odd numbers for the front nine and even numbers for the back nine, where the hole ranked as "1" is the most difficult, and "18" is the easiest.

Chapter 36: Par

A question that I often get is: "What is par?"

You may even have heard the phrase "par for the course" and you understand what that means generally, but you may not understand what it means in golf specifically.

Par is the number of shots/strokes it would take somebody who is a zero-handicap (a highly skilled) player to complete a particular hole.

Most regulation length 18-hole golf courses have a par of 70, 71, or 72.

Shorter or "executive" golf courses have pars of 69 or shorter. Remember, par is a calculation of what a zero-handicap golfer would do. As a beginner, par is going to be out of your reach. Don't be offended by that statement, and don't be embarrassed by it either. As your skill improves you will start to shoot scores that get closer to par.

Chapter 37: Par 3

A hole that is designated as par 3 means that a zero-handicap player (a very skilled player) will complete that hole in three strokes.

Usually this means one stroke to get the ball onto the green, and two putts to get the ball into the hole. Typically, par threes are shorter than 200 yards.

When you start playing on the course, you may be playing par 3's from teeing areas that are 75 or 80 yards from the green.

Then, as your skill increases, you can start to play from teeing areas that are a further distance from the green.

Chapter 38: Par 4

A hole that is designated as par 4 means that that zero-handicap golfer will complete the hole in four strokes.

Usually this means two strokes to get the ball onto the green, and two putts to get the ball into the hole.

Par 4 holes can range in distance from 200 yards to 500 yards, depending on what the golf course architect had in mind when designing that hole, and what tee box you are playing from.

Chapter 39: Par 5

Par 5's are the longest golf holes on a golf course.

These are the holes that a zero-handicap will complete in five strokes. Typically, that means three strokes to get onto the green and two putts.

I hope that you noticed that the common piece to par 3's, par 4's, and par 5's is that the golfer with a zero-handicap will make two putts on each green.

Making two putts per green should become your very first goal as a new golfer. Use the chapters on putting to help you do this.

Chapter 40: Next steps

And that's it for our introduction to golf.

You can treat this as a reference book, and not as a chapter book. Meaning pick and choose the points that you want to go back and refer to and learn about, as not all information here is applied sequentially.

Your next step, once you have mastered the information and content in this series, is to begin our “Beginner to Better” lesson series. This will help you continue to learn skills that will help you to play better golf and shoot lowest scores.

Go to www.thisisgolfgold.com for more information.