



EXCLUSIVE BY  
PETER KNIGHT  
GOLF AUSTRALIA  
TEACHING EDITOR

## WHY IS IT SO HARD TO CHANGE MY SWING?

**YOUR** motivation to change your swing is really strong. You have practised more than usual and have even had a friend videotape your swing. Still, the improvement just doesn't seem to be happening. This can be so frustrating.

Even minor changes can be challenging to make, let alone big changes. This doesn't seem to make sense, especially when you know the benefits and you get glimpses of what's possible when you are with your coach.

The way our brains function actually creates some of these difficulties when it comes to learning and remembering things, however we can do something about it.

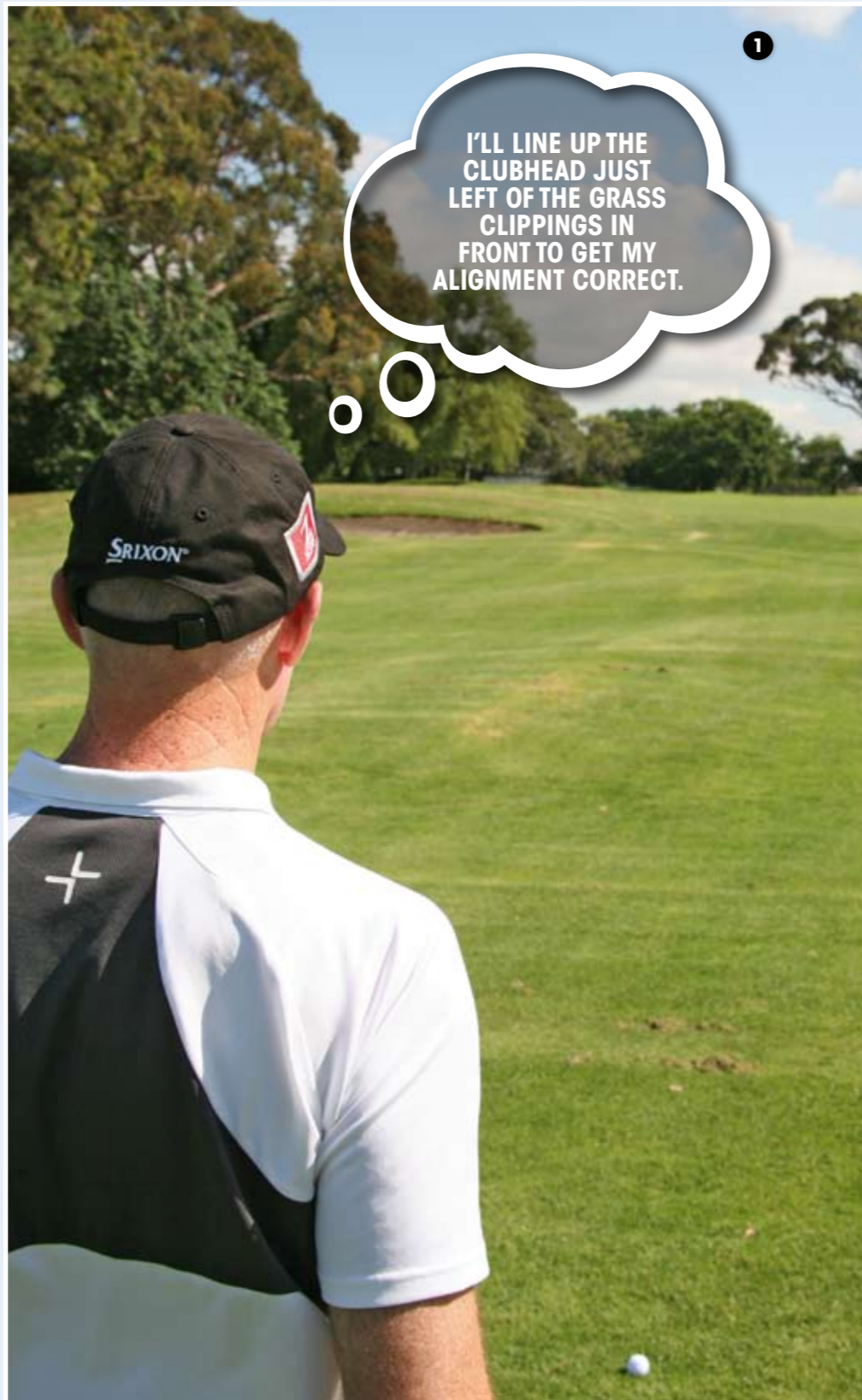
There is an unconscious reluctance to change for a number of reasons

Our brains, just like muscles, use energy when they work. They use more energy when our short-term memory is engaged compared to long term memory. When we learn something new, we first use our short-term memory.

Over time and after sufficient practice, the skill becomes automated and control of the task becomes a job for our long-term memory.

Using more mental energy can be tiring and concentration doesn't last as long. Can you see how making changes to your golf swing requires more energy because of the use of short-term memory? Once the movement is learned, it will take less energy to repeat. To get to that point, there needs to be sufficient deliberate, focused practice to ensure the change learned is an improvement.

We have an internal mental equilibrium mechanism, which detects differences in movement from a known pattern to a new pattern (for example



I'LL LINE UP THE CLUBHEAD JUST LEFT OF THE GRASS CLIPPINGS IN FRONT TO GET MY ALIGNMENT CORRECT.

our current swing to a new and better one). Our brains detect these differences as 'errors' and instinctively pushes back. It seems, then, that in learning new things we are almost fighting ourselves.

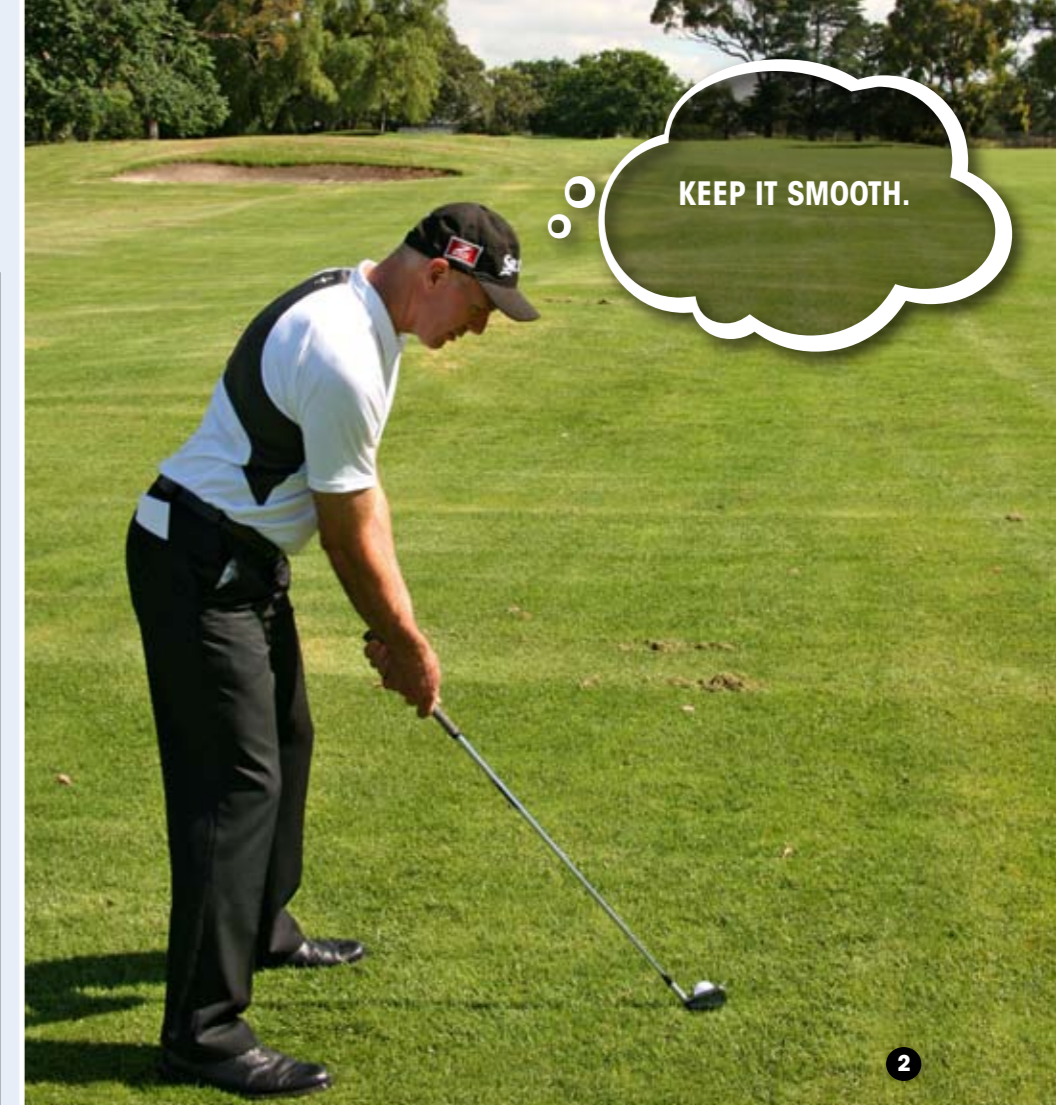
There is the issue of certainty and safety. We are usually more comfortable with what we know, even if we don't like it, than risk change. This doesn't seem logical; however all of our decisions and efforts to change are based on emotion.

So what can we do about this in the learning environment?

- Practise only one or two things at a time. Ideally one set-up thought (**pic 1**) and one swing thought (**pic 2**). This can be a huge challenge, especially if you know there are many things which require improvement. It is easier to focus on fewer things as mental overload can occur even thinking about two things, particularly if they are complex movements. By the time you reach the top of your backswing you shouldn't be thinking anything at all (**pic 3**).
  - If you have a friend watching you practise, explain to them what it is you would like them to watch and ask for feedback only on the point you are focusing on. This is probably a challenge for both you and your friend.
  - Only practise as long as you are able to hold your attention on the point you are working on. If your concentration begins to wander, hit different shots, take a short break or end the practice session.
  - Practise for short periods a few times a week, rather than practising for one long session a week.
- The changes will take place over time. Depending on the amount of time and attention you apply to the change, the length of time will vary. So practise with intent on one or two things for a period of two to four weeks, depending on the amount of practice time you have each week and watch as the improvements become automatic and the quality of your shots and enjoyment increases.

PHOTOS: BTRENDAN JAMES X 3

**PETER KNIGHT** is a Master Professional with the PGA of Australia. He is available for lessons and is based at Melbourne's Yarra Bend Golf Course. For bookings phone, (03) 9481 7874 or visit [www.golfpossibilities.com.au](http://www.golfpossibilities.com.au) or his blog [www.golfpossibilities.com](http://www.golfpossibilities.com)



KEEP IT SMOOTH.

