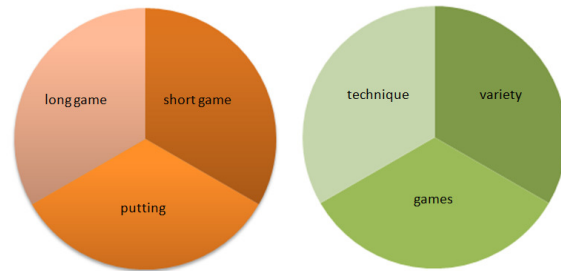


Practicing serves one primary purpose: to improve your competitive performance. You need to ensure you are doing whatever you can to be able to transfer your improvement to the course.

You must also create balance in your practice plan to ensure you are devoting sufficient time to each area of your game.

One way to achieve a balance in your practice is to be mindful of how your shots are distributed on the course. Statistically, approximately 40% of your shots will be full shots, 40% will be putts and 20% will be short game shots. Given the variety of short game shots: chips, pitches and bunker shots, it is fairer to spend 1/3 of your time on your long game, 1/3 on your short game and 1/3 on putting. Nice and easy to remember.



How you sub-divide that time is also crucial. Many players practice only technique when they are hitting full shots on the driving range. While there may be a short-term benefit in the quality of ball striking, there is usually difficulty in taking this improved form to the golf course, particularly under pressure.

To enable a transfer of form from the range to the course, you will need to add variety to your practice and also to create some pressure when you are hitting your shots. For full shots, variety can mean regularly changing the club you are using, your target, shot shape or trajectory, or effort/intensity level.

To create pressure and test how robust your skills are developing, you can carry out competitive drills. Those drills can include the 9 ball test and the Trackman Combine Test. You may also want to simulate on course shots that you may be faced with during up and coming tournaments.

So, how much time should be devoted to technique, variety and skill testing? One third of your time for each form of practice. When you are putting, spend 1/3 on putting technique, such as stroke path or stroke pace; 1/3 of your time on variety, such as green reading or long putting; and 1/3 of your time on skill testing, such as hitting 10 balls from 1 metre at different points around the hole and then hitting a further 10 balls from 2 metres.

When you first adopt the Rule of Thirds to your practice, you are likely to complete the technical part of your session and want to spend just a little more time on it because you have just about got the swing feel you are after or you want to groove a good shot. When this happens, usually the entire time passes without doing anything other than working on technique. I have seen this countless times. The result is very little balance in your practicing, which is reflected on the course.

Practicing according to the Rule of Thirds, which means adding variety and skills testing to the your practice sessions will create a far better transfer to the course and lead you to becoming a much better golfer in the long run.

Application of the Rule of Thirds

Technique

This often seems to imply swing thoughts and drills. While that is correct, it is essentially massed practice, whereby you will play many shots with the same club, target and intention. The intention is the key; it could be to develop a consistent routine, shot shape, improve mental preparation, rhythm, and feel for a particular shot or to practice a swing key or two. Essentially it is practicing the same thing with the objective of it becoming more automatic or habitual. During this type of practice if your intention is to work on technical changes such as a grip change or backswing position we recommend not hitting to a target. If your objective during the session is to work on technique then this should be your sole purpose. Whenever you are hitting to a target there is always the thought that adjustments can be made (sometimes unknowingly) as a response to the shot. Therefore combining technique and target can take the focus off technique, especially if the shot results aren't improving straight away.

Variety

This is the opposite of the technique (massed practice) component. Here the intention is to alter club, target, shot shape or thought/intention on a frequent basis. In this way you are not able to find the rhythm that you might find from hitting multiple similar shots. Practicing this way requires you to recalibrate your thoughts and feels every shot, much like you do on the golf course. This type of practice is far more challenging, but leads to far greater long-term performance gains than massed practice alone. This type of practice can involve a full pre and post shot routine. Your aim is to have the intensity level of your routine match your intensity level during a tournament round. This way you are practicing like you play.

Competitive

Here, the mental component is challenged and developed along with technique. There is pressure introduced either by incorporating a scoring system or by competing against one or more players, or both. Competitive practice provides an opportunity for improving (mental and emotional) state management; developing resilience & concentration; recovery from poor shots; coping with performing poorly or even from performing really well. This type of practice will involve a full pre and post shot routine. Your aim is to have the intensity level of your routine match your intensity level during a tournament round. This way you are practicing like you play.