

Improve Your Bunker Shots

An Easy To Follow System To
Mastering Bunker Fundamentals
and Fearing Bunkers Shots No More



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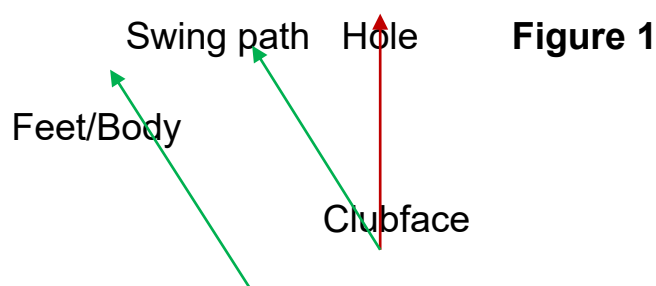
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Who will benefit from this E-Book?

1. **Golfers with a handicap of over 20** will benefit greatly if they take in these points and then apply them in practice and then in competition.
2. **Golfers with handicaps of 10 – 20** should also get some useful tips.
3. **Anyone from a handicap of 2-9** and is not especially strong from bunkers, should also pick up some valuable points to help their bunker play.

Just before we get started, it would be useful if **you grabbed a wedge** of some description so you can play around with your set-up and grip as you read this e-book, it will help you FEEL what you are reading.

The dreaded bunker shot reaps havoc with most club golfers. It is not as hard as people make it. Essentially, a bunker shot is just a big, **intentional fat-shot** (obviously we do not want to contact the ball). However, this shot cannot be played from a regular set-up position and the club should not be square to the feet.



The Importance of Correct Set-Up and Alignment

The higher the handicap – the worse the “set-up” for the bunker shot is. What I see from playing every week with club golfers over the past couple of decades are poor set-ups and a misunderstanding of what the “bunker fundamentals are.”

Jack Nicklaus said something like: “90% of golf swing errors are made BEFORE the golf swing begins”. How could that be? A classic example that can be seen at every golf club in the World – is poor alignment.

In essence, when you align yourself poorly (a lot of club golfers line their feet well right of the target for a regular tee or fairway shot), you do not give yourself room for the arms and club to work properly and swing down the line towards the target because the BODY is in the way. So, what happens a lot of the time is that the misaligned golfer swings across at the ball because he/she subconsciously knows that they have to hit towards the target – which is back across the body (meaning hook or slice).

If you are hitting it right to left with this closed stance (hitting away from the body and out to the right for a right-handed golfer), this type of shot usually curls a lot and it is hard to control.

Once the correct fundamentals have been “ingrained” into your bunker play, escaping them becomes no big deal; you might even grow to enjoy playing from them. Let’s get to work.

Why use a sand wedge, why is it different to the other Irons?

The sand wedge is designed with a thick flange (the base of the club; what the club sits on).

Gene Sarazan – a Great American Golfer from the 20's and 30's, invented the sand-wedge. He put a big, fat base on it, so when he would hit down on the sand, the club would react by “bouncing off” the sand and back up into the air. The club would jump up and the ball would fly out on a “bed of sand.”

With the old sharp bladed ‘Niblicks’ – as the wedge used to be called, the the club would DIG in and therefore the ball would not fly up on the “cloud of sand”.

To add to this extra bounce and lift that the sand wedge gives, all good players open the sand wedge, thereby increasing the BOUNCE and the LIFT that the shot gets. Therefore Pro's and good amateurs can take a big full swing and the ball might only travel eight or nine yards. This can be helpful when getting out of deep bunkers and playing short shots; sometimes you only want to hit a few yards – but you still require enough club-head speed to get through the thick sand.

Now let us look at the grip on the next page. This is especially important as we want the clubface to be wide open at impact – and the grip controls this.

Grip

Okay, so you now know why we use a sand-wedge and why good bunker players open the club face up (for lift and to generate speed to get through sand but without distance). Now we need to make the correct grip changes so the face remains open (**grab your wedge if you have not already done so**).

Basically, all you want to do is:

1. Address the ball in the setup position but do not take hold of the grip with your regular golf grip.
2. Now lay the face open so it has heaps of loft on it (club face looking up), now grip the club in your NORMAL POSITION so you look down and your hands look normal. You should have your normal grip and the club will be facing way right (open) of the target (30-40 degrees right). It should feel strange.

When setting up square now (take a club and set up to a target you can see ahead of you in your room) it should be like the diagram below (we have not touched your alignment yet).



Feet & Body Hole Clubface (currently)

Note: square hands and open clubface

Okay, well done, that is a good grip for a regular bunker shot! Now let's get onto the set up and alignment.

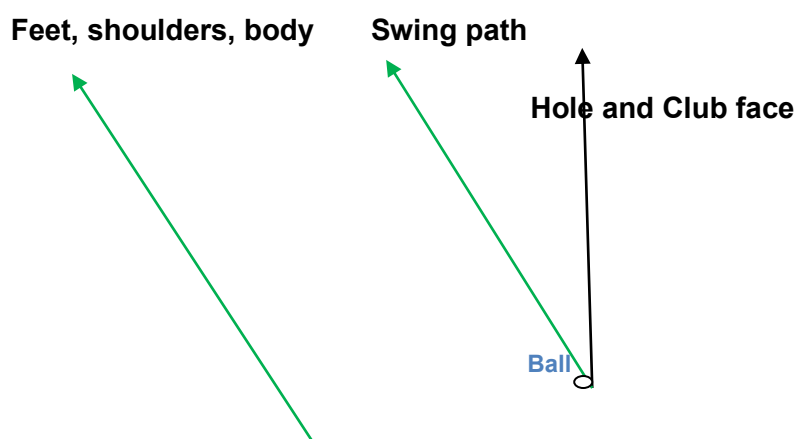
Bunker Shots Set-Up and Alignment

Now we have to get aligned properly, otherwise that ball is going to fly way right!

Basically we want to set up with our body, shoulders and our feet a maximum of 30-40 degrees to square (but club open regardless of feet alignment). (*Many modern players play from more squarer stances. If you find that you are not getting enough distance and cutting across too much from an open stance, try a squarer stance.)

Remember lay the club down, open it up, then grip it so your hands look normal and the face is well open.

Now you should have your feet well open and your clubface going towards the hole as seen below.



Feet and width of stance

Keep your feet wide, at least shoulder width or even wider. This helps with:

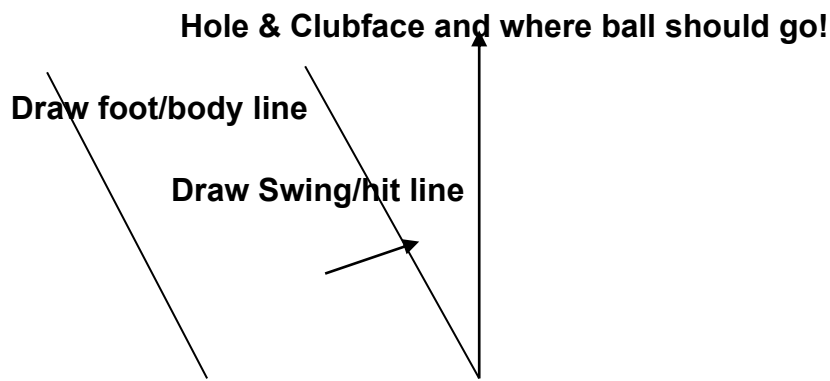
1. Flatness of your attack. We are hitting down so this wide stance will help us not dig in too much.
2. A wide stance also moves you (your center of gravity) further behind the ball which we want (see ball position page).
3. Also dig your feet in a little; this helps with stability.

Swing Path and Ball Position

Okay, now the swing path will follow your open body and feet – which is NOT towards the target. You are swinging normally but you are aiming well left and you have the clubface compensating by being way right of the swing and hit-line (clubface looks back at the hole).

Practicing Alignment

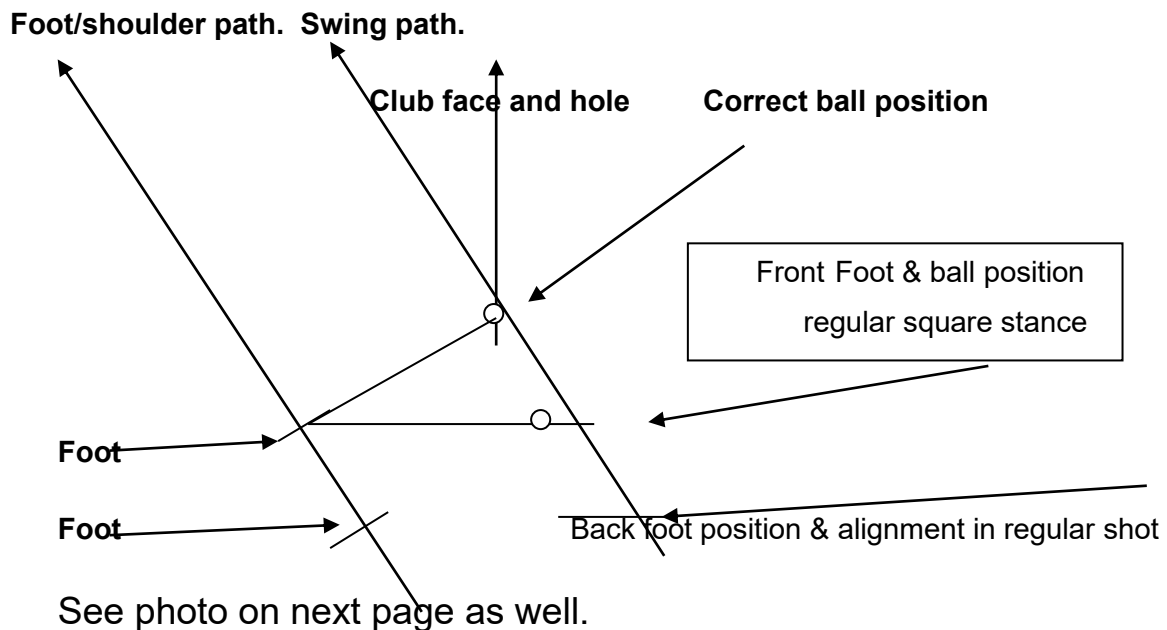
1. At home or wherever, you can practice this alignment by picking a target 30-40 degrees left (a chair leg or tree or pole outside), aim the clubface back at the target (with going through the correct “re-gripping of the grip” as discussed). Practice the correct grip too as described. Do not grip it normal then open the face. **Open the face and then grip it normal.**
2. **In a practice-bunker you** can draw some lines in the sand (see below)



Ball Position and Weight Distribution

Now this is an especially important fundamental of bunker play. I believe most amateurs should play the ball well forwards. Some low markers may want to play with the ball positioned not so far forwards, but I think for most people (me included) the ball should be positioned well forwards for the following reasons:

1. Obviously, we are NOT hitting the ball, so we want the ball position to be a couple of inches ahead of a normal full sand-iron or wedge shot.
2. By opening the stance so much, the ball position must follow this by moving forwards. It will be 2-3 inches or so further forwards than normal (around left instep-toe). So, it should feel that the ball is way forwards... but this is an illusion – because of the alignment factor. See (ugly) diagram below.



3. **Weight distribution** can be centred or forwards (more weight on left side at set up than right; play around with this). So having the ball forwards helps you “go after the ball” which will force your weight onto your front foot through the ball, where you need it. Many good players set up with most of the weight on their left side. Garry Player, who is recognised as one of the greatest bunker players, sets up with nearly all his weight on the left side.



Photo

1. Note my weight is a little more on my front side than centred.
2. Ball is well forwards as I am swinging left of target as we do with most greenside bunker shots. Plus, I'm hitting an intentional fat-shot as we do with all regular bunker shots.

Keeping relaxed and focused while hitting bunker shots

There are two reasons for poor shots:

1. **Poor technique:** most of this stems from the set-up and alignment which you hopefully have correct now
2. **Mental tension** which results in physical tension and poor swings and shots.

What we all need is a mental **anchor** or a swing-key (all great golfers use one for each shot). I like the word anchor as it means something solid that cannot be moved. It is a mental anchor that lets your body perform how it should, which is without mental interference (the mental affects the physical). If you read my other golf E-Books, I will always refer to an anchor for any golf swing, whether the shot is a putt, chip, drive, pitch, iron shot or bunker shot.

Why?

1. **Scenario 1.** What happens when you're in a bunker coming down the stretch, you are having a good round and you have to

hit a sand shot and you feel nervous, and you have pictures of hitting it fat or even thin and sending your player partners diving for cover. A thinned bunker shot can ruin a score – big time.

2. **Scenario 2.** For some reason you do not feel good when you get into a bunker. This is a really bad sign, and a bunker is not a place where you don't want to feel relatively confident.

Okay, so you get the picture.

What is going on here with this mental tension?

When you do not have an **anchor or a swing key** in your head, other thoughts and feelings can get in, you tense up and a bad, nervous swing results.

Pros and good amateurs also have these bad feelings and thoughts (me included), but they can still hit great shots. How?

Solution

Good players go through a pre-shot routine (see my other Golf Mental Mastery book for this) and they have a swing-key that they turn to.

I myself (I'm a solid bunker player) go through my normal routine, which is imagining where I want to hit the ball (where I specifically want to land it) and get the feel and the distance of the shot into my veins. I then hold the length and speed of swing that I need in my head. My mind is anchored in the feel of this swing. This enables my body to free up and swing without "mental trash"

coming into my head and it also tells my brain to hit a certain distance.

The brain can only think of one thing at once so even if you have a negative thought come into your mind, just get back to your pre-shot routine and **back to your swing key, back to your swing key, back to your swing key**. This anchors your mind into the here and now – not into what could happen. This is how good players think.

This is a constant struggle for all players, but that is golf and it's why it is such a great game. Just work on getting back to the present shot and a simple key.

What swing keys are right for you?

The one I use in bunkers is a good one and I have not changed it for many years. Some other players focus on a spot behind the ball (2-3 inches) as they swing. I do not look at a spot; I vaguely look at the ball (what I'm really focused in on is how hard I want to hit it, that is where more focus is). I don't hit the ball because the ball is well forwards – as I have made my set-up changes before I swing (I hit an intentional fat-shot). I keep my mind focused on my anchor (swing key) – which allows me to swing tension-free and hit a good shot.

Try a few different ones and then settle on one



I am thinking of the distance and making a relaxed arm swing. No rushing here, nice, and relaxed.

and use it **every time** you must hit a sand shot (check out my pre-shot routine and in my Golf Mental Mastery E-Book for more mental tricks).

Speciality Bunker Shots

Long Greenside Bunker Shot

A shot from 15 – 40 yards requires the same set up with maybe aiming not quite as far left (for right handers). So, keep the open face because we still want the club face to “bounce – not dig” on entry into the sand.

What happens when you must get: 20, 30 or 40 yards out of a bunker shot? Well, an open sand-iron is not going to get you the distance (Note: you can get more distance out of your sand-iron by not opening it much but as the shot gets longer you will require a club with less loft).

What you do is you just change clubs. Hit a wedge or 9-iron, or even down to a 7-iron if you need to hit it 40 yards. This works great.

Make sure you:

- Practice it a little
- Keep your stance open and wide, clubface open as with a regular sand-iron shot and swing along that body line.

- Hit down enough but not too much; a nice flat plane works well (not a steep hit). The ball will fly out a little lower and will not stop quite as fast as the regular short bunker shot.
- Be confident; if you have made the normal correct bunker set-up changes, have faith, and go for it

Plugged Lie

1. Now this is a shot where you are going to have to **chop down** on the sand hard. A lot of players even use a gap or pitching wedge for this shot because we do not want the sand irons “bounce”; we want to cut down into the sand.
2. Keep swinging across the ball a little with a slightly open clubface and stance (this stops the ball from travelling too far).
3. Play around with a square clubface too, many players play plugged lies with a square club face (I play most of the time with a slightly open face and body/stance).

Fairway Bunker Shot

I use a few keys; here they are:

1. **Dig your feet in a little.** This helps with keeping your feet stable and balanced. You need to stay very balanced.
2. **Ball Position:** I position the ball back only about 1inch. This ensures that I hit the ball first – not the sand.
3. **Make an extremely smooth swing.** I make sure my transition up the top of the swing is smooth and relaxed. I like to let my

arms come down with gravity (no effort). It is very much an arms swing; we do not want active legs... we want wooden legs.

I really enjoy playing these shots, probably because they are hard, and they force me to focus and make a smooth swing – because perfect contact is required.

Hard and soft Sand

In hard wet sand or in a bunker with not much sand, you need to hit down and dig into the sand because the open sand-iron will bounce and not dig at all. A bouncing sand-iron on hard ground equals the dreaded **bladed shot**. So, a pitching wedge would be better for this shot if the sand or base of the bunker is just under the sand. If you choose a sand-iron, you are going to have to hit down hard (a wedge will work better; still open the face up a little).

In soft sand or bunkers that have a lot of sand (many new bunkers have this challenge) you must do the opposite which is:

1. Use the sand-iron because we want bounce (with normal open stance and swing path for a regular bunker shot).
2. You don't want to hit down excessively because the base of the bunker is so far down under the sand; the club is not going to bounce back up and the ball is not going to travel far.
3. Keep the swing flat by thinking of "skimming the sand" more than whacking down on it.
4. Keep the stance wide and bend your legs as this will help with the flat, skimming entry into the sand.

Do not get too technical

Okay, I have given you a whole lot of **technical changes** that are necessary for good bunker play. And I have also given you tips on how to **control your thoughts** when playing bunker shots. **Do not get paralysed** when you are playing by thinking too technically.

I played a couple of days ago – in the middle of writing this and noticed my actual set-up process is just second nature. I do not stand there going “okay my feet need to be 35 degrees left ... check, and I have to open my club up this much... check. No, I naturally set up open, with the ball positioned well up in my stance, and I re-grip the club in an open position. All you must have do is focus on how hard I need to hit it; and I keep that thought in my head when I play (this also keeps me relaxed).

So simply practice hitting bunker shots so you can **ingrain the correct set up, alignment and grip**. Once you have this done, it is just a matter of reading each bunker shot, making necessary changes, and keeping your mind occupied with a good swing thought or feeling – and that is it.

I hope this report on bunker fundamentals helps you with your bunker play. And see over the page for more resources.

Good golfing

Cheers,

Anthony Procopis (AP)

Resources

To learn more about the other golf-improvement courses, go to:

APGOLF.NET

Other Courses

Build a Better Shortgame – videos, eBooks and email-lessons covering the essential fundamentals of consistently solid chipping, pitching and bunker play.

The Automatic Golf System – Minimize technical swing thoughts and improve your ball-striking and scoring now with the swing you already have. Great players play *feel-golf*. They “*look, see, feel, and swing.*”

The Adults Golf Swing and The Simple Swing – create a simpler, more repeatable golf swing.

On-Course Scoring/Play Smart Golf – countless on-course scoring tips that will help you maximize your scoring by navigating the every-round realities of playing from all sorts of lies, under various conditions, under pressure situations, and much more.

Recommend

To refer friends that you think would benefit from these teachings,
send them to APGolf.Net.

Best Regards,

Anthony Procopis