Getting Started in Golf

Your first nine

Fast. Transparent. Feedback you can see.

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For intro golfers and anyone spinning their wheels on talk-head noise.

Get in the game first. Get better after.

How to use this playbook

Golf looks like one sport. For a beginner it is three small games, a first-round problem, and a feedback problem. Most people start at the driving range chasing the pretty swing and the long ball — the part of golf that matters least to scoring and slows your improvement.

This playbook is a sequence, not a catalog of tips. First, get on the course without looking lost. Then make your practice match what you actually play.

You are allowed to be bad at golf.

You are not allowed to be confused about what to do next.

The order that keeps people in the game

1. **Get on the course.** Finish a par-3 nine with three clubs. That is Getting Started.
2. **Practice what you play.** Use the five-step sequence so practice and the course feel like the same game.
3. **Keep the feedback.** Watch the ball finish. Keep the data. Drop the identity. Take the next swing.

The vocabulary

Par
Strokes a hole is designed for. A par 3 means three.

Stroke
One swing. The unit of the whole game.

Pin
The flagstick. Not always your target.

Loft
Angle on the face that lifts the ball. Trust it — don't scoop.

Front tees
Shortest tees. Start here. Play from where you can reach.

Landing spot
Where the ball should first hit the green. Often not the pin.

Bogey
One stroke over par. An honest beginner's home base.

Green
Short-cut grass where you putt.

Bunker
Sand trap. Your 56-degree covers this.

Grain
How grass grows on the green. Can speed or slow a putt.

Handicap
Levels different skills. You do not need the math yet.

THE FIRST 9 PROMISE

Play nine holes with three clubs. Leave knowing exactly what to practice. Come back before the week is over.

01

The Sunday Bag

Do not take a full set. A full set is a decision machine. Every extra club is another chance to stand over the ball and invent a plan you cannot yet execute. Three clubs is a game you can finish.

PUTTER

The green club. Every hole ends here. Speed first, then start line.

52° WEDGE

The tee club on short par 3s and the fuller-swing club. One stock swing you can repeat without inventing a new plan.

56° WEDGE

The scoring club. Chips, pitches, bunkers, everything around the green. Prefer mid-bounce so imperfect contact skims instead of digs.

ALIGNMENT STICK · MUST-HAVE

Fourth piece of The First 9 Method, not an accessory. A few dollars, any store brand. Practice only — it cannot come on the course.

Carry it light. A dozen used balls, three tees, a ball-mark tool, water, a hat. Rent these three clubs if you do not own them. Used is fine. Fancy is a delay.

Leave the driver in the car

Do not buy a driver to start golf. On a par 3 you are never more than a wedge from the green. A driver on a 120-yard hole is theater. The driver is the most expensive club in the bag and the least useful to your development. It will still be there when you have earned it.

Why these three: the 52 covers the fuller swings. The 56 covers the short holes and everything around the green. The putter finishes. And nothing is wasted: a full iron set you buy later brings its own pitching wedge and 8-iron, almost never a 52 or 56, so these stay in your bag. On a longer par 3, about 120 yards and up, borrow or rent a hybrid or 7-iron.

If a boxed starter set is already in the garage, do not add clubs to it. Pull the putter and the sand wedge (around 54 to 56 — it stands in for the 56). If there is a wedge around 50 to 52, pull it too; if not, that is the one club to add. Leave the driver, the irons, and the pitching wedge. Buy one alignment stick if the box did not include one. It is a must-have for practice, cheap, any store brand, and it stays off the course.

02

The Par-3 First Nine

A standard course asks you to spend an afternoon proving you belong. A par 3 asks you to spend an hour learning the game. That difference is why beginners stay or leave.

A full 18 is built for four people, long walks, a stacked tee sheet, and groups behind you. Plan on four to five hours of play — five to six door to door. Nine full-length holes still run about two to two and a half hours. Busy public weekends run longer.

A 9-hole par 3 is a different object on your calendar. Most loops take 45 to 75 minutes. Door to door you can be home in two hours. Holes are short. Walks are short. You lose fewer balls. Nobody is waiting on a driver you do not have. Beginners are expected.

Format	On course	Door to door	Relative cost
Standard 18	4–5 hours	5–6 hours	Highest
Standard 9	2–2.5 hours	~3 hours	Middle
Par-3 9	45–75 min	90–120 min	Lowest

Money follows time. A weekday municipal par 3 is often the cheapest golf in town. Two cheap loops a week beat one expensive Saturday you postpone.

The ease-in math: two par-3 nines in a week is about two hours of actual golf and two first-tee reps. One Saturday 18 is five hours, one terrified opening shot, and a week before you try again. Traction comes from reps under low pressure — not from surviving a championship routing.

MISSION CARD

On the course: putter, 52, 56. The alignment stick is a practice must-have and stays home.

Book a par-3 nine — weekday or twilight if you can. Lights help in hot cities.

Arrive 20 minutes early. Three putts on the practice green. No range marathon.

Tell the window you are new and playing three clubs. Then go.

Finish all nine. That is the win. Driver still in the car.

The check: Did you complete a par-3 nine with the Sunday bag? Yes or no.

03

Etiquette – Tee to Green

You do not need the full rule book. You need enough to get around a par 3 without embarrassing anyone or holding up the group. Speed of play barely matters on a short course. Learn the habit now anyway — it travels with you.

Before the hole

- Enough balls in the bag — a sleeve is fine. Used range-quality balls are honest golf.
- A glove on the lead hand if your hands slip. Optional, not a uniform.
- Collared shirt, shorts or appropriate bottoms. Check the course dress code. Most par 3s are relaxed.

On the first tee

Start at the very front tee — the shortest set. You are new. Play from where you can reach the green. Tell the starter you are new. Most people would rather know than guess.

WHAT TO SAY · THE THREE SENTENCES THAT UNLOCK THE DAY

At the window — “Hi — I’m new. Playing a par-3 nine with three clubs. Front tees.”

On the first tee — “I’m just getting started. I’ll play from up here.”

After a miss — Nothing. A small nod. Walk to it. Play the next one.

On the green

The green is the one place where the ball rolls. Treat it like a pool table. Every spike mark, every unfixed ball mark, every walk across the line is a bump someone else has to putt over. Walk around the green, not across it. Fix your mark.

- Distance rule: whoever is farthest from the hole putts first. It is not about rank. It is about pace.
- If your ball sits in another player’s line, mark it with a coin, pick it up, and replace it after they putt. Two seconds. You just became the person everyone wants in the group.

04

The Games of Golf

Golf is three games that share a bag. Beginners smear them together and practice only the long game because it looks like television. That is how you stay stuck.

PUTTING

Speed plus start line. Every hole ends here. This is where scores are kept honest.

100 YARDS IN

Chips, pitches, short par 3s. Most of an average golfer's strokes live here. This is the scoring game.

THE LONG GAME

On the shelf. You will graduate. The driver is not the door. It is a later room.

Short-game research (the tradition Dave Pelz made famous) keeps finding the same order: most strokes — and most easy early saves — live inside about 100 yards. Putting and wedges first. You are allowed to ignore the driver aisle for months.

Put the long game on the shelf. Once you can play the wedge game and putting well, you graduate. You will enjoy the game more after you learn the first two games.

05

Putting

Putting is speed plus start line. Learn the high side and the low side of the cup. The high side is the side the ball breaks toward — the side you want to miss on if you miss. The low side is where the ball falls away and never had a chance.

GREAT	You make it.
GOOD	Misses on the high side, slightly long. It had a statistical chance to go in.
BAD	Misses on the low side but had distance. You gave it a chance.
TERRIBLE	Misses on the low side with no distance. You never gave it a shot.

THE CONCEPT

Give every putt a chance to go in. Get your speed so a miss finishes slightly past (~a foot) on the high side.

Why: Leaving it short feels careful – and it is the most common amateur miss. Putts that die short almost never fall.

How: Same start line you pictured; roll it to the far edge of the cup or just past. No tape measure.

Common mistake: Dying short on the low side. That putt never had a chance.

A light touch on grain is enough for now. Speed and the high side first.

06

The Wedge Game

ONE HUNDRED YARDS IN

Chipping and pitching are the core fundamentals. This swing is different from the long-game swing. From 100 yards in, a pitch or a chip is not muscle and not a scoop — it is a smooth, repeatable motion where the club does the lifting. This is the finesse swing.

Credit to Dave Pelz. The Short Game Bible is the deeper source if you want it later. This is the distilled version that gets you on the course without a clinic budget.

The finesse swing

- Soft grip — like the club could almost slip. Coaches call this dead hands: wrists and fingers stay quiet; the club moves with your body's smooth turn, not a slap.
- Same smooth rhythm every time. Finish the swing — do not quit at the ball.
- Think of handing a fragile glass from your trail side to your lead side without spilling. Flow, not force.
- Not coiling. Shift hips and chest together. Accuracy before distance.
- Distance: same rhythm, different backswing length. Short / medium / long backswing for shorter / stock / longer carry. You will invent your own yardages. Do not decelerate into the ball — that is the short-game killer.

The counterintuitive part

You want the ball to go high, so you think you need to arch back and scoop it.

- What loft is: the angle already built into the face. It lifts the ball.
- Why it matters: scooping ruins the strike and the distance.
- How: strike just behind the ball; brush the turf (or sand) through. Hit down / through — loft lifts.
- Common mistake: trying to "help" the ball up with the wrists.

Before you swing, name a landing spot — where the ball should first hit the green (or fringe). Often a few feet onto the green, short of the pin, with roll after. The pin is a wish. The landing spot is a plan.

Consistency is the same strike, same spot, every time.

THE LONG GAME STAYS ON THE SHELF

The long game is where beginner golfers go to struggle, spend, and waste time. Everybody wants to drive the ball far. It feels good. Fight the urge to do solely what feels good about golf.

You are here to learn the game, be competent, learn how to practice, and practice what you play. You can play this sport past eighty. The driver will still be there when you have earned it.

07

Practicing

Focus on the first two games for your first month to three months. Play par-3 courses. Do not go to the range to rack over identical balls. Practice putting — high side, finish slightly past (~a foot), locking it in. Practice the finesse swing for pitches and greenside chips — with real targets and real finishes.

The five-step sequence — every shot, every time

01 **Pick your target.**
Must pick a target. Within 100 / 80 / 60 yards — a specific patch. For wedges, name the landing spot (often not the flag). For putts, name a start line and an intention to finish slightly past.

02 **Align.**
Feet set so a line across your toes points parallel to the target line. Use the alignment stick in practice.

03 **Ball position.**
For a 52° or 56°, the ball splits your body. Belt buckle over the ball. Feet no more than shoulder width, slightly in.

04 **Finesse swing.**
Soft grip. Quiet hands. Trust loft. Brush through. Choose a short, medium, or long backswing on purpose — same rhythm, full finish. No deceleration.

05 **Hold your finish.**
Until the ball comes to a complete stop. This is how the body files the shot.

You cannot use the stick in the game. You can use it in practice. When the sequence becomes repetition, it translates to the course.

A simple menu that transfers: with one wedge, hit five balls short backswing, five medium, five longer. Change the landing spot. Watch every ball stop. That beats a blank bucket.

HOLD THE FINISH · INTERNAL DATA COLLECTION

After a solid swing, hold your finish until the ball comes to rest. Your body tells you: good swing or bad? Solid contact? Feel in the hands? Direction you wanted? Distance you wanted?

Your body collects that only if you watch the ball to its finish. If you drop your head and think about the next shot, you miss the download. Watch the ball to the finish.

08

Architect and Greenskeeper

From a given tee and a given pin, you are not just swinging. The architect placed the tees, the trouble, and the green. The greenskeeper cut that green this morning and chose where the hole sits. Your swing is the third voice. It does not have to be the loudest one.

“Hit it hard” feels like a plan because it needs no decision. You are allowed to decline the flag. A miss to the wide side is still you playing the hole.

Three looks, then swing

- Where a bad miss goes — water, out of bounds, a bunker tight against a small shelf.
- Where a boring miss still leaves a next shot — short of the green, or the fat middle.
- Which of your three clubs lets you swing without forcing it. Between two, take the easier one.

One hole, so this is not a slogan

A teaching hole, not a course you have to find. About 110 yards from the front tee. The green is wide. A bunker sits front-right. Today’s pin is tucked just behind that bunker, a few paces from the right edge. The middle of the green is open.

- The architect put the sand where a hard swing at the flag goes. You are allowed not to answer that question.
- Landing spot: a few paces onto the middle, left of the pin. The ball can roll. The flag is a wish.
- Club: the 52°, smooth. If 110 looks longer than a comfortable 52°, aim short of the green on purpose. Short is a plan. Long, in the bunker, is the architect winning.
- The 56° waits until you are around the green, or the hole is clearly a short one you are not forcing. You do not invent a third plan.
- Greenskeeper, once you are on: the hole is a small target on a slope. Speed first. The grades — slightly past, high side — are in the putting section. Use them. Do not invent a new putting theory on the green.

THE WIN

On a par 3, get on the green – or just short of it, on the safe side. Anywhere but the bunker behind a tucked pin.

Then putt. Then walk. Do not hold a lesson on the tee.

08

Same steps. No stick.

On the course you run the five steps with no alignment stick. The target is the landing spot from the last page — fat green first, pin second — not whatever the group is aiming at.

Green-side order: biggest safe piece of green, then a landing spot that feeds toward the middle, then the pin only when you have grass to work with. Hitting any part of the green is a real result. Be proud of it.

Get on the green. Get on the green. Get on the green. On a par 3, that is the win.

09

Internal & External Feedback

Feedback is how you accelerate. There are golfers who have played their entire lives and never learned this. Feedback is how you separate yourself from failure — in this game and in the rest of your life.

So many people take failure as an identity because of the words they choose. Your words speak life or death. In this game you can learn to speak to yourself properly, through the right word choice, inside a focused feedback method.

Internal

When you line up with an alignment stick, your body gets feedback that you are in position. When you visualize the shot, align, swing, and watch the ball stop, each step is a checkpoint: are you on the path to see the vision come true? Meet each step with respect.

External

This is where golfers get led astray. Everyone has an opinion. Media and brands sell get-good-quick tools because that is the market. Drown out the noise. Do not go down the YouTube rabbit hole. There is no perfect club that will make you a phenomenal golfer.

THE INTERNAL SCRIPT

When the ball stops somewhere you did not want: that is not where I wanted to be. I am going to take that data and go back to training. Alignment. Ball at the belt. Soft grip – quiet hands. Trust loft. Name the landing spot. Short, medium, or long backswing on purpose. Watch it finish. On the green: slightly past (~a foot), high side. Do it again.

10

You Belong Here

Golf has a stereotype problem. Country club. Dress code. Money. Newcomers walk in feeling like they do not belong — and the first bad shot confirms it. The truth is the opposite.

We live in a world where sports and failure, if you are not in the right room, get taken on as identity. Little league parents put that pressure on their children. A dance recital. A soccer team. A kid who is not the fastest. “That kid is slow.” “That kid just has natural talent.” Those sayings are everywhere.

The reality is strategy, feedback, a practice plan, and commitment to it.

That is the logical side. The emotional side is this: separate yourself from the identity of failure. It is okay to fail. The best example is professional baseball. The best hitters in the majors strike out more than they hit. We only see the highlight reels. The failure, the practice, and the repetition behind closed doors are what those athletes should be glorified for.

This is your sports therapy session. Golf is rewarding and challenging. To be successful you have to separate your identity from a bad shot.

You are playing a par 27. Nine times three. That is a long game of beating yourself up if you get upset after poor shots and fall into negative self-talk. Have almost a goldfish mentality toward the miss — forget it in seconds — but capture the feedback for the next swing. Keep a positive attitude.

You belong in this game. The stereotype has been proven false time and time again. Tiger Woods overcame more than most and brought people into golf who had been told this game was not for them. You belong. You definitely belong.

The only shot that matters is the next one.

Fast. Transparent. Feedback you can see.

The First 9 is the club. The First 9 Method is the path. The Sunday Bag carries it.

Your first nine

Print this page. Fold it. Put it in the Sunday Bag. When your head gets noisy, read the check and take the next swing.

Before and during

- [ ] Booked a par-3 nine (weekday or twilight).
- [ ] On the course: putter, 52, 56. Alignment stick stays home — practice must-have, not a fourth club.
- [ ] Dozen used balls, three tees, ball-mark tool, water, hat.
- [ ] Arrived 20 minutes early. Three putts (slightly past). No range marathon.
- [ ] Told the window: “I’m new. Three clubs. Front tees.”
- [ ] Started on the shortest tees.
- [ ] Named the fat part of the green before choosing a club.
- [ ] Named a landing spot before every wedge — not always the pin.
- [ ] Soft hands / trusted loft (no scoop).
- [ ] Tried at least one short and one longer backswing on purpose.
- [ ] Held the finish until the ball stopped.
- [ ] Fixed my ball mark. Walked around the green.
- [ ] Finished all nine. Driver still in the car.

After thirty days, you are Getting Started if

- You have completed at least six par-3 nines with the Sunday Bag.
- You can name your target (and for wedges, your landing spot) before you swing.
- Your misses on the green are starting to finish slightly past (~a foot) on the high side.
- A bad shot no longer decides who you are for the rest of the loop.
- You already know where you are playing next.

REMEMBER

You are allowed to be bad at golf.

You are not allowed to be confused about what to do next. Book the next nine before you leave.