

# Putting Starter

## Goal: fewer 3-putts

Four weeks of short sessions on the green, or on a carpet at home.

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A free guide from The Smart Shot, on Instagram @thesmartshotgolf.

Version 1.0, January 2027. Practice, not medical advice.

**Putting Starter, by The Smart Shot**

Version 1.0, January 2027

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This guide is general practice information for golfers, not medical advice or personal coaching. Results depend on your practice and your game; we don't promise a specific score, handicap or number of putts.

Prepared with the help of AI tools; every drill and text was reviewed by a person before publication.

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# 1. How this plan works

Four weeks of short sessions on the strokes that slip away without you noticing: the putts. It won't promise you a handicap. It shows you your numbers, and how they move.

**Start at week 1 and do one week at a time.** Each week has three sessions of 12 to 20 minutes. Practise once a week: Session A. Twice: A and B. Three times: all three. After week 4, keep going with Keep-sharp weeks.

**One score per drill.** 10 balls, one number: "7 out of 10". Write it in the box on the week page, with your level: "L2 6". On the green you only need that week's page: print it or take a screenshot.

**Your level.** Level 1 if your handicap is above 30, or you have none yet. Level 2 for 20 to 30. Level 3 below 20. Score 7 or more twice in a row on a drill: that drill goes up a level. 3 or less twice in a row: it goes down. Around 5 out of 10 is the sweet spot. (Pressure ten has its own rule: see its card.)

**Key number.** Each week page names one drill as its key number: the score that shows best whether that week's work is landing. Short on time? Keep that one.

**Missed a session?** Let it go. Next week, start with Session A.

**Distances.** One putter length is roughly 33–35 in, just under 3 ft. One long stride is about 3 ft.

> **Counting down to a date? Count the full weeks to your trip, season start or competition.**
>
> - **4 weeks or more:** weeks 1 to 3, Keep-sharp weeks until one week is left, then week 4. Skip the Keep-sharp retest: week 4 is your retest.
> - **3 weeks:** weeks 1 and 2, then week 4.
> - **2 weeks:** week 2, then Sessions B and C of week 4, no retest. Practise once a week? Session B only.
> - **Less than 2 weeks:** no new drills. Ten before the tee and the Day Card.

# 2. What you need

- **10 balls.** Your own, the same kind you play with.
- **2 tees**, to mark your spot or a second hole.
- **Your putter**: your club and your measuring stick.
- **Your phone** (a notes page) or a pencil and this plan.
- **A putting green** for most sessions.

**No green, or winter?** Ring of ten, Routine putts and Pressure ten work on a carpet or a putting mat, with a cup or a coin as the hole. Long putts need a real green: on a carpet day, swap them as the drill card says.

**Play it safe.** This plan is practice, not medical advice. Loosen up first, stand tall between blocks, and stop if anything hurts. More in chapter 10.

# 3. Your starting numbers

Three quick tests, about 18 minutes, 30 balls in 3 sets of 10. You do them in week 1 and again in week 4. Write your numbers in "Your before and after" (chapter 8).

| Test | Setup | Counts |
|---|---|---|
| Short putts | From 3 ft, a different side every putt | Holed |
| Mid putts | A ring of balls 10 ft from the hole, one putt each | Holed |
| Long putts | From 35 ft, a new hole or a new side every putt | Stops within 1 putter length (short, long or beside it) |

**Three rules for honest numbers**

1. Loosen up your back and shoulders first. Then roll no more than 2–3 minutes of practice putts: we want your real numbers, not your best ones.
2. No re-hits. On the course, the first try is the only one you get.
3. Retest on the same green, in the same season, if you can. A fast summer green and a slow winter green aren't the same test.

**What your numbers tell you.** These aren't grades and there's no pass mark. The three tests aren't equally hard, so your lowest number isn't automatically your biggest problem. What counts is how each one moves:

- Short and mid putts → weeks 2 and 3
- Long putts → week 1 and the Keep-sharp weeks

# Week 1: Know your numbers, find your speed

**Goal this week:** get your three starting numbers, and start stopping long putts close to the hole.

**Session A is the starting test** (chapter 3). Loosen up your back and shoulders first. Then roll no more than 2–3 minutes of practice putts: we want your real numbers, not your best ones. Pick a green you can come back to in week 4.

| Session | Drill | Level 1 / 2 / 3 | Score |
|---|---|---|---|
| **A**, 18 min | Starting test<br>chapter 3; write your 3 numbers in "Your before and after" | | |
| **B**, 20 min | Lag to the zone | 20 / 35 / 40 ft | ☐ |
| | Ring of ten | 3 / 5 / 7 ft | ☐ |
| | Lag to the zone<br>new hole | 20 / 35 / 40 ft | ☐ |
| **C**, 15 min | Lag to the zone<br>on a slope, uphill and downhill | 20 / 35 / 40 ft | ☐ |
| | Ring of ten | 3 / 5 / 7 ft | ☐ |

Practise once: A. Twice: A + B. Three times: A, B and C. What counts at each level: the drill cards in chapter 5.

**Key number:** Lag to the zone. Practise once a week? Then it's Long putts from the test.
**On the course:** put a dot on your scorecard for every 3-putt.
**3-putts per round:** _____ _____ _____

**Why:** long putts miss on distance far more than on line. Fix the speed and the second putt gets short.

# Week 2: Short putts that drop

**Goal this week:** hole more short putts, and use one short routine on every putt.

**Your routine: Target. Rehearse. Go.** Pick the spot where the ball drops in. One practice stroke while you look at the hole. Set up, one look, roll it. Under 20 seconds, every putt.

| Session | Drill | Level 1 / 2 / 3 | Score |
|---|---|---|---|
| **A**, 20 min | Ring of ten | 3 / 5 / 7 ft | ☐ |
| | Routine putts | 5 / 7 / 8 ft | ☐ |
| | Lag to the zone | 20 / 35 / 40 ft | ☐ |
| **B**, 20 min | Ring of ten | 3 / 5 / 7 ft | ☐ |
| | Lag to the zone | 20 / 35 / 40 ft | ☐ |
| | Ring of ten<br>new hole | 3 / 5 / 7 ft | ☐ |
| **C**, 12 min | Routine putts | 5 / 7 / 8 ft | ☐ |
| | Ring of ten | 3 / 5 / 7 ft | ☐ |

Practise once: A. Twice: A + B. Three times: A, B and C. What counts at each level: the drill cards in chapter 5.

**Key number:** Ring of ten.
**On the course:** Target. Rehearse. Go. on every putt, and keep counting your 3-putts.
**3-putts per round:** _____ _____ _____
**No green?** Ring of ten and Routine putts work on a mat, with a cup or a coin as the hole.

**Why:** a 3 ft putt counts the same as your best drive, and golfers around handicap 20 hole only about half their putts from 3 to 6 ft.

# Week 3: Putts that count

**Goal this week:** hole the short ones when it matters, and keep every long putt to a tap-in.

**Pressure ten.** 10 putts, each from a different side. Say your streak out loud before every putt. Score: your longest streak. Level up at 5 or more twice in a row, down at 1 or less twice in a row.

Your scores may dip this week. That's normal: harder practice sticks better.

| Session | Drill | Level 1 / 2 / 3 | Score |
|---|---|---|---|
| **A**, 15 min | Pressure ten<br>score: longest streak | 2 / 3 / 5 ft | ☐ |
| | Lag to the zone<br>on a slope, uphill and downhill | 20 / 35 / 40 ft | ☐ |
| **B**, 20 min | Routine putts | 5 / 7 / 8 ft | ☐ |
| | Lag to the zone | 20 / 35 / 40 ft | ☐ |
| | Ring of ten | 3 / 5 / 7 ft | ☐ |
| **C**, 15 min | Pressure ten<br>score: longest streak | 2 / 3 / 5 ft | ☐ |
| | Lag to the zone<br>on a side slope, breaking putts | 20 / 35 / 40 ft | ☐ |

Practise once: A. Twice: A + B. Three times: A, B and C. What counts at each level: the drill cards in chapter 5.

**Key number:** Pressure ten.
**On the course:** Target. Rehearse. Go. on every putt; on long putts, think distance only. Keep counting your 3-putts.
**3-putts per round:** _____ _____ _____
**No green?** Pressure ten, Routine putts and Ring of ten work on a mat. Swap the long putts as the drill card says.

**Why:** on the course you get one try. Practising that way, with a little pressure, carries over better.

# Week 4: Retest and take it to the course

**Goal this week:** see how your numbers have moved, and take one warm-up and one routine onto the course.

**Session A is your retest.** Exactly the same three tests as week 1: same distances, same scoring, same rules (loosen up first, no more than 2–3 minutes of practice putts, no re-hits). Use the same green as week 1 if you can. Write your numbers next to week 1 in "Your before and after" (chapter 8).

**Session C:** this week's scores don't change your level. Just roll the ball well.

| Session | Drill | Level 1 / 2 / 3 | Score |
|---|---|---|---|
| **A**, 18 min | Retest<br>chapter 3; write your 3 numbers in "Your before and after" | | |
| **B**, 15 min | Ten before the tee<br>exactly as on the day | 5 × 35 ft, then 5 × 3 ft | ☐ |
| | Lag to the zone<br>new hole | 20 / 35 / 40 ft | ☐ |
| **C**, 12 min | Routine putts | 5 / 7 / 8 ft | ☐ |
| | Lag to the zone | 20 / 35 / 40 ft | ☐ |

Practise once: A. Twice: A + B. Three times: A, B and C. What counts at each level: the drill cards in chapter 5.

**Timing:** got a date? Your last session 1–2 days before it. On the day itself: only Ten before the tee and the Day Card.
**Ten before the tee:** the warm-up from chapter 6, the same at every level.
**No date?** Your Keep-sharp weeks start next.
**On the course:** Ten before the tee before every round, and count your 3-putts.
**3-putts per round:** _____ _____ _____

**Why:** don't learn something new right before a big day. Sharpen what you have.

# Keep-sharp week (K)

**Goal this week:** keep what you've built in less time, and retest every 4 weeks.

**Retest:** in column K4, swap Session A for the starting test (chapter 3). Same green, same season, if you can.
**Counting down to a date?** Keep-sharp weeks fill the gap; skip their retest, because week 4 always comes last and is your retest. Done with K4? Start again in column K1.

| Session | Drill | Level 1 / 2 / 3 | K1 | K2 | K3 | K4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **A**, 15 min | Lag to the zone | 20 / 35 / 40 ft | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| | Ring of ten | 3 / 5 / 7 ft | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **B**, 12 min | Pressure ten<br>score: longest streak | 2 / 3 / 5 ft | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| | Routine putts | 5 / 7 / 8 ft | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| **C**, 15 min | Lag to the zone<br>on a slope, uphill and downhill | 20 / 35 / 40 ft | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| | Ring of ten<br>new hole | 3 / 5 / 7 ft | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

Practise once: A. Twice: A + B. Three times: A, B and C. One column per Keep-sharp week. What counts at each level: the drill cards in chapter 5.

**Key number:** Lag to the zone.
**On the course:** Ten before the tee before every round. Keep counting your 3-putts.
**3-putts per round:** _____ _____ _____
**No green (winter)?** Ring of ten, Routine putts and Pressure ten work on a mat. Swap the long putts as the drill card says.

**Why:** little and often keeps what you've built.

# 5. Drill cards

## Starting test (week 1 and week 4)

About 18 minutes, 30 balls in 3 sets of 10. Compare with yourself, not with others.

| Test | Counts |
|---|---|
| Short putts, 3 ft | Holed |
| Mid putts, 10 ft | Holed |
| Long putts, 35 ft | Stops within 1 putter length |

## Lag to the zone

10 long putts, each to a different hole or from a new direction.

| Level | Distance | Counts |
|---|---|---|
| Level 1 | 20 ft | Stops within 1 putter length |
| Level 2 | 35 ft | Stops within 1 putter length |
| Level 3 | 40 ft | Stops within 1 putter length |

**Level up / down:** 7 or more twice in a row: up. 3 or less twice in a row: down.
**No green?** Swap for Routine putts, or Pressure ten if Routine putts is already in that session.

Score: ☐ /10

## Ring of ten

Place 10 balls in a ring around the hole and putt each one.

| Level | Distance | Counts |
|---|---|---|
| Level 1 | 3 ft | Holed |
| Level 2 | 5 ft | Holed |
| Level 3 | 7 ft | Holed |

**Level up / down:** 7 or more twice in a row: up. 3 or less twice in a row: down.
**Indoors:** works on a carpet or a putting mat, with a cup or a coin as the hole.

Score: ☐ /10

## Routine putts

10 putts with the full routine on every single one: Target. Rehearse. Go. Change side every putt.

| Level | Distance | Counts |
|---|---|---|
| Level 1 | 5 ft | Holed |
| Level 2 | 7 ft | Holed |
| Level 3 | 8 ft | Holed |

**Level up / down:** 7 or more twice in a row: up. 3 or less twice in a row: down.
**Indoors:** works on a carpet or a putting mat, with a cup or a coin as the hole.

Score: ☐ /10

## Pressure ten

10 putts at your level's distance, each from a different side of the hole. Before each putt, say your current streak out loud.

| Level | Distance | Counts |
|---|---|---|
| Level 1 | 2 ft | Longest run holed in a row |
| Level 2 | 3 ft | Longest run holed in a row |
| Level 3 | 5 ft | Longest run holed in a row |

**Level up / down:** 5 or more twice in a row: up. 1 or less twice in a row: down.
**Indoors:** works on a carpet or a putting mat, with a cup or a coin as the hole.

Score: ☐ /10

## Ten before the tee

Five long putts (about 35 ft), then five short ones (3 ft). Long ones first, short ones last.

| Level | Distance | Counts |
|---|---|---|
| Level 1 | 5 × about 35 ft, then 5 × 3 ft | Long putts within 1 putter length + short putts holed |
| Level 2 | 5 × about 35 ft, then 5 × 3 ft | Long putts within 1 putter length + short putts holed |
| Level 3 | 5 × about 35 ft, then 5 × 3 ft | Long putts within 1 putter length + short putts holed |

**Level:** the same at every level. This score doesn't change your level.

Score: ☐ /10

# 6. On the green

## Same routine every putt

**Your routine (use it on every putt from now on): Target. Rehearse. Go.**

1. **Target.** From behind the ball, pick one exact spot: the point where the ball drops in, or a mark on your line to roll over.
2. **Rehearse.** One practice stroke beside the ball while you look at the target. Feel the length, not the mechanics.
3. **Go.** Set the putter, one look at the target, roll it. Don't wait.

Keep it short: well under 20 seconds. Same steps, same pace, every time. Talk with your partners between putts, not during them.

## Four rules for fewer 3-putts

1. **Long putts: think distance only.** Stop it within one putter length. If you miss, miss a little long rather than short. Don't try to hole it.
2. **Breaking putt?** Find the high point of the curve and aim your start line a little above it. The ball curves from the moment it rolls, most of all as it slows near the hole. Missed high, it can still drop. Missed low, it never will.
3. **Downhill?** Picture a hole a little short of the real one and putt to that. Uphill: firmer than the distance looks.
4. **New course?** The practice green and the course greens often roll differently. On the first three greens, watch how far your long putts finish past or short, and adjust on the next one.

## Ten before the tee

Skip the range bucket and roll putts: five long ones (about 35 ft) to learn today's speed, then five short ones (3 ft) to see them drop. Long ones first, short ones last.

Score: long putts within one putter length + short putts holed, ☐/10.

**Every round:** Ten before the tee first. During the round, a dot on your scorecard for every 3-putt. Afterwards, write the total on your week page.

## 7. Round Day Card

**Before you tee off (10 minutes)**

- Ten before the tee: skip the bucket and roll putts: five long ones (about 35 ft) to learn today's speed, five short ones (3 ft) to see them drop. Long ones first, short ones last.
- One goal for today: "Same routine, every putt."

**Every putt**

- Target. Rehearse. Go.
- Chat between putts, not during them.

**Long putts**

- Stop it within one putter length. If you miss, miss a little long rather than short.
- Breaking? Start it a little above the high point.
- Downhill? Putt to a hole a little short of the real one.
- Uphill? Firmer than it looks.

**Short putts**

- Pick the spot, commit.

**New course**

- First three greens: watch where your long putts stop, adjust on the next.

**After a 3-putt**

- One slow breath. The next putt is a new putt.

**Count today**

**3-putts** ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

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# 8. Your before and after

Your three test numbers from week 1 and week 4, side by side. Your weekly scores are on the week pages.

| Test | Week 1 | Week 4 | Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| Short putts, 3 ft | | | |
| Mid putts, 10 ft | | | |
| Long putts, 35 ft | | | |

Same green as week 1? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

**Reading your before and after:** one test day is a snapshot. Wind, green speed and mood all play a part. A number that stays flat or drops is information, not failure. Look at the three together, at your weekly scores, and at your 3-putts per round.

Practising once a week? Two sessions between tests is a short run. Your first Keep-sharp retest (K4) gives a clearer picture.

# 9. What's next

Four weeks done, or your date has come and gone. This page is about keeping what you've built.

**Keep going with Keep-sharp weeks** (chapter 4): short sessions, the same level rules, and a retest every 4 weeks. A number that holds is good news. A number that drops is a signal, not a verdict: spend a week on the part of the plan that trains it. Short and mid putts: weeks 2 and 3. Long putts: week 1.

**Pick your next goal.** One at a time, and something you can count:

- **A new date**: a trip, the start of the season, a competition. Count the weeks and use the box in chapter 1 again.
- **Your lowest-moving test**: give it two weeks, then retest.
- **On the course**: fewer 3-putts than in your last five rounds.

**Winter.** Your first test back on a real green is a new starting point. Compare it with your next test, not with last summer.

New versions of this guide and more drills: on Instagram @thesmartshotgolf.

# 10. The numbers behind the tips

We build on published research and data, in our own words. All figures are approximate: practice greens aren't courses, and every golfer is different.

**Why putting?** Higher handicappers lose strokes in every part of the game (Broadie, 2014). We picked putting because you can train and measure it in short sessions, at the course or on a carpet at home, and because watches and launch monitors are built around full swings, and give you few numbers on putts you can train with.

| What we say | Where it comes from |
|---|---|
| Long putts miss on distance far more than on direction | Broadie, M. (2008). Assessing golfer performance using Golfmetrics. *Science and Golf V.* |
| Judge a putt by how hard it leaves the next one (strokes gained) | Broadie, M. (2014). *Every Shot Counts.* |
| Golfers around handicap 20 hole about 9 in 10 putts inside 3 ft, and about half from 3–6 ft | Shot Scope round data, reported by MyGolfSpy: "Putting Make Percentage By Handicap (Full Chart)" (2025); rounded |
| Knowing your results helps learning; a score after a block of tries works well | Salmoni, Schmidt & Walter (1984); Schmidt, Young, Swinnen & Shapiro (1989), summary feedback |
| A new target every ball carries over better | Shea & Morgan (1979), contextual interference |
| Short sessions spread over the week are retained better | Shea, Lai, Black & Park (2000) |
| Practice scores can dip while real learning goes up | Soderstrom & Bjork (2015), learning vs performance |
| Focus on a target outside your body | Wulf (2013), attentional focus review |
| Practising under mild pressure helps under real pressure | Oudejans & Pijpers (2009); studied in other sports, applied here to putting |
| A short, fixed routine steadies performance | Cotterill (2010), pre-performance routines review |
| A ball on a slope curves most as it slows near the hole, so start a breaking putt above the high point. Downhill putts roll out further, uphill ones die sooner. A putt that stops short can't drop | Physics of a ball rolling on a sloped green. The aiming, speed and first-three-greens tips are coaching rules of thumb in our own words, not research |

## Play it safe

This plan is practice, not medical advice.

- Keep sessions to about 20 minutes.
- Stand tall and stretch between blocks. Putting keeps you bent over for a long time.
- Pick balls up with the face of your putter, or a ball pick-up, if bending is uncomfortable.
- Pain, discomfort or an existing injury or back problem? Stop, and check with a doctor or physio before you continue.