



## Quiet Mind Golf: Sharpen Your Short Game Without Changing Your Technique

**Is it really possible to become a better putter without changing your stroke?**

Oh, the agony of putting. How can something so simple become so difficult? Well, it's not your stroke. It's fine. It's your non-stop, chattering, interfering mind that's the problem.

From mid-handicappers to scratch players, putting can be extremely frustrating even though it's the simplest motion in golf.

The common experience among all golfers is that their minds are full of chatter—"get it there, don't blow it by." They are forever applying some kind of technique ("accelerate, keep still," etc.). They are in a chronic state of instructing, judging and, usually, admonishing themselves.

Does this sound like you?

It doesn't have to be that way.

Here's the first thing you need to understand: There's nothing wrong with you.

There's nothing horrible about your stroke. You didn't miss out when the golf gods handed out hand-eye coordination. You didn't start the game too late. You didn't develop bad habits you cannot shake. Etc., etc.,

You're fine.

Your challenges start in your mind with the critical inner voice that constantly nags you, the seemingly never-ending thought parade, and the stories you tell yourself. And your mind is either worrying about the future, or ruminating about the past.

Your chattering mind makes you tense, prevents your body from doing what it can do naturally, and sends you on an emotional roller coaster.

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Tim O'Connor

Contrast that to when you have putted your best. It seemed fairly easy, like your stroke kind of happened on its own. There was a flow to things, and it all seemed refreshingly effortless. You weren't thinking about much if anything, and you were not trying.

At these times, we're in the present moment. It's more like we're just allowing rather than forcing or trying.

In these times, we glimpse what we're truly capable of as we draw on our innate talent, skill and experience.

Unfortunately, these moments are fleetingly rare for most people, not only in putting, but also often in many parts of their golf, and in their lives.

Why? Your mind is causing you to get in your own way. In other words, you are self interfering. Decrease self-interference and performance improves.

### **OK, how do I decrease self-interference and putt better?**

I've helped many people become better putters and discover that putting, and indeed the entire game, can be fun again.

But here's the thing. I rarely give anyone technical advice about how to putt.

Instead, I coach them in how to concentrate, focus on the present moment, quiet the inner voice, press pause on the thought parade, and stop self-interfering.

It's exciting to work with golfers on putting because they see the difference almost immediately, and they see how learning to quiet their minds can spill over and help their entire game.

This booklet reprises a number of the exercises that we covered in the clinic so you can use them to self-coach yourself to better putting, and experience more fun and freedom in the game.

I must also express my gratitude to Fred Shoemaker of Extraordinary Golf who helped me develop a new approach to golf—and to parts of my life—with his coaching. Many of the exercises and teachings in this book began with Fred.

### **Retinal-After Image Exercise—Developing Awareness**

1. Place a ball on the ground. Kneel down and look at the ball for detail. Look for shading, dimples, sparkles, printing and so on. Look for what you may not have seen before.

Look at the ball intently for a minute or two. Then, put your fingers around the ball—without covering it—and pull it away, while maintaining your gaze on the spot where the ball was. If you were focused on the spot, you will see a dark spot where the ball was—it's called a retinal after image.

2. Address the ball with your putter. Your intent is to putt the ball, but not to a target or hole. Just roll it about four feet or so (don't try to be exact). The entire objective is to putt the ball and see the spot when the ball is gone.

3. Repeat this exercise, but now putt to a target or hole. The objective remains the same: to see the spot. Notice whether there is any difference between the experience of putting to nothing and now putting to a hole. Is there any mental chatter, instruction or judgment?

If so, putt to nothing in particular again, then repeat the exercise of putting to a hole.

### **Awareness**

This and other exercises in the clinic are designed to enhance and develop your awareness of when you are in your head and in 'trying' mode vs. just being present and letting your body putt the ball.

This is a key component of developing awareness—comparing experiences and noticing the differences. It's in the noticing that your awareness will grow. In fact, you will be developing the skill of awareness.

It's very easy to go through life on autopilot, reacting to stimuli and constantly being in our heads—projecting forward and ruminating about the past. Thus, we are rarely present to what we are actually doing.

It's strange because the present moment is really all we have. Think about it. The future is just a fantasy that you experience in the present moment. The past is a memory that you experience in the present moment.

This is important in golf because the present moment allows you to draw on your natural talent, stop self-interfering and be aware of what you're doing as you do it. And that's a recipe for flow and high performance.

### **Quiet Eyes**

This exercise also introduces you to the concept of Quiet Eyes. That is, when our eyes are quiet—focused on, say a dimple on the ball, or on the back of the ball—our brain and body can more efficiently self-organize. The result is more accuracy and better distance control. And while you are focused on a spot or back of the ball, your mind is also quiet, which is beneficial for pressing pause on our thoughts and our inner critic, especially under pressure. (My follow-up group coaching session goes deeper into Quiet Eyes.)

### **Putting to a Flagstick Exercise**

1. On the practice putting green\*, take the flagstick out and lay it to the side of the hole—left or right. (If you don't have one, just put a golf club on the green.) Set up about five or six feet away and putt at the flagstick. Your objective is to hit the flagstick. That's it. This may seem too easy—putting to something about three feet long. That's OK. Putt for about five minutes to the flagstick. Check in with yourself how your body feels, what's going on in your mind, your level of tension or calmness.

\* You can also do this at home by putting to a club on the rug, a large book, wall or long rule etc. Later in this exercise, substitute something solid for the hole to act as a target, such as a jar, a small speaker, etc.

2. Now putt to the hole from the same distance. Notice if anything is different. Is your body tense? Are you giving yourself instructions? Are you thinking?

Again, the objective of the exercise is to be aware of the differences between when we're doing something pretty simple, such as putting to a flagstick laying down, and when we're putting to a hole.

In doing this and similar exercises, we become aware of how we often fixate on the outcome—making the putt—and how this affects us. As we develop our awareness, and notice the differences between putting with ease and flow in one experience and putting with tension and thought when we want a certain result, we can develop the skill of awareness.

We become aware when we're tense, thinking and giving ourselves instruction. And we can then choose to be more present to the experience of putting, which leads—interestingly enough—to sinking more putts. And less judgment and frustration.

## **Adding Numbers While You Putt Exercise**

You need a partner for this. Set up—about eight-to-ten feet from a hole (or target). As the person putting, your job is to look at the hole the entire time you are putting.

Have your partner crouch down behind the hole. He or she will hold one hand just above the hole. The partner's job is to quickly flash three numbers using one hand. (For example, three fingers, then one, and then two.)

Your job as the putter is to add the numbers while you putt and say the answer out loud. (In the example above, you would putt the ball and then say the answer, which is six. Ideally the ball is still rolling toward the target when you say the answer.)

When you are ready to putt, say 'go' and putt—always looking only at the hole. When you say go, your partner will immediately display three numbers with his/her fingers (from 1 to 5). While you are putting, add the numbers and say the total. Maintain your attention on the hole.

Your objective is to maintain your focus on adding the numbers, not on what happens with the ball.

(If you find this too difficult to follow, just have someone say numbers from one to five while you putt, and your job is to add the numbers and say the total. You can even try it alone, or record yourself saying the numbers and play the recording while you putt.)

### **What's the point?**

This and other exercises are intended to show what your body can do when your mind is occupied. Your mind cannot be in two places at once; it cannot give you instructions, for example, while adding numbers.

This exercise is designed to create a distraction for your mind. Most distraction is harmful—such as texting while driving—but for our purposes, it shows us how capable we truly are when we get our minds out of the way.

We begin to see that our bodies are quite capable of delivering a ball to the hole at the right speed and on the right line. It is quite amazing at how well we can be play from a place of trust, and we let our body and brain do what they can do.

## **Look at the Hole While Putting Exercise**

1. Set-up with a ball about four to five feet from a hole. Line up your putt. Rather than looking at the ball while you putt, turn your head and look at the back of the cup (or the

target). Find something to hold your attention, such as a piece of dirt, a fleck of paint or grass. Putt while you are looking at the back of the hole—not at the ball.

The objective is to notice if you can maintain your attention on the spot while you putt. What are you experiencing as you do this?

2. Set-up to the same hole from the same distance. Look at the spot on the back of the cup. Then, look at the ball, keeping the sense of connection with the target, and putt the ball.

Compare the experience of putting while looking at the target, and putting while looking at the ball. Were you able to maintain your connection to the target while looking at the ball?

This exercise helps develop your sense of connection to the target. Interestingly, it's not something that you need to fixate on. Many people think they have to work on having a laser focus on their target in putting and in their long game. That is another form of trying and self-interference.

You are simply making it your intention to connect with the target and stay present, rather than thinking about it.

This exercise helps us become aware when we're thinking, judging, instructing and trying, rather than just being in the moment, being aware of what we're doing—as we do it.

### **Enjoy the feeling of your stroke**

On a putting green, simply make a series of short, medium and longer putts. Don't putt to a hole. Your objective is simply to enjoy your stroke. Savour it. Let your hands and arms do what they want. Be in the experience of enjoying your stroke. As you do this, you may be surprised by the sensations that you become aware of, some of which you may never have experienced.

This is what it's like to be fully present. In this state, you are fully in the moment. You are aware of what you're doing while you're doing it, and it's the gateway to discovering distinctions that will improve your sense of mastery and enable you to self coach yourself.

### **'It was weird, but I loved it.'**

Many people tell me the clinic is unlike any they have ever attended. They also say they have learned more from this clinic than any similar golf experience they've ever had.

Why?

They are finally getting to see just how amazing and capable they really are. That's my mission and my hope for you: that you can take this experience of putting into your whole game and into your life.

### **How to take the learning deeper**

*Because you participated in my clinic, **you are entitled to a 30-minute complimentary private coaching session** to go deeper on your experience during the clinic, or to discuss anything you wish. If you'd like to participate in this complimentary coaching session, please send an email to [tim@oconnorgolf.ca](mailto:tim@oconnorgolf.ca).*

In the journal of Public Personnel Management, it was shown that training improves performance by 23 per cent, but training with follow-up coaching improves performance by 88 per cent.

*"Tim's putting clinics have given me and my players great tools to put into practice when we have that big putt on 18 to shoot a personal best or win a championship. Playing golf from a place of freedom is amazing."*

**Nathan Robinson, Director of Golf**  
**RattleSnake Point Golf Club, Milton, Ontario**

### **My podcast, blog and Moe Norman book**

If the clinic resonated with you, I invite you to listen to my [podcast Swing Thoughts](#), which I co-host with (Humble) Howard Glassman.

If you like reading about golf and awareness, please subscribe to my blog on [www.oconnorgolf.ca](http://www.oconnorgolf.ca). That will allow you to download my [free e-book: Getting Unstuck—Commit to Freedom](#).

To learn some more skills to quiet the noise in your head, I also offer an online course called [Lower Your Score With Obedience Training For Your Golf Brain](#), which is a companion to a [webinar and workshop](#) of the same name that I have been delivering for more than a year. If you're looking for an event to engage with your clients or team, this leaves people feeling calmer, entertained and more skilful in managing their minds.

I also invite you to read my best-selling biography of [Moe Norman—The Feeling of Greatness](#)—about the mysterious Canadian golfer known as the best-ball striker in the world and for being one of the greatest sports legends of all-time.

And if you found value in my clinic, please let people in your network know about it.

Thanks for your attention and participation, and all the best.

**Blessings**

**Tim O'Connor**

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