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## **Golf Tips: How to Play Bunker Shots**

**By Michael Hamilton**

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Bunkers – How to Play Them

Fairway Bunkers

The fairway bunker shot can be an intimidating shot for many inexperienced golfers. For starters, when playing out of fairway bunkers, it is wise to take one to two clubs more than normal. Begin by setting up normally, with your feet slightly dug in for stability and the ball positioned more toward the middle of your stance. Next, grip down slightly on the club for greater control.

Right before you begin your backswing, lift your chin off your chest. That raises your center of gravity and increases your ability to hit the ball first, which is crucial in executing the shot. Swing at 70 percent of your normal speed and there's a good bet you'll hit a clean, solid shot.

So, Hitting a shot from a fairway bunker poses no great problem if the ball has a good lie. (Well, I am really just trying to build your confidence. I could say, you are in a bunker, you're score just went up three strokes!!!)

Long or middle irons as well as 3, 4, and 5 woods can be used with confidence in this situation. Take an open stance, wider than normal. Work your feet into the sand for better balance. Play the ball back 1" to 2" to assure that the club hits the ball before the sand.

Choke down on the shaft.  
Close your eyes (just kidding)

From an open stance, aim slightly to the left.  
Swing Normal Speed  
Pray.

On long fairway bunker shots, try a 5 wood in preference to a long iron. Don't try to overpower this

## Golf Tips: How to Play Bunker Shots

shot. Restrict your body turn and swing easy.

Now, if it is a BAD lie, then you need to play the course. Grab your club you are confident with, between a 7 and SW. Observe the course. Realize that you are not Tiger Woods. Realize the average golfer will clunk it out about 75 yards. Aim for a safe fairway shot to get you back into play. Shoot for the MIDDLE of the fairway, not left or right, 75 yards 'down bunker'.

Most importantly, follow through on your swing. Most weekend golfers, whether near the green or in a fairway bunker, STOP their swing on impact. Golf is simple. You ALWAYS need to follow through. Again, swing easy and follow through.

### Greenside Bunkers

The most common mistake weekend players make in the greenside bunker is allowing their lower bodies to get too active. If you shift your weight or make a turn with your lower body, your swing's shape and impact position will never be the same from one swing to the next—you'll never know whether you'll leave the ball in the bunker or skull one 35 yards across the green.

Proper bunker technique requires that you place your weight forward—and leave it there throughout the swing. Here's a great drill to engrain this feeling. Go to a practice bunker and hit 25 bunker shots with your right (for right-handed golfers) heel in the air—only your right toes should be dug into the sand for balance. This will position the majority of your weight forward to begin your swing. If you try to shift your weight back to your right side as you play the shot, you'll feel the pressure in your right toes and you'll have to fight to keep your right heel from lowering into the sand. It might feel as though you're actually shifting your weight forward in a reverse pivot, but you're not—you're just not used to the feel of the proper bunker technique.

As you learn to keep your weight forward and quiet your lower body on these greenside bunker shots, you'll begin to notice the ball flying the same distance and on the same trajectory again and again. Once this happens, you'll start to develop some touch and begin to think about not only getting the ball out, but also about getting it close.

Poor bunker players have a far-too-active lower body. If you make a turn or weight shift, your swing's shape and the club's impact position will change from swing—with inconsistent results.

To quiet your lower body bring consistency to your greenside bunker game, practice hitting sand shots with your right heel raised. Your swing's shape and club's impact position will be the same—shot after shot.

Michael Hamilton is an accomplished golfer, and editor of Golf Tips Weekly Newsletter. His most recent book can be found at:<http://www.free-golf-tip.com/golfebook.htm>His sites include:<http://www.free-golf-tip.com><http://www.breaking90.com>

### **Five Steps For Improving Bunker Technique**

### By Jack Moorehouse

Although hitting from a bunker is straightforward once you learn the basics of stance and posture, the thought of hitting into a greenside sand trap unsettles many golfers. Improving your technique reduces the fear of bunker play and builds self-confidence in your shot-making capabilities.

Assuming the texture of the sand is similar, and the ball is not plugged, the technique for hitting out of a greenside bunker remains the same for shots up to 30 yards (27m). The key to making this shot, as I've explained in my golf tips, is hitting the sand about 1 to 2 inches behind the ball, throwing the sand forward with the ball. For longer shots the only thing that changes is the swing's length. Rhythm and tempo remain the same.

Below are 5 points I cover in my golf lessons on bunker technique. They're the focus of my golf instruction once I've reviewed how a wedge works and the fundamentals of stance and posture.

#### 1. Move Arms Away in Unison

Having taken a slightly open stance, resist the temptation to get too steep early in the takeaway. Keep the wrists passive as you sweep the club away. Try to synchronize the arm swing and body turn. In other words, make the first part of the takeaway a one-piece movement. Also, make sure the clubhead follows the path away from the ball parallel to the line of your toes.

#### 2. Rotate and Open

Rotate your left arm and wrists as the swing continues, as if you were looking at a wristwatch. It's a visual I often use in my golf instruction to help players remember to make the move. It opens the clubface and helps maximize the bounce effect on the sand wedge at impact. Also, start hinging your wrists as the clubhead passes your right thigh. Keep your head still, turn the left shoulder in under the chin, and turn your back to the target.

#### 3. Turn to the Top

As your body turns, you should feel as if your clubhead is pointing toward the sky and your wrists are cocked. Keep your head and body centered over the over the ball. Swing the club down on a slightly flatter plane, with good rhythm and tempo, as always. This is a key move any time you swing a club.

#### 4. Make the Right Contact

Hitting the right impact point is critical when playing from the sand. In golf lessons I tell students to visualize the ball sitting on top of a tee instead of the sand, then focus on clipping the tee beneath the ball, which just happens to get in the swing's way. Executed properly, this move will throw the ball out of the bunker with just the right amount of sand.

#### 5. Create a Controlled Explosion

As the club comes down in the downswing, you should feel your hands drag left, pulling them across

## Golf Tips: How to Play Bunker Shots

the ball through impact. Make sure that your right hand doesn't cross over the left and that you clear your left hip as the club comes through. If the stance and clubhead are open sufficiently, the ball will fly straight, with a high trajectory.

Of course, the technique for longer bunker shots differs slightly. The key with longer shots is in the follow-through. Use a full finish for long bunker shots, and a short finish for shorter bunker shots.

Below are two exercises that I use in golf lessons to help students improve their bunker technique:

- This exercise establishes how the sand wedge should really work. Stand in a practice bunker without a ball. Adopt your normal bunker stance and take several swings down into the sand. The object is to get the feel of the clubhead dragging through the sand, not digging into it. After a dozen shots, try hitting a ball. Pick out a spot where you want the ball to land and then go for it. Repeat the exercise until you're comfortable with the feel of the wedge splashing through the sand.
- Focusing on a spot where the clubhead hits can divert attention from where it emerges, resulting in a fluffed shot. The "Two Lines" exercise helps eliminate the tendency to lose focus. Stand in a bunker and take your normal bunker stance. Draw two lines in the sand about 6 to 7 inches apart. The lines represent the length of the sand you should carve from under the ball. Line up several balls between the two lines then hit them. The clubhead should enter the sand where the first line is and emerge where the second line is.

Practicing these two exercises while keeping the 5 points in mind will help build better bunker technique. As you become more and more comfortable with hitting out of a bunker, you will increase your self-confidence. And that, as I often tell my students, leads to better play and lower golf handicaps.

Jack Moorehouse is the author of the best-selling book "How To Break 80 And Shoot Like The Pros." He is NOT a golf pro, rather a working man that has helped thousands of golfers from all seven continents lower their handicap immediately. He has a free weekly newsletter with the latest golf tips, golf lessons and golf instruction.



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