



Target, Shot and Club Selection Factors

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When evaluating a shot, you need to take into consideration many factors in order to accurately choose a target, type of shot and club with which to use. By doing so, you'll be saving strokes and therefore time. In an effort to avoid being the culprit of slow play, golfers kindly try to hurry but added strokes and looking for golf balls slows down play. Others find it easy to get caught up in the urgency of wanting to see the result of the shot. Regardless of the reason, not properly evaluating it will almost always ensure a poor outcome, and therefore additional and unnecessary strokes.

The time to hurry is between shots, not during the evaluation period. Your speed of play will not be slowed if you evaluate factors as you approach your ball. You can confirm other factors once you've reached your ball. This is all part of your routine.

By not evaluating the factors attributed to a successful shot, you're likely to have missed the shot before you've even hit it and that's no way to play this wonderful game. Below is a complete list of factors to evaluate when choosing a target, shot and club for each full swing shot:

1. Lie
 - The lie of the ball is a crucial determining factor for what club you can use effectively. A ball that is sitting down in the rough may require a club with more loft than what would get you to the hole, but forwarding it close to the green is better than not getting it out at all. The lie dictates your setup and swing. This often relates to different trajectories and amount that the ball rolls.
2. Total Yardage of Hole
 - Breaking the hole into playable yardages is extremely advantageous, especially shorter holes or ones that are protected by hazards. You may not need to hit driver. Instead you can tee off with an easier club avoiding all of the trouble and still have a short iron in for your approach.
3. Yardage of Shot at Hand
 - Determine the yardage the ball needs to carry. Of course, knowing the distances you hit each club is crucial and some consistency is necessary. More than likely, each club will have a yardage range. But don't guess at the yardage of each shot. Step it off for an accurate yardage.
4. Wind
 - Gauging the wind can be quite a challenge. Sometimes you'll often feel the wind going in one direction from where you stand in the fairway while the flag flutters in the opposite direction. This is typical of courses that are more tree-lined. Learning to feel the wind and discover how much club to add when the wind is against you and how many clubs to go down when the wind is with you is very feel oriented. Learn from your experiences.
5. Temperature
 - The temperature during your round has a direct effect on how far the ball travels. The colder it is outside, the less the ball will distort/compress. This simply means that it will not go as far. Not to mention the extra layers you may be wearing will also restrict your ability to turn.
6. Humidity
 - Much to the surprise of many golfers, high humidity does not make the air heavy and your shots fly shorter than normal. The following was taken from a study from Titleist and FootJoy by Steve Aoyama.

"Air that is hot or humid is actually lighter than air that is cold or dry or both. Heat reduces the air's density by causing it to expand. Humidity also reduces density because water vapor is lighter than dry air, so the more water vapor in the mixture, the less dense the air. So forget how the air feels on a hot, humid day. It is actually lighter, and will allow the ball to fly farther."



7. Elevation Change

- Is the green above or below you? Take more club if the green is above you and less if the green is below. A general rule is to add a club for every ten feet of increased elevation and subtract a club for every ten feet reduction in elevation but the fact is that the ball descends on a different angle depending on the club. The angle of descent also varies per person even if using the same club so there is no concrete way to calculate this – it's simply called experience. There are range finders available that calculate the slope (elevation change) and therefore an adjusted yardage but again, they don't know your angle of descent. Like the wind, you will grasp a sense for this as you gain on-course experience.

8. Location of the Hazards/Obstacles

- Directionally find a target away from any hazards or obstacles and commit to it. Regarding the distance of your shot you should ask yourself, "Would I rather be short or long of my intended target?" In other words, where's the best place to miss this shot. We call these exit strategies. Veteran players spend time during practice rounds scanning for such areas.

9. Ball Striking

- Having consistent contact relates not only to the direction that your ball travels but certainly the distance that the ball flies. If you've been consistently hitting the toe of your club, you've been losing distance so moving up a club is appropriate. On the other hand, many good players get pumped up during the actual tournament and hit it further than they did in a practice round.

10. Curvature

- Any curvature, either from your natural ball flight or from an uneven lie, will make you have an initial target that the ball will start on and an ending target of where you'd like the ball to curve toward.

11. Surface of Landing Spot

- You may find the greens to be hard as a rock or the fairways to be soft. In the winter in Colorado, the fairways and greens tend to harden and create more than normal roll. Hard or soft areas need to be accounted for when choosing a target, deciding on what trajectory to hit the ball and in selecting a club. If the ground is hard, you may have a landing target and an ending target to account for the bounce and roll.

12. Altitude

- If you get to take a golf vacation, some golfers find that the altitude of the locale affects their distance. Altitude is another factor you may experience if playing golf in Florida compared to Denver. Research shows that with all else being equal, a driver may go approximately twelve yards farther here in Denver than that of a sea level location. A 5-iron though only goes approximately six yards farther.

There are quite a few factors that go into accurately choosing a target, shot and club. These factors ultimately lead to what type of shot can be hit. Sometimes you may find that you have shot options while other times you're forced to play conservatively. Professionals spend the time to evaluate each shot because it leads to better 'good shots' and better 'bad shots.' If you're a novice, this list may be understandably overwhelming. If you find it to be, you should simply find comfort in learning one at a time and how it affects your shots.

The busier you keep yourself with the particulars of the shot at hand – the less room there is for negative thoughts. - Jack Nicklaus, 1979

While there are lots of things that happen during a round of golf that you cannot control, evaluating the shot is something that you do have control over and this should be taken advantage of. You will often find that one or more of the factors forces you to be quite versatile. Your ability to adapt to is an enormous part of successful golf.

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