

**PeakSports.com Special Report**

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know to improve preshot routines in golf**

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# Six “Costly” Mental Game Mistakes Golfers Make During Their Preshot Routines

## Introduction

Golfers spend as much as four to five hours playing a round of golf. However, golfers use only a small fraction of that time to prepare mentally for shots and even less time actually hitting shots. In golf, unlike other sports, you hit each shot at your own pace (within the rules) and not play until you are ready. The amount of time you have to play a shot can be a blessing or a curse depending on how a golfer uses this time.

Golfers who use their preshot routine to help them play well use this time effectively. However, many golfers *do not* use the preshot routine to their advantage because they have too many doubts, negative thoughts, second-guess their decisions or overanalyze.

How you mentally and physically prepare for each shot – during your preshot routine – is critical to playing your best golf. I call the preshot routine a “30 second mindset” because you only need to be focused for 30 seconds at a time once you decide on a club and have calculated the yardage of the shot.

### **The purpose of a preshot routine in golf is to:**

- To focus on what's most important to help you execute
- To keep you from thinking negative thoughts or feeling doubtful
- To consistently prepare for each shot
- To instill confidence in your ability to make the shot, or take action
- To trust in your training and go for it

Jack Nicklaus believes that 90% of good shot making includes two critical factors: how you prepare your mind and the consistency of how you set-up to the target.

Shot making does not start when you begin the backswing, as you might think. Your shot making actually begins when your preshot routine starts. Your routine starts when you analyze the requirements of the shot such as the wind, lie of the ball, and distance to the target, etc. even before you address the ball.

Your preshot routine is the perfect time to apply several key “mental game skills” to help ensure you are confident, focused, and ready to pull the trigger. Most golfers can perform the physical routine rather easily without much thought, but what's most important is having a mental routine to focus your mind and program your body for successful execution!

A preshot routine helps you plan, prepare, and program your body to hit your best shot. First, it helps you process information and make decisions to select a club for the shot. Second, it helps you program yourself to make a good swing. Third, it aids in preparing your mind and body to execute a good swing. If you neglect one of these areas, you fail to prepare yourself completely.

Tour professionals have specific preshot routines they use that help them execute a shot or putt. Tour pros are very systematic and precise in the way they plan and prepare for each shot. Every player prepares differently, but they all try to achieve the same goal -- to swing with confidence and trust. Most Tour pros have very well defined, consistent and specific preshot routines that they have developed over years of practice and play.

The behaviors in a preshot routine depend on your personality and other preferences, which means the pacing and thought process of your routine is dictated by your personality. You don't want a quick-paced, fast routine if you are a very methodical person. Greg Norman, for example, prefers a very deliberate preshot routine. Norman selects the shot he wants to play and visualizes that shot by focusing on the apex of the ball in flight. He walks to the ball, aims his club head to the target, aligns his body, and sets his grip. He sets his stance, waggles the club head back and forth to loosen up, and gets ready for the shot. To trigger his swing, he slides his club head away from his body to align the face with the ball.

John Daly refers to take less time over the ball. If you have ever watched Daly putt, it looks like he is in a hurry to get to his next shot. He simply selects the putt he wants to hit, sets up next to the ball, takes one quick practice swing, sets up over the ball, looks at the hole once and goes.

## **Six Mistakes Golfers Make During Their Preshot Preparation**

A preshot or pre-putt routine is a series of thoughts or behaviors that you complete before each shot. Once you establish it as a routine, it becomes “natural” to do and helps you avoid getting distracted. When you do your routine consistently, you’re more likely to feel confident because you know you are doing both physical and mental actions to hit your best shot.

Consistent mental preparation leads to consistent performance, the hallmark of champion golfers. However, one of the goals of having a preshot preparation is to help you feel confident and ready to pull the trigger when it's time.

Over the last two decades of helping golfers improve their mental game and performance, I have seen every mental game mistake you can imagine. In this report, I would like to share with you the top six mistakes golfers make during their preshot preparation. I will discuss each mental game mistake using the full shot routine, but please be aware that the same mistakes – golfers make with the full shot routine – can be applied to the putting and chipping routines.

## **(1) Failing to Have a Specific Plan**

If you fail to have a specific plan for each shot, your mind is lost. Without a plan, it's like driving down to your local store without an idea of something you want to purchase. A specific plan includes your target, the type of shot you want to hit, and the proper club.

I worked with a Nationwide Tour player who would set up to hit his tee ball “somewhere” in the fairway. He did not have a specific target in mind. His target was the fairway! The entire fairway is a huge target and does not program the body with enough information. Instead of trying to hit the fairway, I suggested he pick a corner of a distant bunker or a tree in the background as his target.

## **(2) Lack of Full Commitment to the Plan**

You have to go beyond just having a plan because plans can change rapidly if you second-guess the plan or have doubt about your initial plan. Your bigger danger is not having a plan at all and just stepping up to the ball to hit it with no routine. Without a routine, you are more likely to become distracted or have last second random doubts. But not fully committing to the plan or second-guessing your plan is a close second to not having a plan!

You send mixed messages to your body when you are indecisive or lack commitment to the plan. It happens all the time in golf. For example, indecision happens when you are in between clubs and second-guess the club in your hand as you address the ball.

## **(3) Thinking about Poor Results**

How many times during the round have you tried NOT TO hit a bad shot? When you think about the trouble or not hitting the ball into a hazard or bunker, you are telling your body to hit the shot into the hazard. Many golfers think they will avoid mistakes by thinking about not making mistakes!

First, you should not become obsessed with the results of a specific shot. You want to have a plan, but not worry about what will happen if you don't achieve the plan.

#### **(4) Lack of a Positive Image**

How often do you “see” a bad shot or feel the ball hooking out of bounds before you even hit the shot! Images are more powerful than words when it comes to motor behavior and programming your body for execution. When your images (visual, auditory, or kinesthetic) are negative or focus on faulty execution, you program yourself to hit a poor shot. You want to have complete control over the images in your mind.

A young high school golfer I worked with stopped trying to visualize her shots altogether. When I asked why, she said that she stopped trying to visualize shots because she would only see a bad shot in her mind! Her confidence was not strong enough to see a good shot in her mine!

You want to program your body by seeing a good shot or feeling a good shot in your body before you hit it!

## **(5) Over Analysis or Trying Too Hard**

When golfers try too hard to hit a perfect shot, they are guilty of a common mental game booboo called “paralysis by over-analysis.” Golf is unique because you have a lot of time to hit shots as long as you play within the rules of the game. How much time you take can be a disadvantage for some golfers because they try to be too precise, perfect, and think too much.

Your routine does not have to be complex or follow a 15-step procedure. Your routine is one behavior that includes a series of thoughts and images. Likewise, you don’t want to focus on the six swing keys you worked on with your instructor as you address the ball. The mind can only handle one thought or image at a time— called serial processing. You can clog your mind by thinking too much about how to perform a perfect routine, make a solid swing, or have precise alignment.

## **(6) Lack of Trust in Your Skills**

Your mental preparation during your routine helps improve your faith and trust your swing at a critical time: the take away. You might have a Tiger Woods-like routine in the early stages of planning, having a good image, feeling confident, etc., but all can be for not if at the last moment, you do not trust your swing and allow your practice to take over.

I'm not talking about confidence here. Rather, confidence precedes your execution and says, "I know I can hit this shot." Trust happens the moment you pull the club away and follows confidence. Trust helps you get out of your own way and swing the club like you have trained yourself to do so.

When you steer, guide, or over-control your club during the shot, you interfere with a well-grooved swing. Every mental skill during your pre-shot routine should instill trust when you actually execute your swing!

## Conclusion

If you watch professional athletes - in all sports - perform their routines, you can see a pattern. Shaquille O'Neil uses a specific free throw routine before each foul shot. Ken Griffey, Jr. uses a specific at-bat routine to prepare for each pitch.

Tiger Woods plans and prepares a golf shot by first conferring with his caddy. They discuss which club to use, for example. They also calculate the yardage to the target. He will then visualize his shot and take a practice swing to feel the shot he wants to hit. He focuses on the shot and target as he approaches the ball, sets up the same way each time, then wiggles to get comfortable over the ball. He looks a couple of times at the target, and then thinks about one swing thought or trigger such as tempo to help initiate the swing.

## **Don't Forget the Mental Part of A Routine!**

Remember, your physical routine is simple to perform. You have to complete a physical routine just to set up to your ball for each shot. But a focused mental routine unlocks your physical talent. What's a "mental" routine? Sometimes golfers skip over, get lazy, or simply forget about the mental part of their routine. Golfers struggle more with having and sticking to "mental routines" because it's more abstract and not as concrete.

*Your mental preshot routine integrates with your physical routine. Your mental routine helps you to:*

1. Observe and take in information.
2. Make decisions and develop a plan.
3. Program your body using powerful, positive images.
4. Mentally rehearse the shot you are about to execute.
5. Prepare your body to trust.

Work on each of the elements in your preshot routine to help you be more focused, confident, and ready to trust in your swing!

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