The complete series which appeared in SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

Ben Hogan's Five Lessons
Ben Hogan
With Herbert Warren Wind
Five Lessons
The Modern Fundamentals of Golf
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GOOD GOLF BEGINS WITH A GOOD GRIP. This statement, I realize, packs as much explosive punch as announcing the startling fact that the battery in baseball is composed of a pitcher and a catcher. Moreover, for most golfers the grip is the drabbiest part of the swing. There's no glamour to it. They see it accomplishing nothing active, nothing decisive. On the other hand, for myself and other serious golfers there is an undeniable beauty in the way a fine player sets his hands on the club. Walter Hagen, for instance, had a beautiful grip, delicate and at the same time powerful. It always looked to me as if Hagen's hands had been especially designed to fit on a golf club. Of the younger players today, Jack Burke gets his hands on the club very handsomely. No doubt a professional golfer's admiration for an impressive grip comes from his knowledge that, far from being a static "still life" sort of thing, the grip is the heartbeat of the action of the golf swing.

Logically, it has to be. The player's only contact with the ball is through the clubhead, and his only direct physical contact with the club is through his hands. In the golf swing, the power is originated and generated by the movements of the body. As this power builds up, it is transferred from the
body to the arms, which in turn transfer it through the hands to the clubhead. It multiplies itself enormously with every transfer, like a chain action in physics. Or, to use a more familiar example, think of the children’s game of snap-the-whip where the element at the end of the chain (in golf, the clubhead) is going thousands of times faster than the element which originated the velocity. This chain action depends on a proper grip. With a defective grip, a golfer cannot hold the club securely at the top of the backswing—the club will fly out of control every time. And if the club is not controlled by a proper grip, the power a golfer generates with his body never reaches the club through his hands on the downswing, and the clubhead cannot be accelerated to its maximum.

The standard grip is the overlapping grip. It has been for over half a century now, ever since Harry Vardon popularized it both in Great Britain and here in America. Up to now we haven’t found a grip that promotes as effective a union between the body and the club. One of these days a better one may come along, but until it does, we’ve got to stick with this one. In a good grip both hands act as ONE UNIT. They can’t if you grip the club almost correctly—which really means partially incorrectly. To cite the most common illustration, a right-handed player (whose left hand naturally is much less powerful than his right) kills any chance for a cooperative union of both hands if his right hand is dominant from the start or if it can assume dominance in the middle of the swing and take the whole swing over. One essential, then, to insure yourself a firm two-handed grip is to get your left hand on the club absolutely correctly. Here’s how I would advise you to do it:

2) THE SHAFT ALSO LIES DIRECTLY ACROSS THE TOP JOINT OF THE FOREFINGER. (The accompanying drawing will clarify this for you. I think you will find that whatever subsequent difficulties may arise from the necessarily involved language of instruction will be resolved by the drawings.)

CROOK THE FOREFINGER AROUND THE SHAFT AND YOU WILL DISCOVER THAT YOU CAN LIFT THE CLUB AND MAINTAIN A FAIRLY FIRM GRIP ON IT BY SUPPORTING IT JUST WITH THE MUSCLES OF THAT FINGER AND THE MUSCLES OF THE PAD OF THE PALM.
NOW JUST CLOSE THE LEFT HAND—CLOSE THE FINGERS BEFORE YOU CLOSE THE THUMB—AND THE CLUB WILL BE JUST WHERE IT SHOULD BE.

Two views of the completed left-hand grip. The main pressure points are the last three fingers.

TO GAIN A REAL ACQUAINTANCE WITH THIS PREPARATORY GUIDE TO CORRECT GRIPPING, I WOULD SUGGEST PRACTICING IT FIVE OR 10 MINUTES A DAY FOR A WEEK UNTIL IT BEGINS TO BECOME SECOND NATURE.

When a golfer has completed his left-hand grip, the V formed by the thumb and forefinger should point to his right eye. The total pressure of all the fingers should not be any stronger (and may even be a little less strong) than the pressure exerted by just the forefinger and the palm pad in the preparatory guiding action. In the completed grip, the main pressure points are the last three fingers, with the forefinger and the palm pad adding assisting pressure. The three fingers press up, the pad presses down, and the shaft is locked in between. Keeping pressure on the shaft with the palm pad
does three things: it strengthens the left arm throughout the swing; at the top of the backswing, the pressure from this pad prevents the club from slipping from the player’s grasp; and it acts as a firm reinforcement at impact.

This pressure we are speaking of should be “active,” the kind of pressure that makes your hand feel alive and ready for action. Some golfers grab hold of a club so ferociously they look like they’re going to twist the grip right off it. There’s no need for overdoing the strength of your grip. In fact, there’s a positive harm in it: you automatically tighten the cords in the left arm and render it so stiff, so deaf that it will be unable to hear your requests and give you a muscular response when you start your swing. Too tight a grip will also immobilize your wrist. A secure, alive, and comfortable grip is what you want, for, as the weighted clubhead is swung back, your fingers instinctively tighten their grasp on the shaft.

**Left-hand grip at top of backswing**

**Two anatomical views showing the muscular structure of left hand**
The grip of the right hand, since it is the hand that does the overlapping, is more complicated. If setting up a strong, correct left hand is one half of the job of establishing a one-unit grip, the other half is getting your right hand in a position to perform its share of the work but no more than its equal share. This means, in effect, subduing the natural tendency of the right forefinger and thumb to take charge. If they do, they'll ruin you. The "pincer fingers," the forefinger and thumb, are wonderful for performing countless tasks in daily living such as opening doors and picking up coffee cups, but they are no good at all in helping you to build a good grip and a good swing. The explanation behind this is that the muscles of the right forefinger and thumb connect with the very powerful set of muscles that run along the outside of the right arm and elbow to the right shoulder. If you work the tips of the thumb and forefinger together and apply
any considerable amount of pressure, you automatically activate those muscles of the right arm and shoulder—and those are not the muscles you want to use in the golf swing. Using them is what breeds so many golfers who never swing with both hands working together, who lurch back and then lurch into the ball, all right arm and right shoulder and all wrong.

TO OBTAIN THE PROPER GRIP WITH THE RIGHT HAND, HOLD IT SOMEWHAT EXTENDED, WITH THE PALM FACING YOUR TARGET NOW—YOUR LEFT HAND IS ALREADY CORRECTLY AFFIXED—PLACE THE CLUB IN YOUR RIGHT HAND SO THAT THE SHAFT LIES ACROSS THE TOP JOINT OF THE FOUR FINGERS AND DEFINITELY BELOW THE PALM.

As the drawing shows, the club lies across the top joint of the fingers of the right hand. The two middle fingers supply the major part of the pressure.
Right-hand grip is in the fingers, not the palm.
The V of correct left-hand grip (a palm and finger grip) should point to golfer's right eye.

THE RIGHT-HAND GRIP IS A FINGER GRIP. THE TWO FINGERS WHICH SHOULD APPLY MOST OF THE PRESSURE ARE THE TWO MIDDLE FINGERS. As we have mentioned, the forefinger shouldn't be allowed to become too forceful. As for the little finger, it slides up and over the forefinger of the left hand and locks itself securely in the groove between the left forefinger and the big finger.

NOW, WITH THE CLUB HELD FIRMLY IN THE FINGERS OF YOUR RIGHT HAND, SIMPLY FOLD YOUR RIGHT HAND OVER YOUR LEFT THUMB—that is how I like to think of it. When you have folded the right hand over, the right thumb should ride down the left side of the shaft, slightly.

If there is one major consideration to keep uppermost in your mind about the right hand, it is that the club must be in the fingers and not in the palm. In order to get a check on the ball with backspin or to cut the ball up with a nice under-
spin and to do many other things with the ball, the ball must be hit sharp and crisp, and you can achieve this only if the club is in the fingers of the right hand. Furthermore, a proper right-hand grip will enable the player to transmit the greatest amount of speed to the clubhead. Controlled speed is what we want, and you can get this control only from the fingers, not from the right hand itself.

A word more about the little finger of the right hand. While it has been approved practice for quite some time to let the little finger ride sort of piggyback on top of the left forefinger, I would really advise you to hook that little finger in the groove between the forefinger and the big finger. It helps to keep the hands from slipping apart. It also gives me the good feeling that my hands are knitted vigorously together.

A word further about the thumb area of the right hand. To promote a right-hand grip that is strong where it should be strong (and which will then more than offset the dangerous tendency to let the tips of thumb and forefinger work like a pincer), I recommend the golfer-reader to cultivate the following habit: School yourself when you are taking your grip so that the thumb and the adjoining part of the hand across the V—the part that is the upper extension of the forefinger—press up against each other tightly, as inseparable as Siamese twins. Keep them pressed together as you begin to affix your
grip, and maintain this airtight pressure between them when you fold the right hand over the left thumb. In this connection, I like to feel that the knuckle on the back of my right hand above the forefinger is pressing to the left, toward my target. It rides almost on top of the shaft. I know then that the club has to be in my fingers. Furthermore, when you fold the right hand over the left thumb—and there is a lot left to fold over—the left thumb will fit perfectly in the "cup" formed in the palm of your folded right hand. They fit together like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle.

Above: the completed two-hand grip. The left thumb (see drawing below) fits securely into the cup of the right palm.
This union of left thumb and right thumb pad strengthens the welding together of the two hands and it serves to add real reinforcement to your grip, particularly at the top of the backswing where poor grips are most likely to deteriorate. When you check your right-hand grip, the V formed by the thumb and forefinger should be pointing right at the button of your chin.

![V of right hand points to chin](image)

And a final word about those potential swing-wreckers, the right forefinger and thumb. While the tips of the forefinger and thumb do serve the advanced golfer as his finesse fingers, learning to use them only for touch in striking the ball requires some training. You will develop this talent as you go along. However, at this stage of the game when breaking down bad habits and acquiring correct new habits is our paramount consideration, there is no doubt whatsoever in my mind that the average golfer should forget about this finesse business completely. It can do him so much more harm than good in learning how to use the right hand. In this connection, an extremely beneficial exercise to practice (perhaps five minutes daily for a week) is to grip the club and swing it with the right forefinger and thumb entirely
off the shaft. This gives a golfer a wonderful sense of having just one corporate hand on the club. This, of course, is the ideal. When you complete your grip, try to feel that the tips of the forefinger and thumb are hardly on the club and strive instead to build up that opposite feeling (which we described earlier) that the knuckle above the forefinger is pressing toward the thumb and toward the target.

It may seem that we have gone into unwarranted detail about the elements of the correct grip. This is anything but the case. Too often in golf, players mistake the generality for the detail. They think, for example, that overlapping the finger is the detail and so they do not pay sufficient attention to how they do it. Or they confuse an effect (which can be quite superficial) with the action (the real thing) that causes the effect. For instance, a lot of golfers are under the impression that if their two Vs are pointed correctly, their grip must be correct. It may be or may not be. The direction of the Vs is no guarantee, simply a check point. In golf there are certain things you must do quite precisely, where being approximately right is not right enough. The grip is one of these areas where being half right accomplishes nothing. On the other hand, once you start cultivating the right habits, gripping the club correctly comes easily. You’ll fall right into it. Furthermore, being painstaking about learning to grip rewards you a thousand times over. Once you have mastered a correct grip—and assuming your stance and posture are also correct—you can practically forget about what the hands will be doing, or what they have to do, during the swing. They will take care of it themselves. The reason for this is that a correct grip brings into play the correct muscles of your arms and body.

I would like to support these points, if I may, with a chunk of autobiography, for if any golfer ever ran the whole gamut of grips, I did. I was born left-handed—that was the normal way for me to do things. I was switched over to doing things right-handed when I was a boy but I started golf as a left-
hander because the first club I ever came into possession of, an old five-iron, was a left-handed stick. I stopped being a left-handed golfer for what might be termed local commercial conditions: the boys in my home town, Fort Worth, used to buy their golf clubs (at a dollar per club) at a five-and-dime store, and there simply never was any left-handed equipment in the barrel where the clubs were stacked. When I changed over to the right side, possibly as a hangover from my left-handed start I first used a cross-hand grip. I experimented next with the interlocking grip, and at length—I must have been about 15 at the time—I finally arrived at the overlapping grip. I was working then in the golf shop at the Glen Garden club, and I copied the grip of Ted Longworth, the pro. I recognized quickly that this was the best of all grips, and once I had persuaded myself of that fact, it took me only a short time to familiarize myself with it.

Over the years since first adopting the overlapping grip, I have made two minor alterations. Right after I came out of the service, I changed from what is called the "long thumb," the left thumb fully extended down the shaft, to a modified "short thumb," contracting my left thumb and pulling it up a half inch. The "long thumb" let the club drop down too far at the top of the backswing, and it was really rough to get my timing right. I made my second alteration in 1946, moving my left hand a good half inch to the left. I was working then to find some way of retaining my power while curbing my occasional tendency to hook. Moving my left hand over so that the thumb was directly down the middle of the shaft was the first step in licking that problem. I regard both of these changes as personal modifications or adjustments. That is, they were beneficial for me and I would advocate them as sound measures for golfers with the same natural swing pattern and hitting action as myself. Let me make it clear, though, that I look upon them only as adjustments and not as fundamentals. The truly fortunate golfer
is the player who needs to make the smallest number of adjustments.

The golf grip is bound to function most effectively when the hands and fingers feel thin. Some days they do, some days they don't. Interestingly enough, drinking some ginger ale, because of its effect on the kidneys, seems to prevent the hands from feeling too fat and puffy. If the weather is cold, of course, it always affects your feel. To make sure my hands were warm enough at Carnoustie, I carried a hand-warmer in each pocket. These are Victorian gadgets that work something like a cigarette lighter; the small metal containers (covered with heavy cloth) are filled with a fluid that, once the wick is lit, smolders for about eight hours. These hand-warmers, incidentally, also served to keep the golf balls in my pocket nice and warm. A warm ball, you know, flies farther than a cold one.

In our next lesson, we will take up the modern fundamentals of the stance and posture. But don't go too fast. For at least a week PUT IN 30 MINUTES OF DAILY PRACTICE ON THE GRIP. LEARNING THESE NEXT FUNDAMENTALS WILL THEN BE TWICE AS EASY AND TWICE AS VALUABLE. I want to stress again that intelligent application is required to learn the golf swing, but how self-rewarding this application is! The average golfer will finally learn how to put all the elements of the swing together. He will be able to repeat that swing and to hit shots that have the same basic character as a professional's because he will be using the same method a pro does. He may not be as long as a pro or as accurate, but he will be long and straight. And he will be hitting correctly executed golf shots, with real character to them. That is something a lot of people have never experienced, but it is entirely within the average person's power. I cannot emphasize this point too strongly.

Once the average golfer is properly started on the correct
The material presented in this book, as I said at the beginning, amounts to a sifting of the knowledge I have picked up during my 25 years as a professional golfer. I am hopeful that these lessons will accomplish two things. First, I trust they will greatly increase the average player's enjoyment of this incredibly fascinating game by enabling him to become a real golfer with a sound, powerful, repeating swing. I feel sure they will do this for any player who gains a clear understanding of the fundamental movements (which we went into in the first four lessons) and who will then continue to practice and familiarize himself with these fundamentals throughout this golf season. In this final chapter we will be putting the whole swing together as we review these modern fundamentals of golf.

And second—I hope that these lessons will serve as a body of knowledge that will lead to further advances in our understanding of the golf swing. Every year we learn a little more about golf. Each new chunk of valid knowledge paves the way to greater knowledge. Golf is like medicine and the other fields of science in this respect. In another 15 years, just as there will be many new discoveries in medicine based on and made possible by present-day strides, we will