



Golfers: Lower Scores Are in Sight

Here are the top 10 visual skills for improving your game.

Golfers spend time, energy and money trying to shave strokes off their game. But one of the best ways to improve is literally right in front of their faces: better vision. Sports vision training can enhance skills such as alignment, reading the green, general concentration and, naturally, focus.

“Sports vision training takes you to a higher level of performance,” says Boca Raton, Florida-based sports vision optometrist Dr. Lawrence Lampert. “Most of the pros I work with tell me that vision training is more valuable than endless lessons in mechanics.”

Let’s look at a real-world example.

Seeing is believing: Phil Mickelson

Professional golfer Phil Mickelson has won four major championships and 39 events on the PGA Tour. He’s spent over 500 weeks ranked in the top 10 of the Official World Golf Rankings. This success, however, didn’t come easily.

As a junior at Arizona State University, Mickelson had problems seeing his drives and iron shots, but he hesitated to have his vision corrected because he thought it might affect his depth perception.

In December 1990, he met sports vision optometrist Dr. Jeff Eger, who was able to correct Mickelson’s sight problems with custom-fitted contact lenses. Five weeks later, Mickelson won the 1991 Nortel Tucson Open, competing as a junior and amateur against PGA Tour pros.

Mickelson is not alone. In 1996, Europe’s most successful golfer of all time, Nick Faldo, visited a sports vision optometrist who prescribed a series of visual exercises that helped him improve his putting alignment and distance control. Later that year, he won his third Masters championship.

Top 10 visual skills for golfers

Why is vision as important in golf, where you strike a stationary object, as it is in a sport like baseball, where your target could be traveling 100 mph?

While golf doesn’t require a lot of quick reactions, it’s still a very visual sport. “You have to make accurate judgments with your eyes, without fatigue,” Lampert says. “Reading the green relies almost

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entirely on visual judgments—determining how hard and in what direction to hit your putts.”

“Reading the green relies almost entirely on visual judgments.”

– Dr. Lawrence Lampert, author of *The Pro’s Edge: Vision Training for Golf*

Lampert literally wrote the book on optimizing vision for golf, *The Pro’s Edge: Vision Training for Golf*. Here are the top 10 visual skills he recommends for golfers to elevate their game.

- **Peripheral vision**
“This skill helps you read the greens and judge the overall contours of each hole, as well as aid with alignment for your full swing,” says Lampert. “Training peripheral vision also helps with relaxation and concentration during the game.”
- **Eye focusing**
Golfers continually shift their focus from the ball to the target and back. “The ability to shift your focus clearly from near to far and far to near is important in golf, especially for putting,” says Lampert.
- **Static visual acuity**
Visual acuity refers simply to the clarity of your vision, in this case on objects that aren’t moving. This ability is essential in identifying a target, lining up your shot, and hitting the ball. It’s needed for every kind of shot from tee to fairway to the putting green. Poor visual acuity can be greatly improved with corrective contact lenses, eyewear or laser surgery.
- **Eye alignment**
This may sound simple, but one of the most common causes for misjudgments is bad aim. “If this skill [eye alignment] isn’t accurate,” says Lampert, “you’ll misjudge short or long or to the right or left of the target.”
- **Eye movement**
Eye movement skills are needed to read the green accurately and efficiently. Most players don’t move their eyes smoothly to visualize their putt. Instead, their eyes take quick snapshots and send this information to the brain. Vision training can help athletes judge distance, speed, ground contours and the putting line.
- **Eye teaming**
Eye teaming is the ability of the eyes to work together as a team. “An important reason to train eye teaming is that this skill fatigues easily, causing judgments to become inconsistent,” Lampert says.
- **Contrast sensitivity**
This skill enables you to pick up subtleties that might not be visible to average golfers. “It’s particularly important in reading greens, as it’ll help you see the rolls and direction of the grain, whether the green is slow or fast, wet or dry,” explains Lampert.
- **Depth perception**
Depth perception is essential to being able to correctly judge the distance to the hole and the speed with which you must hit the ball. Depth judgments can also change if you are looking up or down a hill.
- **Eye-hand coordination**
“The eyes tell the brain where the ball is, and the arms and hands swing the club,” says Lampert. “Any miscommunication between the two will adversely affect your game.”

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- **Visualization**

All golfers can benefit from being able to visualize their shots. Strong visualization skills help you maintain your concentration and focus, and keep you “in the zone.”

Sure, to be a good golfer you’ll still need to work on your swing and mechanics. But visual training and the proper vision correction can give you an edge.

Adapted from “Thinking Game” by Keith Henderson, Sports Vision, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2007. Article information courtesy of Johnson & Johnson Vision Care Inc., makers of ACUVUE® Brand Contact Lenses. Visit www.acuvue.com for more information.

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