

# THE HANDICAP ROADMAP

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# CONTENTS

<b>Section 1: How to Use This Guide</b>	2
<b>Section 2: Scoring Stats - The Anatomy of a Scorecard</b>	4
<b>Section 3: Performance Stats by Handicap</b>	6
Driving Distance	7
Driving Accuracy	11
Approach Shot Accuracy	14
Short Game	19
Putting	22
<b>Section 4: The Path Forward - Putting This Guide to Use</b>	26

# SECTION ONE: How to Use This Guide

My goal in putting together this guide is simple: I want to give you a clear roadmap for getting better at golf.

I put this together because most golfers are fighting an uphill battle due to two main roadblocks:

1. Foggy Priorities: They spend a majority of their time practicing things that don't improve their score.
2. The Expectation Trap: They compare their "misses" to the PGA Tour pro's "best" that they see on TV. This leads to constant frustration and mid-round meltdowns.

## The Swing Mechanics Distraction

When a golfer comes to me for a lesson and I ask what they want to work on, the answer is almost always mechanical:

- *"I lift up."*
- *"My backswing is too long."*
- *"I don't rotate enough."*

While technique matters, these are inputs. Your score is an output. Before you start working on overhauling your technique with me or another coach, you should have a decent idea of if you are up to standard on the skill. You might be wasting time on something that doesn't require improvement while there is other low-hanging fruit you could conquer first!

## Reframing Your Game

My goal with this guide is to shift your focus from "perfect swings" to "functional outcomes." Every day, I coach golfers who are miserable because they

didn't hit a "pure" shot, even though that shot landed in an acceptable range from the pin.

This guide will help you learn to:

- **Define Success by the Numbers:** Use benchmarks like GIR+1 to dictate your strategy, not your swing thought of the day.
- **Kill the Perfectionism:** You probably expect too much from your game. It's time you understand what outcomes are realistic for you.
- **Audit your "Misses":** Learn where you are truly losing strokes, so then you can make a change (be it strategic or technical)

Each section will feature important stats from players of different levels, ranging from the elite (PGA Tour data) to 25 handicaps. Simply look at the data from your target handicap and see how you stack up to see if this is a skill you need to work on. If you're already sufficiently good at the stat, I suggest moving onto something more fruitful.

It's time you stop practicing for a "pretty" swing and start practicing for a lower score. Let's get to work!

## SECTION 2: The Anatomy of a Scorecard

Golf is a simple game: the lowest score wins. But most have little idea of *how* those low scores are actually built.

Before we look at the data, we have to clear up one major misconception: your handicap is a measure of your potential, not your average. On a typical day, most golfers score about 3 strokes higher than their handicap index (e.g., a scratch player on a par 72 course usually averages a 75).

When you look at the breakdown below, look for how "boring" a good round actually is. Many of my clients are surprised to see that shooting lower scores isn't about finding more brilliance—it's more about eliminating big mistakes!

### Scoring Stats by Handicap

Handicap	Scoring Average	Birdies/ Round	Pars/ Round	Bogeys/ Round	Doubles or Worse
PGA Tour (Elite)	70.5	3.8	11.9	2	0.3
0	75	2.34	11.52	3.87	0.27
5	80	1.26	9.18	6.12	1.44
10	85	0.72	7.2	7.2	2.88
15	90	0.36	4.86	8.1	4.68
20	95	0.36	3.6	7.38	6.66
25	100	0.18	2.52	6.12	9.18

Sources: ShotScope, PGA Tour

### David's Takeaways

- **The "Big Number" is the Real Enemy:** Look at the Doubles or Worse column. Until you reach the elite level (Scratch or PGA Tour), the single biggest differentiator between handicap tiers is how many blowup holes they make.

The quickest way to drop strokes from your score is by turning some "Doubles" into Bogeys and some Bogeys into Pars.

- **Birdies are Statistical Outliers:** Even a 10-handicap averages less than one birdie per round. Don't chase birdies. Pick smart targets and let birdies come as happy bonuses.
- **Embrace the "Good" Bogey:** A 15-handicap (your average club golfer) makes more bogeys than any other score. For most players, a bogey is a perfectly acceptable outcome that keeps you in the game. When you accept that "Bogey is your friend," you can stop taking unnecessary risks that lead to scorecard-killing triples.
- **Pro vs. Scratch - The War on Bogeys:** Notice that a Scratch golfer and a PGA Pro have nearly identical "Doubles or Worse" stats (0.3 / round). At the elite level, the battle shifts: while high handicappers fight to eliminate Doubles, pros fight to eliminate Bogeys (2.0 vs. 3.9 / round). It's not flashy, but **even for elite players the most effective way to improve is by eliminating mistakes, rather than by hitting more spectacular shots.**

## Section 3: Performance Stats by Handicap

Now that you know a round typically unfolds, it's time for you to figure out what is holding you back from playing the golf you desire.

The goal of this section is to show you exactly how you stack up against your target handicap across the core pillars of the game. By comparing your own numbers to these benchmarks, you can stop guessing what to practice. If your driving distance is high for your handicap but your approach accuracy is low, you've just found your highest-leverage area for improvement.

We will assess your game across these five critical categories:

1. Driving Distance
2. Driving Accuracy
3. Approach Shot Accuracy (GIR)
4. Short Game Proximity to Hole
5. Putting

## Driving Distance: The Reality of the Tee Box

Distance is a massive advantage. All else being equal, the golfer who hits it farther will always have a lower scoring potential. The table below shows the average distance for all drives (including the mishits) across handicap levels.

Important Note: This table shows the averages of *all* drives. This isn't the players' longest ever drive on a perfect summer day; it includes mishits, shots into the wind and uphill shots too. For this reason, the distances are probably shorter than you expect.

### Driving Distance by Handicap

Handicap	Distance
PGA Tour (Elite)	302
0	255
5	240
10	230
15	220
20	210
25	200

Sources: Golf Digest, Golf WRX, BreakXGolf

### David's Takeaways:

- The "Distance Delusion" Gap:** Most of my clients are surprised to learn that the average scratch golfer "only" hits it 250 yards. After seeing Rory and Bryson blast drives 360 yards on TV, 250 yards can feel short. For mere mortals though, 250 and in play is a weapon.

- **The Power of "Enough":** You don't need to hit it 300 yards to play elite golf. If you are a 15-handicap hitting it 220 yards, you are exactly where you "should" be
- **The Gender Gap:** These statistics are based on male golfers. Typically, female golfers drive the ball approximately 60 yards shorter than men across the same handicap tiers.

## Distance and Age

Let's dive in a little deeper. This chart from Arccos gives a great illustration of how far golfers of different age groups across different handicap tiers typically drive the ball. To get an even better idea of how you "stack up" vs. your target handicap, check out the average driving distance for golfers of your age group in your target handicap tier.

**Men's Driving Distance by Age and Handicap**

Age

ARCCOS	15 to 19	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s	70s
<b>0.0 to 4.9</b>	256.8	265.7	263.2	254.5	241.7	229.5	211.5
<b>5.0 to 9.9</b>	245.2	253.4	250.0	243.0	230.6	220.2	205.3
<b>10.0 to 14.9</b>	234.0	241.9	238.1	231.3	220.0	208.5	194.1
<b>15.0 to 19.9</b>	221.0	230.1	225.5	219.4	206.5	197.0	182.9
<b>20.0 to 24.9</b>	208.5	217.6	216.1	207.9	197.0	187.2	171.4
<b>25.0 to 29.9</b>	206.6	209.1	207.1	199.9	189.8	181.1	167.8
<b>30+</b>	189.8	195.5	194.7	191.1	179.3	163.3	155.9

Average Driving Distance (Yards)

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Driving Distance Report | 2025 Edition

## The Two Levers of Distance: Speed and Contact

If you need more distance, there are only two ways to get it: swing faster or hit it better. To find out which one you're missing, you need to jump on a launch monitor (like a TrackMan or Foresight GCQuad) to measure your Clubhead Speed versus your Contact Quality.

## 1. Clubhead Speed: Your Distance Ceiling

Think of clubhead speed as your "engine." If your engine only produces 90 MPH of speed, you have a mathematical ceiling on how far the ball can go.

- **The 90 MPH Benchmark:** According to TrackMan data, a 90 MPH swing has the realistic potential to hit roughly 230 total yards total.
- **The Reality Check:** If you swing at 85 MPH, it is near impossible to hit 230-yard drives consistently. You simply don't have enough "engine" yet.

## 2. Contact: The Efficiency Factor

Having speed is no guarantee of distance. Many golfers have a "100 MPH engine" but only produce "90 MPH results" (or worse!) because of poor contact. I categorize "Contact" into three main efficiency killers:

- **Off-Center Strikes:** Hitting the ball off centre significantly reduces "Smash Factor" (energy transfer), leaving yards on the face of the club. Thin shots, sky balls and heel strikes are particularly damaging.
- **The Glancing Blow:** Common among slicers, an open clubface "wipes" across the ball. Even if you hit the center of the face, you're losing energy to side-spin rather than forward compression.
- **Angle of Attack (AoA):** This is how steeply the club is moving at impact. Notice on the Trackman chart below how distance changes for a 90 MPH golfer based on AoA:
  - Hitting Down (-5°): 215 Yards (Low efficiency)
  - Neutral (0°): 228 Yards
  - Hitting Up (+5°): 239 Yards (Maximum efficiency)

TRACKMAN		Driver Fitting Chart: CARRY Optimizer					
Club Speed (mph)	Attack Angle (deg)	Ball Speed (mph)	Launch Angle (deg)	Spin Rate (rpm)	Carry (yards)	Total (yards)	Dynamic Loft (deg)
75	-5	104	14.6	3722	143	166	18.2
	0	107	16.3	3121	154	178	19.2
	5	108	19.2	2720	164	187	21.8
80	-5	113	12.9	3652	160	176	16.2
	0	115	15.5	3179	171	187	18.3
	5	116	18.0	2648	181	197	20.3
85	-5	121	11.9	3669	175	199	15.0
	0	123	14.5	3164	187	211	17.1
	5	124	17.0	2596	197	223	19.1
90	-5	129	11.1	3689	191	215	14.0
	0	131	13.4	3093	203	228	15.8
	5	132	16.4	2633	214	239	18.5
95	-5	137	9.9	3626	207	243	12.6
	0	138	12.7	3114	219	244	15.0
	5	140	15.7	2595	231	256	17.6

### David's Note on Attack Angle

While hitting "up" on the ball (+3° to +5°) is the "holy grail" for distance, **chasing extreme upward angles can often wreck your swing mechanics.**

- **The Goal:** Avoid being "steep." Hitting -4° or -5° down on a driver is a massive distance killer.
- **The Sweet Spot:** Don't obsess over huge upward numbers. If you are between -1° and +2°, you are in a functional window. Only worry if you are severely steep, as that's where you sacrifice the most yardage.

### The Diagnostic Strategy

**Always look at contact first.** There is no point building a bigger engine (speed) if your contact is poor. Once you are hitting the center of the face with a neutral to slightly positive ball attack angle, *then* you can start training for more speed.

## Driving Accuracy

Every golfer dreams of "hitting it straight". Even me.

In reality, no one has ever hit it straight every time. No, not even Moe Norman. Instead, every golfer has a dispersion pattern: a cone-shaped area where their shots will land.

The table below shows how far your ball will likely deviate from your target line for golfers of different skill levels.

### Driving Accuracy by Handicap Level

Handicap	Distance	68% of shots (the "standard" miss) within	95% of shots (the "big" miss) within
PGA Tour (Elite)	302 yards	16 yards left/ right	32 yards left/ right
0	255 yards	14 yards left/ right	28 yards left/ right
5	240 yards	13 yards left/ right	26 yards left/ right
10	230 yards	15 yards left/ right	30 yards left/ right
15	220 yards	15 yards left/ right	30 yards left/ right
20	210 yards	14 yards left/ right	28 yards left/ right
25	200 yards	14 yards left/ right	28 yards left/ right

Data from BreakX Golf

### The Accuracy Paradox

You might have noticed something strange: every handicap level has roughly the same side-to-side dispersion. The "typical" golfer of each skill level is hitting about two thirds of their shots into a 30 yard wide cone, and 95% of their shots into a 60 yard wide cone.

A look at the chart shows that the PGA Tour pro's "standard miss" is 16 yards, which is actually slightly worse than the 20 handicap's miss of 14 yards. Is the PGA

Tour player less accurate than the 20 handicap? Of course not! Because the Tour Pro is hitting it nearly 100 yards farther, their "cone" has more time to expand. If the Pro hit the ball only 210 yards, their "miss" would be far smaller.

So while a pro and an amateur would likely hit a similar number of fairways to the amateur, don't be mistaken: the pro is managing a much higher level of power with elite-level precision.

## **How to Audit Your Driving**

To see if your driving is up to your target handicap's standard, you don't need to know your distance and measure your dispersion.

### **The "7 out of 10" Rule:**

In your next practice session, pick a target and hit 10 drivers. To play to your target handicap your goal is to:

- Hit at the desired distance for your handicap
- Hit 7 out of 10 shots should finish within 15 yards of your target (i.e. within a 30 yard wide fairway).
- All 10 shots should finish within 30 yards of your target (i.e. within a 60 yard wide fairway).

In reality, you can afford about 5% of your shots to be worse than this, but we want these big misses to be outliers. Strive for all 10 shots in this test to be within 30 yards of your target for this exercise.

### **The distance advantage:**

**The 10/1 Rule: For every 10 yards you are LONGER than your handicap average, you can afford to hit one fewer shot into the 15-yard zone** and you will still be 'gaining' on the field.

If you are shorter than your target distance, you need to be even more

accurate. **For every 10 yards shorter you are, you will need to hit two more shots into the 15-yard zone.**

**Keep in mind that even perfect accuracy can only make up for about 15 yards of lost distance!**

The implication is clear. If you hit it shorter than the “standard” player of your target handicap, you have to be incredibly accurate and will likely need to pick up strokes in other aspects of the game.

### **David’s Takeaways**

- **Distance is a huge advantage, provided you can keep it in play.** We saw that it is very difficult to gain back strokes lost to distance with more accuracy. If you can increase driving distance without losing more wild shots it will have a dramatic effect on your score.
- **Identify your “leaks”.** If you are losing out on distance, you need to identify if it is a contact issue or a clubhead speed issue. Those problems will have vastly different solutions.

## Approach shot Accuracy

### Greens in Regulation (GIR) and Greens in Regulation+1 (GIR+1)

By now, you likely know that a Green in Regulation (GIR) is the gold standard of ball-striking. You achieve it when your ball is on the putting surface in two strokes fewer than par, giving you two putts for a birdie.

For decades, GIR was the only stat that mattered. But for the average golfer, it's an incomplete picture. That's where GIR+1 comes in.

#### What is GIR+1?

GIR+1 means reaching the green in one stroke fewer than par (e.g., hitting a Par 4 in three shots). This is the benchmark for "Bogey Golf." If you hit the green in GIR+1, you have a putt for par. Even a two-putt from there secures a bogey and, more importantly, eliminates the Double Bogeys that inflate your handicap.

#### Shots to Reach the Green

Hole Par	GIR (Shots)	GIR+1 (Shots)
Par 3	1	2
Par 4	2	3
Par 5	3	4

The following chart shows how many GIR and GIR+1 players of different skills levels should be expected to hit.

### Average GIR and GIR+ by Skill Level

Handicap	GIR	GIR+1
PGA Tour (Elite)	12.06	17.7
0	10.44	16.8
5	8.1	15.8
10	6.3	14.7
15	4.5	13.2
20	3.6	11.8
25	2.88	10.7

Data from Arccos, Lou Stagner

### David's Takeaways

- The 15+ Handicap Strategy.** If you are a 15-handicap or higher, stop focusing on your GIR. Golfers of this skill level hit so few GIR that it a) can become discouraging and b) paints an incomplete picture of your ballstriking. Instead, track GIR+1 and focus on giving yourself as many par attempts as possible.
- The Single-Digit Threshold.** Once you dip below a 10 handicap, GIR becomes your primary metric. To stay in the 70s, you need to find an average of at least 8 greens in regulation.

## Approach Shot Proximities

While GIR and GIR+1 give a very good indicator of how good your approach play is, these stats can be a bit “noisy”. For instance, you may be missing greens due to terrible drives putting you out of position. To truly audit your approach play, you need to test your proximities from different distances

### How to Audit Your Accuracy

Hit 10 shots from 100, 150, and 200 yards. Track two types of errors and compare to the charts below:

1. Lateral Error (Left/Right): Usually caused by poor clubface control at impact (clubface open or closed).
2. Depth Error (Short/Long): Usually caused by inconsistent contact (mishits).

### Accuracy from 100 yards

Skill Level	Lateral Error (L/R)	Depth Error (S/L)	Resulting Proximity
PGA Tour (Elite)	10.0 ft	10.5 ft	14.5 ft
Scratch (0)	13.5 ft	14.5 ft	20.0 ft
5 HC	17.0 ft	19.5 ft	26.0 ft
10 HC	21.0 ft	26.5 ft	34.0 ft
15 HC	25.5 ft	34.5 ft	43.0 ft
20 HC	30.0 ft	42.5 ft	52.0 ft
25 HC	38.0 ft	56.5 ft	68.0 ft

### Accuracy from 150 yards

Skill Level	Lateral Error (L/R)	Depth Error (S/L)	Resulting Proximity
PGA Tour (Elite)	15.0 ft	16.0 ft	22.0 ft
Scratch (0)	20.5 ft	22.5 ft	30.5 ft
5 HC	25.0 ft	30.5 ft	39.5 ft
10 HC	32.0 ft	41.5 ft	52.5 ft
15 HC	40.0 ft	55.8 ft	68.8 ft
20 HC	48.0 ft	70.0 ft	85.0 ft
25 HC	63.0 ft	96.0 ft	115.0 ft

### Accuracy from 200 yards

Skill Level	Lateral Error (L/R)	Depth Error (S/L)	Resulting Proximity
PGA Tour (Elite)	21.0 ft	23.5 ft	31.5 ft
Scratch (0)	29.0 ft	33.0 ft	44.0 ft
5 HC	36.5 ft	44.5 ft	57.5 ft
10 HC	47.5 ft	62.0 ft	78.0 ft
15 HC	61.3 ft	87.0 ft	106.5 ft
20 HC	75.0 ft	112.0 ft	135.0 ft
25 HC	98.0 ft	157.0 ft	185.0 ft

### David's Takeaways

- **Aim functionally.** If you tend to miss more in one direction than another, adjust your aim rather than your swing. Do this until 50% of your shots end up on either side of the target.
- **Adjust your expectations.** Even very good players have sizeable dispersion to their shots. For example, a 5 handicap's average proximity to the target is 40' from 150 yards. If you're a 20 handicap don't pout because you missed a green from 150 yards!
- **Ignore the pin. The biggest priority on approach play is to get your shot on, or close to the green.** That's why average golfers should aim for the

**back-centre of the green.** This gives you the best chance of getting on. If you hit it perfectly, you are still on the surface. If you mishit it slightly, you still have a chance to be on or close to the green.

- **Contact is king.** Notice the Depth Error for a 20-handicap from 200 yards (135 ft average proximity). This isn't because they accidentally nuked a 7-iron 40 yards over the green. It's because of the "chunked" or "thin" shots that finished 50 yards short. The biggest priority for these golfers to improve is to make more consistent contact!

## Short Game

Many myths about the short game still persist. You have likely heard that the short game is the most important part of the scoring or that it is what separates pros from amateurs. The truth is, ball striking is far more important in determining your score and is the real differentiator in playing better golf.

If you don't think this is true, let's imagine a scenario where you have to play a one-hole match vs Scottie Scheffler for \$1 million. Do you think your odds are better if you play a 650-yard par 5, or if you had a chip-off? My guess is that you would take the chip-off.

What you actually need is a functional short game. You don't need to hole out on the regular; you just need to get the ball on the green with a realistic chance to two-putt.

### The "Median Ball" Test

Standard "Up-and-Down" stats are misleading because they depend on your putting. To audit your actual chipping skill, hit 11 shots from three different tiers of difficulty (15–25 yards away). **Track how many shots hit the green and how far your average shot is from the hole.**

Tier A will be “easy” shots. These will be from clean lies in the fairway or rough with reasonable amounts of green to work with.

Tier B are the “medium” shots. These shots will be on side-hill lies or some situations with more slope.

Tier C are “difficult” shots. These shots will be from bunkers or in short-sided situations.

To find your average without a calculator, use the Median Ball Trick.

### The Median Ball Trick

- Hit 11 shots from the desired zone
- Toss out your 5 closest shots and your 5 furthest.

- The 6th ball is your "Median" - an average shot that is the truest representation of your current skill level.

### Short game proximity for shots from 15-25 yards

Handicap	Tier 1: Easy (Fairway/Flat)	Tier 2: Mid (Rough/Side-hill)	Tier 3: Hard (Bunker/Short-side)	Green Hit % (The Floor)
PGA Tour (Elite)	6.5 ft	9.0 ft	11.5 ft	98.5%
Scratch (0)	8.5 ft	12.0 ft	15.0 ft	95%
5 HC	10.5 ft	15.0 ft	19.0 ft	91%
10 HC	13.0 ft	19.0 ft	25.0 ft	86%
15 HC	16.5 ft	24.0 ft	32.0 ft	78%
20 HC	20.0 ft	30.0 ft	42.0 ft	68%
25 HC	25.0 ft	38.0 ft	55.0 ft	58%

Data from PGA Tour, Arccos, BreakXGolf

### David's Takeaways

- **The "Green Hit" is the Goal:** Look at the Green Hit %. A 20-handicap misses the green entirely on 1 out of 3 chips. The "double chip" is the ultimate scorecard killer! Your #1 priority is simply getting the ball onto the putting surface—anywhere.
- **Take Your Medicine:** Even a 5-handicap averages 19 feet from a bunker. If you are a 15-handicap in a bunker or short-sided, a 30-foot putt is a *great* result. Stop trying to "save" par with a miracle flop shot and start playing for a guaranteed bogey.
- **Keep it Simple:** Use the simplest tool for the job. If you can use a putter, hybrid, or an 8-iron "bump and run," do it. For most golfers these shots are much more consistent.

### Bonus Takeaway: The 30-Foot Circle Rule

An average club golfer (15-handicap) averages about 16.5 feet from the hole

on an "easy" chip. This means any chip shot that finishes within a 15-foot radius (a 30-foot circle) is a successful shot for recreational golfers.

Next time you're facing a tricky chip and feel pressure to "stick it close" remember the 30-foot circle. For many players, the goal of hitting it to tap-in makes them very tense and leads to poor execution. If this is you, take your focus away from the hole and focus on a massive 30-foot ring on the green. *Anything* inside that ring is a very good shot.

**The Goal:** Stop aiming for the cup and start aiming for the circle. If you hit the circle, you've done your job and avoided the "double chip" that kills your scorecard.

## Putting

Putting success comes down to two primary skills: short-putt make-rate and 3-putt avoidance.

### Short Putting Ability

Most golfers have unrealistic expectations for mid-range putts (10'–25'). Even PGA Tour pros only make about half of their 8-footers and just 12% from 20–25 feet. Naturally, amateurs fare much worse.

Mid-range results are often subject to "luck". A bump in the green may knock a great putt off line, or a slight misread into the hole. For this reason, it is better to track your skill from 3' to 5'. This range is the truest indicator of your stroke mechanics and ability to start the ball on line.

### Short Putting Proficiency by Handicap

Handicap	<2'	3'-5'
PGA Tour (Elite)	~100%	87%
0	97%	70%
5	93%	65%
10	90%	55%
15	86%	48%
20	85%	44%
25	83%	40%

data is from Arccos and PGA Tour

### 3-putt avoidance

Better players 3-putt less frequently, partly because their superior approach shots leave them closer to the hole. However, the biggest factors are **green reading and speed control**.

### 3-Putt Avoidance by Handicap

Handicap	3-putts per round	3-Putt %
PGA Tour (Elite)	0.5	2.80%
0	1.3	7.20%
5	2	11.10%
10	2.6	14.40%
15	3.3	18.30%
20	3.95	21.90%
25	4.6	25.50%

data is from Arccos and PGA Tour

### The “Break-Even” Distance

The Break-Even Distance is the point where you are statistically just as likely to 1-putt as you are to 3-putt. Understanding this changes how you view putting strategy. For a Pro, this distance is 33 feet. For a 25-handicapper, it shrinks to just 11 feet

### The “Break-Even” Distance By Handicap

Handicap	Break-Even Distance	1-Putt % at this Dist	3-Putt % at this Dist
PGA Tour (Elite)	33.0 ft	~6.5%	~6.5%
0	24.0 ft	~9.0%	~9.0%
5	20.0 ft	~11.0%	~11.0%
10	17.0 ft	~14.0%	~14.0%
15	14.5 ft	~17.0%	~17.0%
20	12.5 ft	~21.0%	~21.0%
25	11.0 ft	~24.0%	~24.0%

data is from Arccos and PGA Tour

### Why You Should Celebrate Two-Putts:

Imagine a 25-handicapper hits their best hybrid of the season to 13 feet. The pressure to convert the birdie is on! As their friends watch, they hit a great putt but it stops 10 inches short, dead center.

Cue the ribbing: "*Never up, never in!*".

But the math tells a different story. From 13 feet, that golfer was more likely to 3-putt than to make it. By leaving it short for a tap-in, they secured a 2-putt and a result that is statistically better than average for their skill level.

### David's Takeaways:

- **Lag it Close, Bury your Short Putts.** Don't be fooled by what you see on tv - even PGA Tour players don't sink putts over 10' regularly. To lower your handicap, pour your attention into getting good at lagging it close from outside of 10' and being rock solid on your short putts.

- **Learn to Love “Breaking Even”.** If you 2-putt from outside your break-even distance, you are gaining strokes on your peers. A 2-putt from 20 feet might not feel heroic, but it’s a winning outcome.
- **Identify Your Issue.** If you’re 3-putting too much, you likely have a speed control problem, or a green reading issue. Identify the problem and fix it. If you are missing too many short putts, it’s time to look at your stroke mechanics.

## The Path Forward - Putting This Guide to Use

I hope this guide has helped you realize that you don't need a complete game overhaul to see a massive drop in your handicap. Instead, **you just need smarter targets.**

The gap between a 20-handicap and a 10-handicap can feel like an unbridgeable chasm, but "10 strokes better" is the result of small, incremental gains accumulating across the scorecard. It looks like:

- **Driving:** Finding 20 more yards off the tee while maintaining your dispersion.
- **Approaches:** Improving your 150-yard approach proximity from 85' to 52' from removing a tendency to hit chunks and eliminating an occasional shank.
- **Putting:** Shifting your "Break-Even" putting distance from 12.5' out to 17'.

To master these skills, you may need the eye of a coach like myself. However, the most successful students don't show up and ask, "What's wrong with my swing?" They show up with data and a plan.

When you can tell a coach like myself, *"I'm 3-putting too much because my lag-putting speed control is leaving me long second putts,"* or *"I'm losing three balls a round to the right with my driver,"* you have provided me with clear targets that I can help you get better at. We can quickly move you from practicing blindly to targeting issues precisely.

Use the benchmarks in this guide to audit your rounds and practice. Identify your biggest weaknesses, and tackle that low-hanging fruit first. Stop practicing for a "perfect" swing and start practicing for a functional outcome.

Let's get to work!