



MODULE L1M1

GETTING STARTED

MALLET: GRIP: STANCE: SWING



Croquet Mallets

Give beginners the chance to try out different types of mallets

- Have a good variety of club mallets available for beginners.
- Most new players will find a club mallet they are happy with and use that for their first season's play.
- Encourage club players to allow keen beginners to have a hit with their own mallets also. New players should be encouraged to experiment to find a mallet that suits them.

Mallet choice depends on a player's height, physical make-up and style adopted.

- Weaker players may like a slightly heavier head than stronger players.
- As a general rule, players with an Irish grip will use a mallet with a shorter handle than the other grips, and Solomon grip users will want a longer handle than the others.

Mallet Characteristics.

- Mallet shafts are generally around 36 inches long. The optimal length depends on the grip the player uses (see below), the height of the player, and the most comfortable stance. Select a mallet with a shaft that reaches approximately hip height to start with.
- Traditional wooden mallets with 9" heads are very good for playing stop shots with. Mallets with longer, or heavier, heads can make roll shots easier to play, but make the stop shots more difficult. Some players love the whippy-ness of a carbon-fibre-shafted mallet, while others are more comfortable with the stiffness of a wooden shaft.
- Mallet heads are most commonly wood or carbon fibre often with various plastics attached to the end-faces. Traditional mallet heads (those of most club loan mallets) are 9 inches long. Modern mallets tend to be longer – typically 10-12 inches in length.
- The entire mallet usually weighs somewhere between 2 pound 10 ounces and just over 3 pounds.
- As players progress and develop an effective playing style, the shaft length that first worked may not be optimal – don't be afraid to change.





Grip

The 3 options demonstrated - Standard; Irish; Solomon	
	<p>The standard grip is the most popular grip used by players at all levels. It combines the ability to have a reasonable backswing with the control afforded by the lower hand. Standard grip players should be encouraged to keep the wrists reasonably locked, and to produce power using a swing solely from the shoulders.</p>
	<p>The Solomon grip permits a large backswing, allowing most players to produce a considerable amount of power using the shoulders only to swing. Players adopting this grip tend to be good shots early on, but may take a longer time to gain fine control than those with either of the other grips</p>
	<p>The Irish grip is a very accurate style but a limitation of this grip is that the hand position means that it is difficult to generate a sufficiently large backswing to produce power. Many Irish grip players use a double pendulum swing where the main swing is from the shoulders but is aided by extra movement at the wrists. This grip requires a lot of wrist flexibility to provide sufficient power for some shots, and is a difficult grip to use to produce jump strokes. It is sometimes worth encouraging beginner players who cannot hit the ball hard cleanly to try an alternative grip.</p>

- Usually the bottom hand is the player's non-preferred hand, though it is simply a matter of preference for an individual player. Both hands should grip the mallet firmly.
- All three grips are acceptable, and players should experiment to find which is the most suitable for them. It is very common for new players to copy the style of their coach, but they should also be encouraged to try out the other grips.

Hands together or apart on the shaft? A general maxim in croquet is have both hands working together and "let the mallet do the work". This basically amounts to having a smooth backswing, and then swinging with forward movement from the shoulders only. This works best if the hands are together at the top of the shaft.

The further apart the hands are, the more the player has to use the force of the lower arm when hitting which can limit the power available, lead to discomfort in the lower wrist, and also limit accuracy. **A coach should encourage players to learn to play with their hands reasonably close together as bad habits learned from the start can be very hard to unlearn.**

Stance

Modern croquet players use the Centre stance, where the mallet is swung back between the legs, then forward driving the ball at its target. This stance allows a player to walk up to the striker's ball (the one that is to be struck with the mallet) in the direction that it is to be hit. It also allows the ball to be struck from under the eyes, producing a natural shot that is easy to line up, and allowing for a balance and stable base of support with the feet on either side of, but behind, the striker's ball.

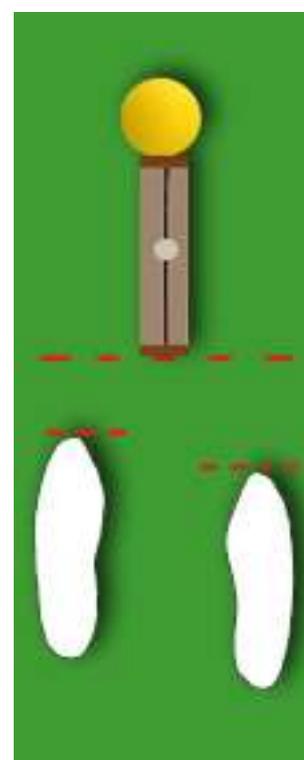


Figure 1: Recommended foot position for a normal stroke.

- Players should be encouraged to experiment with their stance – having both feet level, or slightly stepped, and at incremental distances from the ball.

Feet should provide a steady, balanced base.

For a beginner, feet should be shoulder width apart, and either level or with one foot slightly forward of the other. The front foot will be the foot on the same side as the *top* hand. This position maximises stability and having one foot slightly further back provides room for the player to have a larger backswing than with the feet level.



Swing



Use a smooth flat swing, generating movement from the shoulders, for most strokes.

The backswing needs to be started slowly, and the player must ensure that the mallet has reached the top of the backswing naturally before bringing their hands, and the mallet, forward to make their stroke.

Most players have some degree of “hook” in their backswing because of the way the wrists bend during the backswing in a stroke. It is vital that the mallet has time to come back into alignment before striking the ball during the forward swing. Forcing or hurrying the swing of the mallet or standing too close to the ball will reduce the time needed for the mallet to realign and be vertical when the ball is struck.

The size of the backswing should be increased for powerful strokes and lessened for delicate strokes

With the Irish grip, the backswing is limited as the forearms run into the thighs early in the backswing, therefore to increase the power of the stroke Irish grip players often have significant wrist flexion during the stroke.

Keep body still throughout the swing

Some players have an element of body movement during the swing, but as a rule of thumb, the hips, legs and shoulders should remain still throughout the entire swing. Only the arms should move, with the angle of the elbows and wrists staying the same and the only movement coming from rotation of the arms at the shoulders.

Straight follow-through

The follow-through is the part of the swing where the mallet continues forward after contacting the ball. It is crucial that the mallet remains straight and follows through towards the target. A very common fault found in both new and experienced players is to “pull” a ball offline with an off-line follow-through.

A straight follow-through is most easily achieved by focusing on driving the mallet – as well as the ball – towards the target point throughout the swing. The arms should move out from the body during the follow-through as the mallet drives towards the target. This also flattens the arc of the swing and tends to make the swing more reliable.

It can be useful for a player to swing along a line at the side of a lawn to check the direction of a follow-through.

Casting – swinging with a wind-up

Many experienced players generate greater power and accuracy by swinging the mallet forwards and backwards several times before making a final backswing (in one fluid movement), then a forward swing to strike the ball. This is called “casting”, and is used by almost all top-level players. It is not possible to cast with a grip in which the hands are split widely apart on the mallet shaft, and is difficult for players who have one foot significantly further in front of the other.

Coach's Tip: Shooting straight - *Croquet Matters, May 2013*

Arguably, hitting your striker's ball along the intended line of aim consistently well is the most difficult part of croquet. The key to a regularly successful outcome is to strike your ball in the middle with the middle of the mallet face. Here's a 3 step approach and brief description of each step that will assist you to do exactly that, more often. Assuming you have developed a grip that feels the most natural to you;

Stalk: Stand a few yards back from your ball on the imaginary line that runs from the target back through the centre of your ball and back to the centre of your body. Decide exactly what it is you are intending to do with the shot before approaching your ball. There is no room for doubt here. Ask yourself; How hard will I hit this? Can I see the line that my ball is going to travel on? Am I standing on the line of aim? Imagine what the outcome looks like. When you are confident that everything is perfectly aligned, approach your ball, checking the line between the centre of your ball and the target as you approach. Practice stepping straight into your "stance" when you address your ball. Avoid releasing your mallet, or changing your grip after the start of the stalk.

Stance: The stance you take is the position your body needs to stay in throughout the entire shot. Check your line and if there is any doubt, interruptions, or you feel the need to adjust your body, feet or the aim of your mallet, STOP and go back to step 1. Your stance should be stable, with some flexing in your knees (so that you remain well balanced as your weight moves slightly with the



Figure 2: A good style can take time and practice to perfect.

the spot where your mallet will strike the ball. If you are still confident, remain focused on that spot and commence your swing.

Swing: The ideal swing is a smooth, unhurried, straight pendulum motion generated from your shoulders with as little movement as possible from any other part of your body. With your eyes on the spot, swing right through that spot, following through with the swing until the mallet head disappears from sight in the direction of your target.

We have all heard "keep your head down! follow through!", "keep your body still!" but it is a lot to think about all at the same time. Try focusing on one part of your body to keep it exactly where it is throughout the shot. Recognising the position of your shoulders is useful as keeping them exactly where they are will help to avoid twisting, steering, bobbing and head movement. Make sure you see your mallet strike your ball.

To improve your rate of success, try to develop a routine process, concentrating on what you are thinking and what you are feeling throughout the shot. A familiar routine will help you to identify what a good shot feels like, and it will help you to understand what is happening when things don't go as planned.



Module L1M1 Skill learning (1)



- a. Strike ball across width of lawn to reach the opposite boundary. Ensure the mallet is vertical on impact with ball.
- b. Strike ball from centre of one of the side boundaries at the peg. Strive to get ball to stop as close to the peg as possible. This can be competitive.
- c. Strike ball from corner 1 to position in front of hoop 1 – compete with a partner. Extension: Attempt to run hoop 1 if the ball ends up in front of it.
- d. In pairs, strike ball from south boundary to reach the north boundary line. A large backswing might be needed.
- e. Strike ball from corner 4 to position in front of hoop 1 – compete with a partner. Extension: Attempt to run hoop 1 if the ball ends up in front of it.



“Balance is the key. Comfortably balanced, maybe with knees slightly relaxed if it feels better.”

Question your players for feedback about how balanced they feel. Do you feel like you want to topple forward or backward when you swing the mallet? What weight transfer do you feel during the swing? Do you feel like you are *reaching* for the ball? Help players to discover a stance that allows them to feel comfortable and balanced, and to strike a ball cleanly with force.

Try adjusting the distance between the front foot and the ball to find the optimum position to strike the ball when the mallet is vertical on the forward swing.

Technical notes:

- Emphasise the need to see the mallet hit the ball
- Ensure that players are striking the middle of the striker’s ball with the mallet vertical.
- Ensure that the swing is predominantly from the shoulders to the end of the follow through.
- Remember to give plenty of encouragement and to praise successful attempts by players



Golf Croquet: The lawn and the course

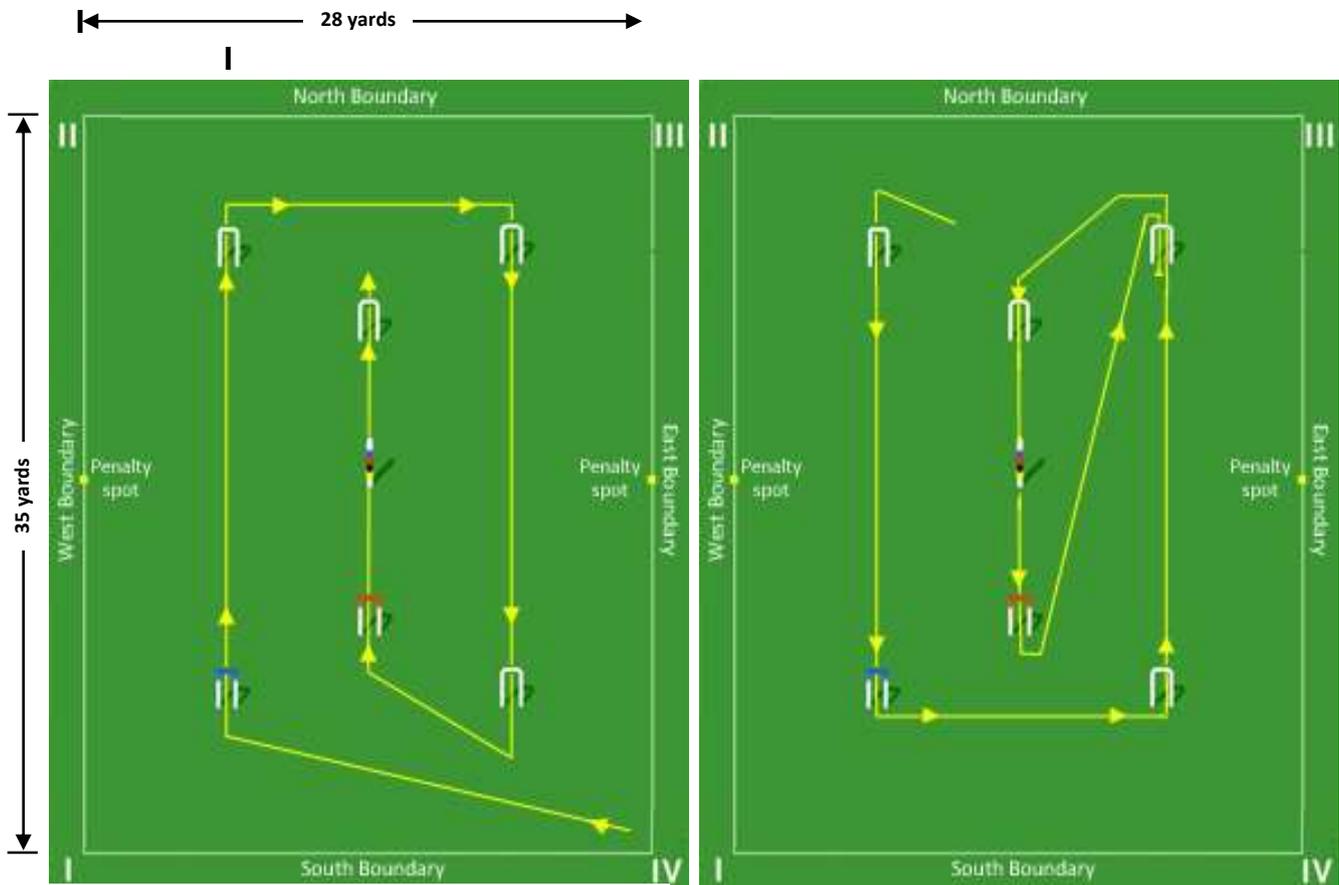


Figure 3: The direction of play for the first six hoops of a 13 point GC game.

Figure 4: The direction of play for the second seven hoops of a 13 point GC game.

Golf Croquet: Game basics

There are always four balls in a game of GC. Blue and black versus red and yellow. (Or green and brown versus pink and white if second colour balls are used). In a game of doubles, the players of one side each have one ball. In a game of singles, each player has the two balls of that side.

Balls are played in sequence, each player having one stroke per turn; Blue, then Red, then Black, then Yellow (As per the colour sequence on the centre peg), or Green, Pink, Brown, White if second colours are used.

A standard game of Golf Croquet is a *best of 13* point game. A hoop run in order (Figures 3 and 4) scores 1 point for the side. The first side to score 7 points is the winner. All players contest the same hoop until it is scored.

The start is determined by a coin toss. The winning side starts with the blue ball. The opposing side then plays the red ball, and so on.



Balls are played into the game from any spot within 1 yard of corner 4 (**Figure 5**).

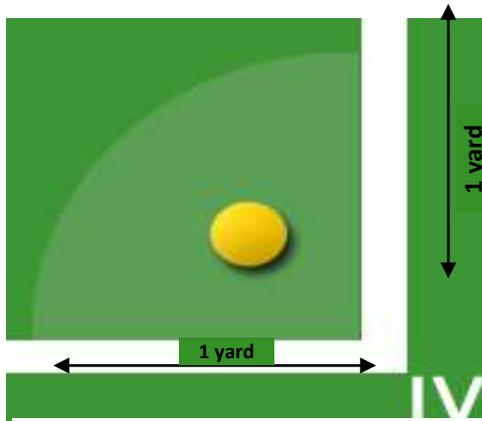


Figure 5:
In their first turn, each ball is played into the game from any point within 1 yard of corner 4

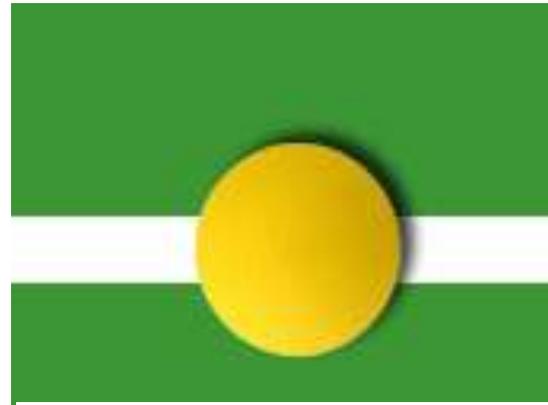


Figure 6:
When a ball crosses a boundary, it is put back on the line where it crossed before its next turn.

Scoring a Point

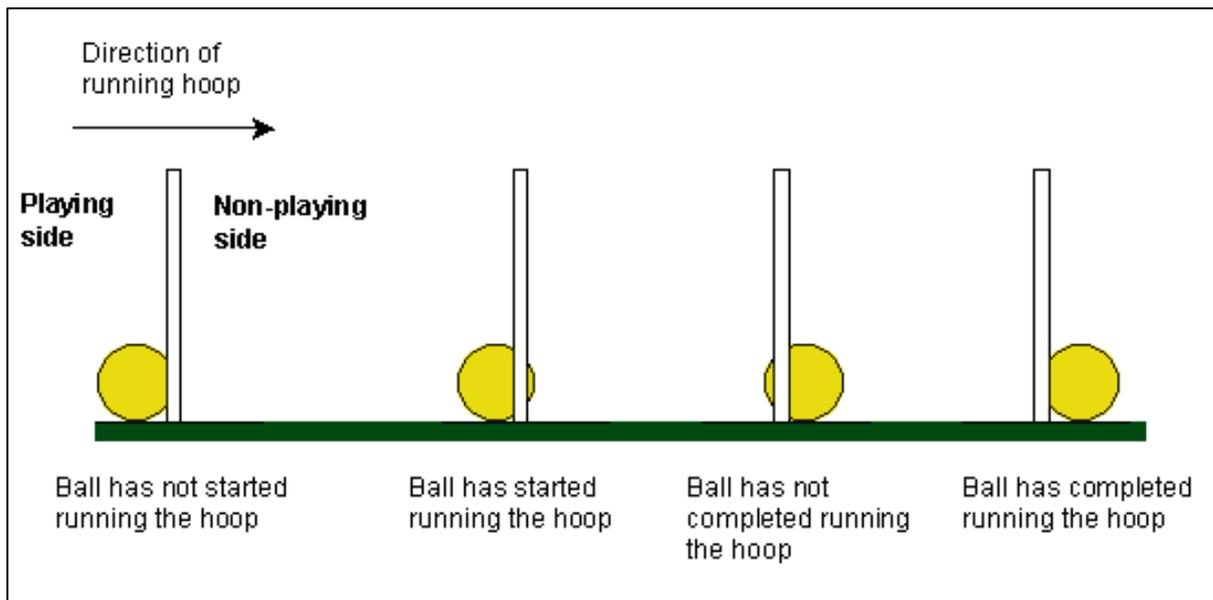


Figure 7: Running a hoop

Keeping score: A coloured peg for the side that wins the point is placed on top of the hoop.

A ball scores a point by passing through the correct hoop in order and direction shown in Figures 3 & 4. This is known as running a hoop.

- If a ball enters its hoop in order from the non-playing side shown in Figure 7, it cannot score the point in that turn. If it has so entered, it cannot score the point in a subsequent turn unless it stops in a position in which it has not started to run the hoop.
- A ball may run a hoop in one or more turns.
- If a stroke causes more than one ball to run the hoop, the ball nearest the hoop before the stroke scores the hoop.



Association Croquet: Game basics

There are four balls in a game of AC. Blue and black versus red and yellow. (Or green and brown versus pink and white if second colour balls are used). In a game of doubles, the players of one side each have 1 ball. In a game of singles, each player has the two balls of that side.

In a game of Association Croquet the first side to score 26 points is the winner, having run all 12 hoops in order, and hitting the centre peg with both balls of their side.

The game starts with the toss of a coin. The winner of the toss can choose to play first, or can select which pair of balls to play with. The opposing side gets the remaining choice. The first stroke of the game for each ball must be played from any point on the 'A' or 'B' Baulk lines.

At the beginning of a turn, the playing side decides which of their two balls they will use for that turn.

When the striker causes their ball to hit another (called a 'ROQUET') the striker is awarded two extra shots.

- 1) a CROQUET stroke, where the strikers ball is placed in contact with the ball that was 'roqueted' and then
- 2) A CONTINUATION stroke, where the striker can roquet another ball, or run a hoop in order.

A striker may roquet and take croquet from each of the other three balls once in a turn before running their next hoop in order.

When a hoop in order is run, the striker is awarded 1 extra shot in which they can roquet another ball, continuing the sequence of roquet – croquet – continuation shots again. Thus, a 'turn' in Association croquet can include many strokes.

A turn that includes a lot of strokes and hoop points is called a **BREAK** (More about breaks later on). The best players can sometimes complete the entire course with both balls to win the game by playing just two breaks! (Similar to 'clearing the table' in a game of snooker)

Keeping score: At the end of a turn, a corresponding coloured clip is placed on the next hoop in order for each ball. Clips are placed on the top of the hoop for the first 6 hoops, and on the side of the hoop for the next 6. (Figure 12)



Figure 12: Coloured clips keeping score and indicating the next hoop in order for each ball.

