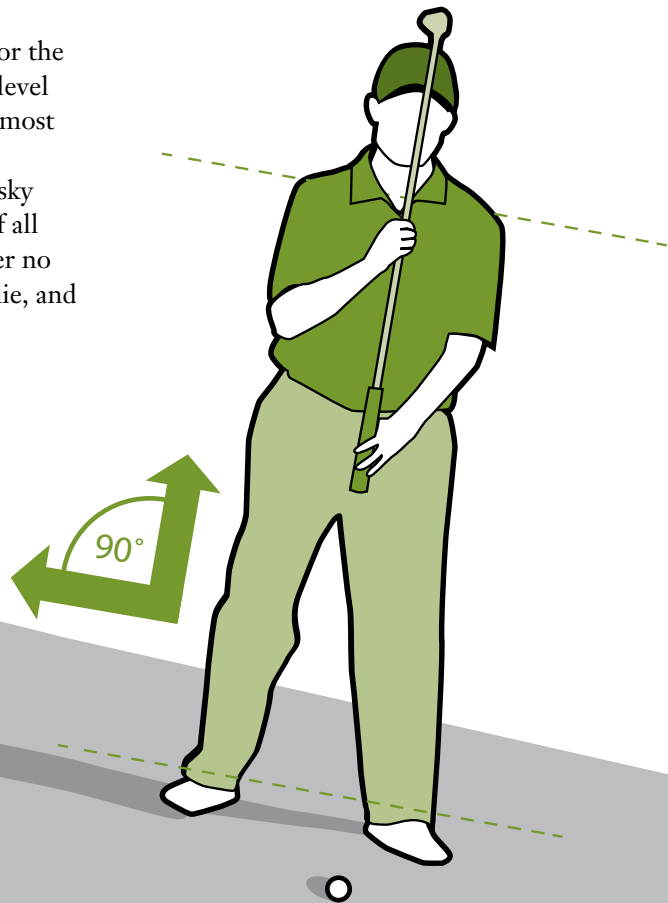


Don't Bring Me Down

Make the grade when you hit off a sliding slope. BY TOM F. STICKNEY II

IF YOU HAVE EVER PLAYED GOLF in the mountains or the desert, you will understand just how infrequent it is to find a level lie in the fairway. Most of the slopes are easy to deal with for most players—provided the slopes are not too steep.

The chief exception to this rule is the downhill lie. This pesky predicament strikes fear into the hearts and souls of golfers of all levels, regardless of the overall severity of the slope. But cover no longer: I stand by a simple procedure in order to handle this lie, and it's one I think you'll find easy to replicate.



1 Match the angle of your spine and shoulders to the slope in general.

Simply put, lean toward the target until your spine is perpendicular to the ground. Doing so will ensure that your shoulders are “level” with the particular slope, and it will position your weight and body so that you can control where the club strikes the ground at impact. Lean back too much, and you will tend to make less-than-solid contact on these shots, sending the ball weakly out to the right more often than not.

2 Chase the slope with your clubhead through and beyond impact.

This technique is the *key* to mastering these downhill lies; it's the one fundamental that will enable you to control the ball's flight. By chasing the slope, you will find that you are hitting more of a punch shot, in that the club will hit the ball first, strike the ground second, and move down and through the turf more effectively. As with any punch shot, you should always play this one with more club, so that you can swing much more easily and produce a lower, more "guided" trajectory—one that is immune to pressure, wind, and steep slopes for the most part. Just remember that in order to make the ball find your target, you must perfect the low finish post-impact.



Practice these techniques, and you'll quickly realize that there's no reason to fret when you play a course with funky lies. Take this fact of mountain and desert golf as a challenge to shape the ball and hit different types of shots than you normally would.

After all, a little bit of challenge and variety are what golf is all about. Experiment with these techniques, then go out there and have fun!

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