

# Going Downhill

Uneven lies present unique challenges, but your response to them should be consistent.

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Photos by Steve Ellis

**W**ho doesn't love hitting balls on the driving range? It's so flat, with perfect lies and no set-up or swing adjustments required. We would never think to practice only straight, level putts, but when it comes to the full swing we take things easy on ourselves. Some of us won't hit balls if it's a little windy, never mind raining!

Finding uneven lies to practice on can be difficult—a shag bag and an empty hole at twilight are often the only option—but improvement often boils down to better adjusting to the different circumstances the golf course throws at us. Making solid contact from uneven grounds means taking what the slope gives you. If you feel like you're fighting the slope, the jig is already up; you should think of uneven lies as a chance to become one with the playing field by adjusting your setup and swing. Here, we will focus on downhill lies, but the principles carry over to uphill and sidehill lies, too.

## Club Selection

The slope will keep the ball flight effectively lower and could add distance, so you should consider selecting a higher-lofted club (and, conversely, a lower-lofted club when facing an uphill slope). That said, there is an overriding piece of advice: Whenever you are in an uncomfortable or unusual situation, take an extra club than you normally would and swing easy. You're already likely to be tense, and hitting a club you would need to connect with perfectly to reach the target will only add pressure and enhance the shot's difficulty.



## Alignment Issues

Shots tend to leak to the right off of downhill lies because you are extending your arms down the slope (inset, right), which in effect holds off clubface rotation and can leave the face open at impact. Don't counteract this by trying to release through the ball. That can cause pulls and even smother-hooks. Simply aim a little left of your intended target to compensate.



## Ball Position

From a downhill lie, you want to move the ball slightly back in your stance—about a ball's worth (inset, left). This will help prevent fat strikes if you've made the proper setup adjustment and gotten your body parallel to the slope. (An alignment stick tucked in one's belt loops is a good self-test.) Remember: Swing with the slope rather than trying to fight it or "help" the ball up. The club has plenty of technology built in and will do this job all on its own if you simply let it. ■

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