



# SLOW IT DOWN

**By Brett Taylor  
with Al Barkow**

It has often been said, and rightly so, that with a good swing tempo a golfer can get away with more than a few mechanical errors. In short, tempo is very important to good golf. However, just as there is no universal golf swing that all golfers can and should have, there is no one tempo that suits all golfers. The reasons are the same and might even sound familiar.

Every player is built a little differently and moves at his own pace. Individual pace is determined by many factors, psychological and otherwise. Tension, the degree to which you are susceptible to it and how you deal with it, definitely affects your swing tempo. Another influence you may not have considered is where you live or grew up. People who come from or live in a big city like New York are likely to have faster swing tempos than those who live in rural Arkansas.

Then there are the mechanics of your swing. For example, short backswings tend to produce faster swing tempos than longer ones. Holding the club too tightly can have an effect. So can a complicated swing pattern.

All of which is why teaching tempo can be difficult. It is very personal. However, there are ways to arrive at the tempo that's best for you and will be most effective in terms of the power, accuracy and especially the consistency of your shot-making.

The emphasis here will be on a too-fast swing tempo because that's the problem for the majority of golfers. But a golfer can also swing too slowly and, in doing so, lose power and some accuracy. There is a middle ground — a tempo that's just right for you. The purpose of this article is to help you find it.

First, a definition of terms is in order. By tempo, we mean the speed



A swing with good tempo should start with a comfortable address position. The grip is relatively light and neutral with neither hand turned too much to the right or left. The arms hang easily and straight down with no stretching outward or crimping inward. The knees should be slightly flexed with the weight distributed on the arches of the feet. The right foot is turned out to the right a touch to allow for a full turn of the body in the backswing. The takeaway involves only a swinging of the arms. There is no movement of the upper or lower body, which sets up a good swing pace to the top of the backswing.

or pace of your overall swing. It is not to be confused with swing speed, which is how fast the club is moving at impact. Swing speed at impact is influenced by your tempo, but not the way you might imagine. An upbeat tempo is not necessarily going to produce more swing speed.

Golfers sometimes confuse tempo with rhythm and timing, thinking they are different names for the same thing. This is not true, although all three have a symbiotic relationship. Timing is the sequencing of the moving parts of the swing — the movement of the arms in relation to the cocking of the wrists, the turning of the hips, all the moving parts in the right place at the right time throughout the

swing. Rhythm is the overall smoothness of those movements — a kind of blending of the moving parts so they not only sequence properly but mesh with each other.

Actually, no one of the three elements comes first. With good tempo, you're almost certainly going to have good rhythm, and vice versa. Timing is bound to be good when the tempo and rhythm are on the mark. Still, the whole equation is centered on tempo, which is why we are concentrating on that aspect.

## What's Your Tempo?

There is a simple technique for finding your tempo. Walk at your normal, everyday pace — not the one

# Simple Way To Improve Your Tempo

## FOR Straighter Ball Flight Better Distance Control



The backswing is marked by a full turn of the upper body with the wrists cocked and the left forearm rotated clockwise.

when rushing to make an appointment and not the one when hanging back so your child can keep up with you. Count one when your right foot

hits the ground, then two when it hits the next time and continue in this way until you have identified your personal pace. This pace is, or should be, your swing tempo. It's not a precise science, but do it enough and you can incorporate it into your system. Whenever you get out of tempo, do the step-gauge again to get it back.

You can also get a little more scientific by using a metronome. There are a few brands on the market. Set it so it beeps at a certain interval, which you can find by coordinating it with your step count. Some teachers advise a two-beep swing — one at the takeaway, another at impact. I think three beeps is better — one at the takeaway, another at the top of the swing and the third at the finish. That coincides with what the storied English golf teacher Percy Boomer recommended. He suggested the Blue Danube Waltz as a kind of metronome for the golf swing. So do I, because it is in three-four time. Practice on the range with the Blue Danube Waltz playing in your ear and develop a good tempo.

### How You Get Out Of Tempo

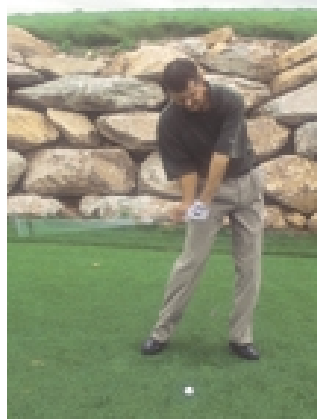
As noted earlier, most golfers swing too fast — faster than they walk at a normal, everyday pace. There are a few reasons for this. Let's look at the psychological ones first.

**Anxiety** — This is an old pre-swing standby. Worry about the consequences of a poor shot on your score, your match or your ego and you get tense. Few people who are under this kind of stress do things slowly or at a normal pace. Anxiety simply speeds things up.

**Negativity Or Doubt** — You're not sure about your club or shot selection, which creates tension, which produces an overly fast swing. Make a decision and be confident of it. Your swing tempo will reflect that confidence.

**Hit Impulse** — You want to hit the ball as far as you can. You think this consequently means hit it as hard as you can. This almost invariably translates into a too-fast swing, especially the downswing segment.

**Emotion** — You have just holed an important putt and gone 1 up in your match or 2-under par. In your joy, you rush to play the next shot, thinking that



In the downswing, there should be no extraneous movements that would require compensating movements to swing the club-head down the line of flight. A simple straight-back, straight-through swing is going to be a swing at just the right tempo. The hands should be well ahead of the clubhead as the swing nears impact. The follow-through is also a reflection of a swing in good tempo. The body is nicely vertical and in good balance.



you're hot and don't want to lose momentum. Or, you've hit a poor shot and get angry with yourself, your caddie, the golf gods, etc., and explode into a temper tantrum. Either way, your tempo is affected. It gets too fast.

There are also purely physical things that can create a poor swing tempo.

**Grip Pressure** — Grip the club too tightly and you create muscular tension that radiates through your hands, up into your arms and to the rest of your body. Physical tension, or tautness, causes jerky movement. Jerky movements inherently have a fast tempo.

However, it's not only how hard you press your hands against the handle of the club, it is also how you position them. The most common poor grip is the right hand set under the handle with the palm more or less facing upward. With this grip, you are exerting pressure on the side of the shaft. This encourages a closing of the club-face at impact and a badly hooked shot. Badly hooked shots cause anxiety and a lack of confidence, which affects your tempo. Additionally, exerting pressure on the side of the shaft adversely affects timing.

**Too Many Moves** — The more moves in your swing, the faster your



A metronome can measure the number of beats or times per minute the right foot hits the ground while walking at a normal pace.

tempo is likely to be. The reason is that compensations are required to get the club square to the ball, putting a strain on timing and rhythm. These compensations are harder to achieve, and tempo suffers as a result.

It's something of a law that less movement equals better tempo. When trying to improve a higher handicapper's swing, golf instructors usually take excess movement out of it.

If your hips slide laterally in the backswing, if you dip your left shoulder down instead of turning it, if you swing too

much inside or outside on the backswing and have to re-route the club to get it moving down the line, your timing is a problem, and so is your swing tempo. If your backswing is short, the club never getting to parallel or even close, the swing is usually too fast because you instinctively feel you will lose distance and must make up for it with a sped-up downswing.

Most golfers' putting strokes are at a slower pace than their full swings. The primary reason is there are far fewer movements in putting.

## Tell-Tale Signs Of Poor Tempo

Ball flight is always the best evidence of what you have done mechanically in your swing. It also tells you about your tempo. If you are swinging too fast, your contact point with the ball will be erratic and all over the clubface — out on the toe, on the heel, high on the face, etc. The markings on the clubface are the tell-tale signs.

Generally, if your hands and arms are swinging too fast — not in coordination with your torso — you will hit the ball left of your target. If your body is moving too quickly in the downswing and the hands and arms are lagging behind, the shots will go right of the target. In this case, you have two options — slow the body or speed up the arms. The view here is you rarely want to speed up the naturally slower element in the swing, which is the bigger muscles of the body — the shoulders and chest. The answer is to adjust the speed of the arms.



**Faulty or overdone backswing movements require compensations in the downswing and a poor tempo. When the backswing is too short, excessive downswing speed is generated. A fuller turn of the upper body is necessary in this case.**



**A classic overswing, in which the upper body is turned too much to the right, causes the head to come off the ball. Plus, with so much turning and flexing of the legs, it is very difficult to return to a proper impact position with a sound swing in good tempo.**

## How To Achieve A Good Tempo

As mentioned earlier, most tempo problems are associated with speed, like a too-fast swing. It starts with the take-

away. If you start the club with a jerk, which by definition is a short and quick movement, it usually leads to an overall too-fast swing. Much instruction tells golfers to slow the takeaway, and that is a good thing. However, you can be

too deliberate. Sensing you will lose power as a result, you may rush the rest of the backswing and especially the downswing in an effort to generate maximum clubhead speed.

The first move in the swing should be the first beat at the start of the Blue Danube Waltz, part of the one-two-three pace discussed earlier.

The change of direction or transition from the backswing to the downswing is a critical point in regard to tempo. A swing that is too fast often begins at this point. There is a rush from the top that nullifies a takeaway with the perfect tempo.

There needs to be a slight pause at the top of the backswing before beginning the downswing, a moment when you sort of gather yourself for the move to impact. Some golfers may actually stop the club at the top for what seems like a whole second or two. That is rare, but in fact the club does have to stop for a moment in changing direction. What you want to do is feel or perceive that it has stopped. There is no set time frame for the pause. It is an individual feeling, but one that you should strive for.

There are mechanical ways to achieve that pause at the top. Completing your backswing is one. Swing the club as far back and up as you can comfortably, without losing your balance. You will almost automatically develop a natural pause at the top and an overall better tempo.

To extend your backswing to the fullest, make a full turn of your shoul-

ders or lift your left heel off the ground. However, the lifting of the heel should not be a conscious effort. It's fine if it happens naturally due to your flexibility level, but it can be disruptive if you force it.

An alternative is if your right foot is perpendicular to the target line at address, as is the case with most golfers, fan it out to the right a little. This will help you complete your backswing turn.

Jack Nicklaus has talked about the first 2 feet of the downswing being at the same pace as the first 2 feet of the backswing. In this way, a good tempo is achieved. The sense of this is a slowing of the club as it begins its descent to impact. That sounds counter-productive. Common sense would seem to indicate that you want to start swinging the club faster at this point to increase clubhead speed. But golf is often contrary to what seems right. The club is going to pick up speed in the downswing by virtue of gravity and centrifugal force. Let those natural phenomena work and you will develop more power than you would by forcing speed on the club.

The waggle is a good time to begin developing the tempo at which you want to swing the club. The movement of the club back and forth behind the ball in the moments prior to starting the backswing should be a rehearsal of the swing pace.

Practice swings can also serve as a tempo rehearsal. Paul Azinger, for example, takes slow practice swings to the point of exaggeration to infuse the



**A poor grip common among average golfers occurs when the right hand gets too far under the handle. This exerts pressure on the sides of the shaft, which encourages a closing of the clubface at impact.**

slower tempo he's after.

Grip pressure is an excellent conductor of swing tempo. Hold the club lightly in your hands, especially the right hand, and there is a good chance your swing tempo will be well-paced. Don't be afraid of dropping the club or having it fall out of your hands during

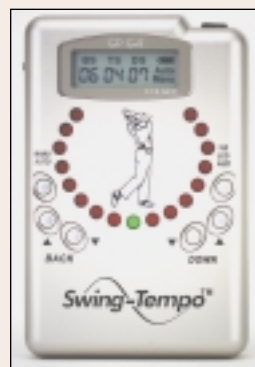
## New Tempo-Training Device

**A**n innovative new training aid is now available to help you find your perfect tempo. The Swing-Tempo is a pocket-sized device that allows you to set and retain your optimal tempo settings.

Using three methods to provide instant feedback on your tempo and timing, the Swing-Tempo enables you to learn your ideal tempo by seeing it in visual mode, hearing it in audio mode and feeling it in vibration mode.

By dividing the golf swing into three measurable components — the backswing, top swing and downswing — the device teaches you a consistent and repeatable swing. You can also mimic the tempo of your favorite tour professional.

Perfect for the practice range, the unit clips to your belt or bag so you can take it with you on the course. For more information, contact GP Golf Innovations Inc., 6965 Abbottswood Drive, Dept. GI, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA 90275-3021; 1-800-708-3676; [www.swing-tempo.com](http://www.swing-tempo.com).





the swing. Remember that the very act of swinging the club increases grip pressure without you doing anything about it. That's science working.

Weight distribution at address also can help create good tempo. Whenever you swing the club, your weight goes into the right heel in the backswing. Therefore, if your weight is already on your heels at the start of the swing, as is often taught, there is no place for the weight to transfer smoothly. You will be out of balance, and that leads to poor tempo. Your weight at address should be between the heels and the balls of the feet.

## Other Ways To Get In Tempo

There are a few methods for developing a good swing tempo that are only indirectly associated with the game itself. For example, when you have breakfast before going to the

course, reach slowly for the salt shaker, your cup of coffee, the fork and knife, etc. Bring the food to your mouth slowly. On your drive to the course, go below the speed limit. Ben



**Weight distribution at address is key to creating a proper swing tempo. In every swing, the golfer's weight transfers to the right heel in the backswing. If the weight is already back on the heels (left), there will be no place for it to go and tempo will be compromised. When the weight is out on the balls of the feet (right), you will be in poor balance in the downswing, which will cause poor overall swing tempo.**

Hogan did that. Control your breathing. Before you get to the course and during the round, take deep breaths and let the air out slowly.

There's also a club on the market with a very whippy "spaghetti" shaft. It is of conventional length and has a proper clubhead so balls can be hit with it. Swing it in your backyard or actually hit some shots with it. In trying to control the clubhead, you have no choice but to swing with good rhythm and tempo, which is to say slowly.

A good drill to help you counter the hit impulse that makes for too-fast swings is to hit some marshmallows or popcorn. When you feel there's no weight being hit, the tendency is to swing easier. It is the same when clipping the dandelions while waiting to play a shot. The swing is always relaxed. By the way, you'll be amazed at how far the marshmallow will go.

Finally, an overall concept that will help you swing the club at the most effective pace is to always be mentally aware of the clubhead — where it is at all times from address all the way into your follow-through. Every player is going to swing at his own pace, and everyone has a very good chance of finding that pace by being aware of where the clubhead is at all times. ☐

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