

## Stroke “Best Practices” Routine

supporting “The Illustrated Principles of Pool and Billiards”  
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Here is an example set of **suggested “best practices”** you might consider if you are having trouble with **stroke consistency or accuracy**:

1. When in your stance, the cue stick should be **set** in the desired aiming line direction with the cue tip at the desired cue ball contact point (with only a small gap between the cue tip and ball). It helps to have a low stance, with your head close to and over the cue stick, to visualize your aim. Your forearm should be vertical (hanging straight down) at cue ball contact. You should hold the cue stick at the cue ball while making small adjustments and verifying both the aiming line and your contact point.
2. Take several continuous (pause-less) **warm-up** strokes to ensure that you are relaxed and settled and that your aim will remain true during motion. Some people recommend getting a feel for the desired stroke speed during the warm-up strokes, but the value of this is debatable. During your warm-up strokes, it is recommended that you focus on the cue ball. This will help prevent you from hitting the cue ball prematurely by accident, and it also helps reinforce confidence in your tip contact point. Alternatively, you can move your eye gaze between the cue ball and the object ball.
3. **Pause** (i.e., set again) at the cue ball on your last warm-up stroke and verify the aiming line and cue ball contact point. If any adjustments are required, make the changes and repeat step 2. At the end of this step, your eyes should be focused on the cue ball contact point.
4. Smoothly and slowly **pull back** the cue stick, **pause** at the end of your backstroke, and move your eye gaze to the object ball (or more specifically, the ghost-ball target [see **NV 3.1**]). A deliberate pause at the end of your backstroke (i.e., before your final forward stroke) helps give your eyes time to focus on your target before your final stroke. Alternatively, you can shift your eye gaze from the cue ball to the object ball at the end of step 3, before the final backstroke. Even if you do this, you should still consider pausing at the end of the final backstroke to prevent you from rushing the transition to the forward stroke. Note - for shots where the cue tip contact point is critical (e.g., jump shot, masse shot, break shot, when elevated over a ball), focusing on the cue ball tip-contact point (instead of the object ball target) during the final forward stroke can be more effective.
5. With your eye gaze completely focused on the ghost-ball target, smoothly **accelerate** to impact, and **follow through**, keeping everything still except below your elbow. The deliberate pause at the end of your backstroke (see step 4) might help you create a smoother transition to your forward stroke. Allison Fisher is an excellent model for this. She has a noticeable and consistent pause before her final forward stroke. Concerning the importance of follow-through, it has no direct effect on the cue ball, because the tip stays in contact with the cue ball only for an instant (e.g., see **HSV A.38**). However, if you don't have much follow-through, then you are probably somehow constraining your stroke, and this might affect consistency and accuracy (and power for fast speed shots).
6. **Freeze** after your stroke, keeping your body, head, and cue stick down well after impact.
7. If the shot is missed, immediately try to **diagnose** what went wrong (e.g., check your follow-through direction for stroke steer [see **NV 2.6**] or unintentional elbow drop, check your grip pressure to make sure you didn't tense up, decide if squirt or throw was not adequately accounted for if English was used, etc.).

A detailed acronym one can use to summarize this list is **SWPPPGAFFD** (pronounced "swap-gaffed"): **set, warm-up, pause, pull-back, pause, gaze, accelerate, follow-through, freeze, diagnose**. I know this acronym is a bit ridiculous in length, especially if you hope to remember what all of the letters mean; so if you want something simpler, use **SPFF (set, pause, finish, freeze)**, which is taught by many BCA-certified instructors. This acronym is a lot snappier and easier to remember.