

# Take a Stance

by Tom Simpson © October 2001

Most players take their stance for granted. They don't give it much thought. "Hey, I'm not falling over. What's the problem?" OK, maybe you're not falling over, but are you off balance? Are you swaying? Are you inconsistent?

The purpose of the stance is to serve as a rock-solid foundation for your aim and for your stroke. A good stance is one that consistently arranges your body to support and facilitate a straight, smooth, fluid stroke. Let's look at some vital aspects of stance.

**Balance:** You should be balanced from side to side. In other words, no leaning, if you can avoid it. If you *must* lean or brace yourself against the table, fine, just make sure you are comfortable and stable. Your weight should be distributed about evenly across your two feet. You must also be balanced from front to back. If your front knee is bent a lot, you might have too much weight on the front foot. If you can lift your front foot while you're down in your stance, you have too much weight on the back foot. Correct this by moving your hips forward or back along the line of the shot.

**Stability:** Once you go down to shoot, you have to settle in and avoid swaying. Again, think of your stance as a foundation. A relaxed, stable stance allows you to stroke fluidly, without interference from clenched up muscles or twisted up joints. Gain stability by finding ways to align yourself to gravity. Don't fight anything.

**Width:** Most good American players use a very narrow stance, like an archer. One foot is in front of the other, close to being on the same line, near the line of the shot. Good balance is difficult in this stance, and it requires a lot of neck twisting. The other extreme is the snooker stance – feet side by side. I've found that players using the narrow stance almost always improve when they widen their stance a bit, to somewhere between the two extremes. Each person is different, so experiment a little. Try starting with your feet side by side and your stick pointed straight forward. Now, move your front foot (the left if you are right-handed) forward about a foot and out to the side about a foot. The butt of the cue should be directly above the top of your rear foot. Bend forward into a shooting position and see if you feel you can sight straight down your cue. Adjust for comfort and confident sighting.

**Depth:** A deep stance is one in which your feet are far apart. Deep stances are often taken by taller players, as a way to get their bodies down to table height. Better players also take deep stances to gain stability.

**Height:** How far is your chin above the shaft? The closer you are to upright, the easier it is to see the angle of the shot. As you bend lower, you see the path of the ball. You must be comfortable that you see the angle *before* you bend down. For good aiming, the lower you can comfortably go, the better. As you age, you may need to come up a couple of inches. Check your neck for tension. Come up until you are no longer straining. This will make a real difference.

**Comfort:** In general, a good stance is natural and comfortable. Natural means your joints are not twisted up. Look at the angles made by your feet when you're down in your stance. A natural position will look similar to the angles of your feet when you are standing normally. If you have pain or strain, something is wrong. With a comfortable stance, you can perform well for a longer time.

**Distance:** Over time, we learn to take our stance the "right" distance from the shot, so when we bend down, our bridge hand lands in the right place. Note that stance changes often result in you standing closer or farther from the shot than this habitual distance. You'll need to consciously check this for a while, until the new stance distance burns in. Move your whole body (feet included) forward or back to adjust. The new habit will soon form, and you'll automatically take your stance at a proper distance again.

When you look at an effective stance, there is not much to notice. Good stance is simple, natural, and neutral. Aspects of a stance that "stick out" are usually the things worth working on. A great stance has no extra stuff. Get down. Get simple.