

# Going off on a Tangent

As players improve they begin to think less and rely more on feel while performing tasks as if the knowledge were instinctual not learned. Most players develop their feel for hitting the cue ball through a process that occurs over several years. However, by employing certain exercises and a little focused practice, the time needed to begin performing “instinctually” can be compressed dramatically. As you work through this month’s exercise, try doing so without really thinking about what you are learning but rather observing how what you do relates to your desired results.

Set up the shot in the diagram marking the balls’ positions and, with the chalk, drawing the line that is perpendicular to the line of the object ball’s path to the pocket. Move the cue ball over to the X for a straight-in shot and shoot a few stop shots at different speeds. You already have the feel for doing this. Move your tip lower for softer hits and higher up on the cue ball as you add speed.

Great! Now move the cue ball to the position shown and shoot a stop shot at any speed. The cue ball will not stop of course because the shot is no longer straight in. When you do execute a stop shot the cue ball will travel on the perpendicular line that you drew. Shoot a few more at various speeds without thinking really about what you are doing and without too much concern yet for where the cue ball comes to rest. Though seemingly incongruous, the best way to make the cue ball behave is to focus completely on the object ball throughout the shot.

After shooting five or ten shots successfully, pocketing the object ball and keeping the cue ball on the perpendicular line, pause for a few minutes to consider the stop shot. The stop shot, more than anything you can do with the cue ball, gives you control over the future. On a true stop shot you know the precise point on which the cue ball will rest after pocketing the object ball. When you have to cut the object ball and you shoot a stop shot, you know precisely what line the cue ball will travel on after hitting the object ball, leaving speed as the only variable to control.

Getting back to the exercise you can now add speed control to the shots. Practice a soft hit on the bottom of the cue ball to move the cue ball just to the rail; a short bridge and short stroke make this easier. Try hitting the shot hard enough to move the cue ball to the square marked on the diagram near the diagonally opposite corner. Then you can place a sheet of paper at various places along the cue ball’s path and shoot to make the cue ball come to rest on the paper. Remember not to think about what you are trying to do. Instead, decide what you want to do and then focus on the object ball for the shot.

Once you have a little confidence with your feel for keeping the cue ball on the perpendicular line you can place two obstructing balls around the line and continue shooting the same shots, moving the cue ball between the obstructions as if they did not exist. Finally you can move out of the exercise by setting up a variety of shots around the table and hitting the perpendicular line with various speeds. Have you amazed yourself yet with your feel for executing this shot?

You may wonder how useful this can be when most shots offer such a daunting range of possible tracks for the cue ball. Next time you watch professionals going through racks, observe how often they use the perpendicular line off of the object ball for position. You may find the frequency amazingly high. Because pool confronts the player with nearly limitless possibilities, most great players train themselves to create certainty where others may see doubt, especially under a little pressure. Once you add english to manipulate the cue ball's path from a rail you will see how one track from the object ball can produce a great number of ultimate paths for the cue ball. Soon you will see how often this shot works while it becomes natural for you to accomplish and, without knowing it, you will begin to make pool look easy. Finally, if you practice in a public room, please get a brush from the counter and clean up after yourself when you finish. You wouldn't want to make enemies along your road to greatness.

