
Supporting narrated video (NV) demonstrations, high-speed video (HSV) clips, technical proofs (TP), and all past articles are available online at billiards.colostate.edu. Reference numbers used in the articles help you locate the resources on the website.

Recently, I posted online video [NV J.66](#) covering the generally recommended “best practices” for the stroke. In this article, I summarize important highlights from the video. Before I begin, I want to be clear that as long as a stroke is accurate and consistent with both direction and speed, it is a good stroke, even if you pump your stroke with a loose wrist like Francisco Bustamante, or use a sidearm stroke with lots of “body English” like Keith McCreedy, or use a short, punchy stroke with unnecessary elbow motion like Allen Hopkins, or have a bent and locked wrist like John Schmidt (see the video for examples of each of these stroke types). All these players are accurate and consistent, and that is all that really matters, so there would be no reason for them to change. However, if you have trouble with stroke consistency or accuracy, it might help to try to incorporate some of the following stroke “best practices” into your game.

1. Set and Check

I will assume you are already in a good stance after a purposeful pre-shot routine. If you need help with these things, see the links in the [NV J.66](#) video description. As shown in **Image 1**, in the “set” position, with the tip close to the cue ball (CB), the forearm should be perpendicular to the cue with the cue as level as possible. If you are wondering why I crouch in my stance with bent knees, see online videos [NV J.21](#) and [NV J.40](#). As shown in **Image 2**, the forearm should also be in a vertical plane. This will make it easier to stroke straight. With the cue still and the tip close to the CB, carefully check visual alignment, cue direction, and tip position. This is easier with a low stance with the chin as close to the cue as possible. Before moving the cue, make sure everything looks good by slowly moving your eyes between the CB and object ball (OB), giving your eyes time to focus on each.



Image 1 “Set” position



Image 2 Vertical forearm

2. Relax and Test

As demonstrated in [NV J.66](#), take several slow warm-up strokes to ensure you are relaxed and settled, and to test that your aim remains true during arm motion. You can also judge the stroke length you want based on the desired shot speed. It is recommended you keep your eyes focused on the CB during the warm-up strokes to make sure you do not contact the CB by mistake.

3. Pause and Verify

After the warm-up strokes, re-check the cue alignment and tip position with the cue still, before committing to the final stroke.

4. Focus on Target

Now shift and lock your eye gaze from the CB to your ghost-ball or contact-point target. Give your eyes time to settle before starting the final stroke.

5. Pull Back Slowly

Smoothly and slowly pull back the cue and “pause” (even if only for an instant) at the end of your backstroke. The backstroke length should generally be shorter for softer shots and longer for power shots.

6. Transition Smoothly

Be very careful to have a smooth and non-rushed transition between the final backstroke and forward stroke. If you have trouble with this, it can help to add a deliberate pause at the end of the backstroke. As demonstrated in [NV J.66](#), a jerky transition can create unwanted body motion and stroking errors. Again, go back slow, and don’t rush the transition.

7. Keep Grip Relaxed

As illustrated in **Image 3**, keep your grip relaxed during the entire stroke. As demonstrated in [NV J.66](#), tightening the grip can lead to poor tip-contact-point accuracy, and tightening your entire arm can cause the cue to lift. Again, keep your grip and arm relaxed during the stroke if you want to hit the CB where you are aiming.



[Image 3](#) Relaxed grip

8. Accelerate Smoothly

Be sure to accelerate smoothly into the CB, and follow through. This will help make your stroke more accurate and consistent, and you will have better speed control. Sometimes people refer to this whole process as having good “timing.” If you rush the backstroke or transition, or decelerate during the stroke into the CB, or constrain the follow-through, you have bad “timing” and you will not have good speed control.

9. Keep Elbow Still

If you want to be accurate with the tip contact point on the CB, you should keep the elbow still during the stroke into the CB. If you drop your elbow, you will not hit the CB at the height you expect. It is OK to drop the elbow if you can drop it straight and do so mostly after the hit. One problem with elbow drop for some people is that other bad things often come with it like wrist turn and chicken-wing sideways motion. The recommended type of stroke is called a “pendulum stroke,” where the shoulder and elbow remain still and only the forearm moves (like a pendulum). In **Image 4**, the elbow at the end of the stroke is in the same position as at the beginning and during the entire stroke, as if it were “pinned.”



[Image 4](#) Pinned elbow

10. Finish the Stroke

If you accelerate into the CB, the cue will follow through naturally. This is sometimes called “finishing the stroke.” Even with a straight draw shot, where the CB will come back, you have plenty of time to get the cue out of the way after finishing the stroke. If you decelerate, or slow down, during the stroke into the CB, you will not have good speed control.

11. Stay Down and Still

OK. I lied. There are 11 stroke “best practices,” not 10. Be sure to freeze after your stroke, keeping your head, body, arm, and cue still and down well after impact. As demonstrated in [NV J.66](#), do not lift up and turn your head to watch the OB. And do not lift your body up on the shot either. Be a “relaxed statue” during and after the shot. Some people ask: Why do I need to stay down and still if the ball is already gone? The reason is: If you stay down and still after the shot, there is no way you will move during the shot, which **can** cause problems. Remember, for best results, be a relaxed statue during and after the hit.

I hope the advice in this article and online video [NV J.66](#) helps you fix some stroke issues that might be holding back your game or causing inaccuracy and inconsistency. In the video description, there is a link to a [stroke “best practices” document](#) that concisely summarizes everything in the video. Also linked are other useful supporting resources and related videos. Be sure to check out these resources if you want more help with your fundamentals. Finally, if you want to learn by watching top players with excellent “best practices” technique, watch and study match videos with Allison Fisher, Chang Jung-Lin, Chris Melling, Eklent Kaci, and Tyler Styer (see examples of their strokes in [NV J.66](#)). These players exhibit most of the “best practices” summarized in this article.

Good luck with your game from Dr. Dave.



normal video

[NV J.21](#) – How to Find the Perfect Pool/Snooker/Billiards Stance

[NV J.40](#) – Pre-Stance Routine ... A New Approach

[NV J.66](#) – 10 Secrets of a GOOD STROKE in Pool

PS:

- I know other authors and I tend to use lots of terminology, and I know not all readers are totally familiar with these terms. If you ever come across a word or phrase you do not fully understand, please refer to the [online glossary](#) at billiards.colostate.edu.

Dr. Dave is a PBIA Advanced Instructor, Dean of the Billiard University, and author of the book: [The Illustrated Principles of Pool and Billiards](#) and numerous instructional DVD series, all available at: DrDaveBilliards.com.