

## How to Shoot a Basketball Perfectly in 10 Steps

<https://www.basketballforcoaches.com/how-to-shoot-a-basketball/>

### Step #1 - Shot Preparation



Being a great shooter starts before you receive the basketball.

This step is often overlooked by most players and coaches but can be the difference between having enough time to take a good shot or getting your shot blocked by a defender closing out.

*"You don't shoot fast. You get ready to shoot fast" - Don Meyer*

Here are the three rules to make sure you're prepared to shoot when you catch the basketball...

**a. Start with your knees and hips slightly bent**

If you catch the basketball with straight legs, it will take extra time to bend your legs before raising up for your shot.

This is too slow.

**b. Show target hands**

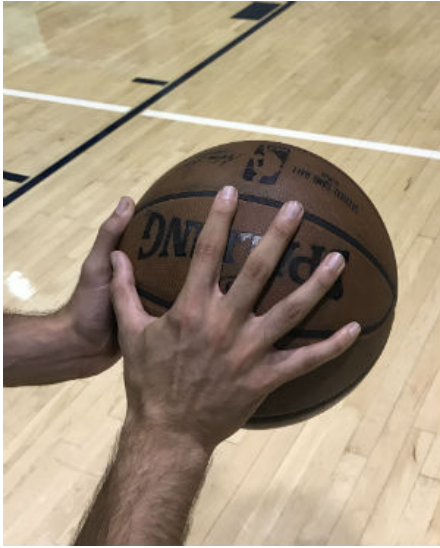
Showing target hands to the player with the basketball shows them exactly where to pass to your shot pocket (we'll talk about this later).

**c. Be mentally prepared to shoot**

You'll never be more open than when you first catch the basketball.

As long as you're within your comfortable shooting range, you must be mentally prepared to shoot on the catch.

## Step #2 - Hand Placement on the Ball



Upon catching the basketball or raising up into a shot, players must be able to quickly adjust their hands to the correct positions on the basketball.

The shooting hand must be under/behind the basketball and the balance hand should be on the side of the basketball.

The thumb of your shooting hand and the base of the thumb on your balance hand should form a 'T' (as pictured).

All finger pads and hand pads should be touching the basketball.

The only area of your shooting hand not touching the basketball is the small gap in the middle of your hand.

Another important but overlooked detail is that the fingers should be spread comfortably wide on the basketball.

These adjustments must happen immediately upon receiving the basketball.

### Step #3 - Balanced Base



*"The key to being a good shooter is balance. Everything follows balance" - Larry Bird*

Most players and coaches believe that shooting success is mostly to do with the movements of the upper body...

This is far from the truth. Great shooting always starts with the base.

If a player can't get the base of their shot correct, then it's very hard to become a consistent shooter.

A balanced base involves three important factors...

**a. Feet slightly narrower than shoulder-width apart**

If your feet are too narrow, it's very difficult to stay on balance when raising up for the shot.

If your feet are too wide, you won't get enough lift in your shot.

(Have a photo showing too close, perfect, too wide.)

**b. Dominant foot slightly in front**

When combined with the next step (the turn), this will improve the balance of your shot and release tension in your shoulder.

For right-handed shooters, this means sliding the right foot forward slightly. The opposite for left-handed shooters.

**c. Weight equally distributed on each foot**

For obvious reasons, a player should not be leaning to either side when taking a shot. Your weight should be equally distributed on both feet.

#### Step #4 - Feet Direction (The Turn)



I could have included this in the 'balanced base' section above, but I feel that this is so important it deserved its own step.

When shooting the basketball, a player's feet should be turned slightly.

For right-handed shooters, their feet should be turned slightly to the left (11 o'clock).

For left-handed shooters, their feet should be turned slightly to the right (1 o'clock).

To understand why this is important, stand at the free-throw line with all 10 toes pointing towards the rim.

If you attempt to keep your elbow lined up with the rim while shooting with this base, you'll notice that tension is required in the chest.

To relieve the body of this tension, players should turn their feet slightly which will allow their elbow and shoulder to line up with the rim more comfortably.

## Step #5 - Consistent Shot Pocket



The 'shot pocket' is the area a player is most comfortable starting the basketball from when beginning their shot.

This will usually be around the lower chest or stomach area of a player and will either be usually be in the middle of their body or slightly to the shooting hand side.

All players must find what feels comfortable for them.

Each time a player catches the basketball to shoot, they should be bringing the basketball back to their shot pocket before raising up into their shot.

There are two main reasons for this...

1. Keeping a consistent shot pocket ensures players are shooting the basketball the same way every time they shoot.
2. Since the shot pocket is often low, this will give player much better rhythm as they go up for their shot.

Will there be time when players don't have time to return the basketball to their shot pocket? Sure...

But they'll shoot better when they do.

## **Step #6 - Eyes on the Target**

A while ago I asked 15 shooting coaches which part of the rim they encouraged players to focus on when shooting.

The answers were surprising...

Many of the shooting coaches were teaching their players to aim for different targets on the rim... Yet all of them were able to develop great shooters.

*"What does this tell us?"*

**There isn't one 'correct' target to focus on when shooting.**

Players have a number of options...

- The center of the front of the rim.
- The center of the back of the rim.
- The first loop in the net.
- The entire hoop.
- etc.

Whichever target you decide to use, this is the most important thing you must keep in mind at all times...

**Once you find a target you're comfortable with, be consistent.**

'Front-rim shooters' and 'back-rim shooters' are focusing on targets which are 17 inches (45cm) apart aiming to achieve the same goal.

If you're constantly changing the target you're aiming at, it's nearly impossible for you to become a consistent shooter.

You have to pick one and then allow your shot to develop using that target.

## Step #7 - Wrinkle the Wrist



Shooting with a straight wrist is another one of the most common problems for youth players.

Players who do this will often push the basketball towards the rim (flat shot) instead of shooting the basketball up and through the rim.

Fortunately, it's a simple fix with a visual cue.

**The aim of this step is to get the wrist of the shooting hand bent back as far as possible (usually a little before 90 degrees).**

This will give extra power to the shot and will also create the necessary backspin required to be a good shooter.

When bent back correctly, there will be small wrinkles in the skin on the back of the shooting wrist.

This provides a convenient visual cue for players to know if they're bending their wrist back correctly before shooting.

## Step #8 - Elbow Under the Basketball



When you're raising up for the shot, the elbow of your shooting arm should be directly under the basketball.

**This requires players to have their upper and lower arm forming an 'L' shape and also have their wrist bent back to 90 degrees (step 7).**

Doing this will ensure that the basketball will be shot in a straight line to the rim and also have good backspin.

Players who flare their elbow out while shooting will often miss to the left or right because they're not shooting the basketball straight.

A player will often flare out their elbow when they don't turn their feet correctly (step 4).

This is because the chest requires uncomfortable tension to pull in the elbow when 10 toes are pointing towards the rim.



## Step #9 - Balance Hand



The 'balance hand' is what we call the non-shooting hand.

**As the name implies, its only role during the shooting motion is helping to balance the basketball on the shooting hand up until the release point.**

For right-handed shooters, this is the left hand.

For left-handed shooters, this is the right hand.

If you've been around basketball long enough, you'll often hear this hand referred to as the *'guide hand'*.

I don't like this terminology as this hand should never 'guide' the basketball anywhere during the shooting motion.

There should be no force from the balance hand when a shot is taken.

**As the elbow starts to extend in the shooting motion, the balance hand releases flat off the side of the basketball.**

If the balance hand isn't flat on release, this means that a player has pushed the basketball with their balance hand (most often with their thumb) while in the shooting motion and the shot will usually end up missing left or right.

## **Step #10 - Rhythm Shot + Follow Through**

The final step is where it all comes together...

Shooting with rhythm involves many parts occurring simultaneously:

- The basketball is lifted up from the shot pocket.
- The knees and hips straighten out as the player raises themselves into the air for power.
- The elbow of the shooting arm straightens up in the air once the basketball has been lifted past shoulder height. (To check if you're shooting the basketball up into the air at the correct angle, make sure that the elbow of your shooting arm finishes next to your eyebrow on the follow through).
- Near the peak of the shot, the wrist is snapped in the direction of the rim so that they fingers are pointing towards the ground. This will ensure the basketball has good backspin resulting in a 'soft' shot.
- Also at the peak of the shot, the balance hand will release from the basketball keeping perfectly flat. This ensures the balance hand isn't pushing the basketball.
- The final two fingers to touch the basketball should be the index and middle fingers at the same time.
- When you return to the ground, the rhythm of your jump shot will have guided your body forward slightly of where you took off from. When practicing, I encourage players to hold this form until the basketball has hit the rim so that they can look up and evaluate their technique.

## How to Improve Your Basketball Shooting Form

Great shooters regularly work on shooting mechanics. Incorporating the following tips into your practice routine will help you improve your basketball shooting form:

1. **Hand positioning is key.** Your grip on the ball plays a major role in your ability to shoot well. Your grip affects feel, spin, connection, and control through your release. To find the correct position, place your shooting hand behind the ball with the tip of your index finger on the air valve, so you're gripping the middle of the ball. Place your balance hand (also called the guide hand) on the side of the ball so that the tip of your shooting hand's thumb points towards the side of your balance hand's thumb to form a "T" shape. Always hold the ball with your finger pads, leaving some breathing room between the ball and the palm of your hand. To practice your hand alignment on the ball, put the index finger of your shooting hand on the basketball's air valve and let the ball rest in your hand to feel the center of the ball. Standing just a few feet from the basket, take 10 shots by finding the air valve first. Then take 10 more just by finding the center of the ball with your hand, not searching for the air valve. Repeat until you can easily find the ball's center without using the air valve as a guide.

2. **Find your shot pocket.** The shot pocket is the area of the body where a basketball player holds the ball to begin their shot. Using a consistent starting position is one way to ensure a consistent shooting form. To find your shot pocket, hold the ball in front of your stomach at a location that feels most comfortable to you. When you intend to shoot right after catching the ball, bring the ball back to your shot pocket and position your hands into the proper grip on the ball. Starting from your shot pocket will give you a consistent shooting rhythm every time.

3. **Pay attention to your lower body.** Every good shot begins in the lower body. Begin by pointing your toes in the same direction, first squaring them with the rim, and then working through practice to find the most natural stance for your body. Use an open stance, with your feet shoulder-width apart for proper stability. Right-handed shooters should place their right foot slightly in front of the left and left-handed shooters should do the opposite. Your legs give you power and consistency, so load your lower body by pushing the arches of your feet into the floor. Keeping your knees behind your toes, shift your weight to the balls of your feet, and concentrate on letting power and energy flow from your feet up through your hips and glutes. Square your toes, knees, and shoulders, and remember to flex your legs on every shot.

4. **Aim at a consistent spot on the rim.** Before taking a shot, NBA champion Steph Curry focuses on the front of the rim and envisions the ball dropping in just over the front of it. You can aim at any spot on the rim, whether it's the front, back, or middle of the rim, as long as you remain consistent. To get comfortable finding your target quickly, spend 15 minutes walking around the basketball court, keeping your eyes on the rim. Familiarize yourself with how the area you're targeting appears from different angles or distances. Without a ball, practice running to a random spot on the floor, stopping, and finding that spot on the rim with your eyes as quickly as possible. If you're using the front of the rim as a target, always seek out the three rim hooks facing you as a reference point.

**5. Properly align your shooting elbow and wrist.** When shooting, the flight of the ball must follow a straight line with the correct backspin to enter the basket. When you lift the ball to start your shooting motion, make sure that your shooting elbow is underneath the basketball, bending into an "L" shape. Bend your wrist back, as close to a 90-degree angle as possible, so your palm forms a platform for the ball.

**6. Avoid using your balance hand to propel the ball forward.** If you're frequently missing shots to the left or right, there's a good chance you're adding force to the ball with your balance hand. You should only use this hand to balance the ball until you straighten your elbow to begin your shooting motion. At that point, release your balance hand off the side of the ball without pushing forward.

**7. Increase the height of your release point.** Releasing your shot from a higher point will help you avoid blocks and improve your shooting range. To improve your release, start by lifting the ball up from the shot pocket as you straighten your legs. Once the ball is above your shoulders, straighten your shooting elbow. At the ball's release point, snap your wrist forward so that your fingers end up pointing down after the release (your index and middle fingers should be the last to touch the ball). Don't release too low. A higher release point makes it harder for a defender to interfere with your shot. As you release the ball, keep your elbow and wrist in line with the basket, extending your arm fully, so at the point of release your elbow ends above your eye.

### **Drills to Improve Your Form Shooting**

Good basketball shooting may seem simple on the surface, but it results from several different body parts working in fluid motion together. Add the following drills into your daily practice routine to ensure your jump shots consistently fall over the front of the rim:

1. Start just a few feet from the basket, and shoot until you hit five perfect makes.
2. Record how many shots it takes for you to get to five.
3. Take a step back to the middle of the lane, and shoot until you hit five more perfect makes.
4. Repeat twice more, moving backward after making five in a row.

Once you've hit five perfect makes from each of the four spots in front of the basket, start adding the other spots to your form shooting practice.

1. First, shoot five form shots from each of the 20 spots, and record your makes.
2. Once you can comfortably shoot 100 total form shots in a training session, you can move on to Phase 2 of the training.
3. Push yourself to take as many shots as it takes to hit five perfect makes from each of the 20 spots. This may take a few weeks or even months but stick with it.

Remember, when form shooting, if you're not perfect directly in front of the basket, it's going to be impossible to be perfect as you move away from the basket.

- Each time you miss, pause and notice whether you missed short, long, or to one side. What can you do to correct your misses?
- Film yourself shooting from the front and the side. Play the video back, studying your form and mechanical foundation. Are you making any common mistakes? How can you fine-tune your mechanics to make your shot more efficient?