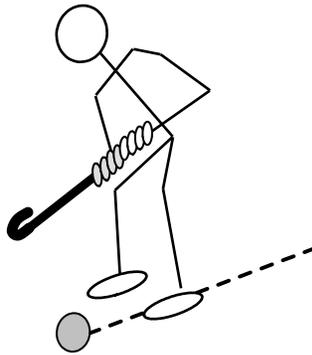


How to Hit a Hockey Ball

Know these four words:

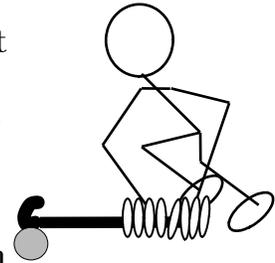
1. **Parallel**
2. **Perpendicular**
3. **“X”**
4. **Curiosity**



Your **BEST** hits will be when the ball is in line w/the foot you “plant”. Step forward to your target for a BAD hit. Step *towards* the **ball** to get the BEST *angle of contact*.

Parallel – Grip your stick as if preparing to hit. Open your hands flat so both surfaces are parallel with the face of the stick. The ball bounces off the spot where you strike it. Contact the opposite side of the ball from your target, or you will either slice (right) or pull (left) the ball when you hit it.

Perpendicular – Your fingers **MUST** be perpendicular to the handle of your stick. This is a major difference from your ball-control grip (dribbling, stopping, pushing, etc.). If your fingers are not perpendicular, you cannot get your hands together (no space between the hands when hitting). After mastering parallel and perpendicular, you must then NOT bend your wrists to get the stick head to the ball (how many directions can you bend your wrist?). Try bending your knees, a lot, without bending your wrists, to see why bending your waist is a better way to lower the stick head to the ball. Bend at the waist while hitting (the one time you can bend at the waist in Hockey).



“X” - On the follow through you must rotate your forearms (right hand over left), to maximize power, prevent high-sticks, and avoid injuring your wrists. Again, do NOT bend your wrists – roll your wrists together (so your forearms make an “X”). On the back swing, the stick should be pointing away from your target, so that the full swing traces a half circle with a curve to the left at the end. Too big (high) a back-swing increases the chance of a bad hit, and wastes time by giving the defender a longer opportunity to steal the ball.

Curiosity – After choosing a destination for the ball (while taking your back-swing, as early as possible), look down (bend over slightly at the waist), swing through the ball, and **keep looking down** to make sure you did not miss the ball (the destination cannot change at this point, why look at it a second time?). Looking down (briefly ignoring the hit) prevents embarrassing whiffs.



Note: there is no required footwork. Either stand still, or step to the ball (perpendicular to the direction of your hit). **Avoid** stepping *forward* to hit best. A hit is not a dance step. A hit is your arms guiding the face of the stick through the side of the ball opposite your target destination.

Practicing the Hit.

First, stand still. This will be hard for many of you, who want to step and hit. Some of you will even swing your stick forward, pointing it at your target, and then step towards the target, while taking the back-swing. When you step towards the target, you step over the imaginary line (see first diagram above), and past the ball (which is supposed to be motionless, and on the same line), so when your stick does finally come down to touch the ball, it is hitting above the sweet spot on the side of the ball opposite your target, and you are basically hammering the ball into the ground. This is a not an efficient way to propel the ball straight towards your target. If you try to fix this bad contact angle by pushing the ball forward to compensate for your familiar step towards the target, then you have to time the step perfectly (too slow a step, and you will be reaching ahead to make contact and undercut the ball raising it dangerously; too fast a step, and you will again be slightly ahead of the ball, hammering it into the ground, and maybe getting a huge earthworm killing divot in the process). Please be kind to earthworms. Do not step towards your target.

If you are stationary, and the ball is stationary, you will be able to focus on the four words of hitting. Remember, no steps. You can place the left foot slightly forward (towards the ball, NOT your target) for better balance- you can sway from the right foot onto your left foot if it makes you feel better :-)

1. Try hitting the ball (gently, but smoothly) using only your left hand/arm. Allow the stick to swing like a pendulum through the ball. Rotate the left arm on the follow through, and do NOT look up at the path of the ball.
2. The try it using only your right hand (right elbow slightly bent). Let the stick do the work. Do not try too hard to “power” the stick through the ball. Keep looking down to where the ball “was”.
3. Try it with both hands, keep looking down until both forearms have rotated through the follow through (the “X”). Hit softly, please (Baby-bear hits at first). Hit like the parents after you have the technique down. Can you hit when the RIGHT foot is even with the ball (with your weight on it)?
4. After you have made some happy hits at different paces, you can try stepping away from the ball, taking your back-swing, and then making one step towards the BALL. Then try two steps (towards ball, not the target).
5. Now push the ball straight away from your belly button, start your back-swing as you step towards the ball, and strike it when your left foot is even with the ball. Then try it RIGHT footed (right even with the ball). You will notice that either foot works well, when “down”, and your head is forward.

When you hit, it should feel good. Almost relaxing. There should be no strain when hitting, because the stick is doing the work, not you. Enjoy hitting!

When to Hit the Ball.

Knowing when to hit the ball is an important part of combining your Indoor Hockey game with the spacious, and less precise, outdoor version. Hitting a ball is always an *option*, it is never a requirement. You choose to hit the ball when it suits you (no one can make you hit the ball). There should be at least ONE good reason (“Why am I choosing to hit the ball in this situation?”) behind every decision to hit the ball.

A necessary condition to hit a ball, is the **time and space** to take a back-swing, take the down-swing, and follow through with your stick. If it is too crowded (to swing the stick), or a defender is about to tackle the ball, maybe it would be best to maintain possession (how?), or choose a different skill to deliver the ball to your chosen destination.

What might be some reasons to hit the ball, rather than simply push it?

- Speed of the ball is important
- Distance the ball must travel may be far (short hits can be useful too!)
- The ball is already “off” (away from) your stick, eliminating any “release” time advantage that could otherwise be gained by using a push pass (no back-swing is always “faster” than any back-swing).

Situations you could use a hit for:

- Restarts (some of the time, but not always).
- Passing to a friend (when a “softer” skill is not a superior choice)
- Passing to the back of the goal (again, when “softer” is not better)
- To relieve pressure on the defense (not a pass, but a reason to hit up field)

Various qualities of a hit- make your hits different to achieve a happy ending:

- Pace of the ball. Think of the Three Bears, playing hockey. You would have Papa-bear hits, Mama-bear hits, and Baby-bear hits. How hard you make your swing will determine which hit you create. However, the actual back-swing and follow through for a Baby-bear hit **should look the same** as a swing for a Pap-bear hit (try very “soft” hits while still using a “full” swing...making each ball go about the same distance). If you take half a swing for a Baby-bear hit, a talented opponent will read the partial swing and know to attempt to intercept the ball (they will know your pass is going a short distance, *and* that it will be slower than other hits – meaning they do not have to run as far, and have more time to chase down, what was your ball). Also, if you increase the range of your swing (taking a “big” swing instead of a normal swing), then you will create many tiny mistakes throughout your motion, and your hit will not be a consistent one.

- Angled hits: Hits to the left, and to the right. It is possible to change the angle of release (especially with a “sweep-hit”) to disguise the ball’s path to deceive defenders.
- Raised hits: Both low lifts (hitting the ball a few inches off the ground) and Chip-shots (hits high into the goal when **ZERO** defenders are standing in the ball’s trajectory). A good player LOOKS **before** raising a hit. **ALWAYS!**
- Reverse hits: Using the inside edge of the stick for left-sided hits (a unique technique where the round side of the stick faces the ground while swinging, or sweeping, towards a ball on the attacker’s left side). Although a reverse hit is effective along the ground, be careful not to raise the ball above knee height when not shooting on goal (it is an automatic foul in scholastic Hockey). Again, when you use a skill that raises the ball off the ground, you are responsible for where the ball travels; LOOK up first!

Hitting to score.

Some shots on goal require a hit. If the GK is set, and ready to cover the angle of your shot, then the speed of the ball may make the difference between a goal and a save (provided the hit is accurate enough to not miss the cage entirely).

When choosing to hit (rather than push, flick, dribble, Vampire Bunny, etc.) to goal, the geometry of scoring still holds true:

- Aim for the far post, unless you have a very good reason to shoot near post (far post shots make the cage “bigger”, and create better rebounds for your teammates)
- avoid shots from the “stale-piece-of-cake” (very narrow for you, easy for GK to cover cage unless you can lift the ball over their head).. When in possession on your offensive end-line, you should look for a pass (or a dribble) to the fresh piece of cake.
- Remember the Three Bears. If you want a happy ending, choose the correct pace of your hit (not too hard, not too soft, just right....)
- Choose the correct skill when hitting (on the ground or raised, front stick or reverse stick, off your left foot or your right foot, angled or straight on?)
- Relax when hitting in the “D”. Pass the ball to the back of the net as if it were a friend. Change anything “because it is a shot” and you will fail.
- If the GK comes half way off the goal line, skip the hit- lift it overhead.
- If you successfully dodge the goalie, WALK IT IN! Again, skip the hit. Too many easy goals have been missed because of a bad hit on an open cage.

Hitting can be a very useful tool in Hockey, however, like make-up, more is not always better. *Remember the four words, simplify your swing and your footwork*, and most importantly: **choose to hit when you decide it is your best choice**. Never let anyone force you to hit when you do not want to.