

PPP – Perfect Position Practice

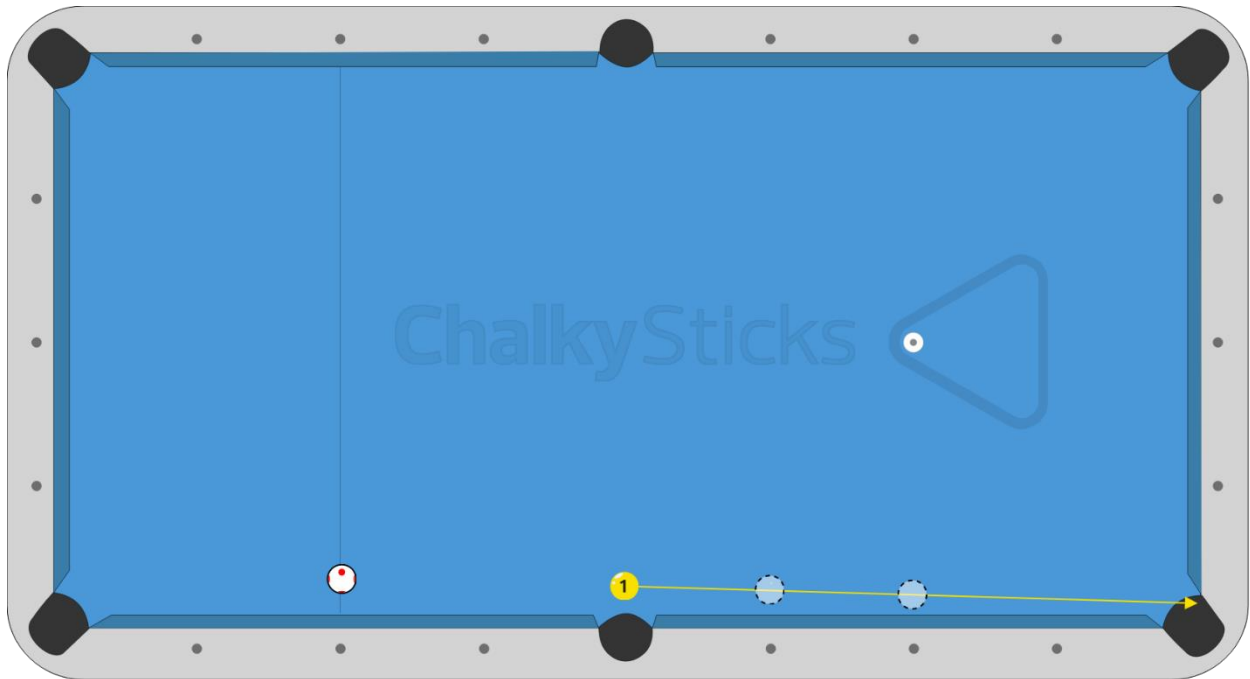
The following is a collection of shots that should be in every player's arsenal. As you progress from beginner to intermediate to advanced and beyond, these shots become more and more routine and you will be able to execute them with a high degree of confidence. To do that you need to put in the time to learn and master these key shots.

The shots below are similar to those I've seen in various resources over the years – books, videos, etc. – as well as some of my own personal favorites. That makes sense, there are only so many foundational shots to work on, but everyone puts their own spin on things (no pun intended). Regardless of where you see them or how you practice them, put the time in and you will see the results. You may even come up with a few of your own that you can add to your practice routine.

NOTES:

- Be sure to practice all shots from BOTH sides of the table. I'll say this once rather than say it for each shot below. 😊
- I'm not a big fan of using stickers or marks on the table for this type of practice. They have their place, but you can become too comfortable sighting and shooting a specific shot over and over and get false positive results. I would rather you place the balls in the same general area, similar angle, etc. that you are trying to practice, an inch or two off here and there. That way you are forced to aim, align, and shoot each shot as a singular shot, simulating a more realistic game situation.

Shot 1 – Straight In

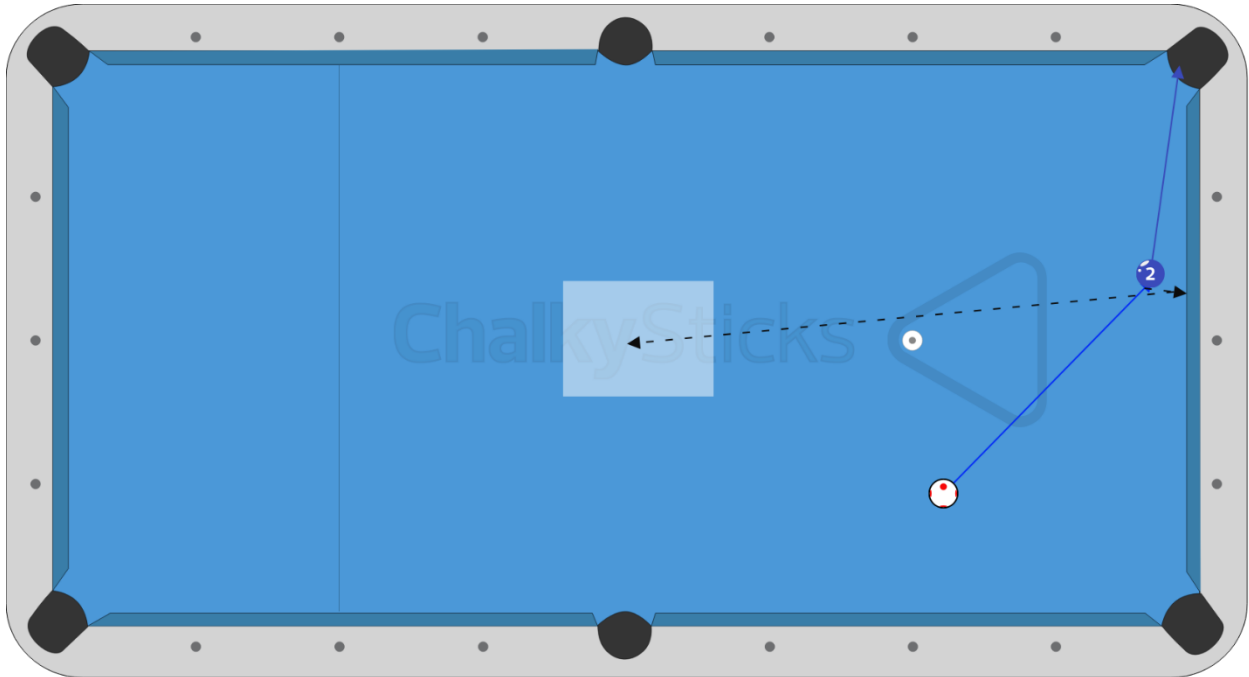


This is basically the first shot of one of my favorite drills, where you line up all 15 balls across the middle of the table, take ball in hand on the head string and shoot each of them in order using ball in hand on each shot. You can get more detailed information on that drill in both article and video form elsewhere on my site. In my opinion, this is the toughest of the 15 shots – the effective pocket is the smallest of all the shots, on tight tables you can't really hit the rail much before the pocket, especially at speed, and the rail can sometimes skew your perception of the shot.

Start off as diagrammed, the goal is to shoot a nice, smooth stop shot. From two diamonds away, you can use what should be your standard reference speed (3 or 4 out of 10) and a slightly below center hit. Think nice and smooth. Can also use the same position and practice following the cue ball forward to different diamond positions or even into the pocket. Also practice drawing back to the head string or all the way back to the end rail.

For added difficulty, move the 1 ball to the diagrammed spots and practice the same shots from those positions. Learning what speed and tip position is needed to stop, follow, or draw the ball from these common distances – 2, 3, and 4 feet (or diamonds) - is crucial for perfect position play and will prepare you for many situations on the pool table.

Shot 2 – 1 Rail to Center

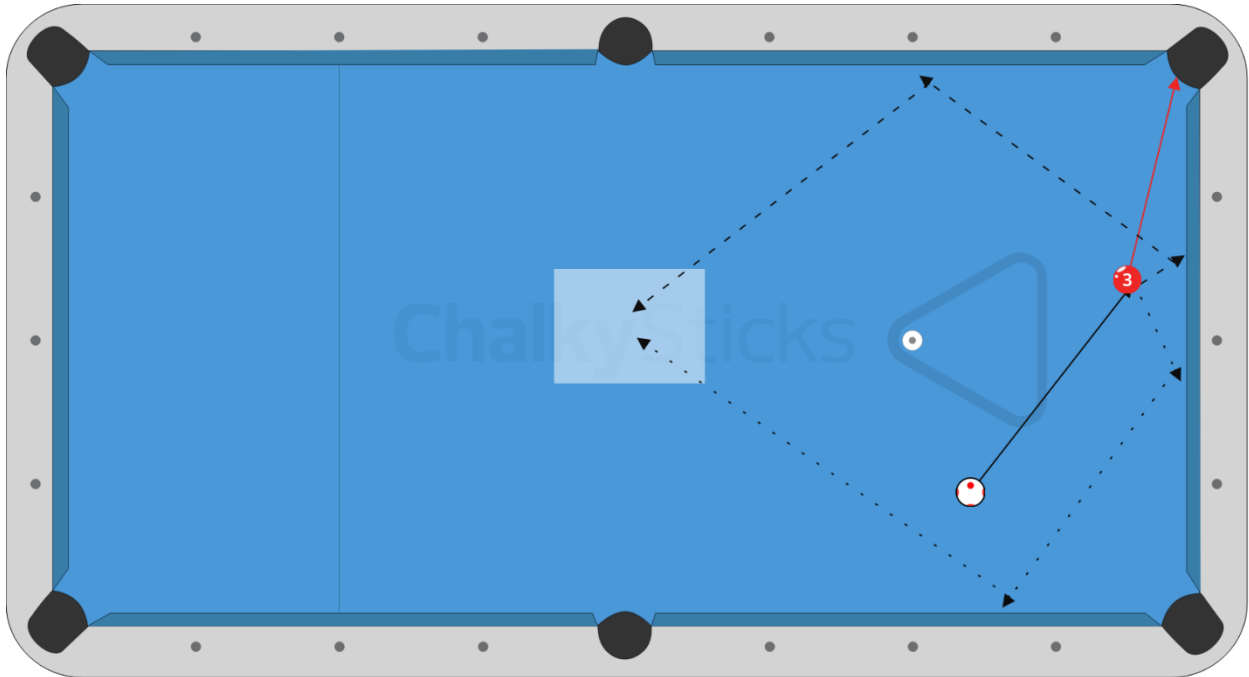


Set up the balls roughly as shown, with a nice angle, not too shallow or steep. Use a rolling cue ball to make the ball and get to the center of the table in the shaded area.

Play around with the angles and distances to explore the variations on this shot. Sometimes you can use a little left or right English to alter the path of the cue ball off the rail and go closer to one of the side rails as needed. If the angle is shallow, you may need to use more of a stun shot or even a bit of draw to get back to center table. If the angle is steeper, you may need to make the cue ball travel up to the head rail and back to center table to pocket the shot reliably and avoid a possible skid. Trying to hold the cue ball by hitting the shot softly also brings cut induced throw (CIT) or cling into play which can be tough to judge in different conditions and on different equipment.

Practice the speed and spin needed to get to the center of the table as well as the end rail. Once you master the speed for these two targets, anything in between can easily be estimated. By practicing this shot from different positions, you will start to build up your own internal shot computer. When you recognize the shot in the future your brain/eyes/arm/hand will make the connection and execute the shot to perfection!

Shot 3 – 2 Rails Back to Center #1

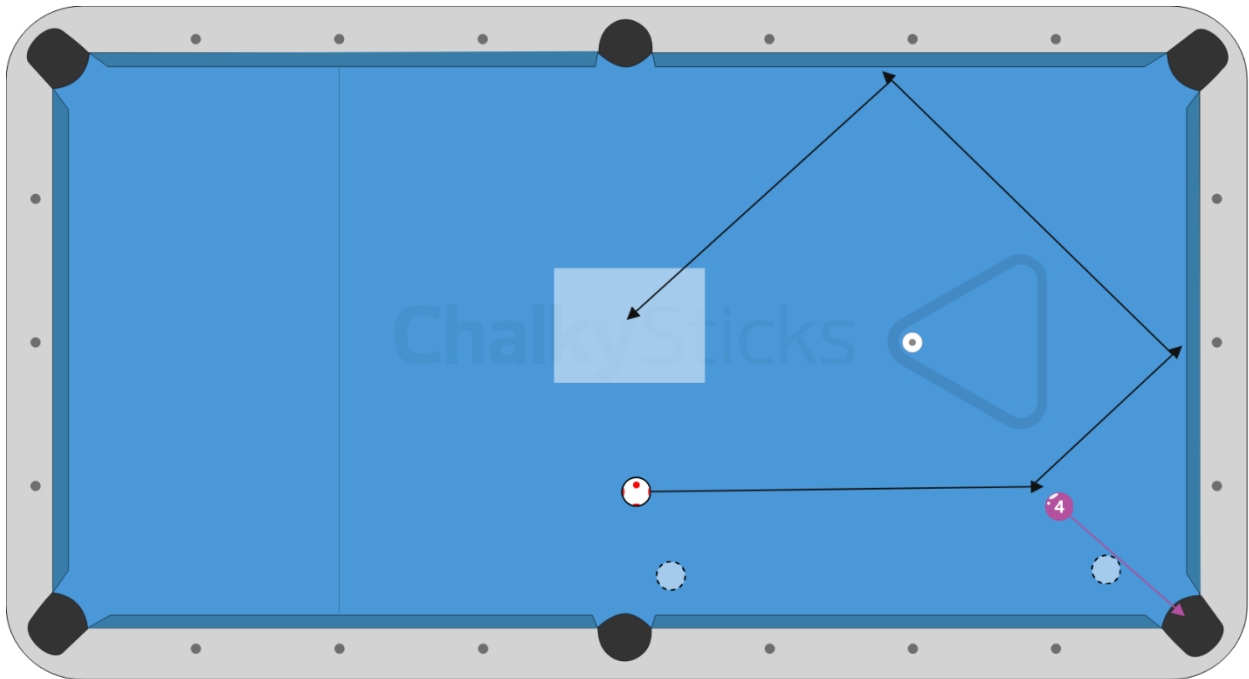


This shot covers two ways to get back to the center of the table – forward with high and/or inside English, and backward with low and/or outside English. The exact blend that's needed will be determined by the position of the cue ball and object ball. Because of that, it's important to vary the position from shot to shot or from session to session. That's the best way for you to continue to build up your internal shot computer.

The decision to go forward or back is often dictated by the position of the next ball and the position of other balls on the table. That's why it's important to practice both, especially if one shot is weaker for you than the other. If both choices are equal, then go with whatever feels the most comfortable or leads most naturally to the next shot.

The great thing about these shots is with practice you are learning to blend speed and spin, hitting the first rail at different points and with different speeds/spins to reach the center of the table. That means you are also mastering the shorter two rail shot to either long rail, same shot just less speed. Then by adding more speed, you can also work on extending the shot up to the other end of the table.

Shot 4 – 2 Rails Back to Center #2

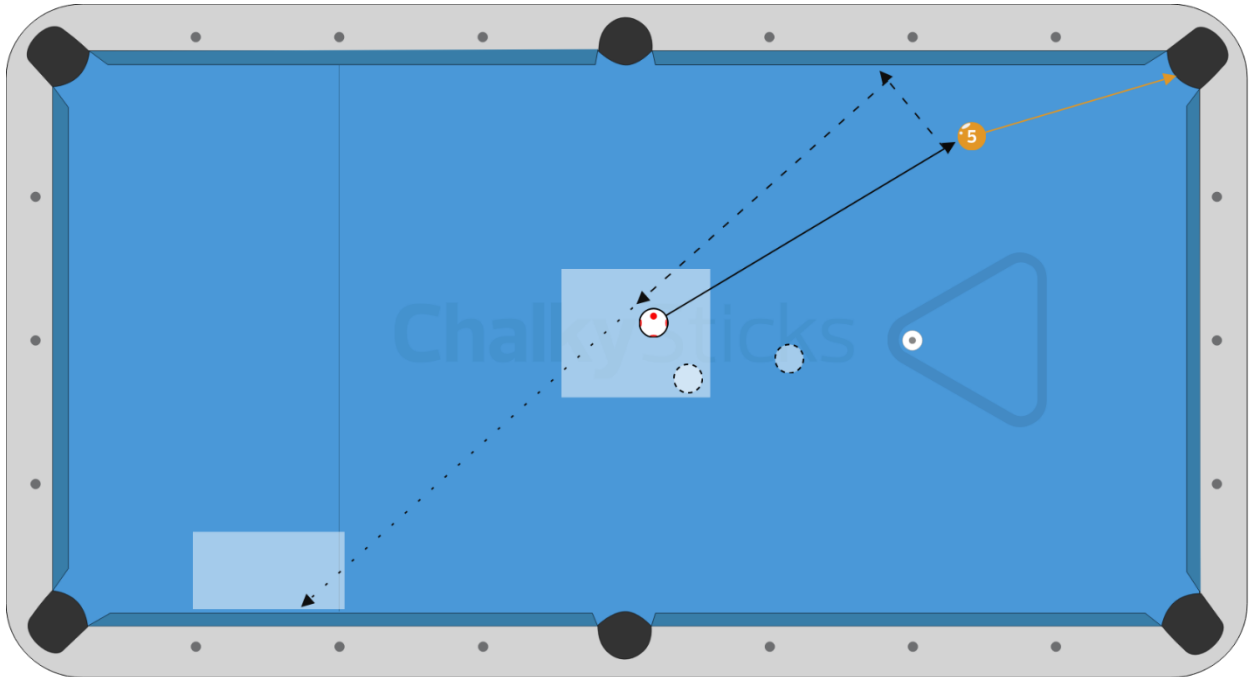


This is a variation of shot #3, very similar since the route is using two rails back to the center. But the hit will normally require less force, since you aren't having to follow through the ball or draw or stun back off the ball. You must practice this version as well to get the speed and spin right.

Variations are endless, but practice with both balls within one diamond from the bottom long rail and roughly parallel to the rail. I show one alternative above from the ghost ball positions in the diagram.

As with shot #3 above, you can use less speed to hit targets on the second rail, and more speed to extend the shot and hit the target on the third rail, making this a very versatile shot as well.

Shot 5 – 1 Rail to Center



This may very well be the most important shot of them all! It comes up SO often in so many variations that you MUST master it!

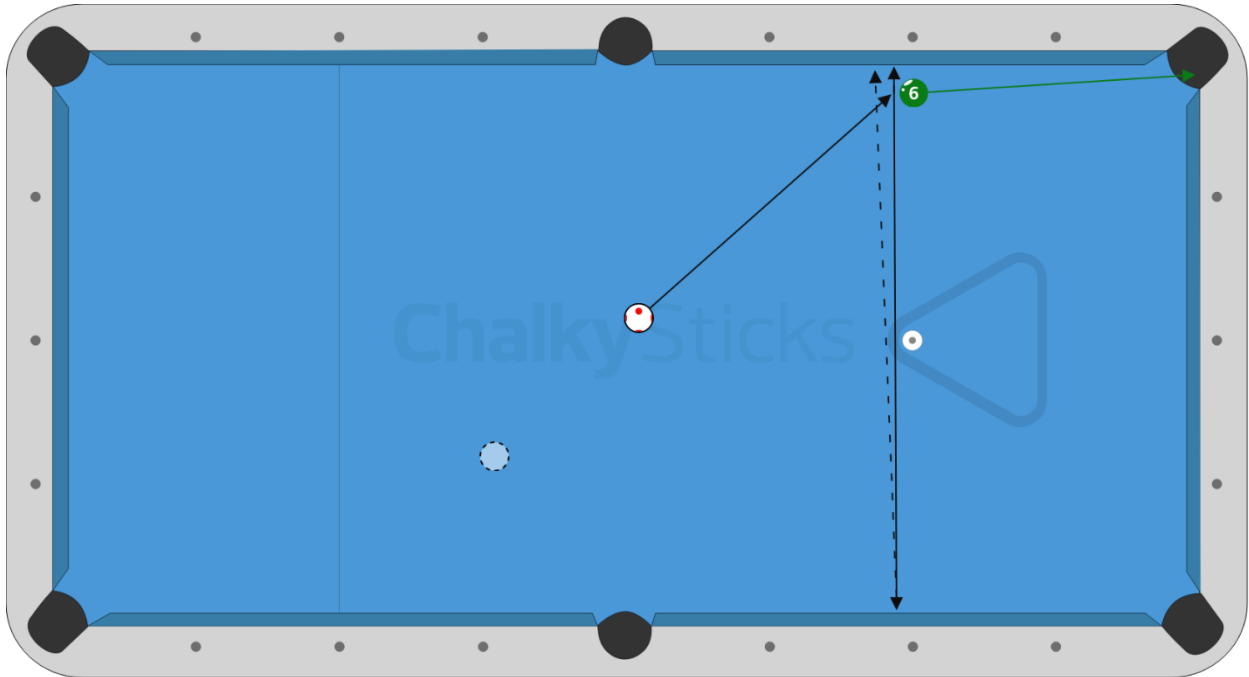
First, you must get proficient at making the shot. Many amateurs try to use the long rail as a guide. While that may work at slow speeds or on easy equipment, as you graduate to tighter equipment you will quickly learn the value of hitting it clean. That is also made more difficult since often you need to use low or low outside English to accomplish your desired position, and doing so can introduce speed and a bit of deflection which causes you to hit the ball fat as well.

Move the object ball around, closer to the rail, closer to the pocket, and farther away from the rail and pocket. Move the cue ball around as well to steeper angles (as shown by ghost balls) to see where your limits are. After a certain point you will have to take a different route back to the center of the table (typically 2 rails back and forth, covered below). Play with it to build up the judgement needed to decide whether to stun or draw the cue ball, spin it, or some combination.

Once you are proficient getting back to the center of the table, work on adding more speed to reach your second rail target as shown. When playing for a ball on or near the end rail, often you want to aim for the second rail in the shaded area. That way you have a good approach angle and a decent margin of error to avoid the possible scratch.

Practice practice practice!

Shot 6 – 1 or 2 Rails Straight Across

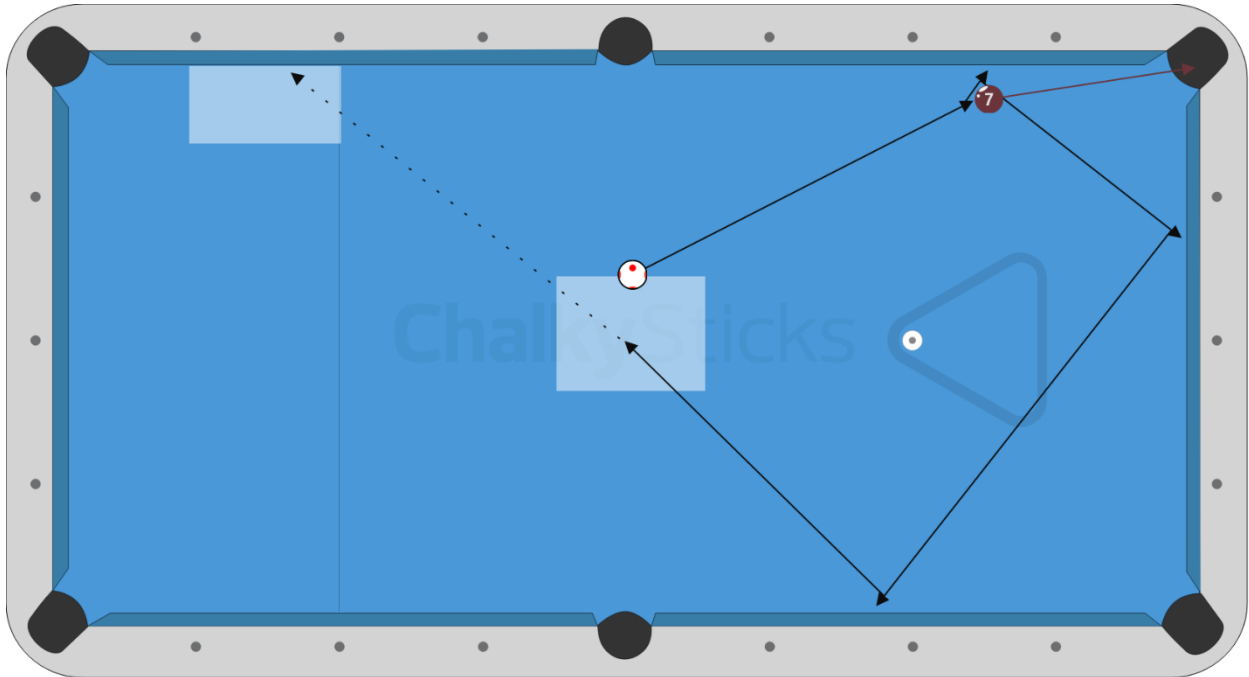


This is another very important shot, and bears some similarities to shot #5 above. You must learn to hit this shot cleanly down the rail, not relying on using the rail as a guide. Once that is accomplished, you must learn the reference shot of sending the cue ball one rail back across the table. When the object ball is near the rail as above, many times all that is needed is a pure stun shot. When the object ball is farther from the rail, the tangent line points backward, so usually a slightly above center hit is needed.

Practice from shallower angles (too shallow and too much force is needed) and thinner angles (too thin and the shot become difficult or the speed is tough to hold for just one rail). Also practice with a little more distance (as shown above by ghost ball) so you develop the feel for the amount of stun or follow necessary to come straight across the table.

In addition to adding more speed to go two rails instead of one (as shown by dashed line), also play with small amounts of follow, draw, or even a little sidespin to come back one diamond above or below the straight across line. Emphasis on small amount – many people use too much side spin on these shots and scratch in the side or corner pockets. A little goes a long way. You can even extend the concept to go two rails and get back to center table or down to the end rail.

Shot 7 – 3 Rails to Center

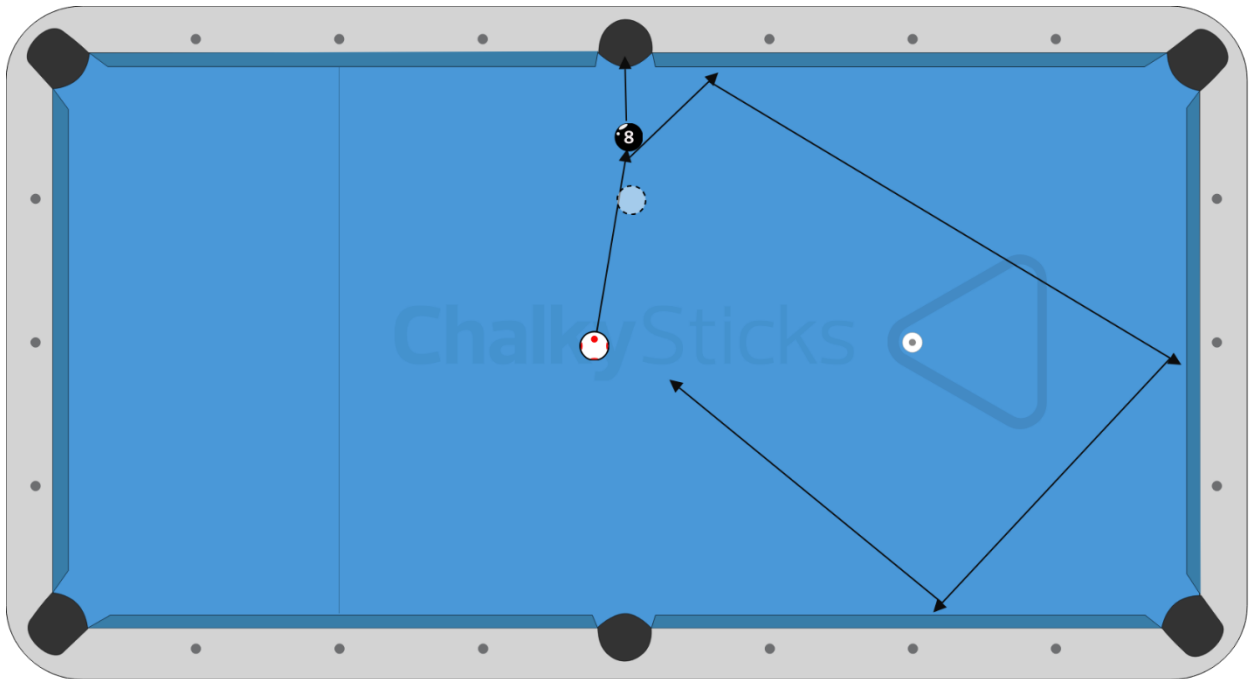


Yet another very common pattern, hitting a ball with inside English to go three rails back to the center of the table. As with the other shots, move the object ball and cue ball around to begin to get a feel for the speed/spin that is needed for various angles as well as the limitations of the shot.

The big thing to watch out for on this shot is typically deflection. Amateurs routinely miss this type of shot – they usually hit it too hard for one, bringing too much deflection into play, or sometimes they don't use enough spin, and then when they try to add it they aren't used to (or don't know) how to compensate for the effects. You can compensate for deflection using any method you choose – aiming a little thicker, aiming at the closer point of the pocket, front hand or back hand English, etc. Regardless of the method you will have to factor in the speed of the shot, the amount of spin used, and the distance to make the proper adjustment.

To get to the center from various positions, you will have to learn to use varying amounts of spin and/or follow to alter the angle into the first and second rails. By doing so you will also be accumulating knowledge on how to direct the cue ball to various positions on the first and second rails if that's all that is needed. And of course, you can use a bit more speed to extend the shot as shown to the other end of the table, a very common cue ball pattern and very useful to be able to control the spin and cue ball path to avoid the scratch in the corner.

Shot 8 – 3 Rails Back to Center from Center



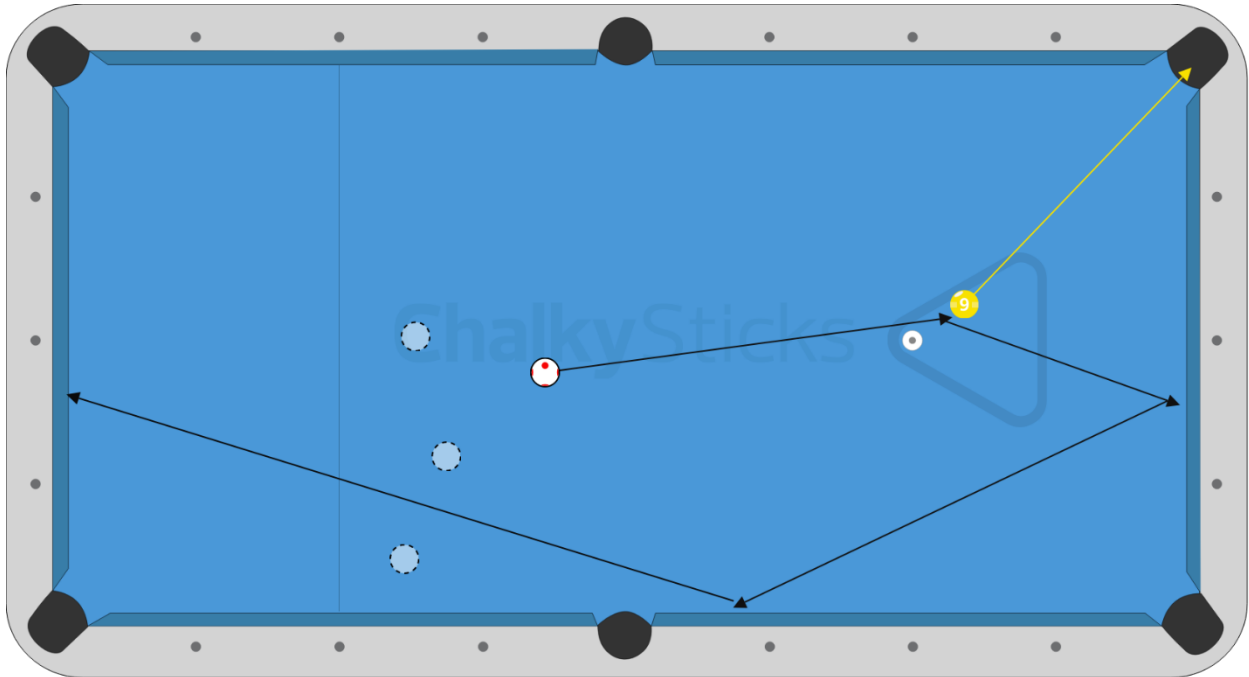
Very similar to shot #7 in execution, the goal is to use the correct combination of stun/follow/draw and spin to go three rails around the table and back to the center. Not to be repetitive, but as with the other shots you can use less speed for intermediary rail targets, more speed to extend to the fourth rail.

Practice with the object ball in the position shown (about $\frac{1}{2}$ diamond from the pocket) and maybe one diamond out (as shown by ghost ball). Can also place the object ball very close to pocket or slightly to one side of the pocket or the other.

An excellent way to practice these is using an endless-type drill. Make the ball and try to return to the center of the table. Re-spot the object ball and go three rails again from where the cue ball landed. You can even add another ball in the opposite side pocket and alternate directions on each shot. Whatever method you use, you will be practicing getting into the first rail at the proper angle to return to the center. Placing a sheet of paper, coaster, or something similar in the middle can give you a nice visual target to aim for as well.

One last note – when aiming into the first rail, connecting with the second (middle) diamond will generally connect to the middle diamonds on the other rails and out to the center and to a safe landing zone on the fourth rail if needed.

Shot 9 – 9 Ball for the Win!



This is more of a shot making exercise than position play, but nonetheless it's a very important shot to practice. Quite often after the break the middle ball in the rack (in 9 ball, 10 ball, sometimes 8 ball or rotation) stays in the rack area. Also quite often, when trying to position yourself for the winning ball, you are traveling from the other end of the table and trying to follow a 2 or 3 rail shot and you come up short. Either that or your opponent leaves you with a difficult shot on the winning ball.

Place the object ball in the rack area and place the cue ball 3 to 4 diamonds away – some example positions are shown in the diagram. The key here is to practice not only making the ball but using the correct speed and spin to increase your ball pocketing percentage and make sure you don't scratch in the sides or corners at the other end of the table. For many typical angles, using a normal rolling ball and at most a $\frac{1}{2}$ tip of outside English is enough to get the job done.

There are obviously many, many more possible shots on the pool table, many different positions that need to be attained, and multiple routes to take. But I think you will find that some variation of these common shots will occur frequently in every game. I find that really practicing and understanding the shots in practice allows me to relax and use my subconscious to make the shot and get the required position, saving my concentration for the shots that truly need it.

As I said in the beginning, practice the shots from standard positions and on both sides of the table. Don't get too hung up on replacing the balls in exactly the same position, but as you are practicing certain angles, distances, etc. try to repeat the same type of shot to store it in your mental pool computer. A good recommendation when you first begin is to pick 1 – 2 shots and work on them in each practice session. I mean really work on them, use the full rack of balls and hit 15, 30, or even more of each shot, changing the angle or distance every 5 or 10 shots or so. Come back to a shot in a future practice session if you are having issues, better to do that than to overwork yourself in a single session.

Good luck!