

Hitting Mechanics

Hitting is the art of mastering a series of component steps that lead to making contact with the ball. These steps should be kept as simple as possible to reduce the opportunity for error.

Grip –

- ✓ The batter should choose a lighter bat to increase bat speed, which is the greatest variable in imparting force to the ball.
- ✓ The bat should have a handle that fits the batter's grip comfortably.
- ✓ Batters should grip the bat with their middle knuckles aligned in order to facilitate proper wrist action.
- ✓ The bat should rest primarily in the last three fingers of each hand, not deep in the palm.
- ✓ Players with slower bat speed should choke up on the bat's handle in order to help speed their swing.
- ✓ The grip should be relaxed – an excessively tight grip will reduce wrist action.

Stance –

- ✓ A basic rule of thumb regarding stances in this day and age is 'Extreme stances require extreme abilities.' Simple is preferable; the less deviation from the norm the better.
- ✓ The batter should have feet spread shoulder width, and weight resting lightly on the balls of their feet.
- ✓ The knees should be slightly softened, but not bent;
- ✓ The upper torso slightly inclined at the waist, but not hunched.
- ✓ The batter's head should be able to see the pitcher with both eyes.
- ✓ The batter's elbows can be either be out from the body, or down and in; but in both cases the hands should be at the top of the strike zone, about 3-6 inches from the back shoulder.
- ✓ The bat should be straight up (flashlight analogy – if the knob of the bat is a flashlight, its beam should be shining on a spot in the opposite batters box.)
- ✓ As in the grip, a relaxed stance is key.

Load –

- ✓ Key to preparing to hit the ball is the weight shift, or load. This occurs when the batter transfers a portion of his weight to the back foot, releasing the weight on the front foot thereby freeing that foot for a forward stride. There's no one right way to do this, so coaches can be flexible in their approach.
- ✓ The end result, however, must be the same – a larger portion of weight on the inside of the back, or pivot, foot.

Stride –

- ✓ As the pitch comes into the plate, the batter takes a small, slow six inch stride towards the ball.
- ✓ Lead with the heel – land on the inside of the stride foot to keep the toe closed and delay a too early opening of the torso. This step sets the trigger for the swing, but it does not trigger the swing itself – the batter must keep his hands back near their start position and wait on the pitch. If the hands are not already back, then they should move back in sync with the stride – step forward, hands back.
- ✓ Batters must avoid putting too much weight on the front foot, or over-striding; both make it difficult to hit the ball (moving level of the head, unbalancing weight), and reduce the power the player can generate.

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Uncoiling the torso –

- ✓ The faster the torso rotates, or uncoils, to the pitch, the more power will be generated by the swing. The uncoiling is triggered by the firm planting of the stride foot.
- ✓ The lead leg stiffens, pushing back against the lead hip and causing it to open to the ball. The back leg pushes the back hip forward, accelerating the rotation of the hips. The shoulders stay closed and the hands stay close to the body, speeding the rotation of the lower torso before they begin their release to the ball. The phrase ‘Weight/Wait’ can be used to emphasize the hitting concept of keeping both the weight and the hands back in the stance.

Swing –

- ✓ The batter triggers the swing by whipping the bat from his hands high position at the ball. This is not about swinging hard – it is about swinging as if you were throwing the bat at the pitcher.
- ✓ The arms extend to meet the ball, elbows bent and in toward to torso (power Vs); the bottom, or lead, hand picks the plane of the swing.
- ✓ At contact the wrists are square to the ball with the lead hand palm up and the top hand palm down.
- ✓ The rear leg should be thrusting forward, causing the front leg to lock at the knee (not stride) and the hips to rotate so that the belly button faces the pitcher.
- ✓ Proper leg drive will result in a ‘squish the bug’ action in the rear foot – the foot twists so that the toes face the pitcher, and weight is on the ball of the foot with the heel in the air.
- ✓ The swing continues through contact; the batter’s head remains still throughout, chin down and eyes locked on the contact point.
- ✓ The only thing that should change about a swing is the plane of the swing – all else remains the same. The plane changes due to different pitch locations – a quicker, earlier but longer swing for inside pitches to make contact further in front of the batter, a patient, shorter swing for outside pitches.

Ducking from pitches –

- ✓ The batter should turn his lead shoulder toward the catcher, dropping his head below his shoulders and if necessary falling on his stomach. This technique reduces exposure of vulnerable body parts while maximizing the effectiveness of the batting helmet.
- ✓ This technique should be practiced (see Bomber Drill in Drills Section).

Follow through –

- ✓ Once the hips have rotated and contact has been made with the ball, the swing should continue with the wrists turning over and the bat continuing all the way around to the middle of the back.
- ✓ The hands finish high, away from the body.
- ✓ Hips are square to the mound, with the batter’s belt buckle facing the pitcher.
- ✓ A short follow through that ends up against the lead shoulder means that the batter is sweeping at the ball – bat in palms, wrists not turning over, and slow bat speed.

Approach –

- ✓ Mastering the mechanics of hitting are one thing, but the best hitters also bring a clear idea of what they want to do during an at bat each and every time they step to the plate. They know what pitches they hit best, and they assume that they are going to see that pitch at least once an at bat. So they are looking for it, and prepare to hit it if it comes.
- ✓ Despite this aggressive, ready mindset, though, they aren't afraid to take one or even two strikes if they don't see what they are looking for. It is much better to buy time by waiting a pitcher out in order to get another chance to see 'your pitch', than it is to swing at something you are not ready for and don't hit well.

Bunting – There are two main techniques for bunting. (Minors, Majors and Babe Ruth Only)

1. The batter pivots on both feet and squares his shoulders to the pitcher, keeping the knees slightly bent and the feet about shoulder-width apart to provide a good base and promote balance.
 2. In the second, the batter squares both shoulders and feet to the pitcher. In the latter position, it may be harder to get out of the way of an inside pitch, and for older kids makes it difficult to fake a bunt and slash at a pitch.
- ✓ Regardless of feet position, the batter slides his upper hand toward the barrel of the bat.
 - ✓ He does not wrap his fingers around the barrel; instead his thumb, index, and middle finger make a groove in which the lower part of the barrel near the handle rests loosely.
 - ✓ With his arms extended but not stiff, he holds the bat out in front of the plate, just below the shoulders.
 - ✓ The head of the bat should be tilted so that it is slightly above the hands to avoid pop ups when contact is made.
 - ✓ The bottom hand is used like the rudder of a ship to angle the bat in the direction you want the ball to travel.
 - ✓ All pitches above the bat should be balls and left alone.
 - ✓ The batter should bend at the knees to adjust the bat to low pitches.
 - ✓ The batter should attempt to gently 'catch' the ball with the barrel of the bat – the batter should not stab at the ball.
 - ✓ The bat should give a little on impact just as if a glove was being used.
 - ✓ Batters shouldn't worry about showing the bunt too early when sacrificing.
 - ✓ The placement of the bunt is what's most important, not the element of surprise.
 - ✓ One mistake that many hitters make when bunting is to try to make the bunt too perfect in hopes of getting a hit. The object of a sacrifice bunt is to advance the runners who already are on base. Try not to bunt the ball directly to the pitcher. For the most part if you make the pitcher come off the mound in one direction of the other to field the ball, your goal will be accomplished.
 - ✓ Bunting for hits can use the same techniques as listed above. Here the emphasis is not just on placement, but on disguising intent. Rather than show the bunt early, players should practice waiting as long as they can before pivoting or squaring for the bunt.

Note: The hitting section is drawn from Baseball Skills & Drills, American Baseball Coaches Association; "Down" Town, Rick Down, www.beabetterhitter.com/text/downtown. Bunting is largely drawn from the Ripken Coaches Clipboard, <http://ripkenbaseball.com/cc/?zone=notebook&id=7573>