

Study: Golfers can improve their putt with a different look

April 3 2012, by Amy Patterson Neubert



Jessica K. Witt, a Purdue assistant professor of psychological science who studies perception in sports, has found that golfers putt better if they visualize the hole as bigger. Her findings are published in the April issue of *Psychological Science*. Credit: Purdue University photo/Andrew Hancock

Golfers looking to improve their putting may find an advantage in visualizing the hole as bigger, according to a new study from Purdue University.

"People in our study made more successful putts in a smaller hole when

a [visual illusion](#) helped them perceive it as larger," said Jessica K. Witt, an assistant professor of psychological science who studies [perception](#) in sports. "We know that how people perceive the environment affects their ability to act in it, such as scoring a basket or hitting a baseball, and now we know that seeing a target as larger leads to improved performance.

"More work is needed to better understand this effect, but we think the perceived increase in target size will boost confidence in one's abilities."

For the first time, Witt looked at how manipulating what athletes see could influence their immediate performance. Her findings are published in the April issue of [Psychological Science](#).

Witt's previous work has shown how perception and performance work together in softball, tennis and football. For example, softball players who hit the ball better saw it as bigger, and people successfully kicking a football through the goal posts saw the target as larger.

In this golf study, 36 participants putted to two different-sized holes while a projector displayed a ring of smaller and larger circles around each hole to create an [optical illusion](#). The smaller circles around the hole made it look bigger. Before putting, the person's perception of each hole was measured by having them draw the estimated size of the hole. Their perception was correlated with their scores, and those who saw the smaller hole, which was 5.08 centimeters in [diameter](#), as bigger putted about 10 percent more successfully.

"A future goal is to develop techniques to help athletes see their target differently," Witt said. "Effects of these visual illusions will then lead to improvements in performance."

Provided by Purdue University

Citation: Study: Golfers can improve their putt with a different look (2012, April 3) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-04-golfers-putt.html>

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