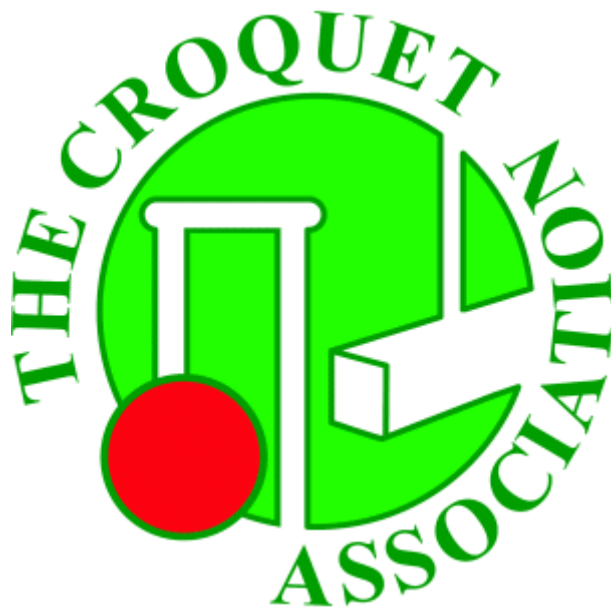


***Introducing
Association Croquet
Manual for Coaches***



Published by The Croquet Association

Foreword

Association Croquet is, at its heart, a very straightforward game: its close cousin, garden croquet, can be picked up quickly from a short set of rules. Our role as Association Croquet coaches is to make learning the game simple and enjoyable.

Croquet coaching has evolved since the *Association Croquet Coaching Manual* was published by the CA in 2006. *Introducing Association Croquet* replaces the first section of the old Manual and has been completely rewritten. The order in which new material is introduced has been refreshed so as to introduce skills gradually. Skills are introduced one at a time, building on what has already been learned. So the first croquet shot covered is the take-off, simply because it is essentially a one-ball shot and therefore easiest for newcomers to master; the standard defensive opening is kept until later when students have gained a sense of the game as a whole. There is particular emphasis on two key aspects of AC which some beginners find not so easy to assimilate: roquet/ball in hand/croquet/continuation, and split croquet shots. There is also plenty of game time to foster enjoyment.

Different approaches are offered for different audiences. Jargon is side-lined. Coaches are encouraged in the early stages of learning to keep the game moving forward and avoid demoralising 'end of turn' situations arising from technical shortcomings born of inexperience. Several competitions, fun games and coaching games are included to get students enjoying the tap of mallet on ball as soon as possible. Above all, beware of over-complicating: what comes easily to experienced players can be confusing to those new to the game, so keep it simple. The aim is for those learning Association Croquet to get playing quickly and to find pleasure and satisfaction at each level of their development.

The standard course plan below (pages 7 to 24) can be used as it stands. However, much depends on the enthusiasm, the empathy, the encouragement of the coach. Good coaching responds to the needs of the individuals being coached, and needs a flexible approach. There is therefore nothing prescriptive about what follows. It may, for instance, feel right to bring the rush or 'nudge' further forward, and delay the stop shot until later. All coaches have their own experience of what they find makes for successful learning and what they find doesn't work so well, and the text is to be regarded as a framework upon which coaches can develop coaching sessions through tried and tested methods.

This Manual has been written by John Harris. It is commended by the Coaching Committee of the Croquet Association to all those who have the privilege of introducing newcomers to this engaging and very rewarding game.

Sarah Hayes
Chairman, Croquet Association Coaching Committee

Acknowledgements

Many people have offered help and I am grateful to them all. My particular thanks are due to James Hawkins, Sarah Hayes, Cliff Jones, Dave Hudson, Debbie James, Callum Johnson, Derek Knight, Anna Giraud, Ian Harrison, Ian Shore, Fiona Crompton, Ian Cobbold, Alison Larard, David Openshaw, Helen Morrill, Cathie Dance, and members of the CA Coaching Committee for offering very helpful suggestions. Remaining shortcomings are my own. – John Harris

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Introducing Association Croquet Manual for Coaches

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Jargon buster	4
Introduction	5
Association Croquet in a nutshell	5
Top tips	6
Introducing AC to adults	
<i>Part 1: basic technique; 'Pirates'</i>	7
<i>Part 2: take-off; roquet/croquet/continuation; 'Six-Ball'</i>	10
<i>Part 3: straight and angled drives; hoop approaches</i>	13
<i>Part 4: half and full rolls; break building</i>	18
<i>Part 5: stop shots; the 4-ball break; bisques</i>	21
<i>Part 6: openings and endings; nudges and rushes</i>	23
Follow-on sessions	25
Introducing AC to other audiences	
<i>Introducing AC to Golf Croquet players</i>	26
<i>Introducing AC to Garden Croquet players</i>	30
<i>Introducing AC to younger people</i>	31
<i>Introducing AC to students</i>	32
<i>Introducing AC to social groups</i>	33
<i>AC and dementia</i>	33
Competitions, fun games and coaching games	
<i>Line and Length</i>	34
<i>Push to the Peg</i>	34
<i>Racing Croquet</i>	35
<i>Pirates</i>	35
<i>Ricochet</i>	36
<i>Six-Ball Croquet</i>	36
<i>Bringing in the Washing</i>	37
<i>Scarborough</i>	37
<i>Stop the Clock!</i>	38
<i>Black Bess</i>	38
Further learning for students and coaches	39

Jargon buster

Your students have come to enjoy croquet, not learn a new language. Where possible, delay using jargon until students are familiar with the concept and now find it convenient to know the conventional name for it. Until then, here are some to try:

Striker's ball	Your own ball
Stalk	Approach the ball with feet, ball and target all lined up
Cast	Check the aim (by swinging the mallet over the ball)
Roquet a ball	Hit another ball with your own ball
Run a hoop	Get through a hoop; score a hoop
Croquet shot	Two-ball shot
Ball in hand	Pick up your own ball
Drive	Straight croquet shot
Drive ratio	How many times further has the far ball travelled?
Rush	Catapult another ball forward; "roquet with welly"
Cut rush	Nudge
Penult; rover	Last-but-one-hoop; last hoop
1-back	Hoop 7

In a break...

Pilot	Ball at your next hoop
Pioneer	Ball at your next hoop but one
Pivot	Fourth ball (in a useful position between the hoops)
Reception ball	Ball waiting ready to use again after running a hoop

Introduction

Thousands of people a year buy garden croquet sets and teach themselves the game quickly and easily from a simple booklet. What they are playing is essentially Association Croquet. Our task as coaches is to make learning AC as simple and enjoyable as we can.

Length of course – the course plan below is set out in six parts, ideal for six evening sessions of an hour and a half each. However there is nothing sacrosanct about this. The material will work equally well in, say, four afternoon sessions, or two good half days.

Clientele – who is your audience? GC players have a head start and should be fast learners. Social groups will move very much more slowly, preferring to enjoy the games and each other's company at each stage. Children need an approach centred on fun games. The basic plan below will therefore need adapting to suit: see pages 26 to 33 for some suggested variations for different audiences.

Group size – a ratio of 1:4 is recommended, with an assistant coach working with and under you for groups of 5-8. Groups of over 8 are normally too large to work well *unless* the lead coach is already very experienced in dealing with larger numbers. A lower ratio is recommended when working with children.

Resources needed – a group of 8 will need two adjacent lawns, preferably two half lawns; a mallet each; primary and secondary balls plus an additional set of primaries (and secondaries if available); and bisque sticks, for you to use as teaching aids.

Association Croquet in a nutshell

This may be particularly helpful when introducing AC to transitioning GC players. Explain that at the heart of Association Croquet is earning extra shots to build a break:

- 1 You have two balls, and can pick either one or the other for each turn.*
- 2 Both balls have to score all the hoops. The clips show you where you're going.*
- 3 You can keep your turn going by earning extra shots:
Run your hoop and you get another go.
Hit another ball and you get another two goes.
The first of those is played from anywhere in contact with the ball you've just hit.*
- 4 Finish at the peg.
That's it!*

Top tips

*Leading a group is a skilled role: the most effective teachers and coaches spend a lifetime developing and improving their craft.
Here are ten top tips to get started with.*

Prepare – know your material well. Be early: have the lawns and all equipment ready. Know who you are going to be working with and greet each one warmly and personally. Show confidence and assurance: your students will then willingly entrust themselves to you.

Position – place your students where you can make good eye contact with each and where each can hear you clearly. For general exposition, stand students along the boundary and place yourself 4-5 yards in. To demonstrate shots, turn sideways so that students can see the detail. For hoops, place students where they can see your teaching point: the best position will depend on the key learning at that moment, and may, for example, be with all students on the far side of the hoop, or to one side.

Voice – before speaking, wait until the *full* group has assembled and all are ready to receive. Speak rather more slowly than in normal conversation. Consciously use a firm, clear voice that will carry well to the furthest student. Be expressive!

'Chunk' the learning – the material will be very familiar to us; for group members it is all new, and may seem confusing. Make it simple. Break each piece of new learning into small chunks and ensure that each chunk is fully understood. A typical learning sequence will be exposition → demonstration → individual practice → recap, with the whole sequence being a maximum of a few minutes long. With children, keep instructions particularly short: focus instead on fun.

Learning by doing – some learn by hearing, some by looking, some by reading, some by making connections with prior learning. But to fully grasp something new in croquet, everyone needs to *do* it for themselves. "I hear and I forget; I see and I remember; I do and I understand."

Repeat and recap – what has become very familiar to an experienced player is new to a beginner. Even the simple sequence of roquet → ball in hand → croquet shot → continuation shot will need regular reinforcement and repetition. Repeat and recap regularly and unashamedly.

Question and answer – use q&a to vary the voice, to bring students into the learning, and to check understanding. Use open as well as closed questions. Take more than one answer. Try asking a question; pausing some seconds to give students good thinking time; drawing everyone in by gently asking an individual for their thoughts; asking another student and comparing the answers.

Circulate – give all students equal time. Get round all students in a continuous circuit, offering focused reinforcement, individual guidance, praise, and moving briskly on. Everybody in the group needs and deserves your attention!

Praise, praise, praise – recognise progress enthusiastically. Praise what they are doing right: a shot may be too short, but praise its direction; a hoop may be blobbed, but praise the stalking, the grip, the concentration. Reinforce the good as well as supporting each student in his or her development: students will blossom with regular encouragement and praise.

Play, play, play – croquet is about playing the game. Throughout the course, get them playing as much as possible. Above all, make sure they enjoy it. Keep it moving, keep it light, keep it positive, make it fun. Be enthusiastic about croquet and let them catch your enthusiasm: it's the single most effective way of getting students hooked. Help them experience for themselves the pleasures, rewards and delights of the game. If your sessions are enjoyable, they'll hopefully come back for more.

Introducing Association Croquet to adults

The standard course plan below is aimed at adults looking to learn AC to a sufficient level of proficiency to enjoy the game and perhaps join a club. Other audiences have different starting points and different expectations, and so need different approaches – see pages 26 to 33.

For consistency, it is helpful in demonstrations for the striker's ball to always be Red. This follows the convention used in many books on AC and makes learning simpler.

Part 1

Stance, grip and swing; aiming; hoop running. 'Pirates'

Sections	Notes
<p>Welcome</p> <p>Introductions</p> <p>Domestics – toilets, drinks</p> <p>Aim of course</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To get you playing Association Croquet with enjoyment and growing levels of skill and tactics. "There are various forms of Croquet: we'll be learning the original game, the one most played internationally, and one which we find absorbing, enjoyable and very satisfying." <p>Brief overview of this session</p>	
<p>Very brief outline of game (14 points), on whiteboard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> order of hoops, blue to red, cold to hot, in a spiral; trying to earn extra shots to build a break; peg out 	
<p>Choosing a mallet</p> <p>Allocate mallets individually. <i>For rough sizing</i>, ask students to stand straight and relaxed, hands by the side; match with a mallet an inch or so higher than the wrist bone. <i>For a tailored fit</i>, students should be able to stand comfortably, bending slightly forward to look vertically down the striking face of the mallet, with their hands meeting naturally, ready to grasp the handle at or near the top. If it doesn't feel comfortable, encourage the student to try a different length of mallet.</p>	
<p>Stance, grip and swing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to stand on a boundary line that does not face the sun. You stand a few yards into the lawn. Start by asking students to hold the mallet by their side, one handed, and start to get it to swing very gently a few inches forward and back, from the shoulder, in a long pendulum. It should feel easy and relaxed, the mallet moving with its own momentum. Now introduce the standard grip. Ask who is left handed... who is right handed. For right handers: left hand (the 'holding hand', the 'secondary hand') at top of handle, knuckles at 11 o'clock; right hand (the 'preferred hand', the 'primary hand') below it, thumb down and pointing forward. For left handers: right hand at the top, knuckles at 1 o'clock; left hand below, thumb down and pointing forward. Swing gently between the feet – feel the momentum. 	

- It's important for the grip to feel comfortable, and as natural, as possible. If the Standard grip feels wrong, try reversing the hands, or try other grips – Irish (but can tax the wrists) or Solomon. These diagrams are for right handed players: reverse for left handers:



Be aware that the shaft is usually shorter for Irish, longer for Solomon. Many beginners will naturally place the lower hand further down the mallet for security: gently encourage them to keep hands closer together, to keep the body evenly balanced and help get a good pendulum swing.

Aim

- Still standing on the boundary line, with a ball each, students tap their ball very gently. They may be surprised how far it travels. Coach returns balls, and gives the reason: ball = 1lb, mallet = 3lb.
- Move alternate students to form two rows, 2 yards apart, and ask students to tap a ball gently to each other.
- Guide students to *focus on the point of impact* when striking the ball.
- Increase to 3 yards. Student A places mallet, head down, parallel to the boundary; student B attempts to hit it; and reverse.

Improving the aim

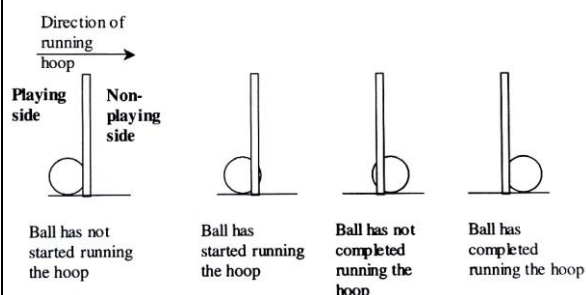
- Look at line on mallet to check alignment. Students practise briefly.
- Check alignment *and cast*. Demo. Students practise briefly.
- Stalk*, check alignment and cast. Demo, using a stalk of a few yards. Students practise briefly.
- Increase the distances the ball is to travel to 4 yards, 5 yards.

Hitting another ball

- Two balls each, a yard apart: brief section in which students use their own ball to hit (roquet) the other.
- Continually reinforce the need to **stalk → check alignment → cast**.
- Gradually increase the distance, a foot at a time. Decrease by a foot if missing one in three or more.

Straight hoop running

- Hold a ball in the jaws and rattle it: "Look, there's plenty of room!"
- Demo from the "sweet spot", 9 inches in front. Explanation:




- * stalk
- * toe of mallet slightly raised (so shuffle back slightly)
- * cast
- * alert but relaxed
- * stroke it through the hoop: hit *through* the ball

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A ball is through the hoop when its back edge clears the playing side of the hoop. "Look across the hoop from the side: if any part of the ball is peeping out of the playing side of the hoop, it's not through; if you can't see it, it's through." <p>Hoop running – individual practice</p> <p>Make sure students don't attempt hoop running from much further away: a foot is fine but a yard is too much. Encourage them to 'practise simple'.</p>	
<p>Angled hoops</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation: "the ball needs to just miss the near wire and glance off the far wire, and so through the hoop." • Demonstration. "See how the ball changes its trajectory as it glances off the far wire and passes through." • <i>Tip:</i> aim a little beyond the centre line of the hoop. • Angled hoops – practice, one student per hoop. Get them to set up the ball 9-12" from the hoop and directly opposite the LH wire or the RH wire in turn. This helps them practise achievable shots. • <i>Tip:</i> step back a little; this raises the toe of the mallet an inch or so to help give the ball forward roll (otherwise it will skid for the first yard or so). Forward roll helps it work its way through the hoop. • <i>Tip:</i> after stalking and once in position, move the mallet head slightly to one side so that the side of the mallet aligns with the side of the ball. Use the mallet as a sight line to check that the ball will just miss the near wire. As you take the shot the mallet will return into position so as to strike through the centre of the ball. <p>As confidence increases, students can pair up and run a ball back and forth. Make sure students don't attempt hoop running from too steep an angle or too far away: keep encouraging them to 'practise simple'.</p>	
<p>A game – 'Pirates' (see page 35)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain that this is not croquet; it's a fun game, which uses roquets and hoop running, plus the added dimension of a little low cunning. • One ball each, with up to six or so on the lawn. Students start in any order. Let them discover for themselves what the tactics might be. Keep it moving, keep it short, keep it fun. • Use hoops 1-6. Score 1 for any hoop run from the correct side. • Hoops can be run in any order. Hoops can also be run more than once, but you must run a different hoop first before the earlier hoop becomes 'live' again. • Hit another ball to steal any points it has. • Extra shot after scoring and after hitting another ball. Bank points when you have 3. • Start from anywhere on the boundary. Balls that go off are replaced on the boundary. • First to 5 points makes a satisfying, short game. 	
<p>Recap key learning</p> <p>Any questions?</p> <p>Our topics next time will be:</p> <p>A simple croquet shot: the take-off shot Earning extra shots to continue your turn Basic rules and etiquette. Six-Ball Croquet.</p> <p>Praise and depart</p>	

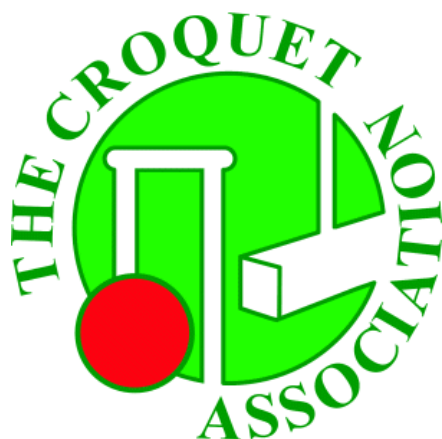
Part 2

The take-off shot. Roquet/ball in hand/croquet/continuation. Basic rules and etiquette. Six-Ball Croquet.

Sections	Notes
<p>Individual warming up practice for those arriving early</p> <p>Welcome back</p> <p>Recap key learning from Part 1</p>	
<p>More on roquets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When students are roqueting, remind them to stalk and cast. When casting, check that the line on the mallet is exactly above the centre of the ball and points exactly to the target. When hitting the ball, students need to keep eyes fixed on the back of the ball. This will help to ensure that the middle of the mallet face strikes the middle of the ball. If this does not happen, the mallet is liable to twist, and send the ball off to one side. 	
<p>Brief practical recaps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pair practice: roquets Individual or pair practice: running straight hoops Running angled hoops 	
<p>Earning extra shots:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> running a hoop = 1 extra shot; hitting another ball = 2 extra shots, i.e. a croquet shot, followed by a continuation shot <p>The croquet shot is a two-ball shot: it's unique to croquet and gives the game its name.</p>	
<p>Optional extra: 'Ricochet'</p> <p>'Ricochet' offers good reinforcement of hitting the ball, hoop running, roquets and earning extra shots, without using any croquet shots. See below, page 36, for a simple version of the rules.</p> <p><i>Omit 'Ricochet' if students are making good progress.</i> It may be useful if time is plentiful, if it's appropriate to slow the pace of learning, or if the group simply wants to have fun. Otherwise move directly on to the take-off shot.</p>	
<p>The take-off shot – the 'arrowhead shot'</p> <p>"There are lots of different ways of playing the croquet shot, but we'll start with the simplest."</p> <p>Explanation and demonstration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> your ball hits another ball you pick up your own ball ready to place it touching the ball it has just hit "Where do you want your own ball to be next? Look towards that spot, and move your ball round the other ball so that the two balls are side by side, touching each other, and at right angles to the planned line of travel." Ask students to look for the 'arrowhead': "it's showing the direction your own ball will travel." Add a bisque stick by way of a shaft: it's pointing to the path your own ball will take. 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The other ball must move or shake, so check the balls are actually touching, then angle the mallet a little towards the other ball. • Your own ball will “take off” down the lawn in the direction you planned. The other ball will stay close to where it started. <p>Individual practice. Get round all students in a continuous brisk sequence, to praise, guide, reinforce – ‘catch them doing it right’.</p>	
<p>More on the take-off or arrowhead shot</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage students to have confidence that the ball will travel broadly in the direction of the arrow shaft, even though the line on the mallet is pointing to one side. Ask them to put two balls together along the boundary line, then hit the striker’s ball at various angles. They will see that, provided they hit their own ball inwards towards the croqueted ball, their own ball will always travel broadly at right angles to the boundary. • They will also see that the croqueted ball will always travel along the boundary itself. (They may ask why: best to avoid a detailed discussion and simply reply ‘Oh, physics!’) The distances travelled by the two balls vary with different angles of attack, but the general direction remains the same. 	
<p>Keeping a turn going</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lay out the four balls two or three yards apart in a very easy sequence, leading to hoop 1. • Starting at the furthest ball, demo the run up towards hoop 1 and on through it, talking through roquet → ball in hand → croquet → continuation for each shot. • Lay out another easy sequence, leading to hoop 1. Two students now demonstrate the sequence, playing alternate strokes. Again talk through each shot to reinforce roquet → ball in hand → croquet → continuation shot. • Practice: pairs, alternate stroke, using three balls per pair, or four if enough are available. 	
<p>Starting to build a break</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demo: place a pilot ball a yard in front of the hoop; two more balls leading to it in easy steps; and a reception ball on the other side of the hoop. Talk through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Roquet → ball in hand → take-off → - Roquet → ball in hand → take-off → run a hoop → - Continuation shot (use it to roquet the reception ball) • Set up another very simple demo. Ask the group to identify the next move, and a student to play it. Continuously reinforce roquet → ball in hand → croquet shot → continuation shot. <p>Individual practice from different starting angles, three balls per student. Students place a ball on either side of a hoop and start with an easy roquet: Roquet → ball in hand → take-off → run a hoop → Continuation shot (use it to roquet the reception ball)</p> <p>If there are insufficient balls for three each, use alternate stroke doubles.</p>	
<p>Croquet rules and etiquette ... to be ready for a simple game:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The croqueted ball must move or shake [but be lenient for the first sessions. Notice when a ball doesn’t move, but smile and play on. Keep the game going; don’t allow a technical shortcoming to drain momentum and stop the flow of the game.] 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both balls must stay on the lawn after a croquet shot [but, again, be lenient at this stage. Notice what’s happened, quietly replace ball on the boundary or yard line without criticism; smile; and play on.] • You are your own referee. 	
<p>Six-ball Croquet</p> <p>See page 36 below for the rules. Explain that they’ll be playing a simple game of croquet, with extra balls to help, and using only the rules and shots learned so far (roquet, take-off, hoop running). Hoops may be run in any order, but only once each.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow all players on the lawn at all times. • Be lenient on whether the croqueted ball moves: notice what’s happening, but play on to keep the action going. • First to 3, 4 or 5 points gives a short, satisfying game. • Be continuously encouraging: keep it moving: use lots of praise! Help them enjoy the game to the full. <p>Playing with two balls</p> <p>To some students this will be a novel concept. Some students may assume they need to play balls alternately; or need to keep playing with the first ball until it’s scored all hoops; or need to allow the other ball to ‘catch up’; or can switch balls mid-turn.</p> <p>At the beginning of each turn, remind students they have a choice of balls, and that they should see which ball it is most advantageous to play in this turn. Which has the easier shot? Which already has a ball close to a hoop it hasn’t yet scored?</p> <p>“You can choose which ball to play when you start your turn. If you decide to play Red, then that turn is all about Red: strike Red to roquet another ball; pick up Red; place Red next to the roqueted ball; strike Red for the continuation shot. But next time you walk onto the lawn, you can decide whether it’s strategically more helpful to you to play Red or to play Yellow. Whichever you choose, it’s all about that ball during that turn.”</p>	
<p>Recap key learning</p> <p>Any questions?</p> <p>Our topics next time will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new croquet shot: the drive, and a variant, the angled croquet drive A useful sequence to help you keep going after scoring a hoop A simple croquet game <p>Praise and depart</p>	



Part 3

Straight croquet drive and angled drive; hoop approach sequence. A simple croquet game.

Sections	Notes
<p><i>Individual warming up practice</i> for those arriving early</p> <p><i>Welcome back: recap key learning from Parts 1-2</i></p> <p><i>Individual practice</i></p>	
<p><i>The straight croquet drive</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starting on the boundary line, stand students to each side of you, and demonstrate, first, a take-off, then a straight croquet drive. Note the different finishing positions of the two croqueted balls. • Did students notice anything about how the shot was done? • Emphasise that in a take-off, both balls are side by side; in a straight drive, both balls follow the line on the mallet. • Remind students that in a straight croquet drive you are moving not one ball, but two; the shot therefore needs more back swing. • You need to hit <i>through</i> both balls with a smooth follow-through. This will make the shot more consistent. <p><i>Straight drive: individual practice</i></p> <p>Check that students do not move shoulders forward during the shot, and that the mallet shaft is perpendicular at the point of contact with the ball.</p>	
<p><i>Measuring the drive ratio: demonstration</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standing again on the boundary, demonstrate a short straight drive. Ask students to compare the distances travelled by the two balls and estimate the ratio (or how many times further the croqueted ball travels than the striker's ball). • Now demonstrate a longer drive. What is the ratio now? • "If a player is playing consistently, the ratio will be broadly the same whether the shot is played gently or firmly." <p><i>Measuring one's own drive ratio: individual practice</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two balls per student. Students try gentle and firm straight drives, using paces to work out broad ratios. Encourage students to carry on even if some of their shots come out with inconsistent results. • Emphasise that it does not matter whether a student's personal ratio is 1:3, 1:4, or in between; the key thing is to know it. 	
<p><i>Applying the drive: the hoop approach shot</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind students how helpful it is after running a hoop to have a ball ready just beyond the hoop. • Demonstration: play a straight croquet drive from a yard or so in front of the hoop and a few inches to one side of the centre line. Go on to run the hoop and roquet the reception ball. • Explain that the aim is to get your own ball as near as possible to the "sweet spot" a foot or so in front of the hoop. • Repeat from the other side of the hoop centre line. Keep it simple. 	
<p><i>Hoop approach shot: individual practice</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two balls per student. Check that students start a little either side of the hoop centre line. It then becomes an exercise in judging the strength of shot needed to land on or near the "sweet spot". 	

Varying the angle of strike: what happens to the other ball?

- Place two balls, touching, both side by side on the boundary line. "Let's stalk along the boundary line and hit our own ball straight: what will happen to the other ball?" (It travels along the boundary line.)
- "Now let's hit our own ball at a different angle, say this one. What will happen to the other ball now?" (Give plenty of time for different answers from several people. Accept them all warmly without comment. Then get students to try some of them.)
- "So the other ball will *always* move along the boundary line, however we hit our ball. Why is that, do you think?" (Because the other ball is being impelled *there*, where I'm pointing, where the two balls are touching: so, however we hit our own ball, the other ball *must* always go in the same direction, along the *line of centres* of the two balls.)
- Get students to try this novel concept for themselves.

Varying the angle of the drive

- Place two balls on the middle of the south yard line, as if setting up for a straight drive towards hoop 5.
- Now announce that you want the croqueted ball to go towards hoop 5, but the striker's ball to go to the left, in the direction of hoop 1. How do we do it?
- Accept all answers openly – give the discussion free range. Ask several students to try out their suggestions there and then. Respond positively, even when it's not the 'right' answer.
- Show that the solution is to aim in between. This may not be easy for some students to visualise, so use bisque sticks to illustrate.
 - First remind students that we've just established that the croqueted ball will *always* go down the line that joins the centres of the two balls. Reason: however you hit the striker's ball, the point of impact on the croqueted ball is the same; it *will* travel down that line.
 - Put a bisque stick on the ground, one end touching the croqueted ball, pointing down the direction of travel. That's the croqueted ball dealt with: we can be *certain* it will travel in that direction.



- Now place a second bisque stick, one end touching the striker's ball, pointing down the desired direction of travel for 'our' ball.
- Now place a third bisque stick midway between the two. This illustrates the principle that the direction of stalk and aim is in between the line of travel of the two balls.

- Ask a student to demonstrate stalking along the line of the central bisque stick, then casting down it, and ask the group to confirm that it is the desired direction of swing. Check that all students understand that the direction of aim is neither towards the destination of Red, nor towards the destination of Blue, but between the two.



- Now **remove the outer bisques**, leaving only the centre one in position. The student stalks and casts down the line of the one remaining bisque stick. Ask students to reconfirm that the mallet is indeed swinging down the line of the remaining bisque. The student now plays the shot.
- Repeat, with the striker's ball and croqueted ball in the same positions, but this time with the geometry reversed – the croqueted ball still aiming in the direction of hoop 5, but the striker's ball now aiming in the direction of hoop 4.

Members of the group may well need further explanation, so ask a quick and confident student to demonstrate the sequence again.

Important:

Stress that splitting the angle is not an exact science: aim in between and your own ball will travel **broadly** in the direction you want. Students will learn from experience how to judge more exactly the right line of aim. For now, keep it simple.

Another way of illustrating the angled croquet drive

Some students do not find it easy to visualise where to aim; this alternative demonstration can help.

- 1 Place Yellow on the lawn. Explain that Red has roqueted Yellow so Red is ball in hand.
- 2 Ask a student to choose in which direction they would like Yellow to travel. Get the student to insert a bisque stick upright into the ground on Yellow's line of travel, 18 inches or two feet away from it.



Step 2



Step 3



Step 4

- 3 Now ask a student to place Red ready for the croquet shot – Red, Yellow and bisque stick all in line.
- 4 Next ask a student to propose a direction of travel for Red. The student goes on to insert a second bisque stick upright on its line of travel, again 18 inches or two feet away from it.

- 5 Ask: where do we need to aim the mallet? Insert a third bisque stick upright midway between the first two.
 - 6 Ask a student to play the shot, aiming the mallet towards the middle bisque stick. With distances as short as these, Red and Yellow will demolish the two outer bisque sticks. This offers a simple visual confirmation of the process that is strong and memorable.
- The whole sequence can now be briefly repeated involving different students. If Yellow previously travelled to the right of Red, now arrange for Yellow to travel to the left of Red.



The angled drive – individual practice

- First ask students to set up and practise short, easy angled drives (split shots). Give them three bisque sticks to help them if they need it, and plentiful reminders to set up in three distinct stages:
 - 1 Decide the direction you want the croqueted ball to travel in; now move the striker's ball round the croqueted ball so that both balls are pointing in that direction.
 - 2 Next decide the direction you want the striker's ball to travel in; picture the angle between the two lines of travel.
 - 3 Halve the angle and shoot down that line. Use a bisque stick as a visual aid if you like, and aim the mallet towards it.
- Once students are comfortable with the key points, they can try hoop approach shots from different starting points: they will find that the direction of aim is often towards the hoop itself.

Students will in the end become comfortable visualising angles and aiming in between. Some may prefer to visualise the finishing positions of the two balls, draw an imaginary line between them, halve it, and aim there. This alternative (and far more accurate) method is conceptually more difficult for beginners to master at this stage and so is best kept for any individuals keen to pursue the subject.

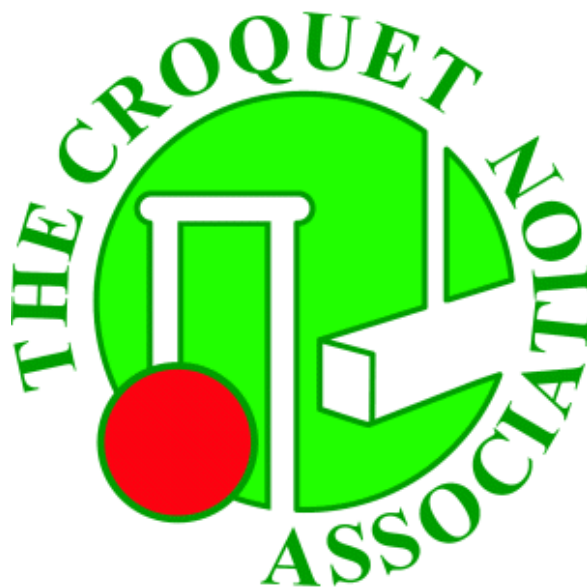
Pair practice

- Three balls per pair, at two adjacent hoops.
- One pair lines up an easy roquet on a pilot at hoop 4, and a pioneer at hoop 5: roquet the pilot, hoop approach shot, run the hoop, and take off to the next hoop. Another pair lines up an easy roquet on a pilot at hoop 6, and a pioneer at hoop 3.
- Students play alternate shots, and try to go continuously round and round. Can you score more than one hoop in a turn before things start going wrong?

New rules and routines

- Toss up: winner chooses either order or colours.
- "There's an imaginary line one yard in from the boundary all the way round the lawn: *look, here it is!*" Indicate A baulk: "Start on this part of the yard line, anywhere from *here* (the corner spot) to the middle." String may help, but an exaggerated pantomime of showing students an invisible line can be very memorable.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During a croquet shot try to keep both balls on the lawn. Otherwise it's end of turn. • Hoops are now to be run in the correct order, from the correct side. • Four balls, not six. <p><i>A simple game of croquet</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider using alternate stroke doubles. Allow all players on the lawn at all times to be near the action and discussion. • Be lenient if the croqueted ball does not move; gently note what's happening, smile, and play on. • quietly reinstate balls onto the yard line if needed. • Be continuously positive and encouraging. Where there is a choice of shots, players may feel most comfortable going for the simplest, and at this stage that's fine. If a weaker player falls short on a challenging shot, smile and use the 'magic boot' judiciously to nudge balls into a more favourable position. • Students may ask for guidance on the best opening. This is <i>not</i> the time to discuss defensive opening tactics. Keep it light and fun: suggest they try what they have in mind and see what happens. Get the game started and keep it moving. Students will soon see that some openings work better than others. 	
<p><i>Recap key learning</i> <i>Any questions?</i> <i>Our topics next time will be:</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">In croquet shots, sending balls different distances Starting to build a break</p> <p><i>Praise and depart</i></p>	



Part 4

*Half rolls and full rolls; starting to build a break.
A game!*

Sections	Notes
<p>Individual warming up practice for those arriving early</p> <p>Welcome back</p> <p>Brief recap of learning from Parts 1 to 3</p> <p>Specific recaps of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • straight croquet drive • drive ratios • split croquet drive – direction of croqueted ball • split croquet drive – direction of own ball <p>Individual practice</p>	
<p>Demonstration of different shots</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up four croquet shots on the boundary, a yard or two apart, all pointing straight down the lawn. Ask students to gather to one side, on or near the boundary, to get a side view of the four shots: • Play the second pair as a straight drive • Play the third pair as a half roll • Play the fourth pair as a full roll • Finally, play the first pair as a stop shot <p>It is helpful if the croqueted ball can, in each case, travel broadly the same distance, for example half way down the lawn. This makes for a memorable image of how the relative distances travelled can be made to vary widely.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students to estimate rough ratios for each of the shots. • Did anyone notice how it was being done? 	
<p>The half roll shot</p> <p>Explanation and demonstration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stand as for a normal shot, with shoe tips say a couple of inches behind the striker's ball, mallet vertical at 90 degrees to the ground. • Now explain you are walking forward, so that shoe tips are now either side of where the two balls are touching. • Mallet handle is now at around 60 degrees from the ground, 30 degrees off the vertical (i.e. the head of the mallet is tilting down around 30 degrees). • Slide the lower hand half way down the mallet. This should give a comfortable position for this shot and put the mallet at a good angle. • Sweep through both balls and consciously follow on through. • Repeat the demonstration. Reminders: You want your own ball to go <i>further</i> than it would do in a normal croquet drive, so <i>move further forward</i>, and <i>follow through deliberately</i>. <p>Individual practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students may find this hard at first. Give them brisk, positive guidance: be continuously encouraging. • Students will find out for themselves that they can do split half rolls, and so set up different directions as well as different relative distances. 	

The full roll shot

Explanation and demonstration:

- Stand as for a normal shot, with shoe tips say a couple of inches behind the striker's ball, mallet vertical at 90 degrees.
- Walk forward to the half roll position, shoe tips either side of where the two balls are touching, lower hand half way down the handle, and mallet at around 60 degrees.
- Now explain you want your own ball to travel further forward still, so you are walking still further forward, so that shoe *backs* are now either side of where the two balls are touching.
- Mallet is now at around 45 degrees. *Both* hands will now need to be much lower down the handle – lower hand almost touching the mallet head, upper hand half way down the handle. The lower hand will be more comfortable in this shot if the grip is adjusted, with knuckles pointing down towards the lawn in a Solomon grip.
- Sweep through both balls and follow through generously. Repeat the demonstration.
- For many people this is a very uncomfortable position. If so, keep the mallet grasped at the middle and bottom; keep the foot on your non-dominant or secondary side in the same place, pointing to the target; now bring the other foot back behind the forward foot. Swing along the side of the body. Again, sweep through both balls with generous follow-through.
- Adopting this side position gives greater power, and so makes long shots easier to play.
- Students may well need to make minor adjustments to this position: they need to feel comfortable enough, and must be balanced.

Individual practice. Students may not find this easy at first – “don't worry; have a go and see how you get on. Are you balanced? You'll find it easier the more you do it.” Give them plenty of positive guidance and continuous encouragement and praise.

The two hoop break

- Set up a ball at hoop 2, another placed appropriately near the peg, and another at hoop 1 with a very easy roquet on it.
- Ask students to talk through the next shots in turn. The only shots needed are roquet, hoop approach shot, hoop run, and take-off. A student then plays the shot in question.

Key learning:

- A ball at the next hoop is key in scoring that hoop;
- If you can continue on to the next hoop, do it. There is no need for partner ball to run hoop 1 right now: make as much progress with the striker's ball as you can.

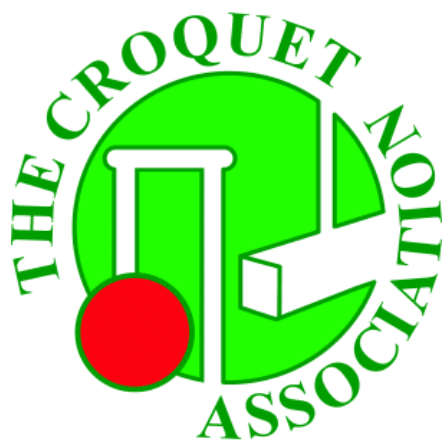
The downside: it involves leaving balls behind, and before long you run out of options. “We'll look next time at using the shots you've just learned to help you continue a break right round the lawn.”

Short games of croquet

Set a time limit of, for example, 20 or 25 minutes per game:

- Two players per game, two balls each.
- Ensure even games by pitting more able players against each other and weaker players against each other

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefly recap all rules known so far • No advice on opening shots – let them discover the tactics for themselves • Continue to be lenient on croqueted balls not moving or shaking, and on balls going off after a croquet shot: notice what has happened, but play on. • Take opportunities for discussing options briefly, but then allow players to play the shots they feel most comfortable with • Give extra guidance to weaker players to help even up the game • Keep the games going by using the 'magic boot' judiciously to nudge poor shots into favourable positions • If a student finds a shot such as a half roll or full roll has not gone to plan, allow them to retake it without penalty • Continue to allow all players on the lawn at this stage so as to be part of the action and part of any guidance being offered • Be sensitive on the finishing time: it's helpful, for instance, to allow a weaker player to finish a productive turn, or to call time when the scores are level – "It's a draw!" • Enthusiasm is catching: be continuously positive and encouraging! 	
<p><i>Recap key learning</i></p> <p><i>Any questions?</i></p> <p><i>Our topics next time will be:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The stop shot • The four-ball break • Extra turns • Arrangements for joining the Club <p><i>Praise and depart</i></p>	



Part 5

The stop-shot; the four-ball break; bisques; Club membership

Sections	Notes
<p>Individual warming up practice for those arriving early</p> <p>Welcome back</p> <p>Brief recap of learning from Parts 1-4 with particular emphasis on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The half roll • The full roll <p>Individual practice</p>	
<p>The stop shot</p> <p>"We've seen how, by varying the croquet shot, you can make your own ball travel further: any suggestions on how we might make it travel <i>less</i> far?"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't stand forward; stand back – shuffle back two or three inches (much more and you'll miss the ball). As before, demonstrate by showing the difference between the normal foot position and the foot position for a stop shot. • Do not follow through. Stop the swing as soon as the mallet makes contact with the ball. Again, show the contrast. • Three ways of eliminating follow-through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stop the arms moving; - Soft hands; - Ground the mallet on impact (but timing needs practice!) • 'Stop' shot because the aim is to 'stop' your own ball travelling so far. <p>Individual practice. Acknowledge that this can be a tricky shot to get just right – students are not to worry if it takes a while to master. "Have a go and see how you get on."</p>	
<p>Introducing the four-ball break and a simple leave</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefly recap the two-hoop break, with balls already set up at hoop 2 and centre, and an easy roquet at hoop 1. • What made the two-hoop break work? (Ball ready at the next hoop). • Why does the two-hoop break then come to an end? (Run out of balls at the next hoop) • So what do we need to continue the break? (Ball ready at hoop 3) • Is there a ball we've left behind? Let's see a way of getting the left-behind ball ready for us at the next hoop. <p>Now demonstrate the four-ball break. Start with the same set-up: balls at hoop 2 and the centre, and an easy roquet at hoop 1.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announce each shot in the sequence clearly before playing it: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 roquet → 2 hoop approach shot → 3 run the hoop → 4 roquet reception ball → 5 <i>croquet drive: reception ball to next hoop but one; striker's ball to near the ball in the centre</i> 6 roquet pivot ball 7 take off to new pilot ball 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The key shot here is number 5, the croquet drive on reception ball to the next hoop but one. This is the key learning point, so place real emphasis on this shot each time it comes round. • Continue to hoop 6, and a tidy leave, with an easy roquet on partner ball. Do not make the leave in any way complex: this is not the time to introduce cross-wiring, potential rushes, squeezes and so on. Focus only on a simple leave with partner balls joined up and opposition balls separated. 	
<p><i>Four-ball break practice</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternate stroke pair practice. • If numbers require it, select a confident pair and ask them to play with secondary balls, starting from B baulk, imagining that hoop 3 is their new hoop 1. Less confident players will be confused both by secondary balls and by the inverted lawn layout, so start these players as normal at hoop 1 with primaries. • Move briskly between pairs, guiding as appropriate with the sequence of shots, and highlighting the key croquet drive on reception ball. • Many shots will be imperfect. Use the 'magic boot' liberally to move balls into favourable positions: the key learning here is not shot accuracy, but reinforcing the four-ball break pattern. 	
<p><i>Bisques</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show a bisque stick. "You'll be entitled to up to 10. Each one gives you an extra turn. Each one can be taken at any time." • "The number of bisques you get depends on how skilled you are. More experienced players get fewer bisques, less experienced players get more. This means you can play someone of any standard and, with your bisques, you should be able to have an enjoyable game." • "You can use bisques as a 'get out of jail card' if things go wrong." • "But you can also use bisques pro-actively, to move balls into helpful positions." • "We'll now play a game and, just for this game, you'll have one bisque per turn to help you get used to using them." 	
<p><i>A game of croquet</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use all rules and moves known so far. Start to encourage players to take responsibility for croqueted balls not moving, but allow them to re-take the shot if needs be. • One bisque per turn. This means the 'magic boot' can now be retired! • Use a time limit, say 40 minutes: win, lose or draw. • Offer guidance and clarifications when asked, but otherwise allow players to discover the tactics for themselves. 	
<p><i>Recap key learning</i> <i>Benefits of Club (and CA) membership – issue Club membership forms</i> <i>Any questions</i> <i>Our topics next time will be:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openings and endings • Nudging balls into favourable positions • Longer forms of the game <p><i>Praise and depart</i></p>	

Part 6

Openings and endings; nudges and rushes; longer forms of the game

Sections	Notes
<p>Individual warming up practice for those arriving early</p> <p>Welcome back</p> <p>Brief recap of learning from Parts 1-5 not covered below</p> <p>Individual practice</p>	
<p>The rush (the 'catapult')</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstration. The aim is to run hoop 1 in this turn. Set up a simple rush on a ball a several feet to the east of the hoop. Now make a gentle roquet: the next shot is a long, tricky hoop approach shot. • Now restage the demonstration, roqueting with more backswing to 'catapult' the ball forward into a better position, giving a much easier hoop approach shot. • Key question: when you are about to roquet, would it be better to take croquet from roughly where the other ball is now, or from further on? If further on, use the catapult: "roquet with more welly". • Explain the two key principles of a successful catapult (straight rush): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aim accurately, striking the other ball in the centre. - Strike your own ball with the mallet flat, i.e. with the striking face at 90 degrees. Otherwise odd things happen! <p>Individual practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure students practise rushing a ball that is no more than a foot away – "if it's further than a foot, it's not a rush, it's a roquet". • Also ensure they start by rushing short distances: 'practise simple'. 	
<p>The cut rush (the 'nudge')</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many students will already be familiar with the principle from pool or snooker: to make the other ball go a little to the left, strike it slightly to the right of centre, and vice versa. • More backswing is needed (because more energy is retained by the striker's ball). <p>Brief time for individual practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As before, ensure students practise with the target ball close. • Encourage students to aim only a little off-centre. Otherwise it's all too easy to miss! • Those students keen to learn more about angles and striking points can be introduced to the idea of aiming at a phantom ball. Put a spare ball (white is ideal) temporarily in position to help students visualise the point of impact and direction of aim. But target this to receptive students only: for others, it can prove confusing – "Why is there now a white ball in play? Is it part of the game?" 	
<p>The four-ball break and pegging out</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstration. Explain that partner ball has already reached peg. You are now part way through a four-ball break with your other ball and looking to finish the game in this turn. • Take the chance to recap the four-ball break. Set up opposition balls at hoop 4 and centre, and a simple roquet on partner ball at hoop 3. 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the opportunity also to do some very simple rushes and nudges, explaining before taking the shot that you're trying to edge the ball into a better position for the next shot. • Talk through the moves, again with particular emphasis on the key shot – driving the reception ball to “the next hoop but one”. • After running hoop 5 (in a 14-point game), there is no “next hoop but one”, so place the reception ball near peg – the next target but one. Continue the break and peg out both balls. This is the first time the students will have seen it: keep it simple. 	
<p><i>Revision – as requested by participants</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell students they have now covered nearly all they need to know at this stage to play the game with confidence and enjoyment. Revise any topics they choose from the whole course. • Some items can be dealt with through small groups. Meeting the various needs is demanding on the coach; keep it crisp and try to get quickly round to each individual. 	
<p><i>Openings</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief explanation of the standard defensive opening, with two balls on the East boundary and two on the West. • Explain that the purpose is to be joined up while avoiding giving an easy opportunity to the other side. It then becomes a game of ‘cat and mouse’ with each side trying to gain the advantage. 	
<p><i>A longer game</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pair up opponents with similar abilities. • Use all rules known so far. • Students may well decide not to try a defensive opening: that’s fine. • Some students will default to the take-off for preference: encourage them to use all the shots they have practised so far. • Three bisques each (more can allow individuals to hog the lawn, to the discouragement of others eager to get on). • If a croqueted ball does not move or shake, or a ball goes off after a croquet shot, students may use a bisque to retake the shot. • Use a time limit: win, lose or draw. • Offer guidance and clarifications when asked, but otherwise let players make their own decisions. The coach’s role is then to give continuous encouragement. 	
<p><i>Longer forms of the game</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefly point out the range of AC variants available to meet different needs, from 14 point short lawn (1 to 1¼ hours) through 18 point full lawn (typically 2 hours) to 26 point full lawn (typically 3 hours). • Players will be able discover for themselves the version or versions they prefer to play. 	
<p><i>Recap key learning</i> <i>Further learning</i> (see page 39 below) <i>Membership arrangements – collect any membership forms</i> <i>Follow-on session/s</i> (see page 25 below) <i>Any questions</i> <i>Praise and depart</i></p>	

Follow-on session/s

Many students feel daunted at the prospect of joining Club sessions or ringing others up for a game. New members can also quickly lose momentum over the winter break. Follow-on sessions, arranged for those who choose to join the Club, can go a long way towards helping them feel comfortable as full and integrated members.

Immediately at the end of the introductory course:

- For the core of each follow-on session, play guided games, with all players on the lawn and frequent collective discussion of options.
- For a fun, competitive start to a session, try warming up with 'Line and Length' (page 34), 'Push to the Peg' (page 34), or 'Racing Croquet' (page 35).
- Enlist the help of friendly Club members who have recently joined – to encourage, be a friendly face, be a buddy, and/or become informal mentors.
- Offer individual guidance and support as necessary. Be positive and helpful while encouraging them to be more and more independent.
- Include a short, informal Laws clinic to reassure new members that they know enough of the rules to hold their own. Avoid the full Seventh Edition Laws as too detailed at this stage: direct them to the slim green Basic Laws, which contains the essential core of what they need to know.
- Introduce the handicap card.
- Gradually increase the number of bisques – not too quickly, otherwise competitive individuals may hog the lawn, and others simply burn them without purposefulness.
- Explain how Club sessions work. See whether two or more of these new members can arrange to come to the same Club session: there is safety in numbers! Try to ensure that a buddy or mentor is there too.
- Explain how the Club's lawn booking system works. Encourage these new members to arrange dates and times for a game. Encourage them to book lawn time together there and then.

Refresher session at the start of the new season:

- Technical skills – half roll; full roll; split shots
- Shot sequences – four-ball break; planning and executing a peg-out
- Tactics – simple leaves; use of bisques
- Coaching clinic on any aspect of technique, tactics or croquet mindset
- Laws clinic, including Seventh Edition Laws Table 1 (page 104) on situations too close to call
- If you have three on the same lawn, try 'Scarborough' as a good coaching game – see 'Competitions, Fun Games and Coaching Games' page 37. Discuss options together on the lawn as a group. This is especially valuable when a new player is about to start a new turn and the option is there for Yellow to be placed anywhere on the lawn before the first shot of the turn.
- Reassure students struggling to play consistent croquet shots that practice does make perfect – practice in judging the strength of shot needed, the angle of strike, the angle of the mallet on impact, and the amount of follow through.
- Pro/am doubles – a simple, effective way of developing students' understanding and ambition.

Introducing AC to other audiences

The full course plan above is aimed at adults looking to learn AC to a sufficient level of proficiency to enjoy the game and perhaps join a club. Other audiences have different starting points and different expectations, and so need different approaches. Use a half lawn for preference, otherwise a full lawn.

Introducing AC to Golf Croquet players

Many GC players shy away from AC, yet their GC experience gives them a head start in learning the game. The plan below builds on what they already know and enjoy.

To help banish misconceptions, they may need to be continuously reassured that AC is essentially a very straightforward game. See 'Association Croquet in a Nutshell', page 5, for a simple, accessible starting point that GC players can easily relate to.

Assess your audience. Are your students committed to learning AC? Or are they hesitant about AC and yet to be convinced it is for them?

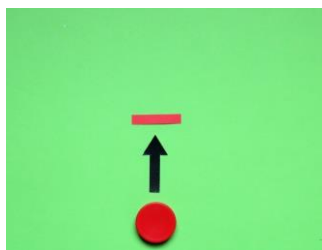
- For committed players, who already have some understanding of what AC involves and know they would like to learn it, move quickly through the material below, **omitting 'Black Bess'** and highlighting the overlaps with GC. Then proceed directly on to Parts 3-6 of the standard course plan (pages 13-24). Learning can be at pace as much will already be familiar to them.
- For players not yet ready to commit to AC until they know they may enjoy it, move quickly through the material below, emphasising the overlaps with GC. **Include 'Black Bess'**, a hybrid game which adds two basic AC skills to what is in all other respects a game of GC. This gives a more gradual transition to full AC. As students gain confidence, continue to the end of the material below then move on to Parts 3-6 of the standard course plan (pages 13-24).

<i>Sections</i>	<i>Notes</i>										
<p><i>Welcome</i> <i>Introductions</i> <i>Domestics</i> – toilets, drinks <i>Aim of course</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To get you playing Association Croquet with enjoyment and developing levels of skill and tactics. "As you know, there are various forms of Croquet: we'll be learning the original game, the one most played internationally, and one which we find absorbing, enjoyable and very satisfying." <p><i>Brief overview of this session</i></p>											
<p><i>Your GC experience gives you a head start in AC!</i> Start by getting students to identify common ground between GC and AC. If possible, gather points on a flipchart or whiteboard, as a visible reinforcement that much about this new game is already very familiar to them:</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">Lawn size</td> <td style="width: 50%;">Lawn layout</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Same mallets, same balls</td> <td>Bright colours play dark colours</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Stance, grip, swing</td> <td>Single-ball shots</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Hoop running (straight or angled)</td> <td>Clearing shot or roquet</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Promoting shot or rush</td> <td>Extra turns or bisques</td> </tr> </table>	Lawn size	Lawn layout	Same mallets, same balls	Bright colours play dark colours	Stance, grip, swing	Single-ball shots	Hoop running (straight or angled)	Clearing shot or roquet	Promoting shot or rush	Extra turns or bisques	
Lawn size	Lawn layout										
Same mallets, same balls	Bright colours play dark colours										
Stance, grip, swing	Single-ball shots										
Hoop running (straight or angled)	Clearing shot or roquet										
Promoting shot or rush	Extra turns or bisques										

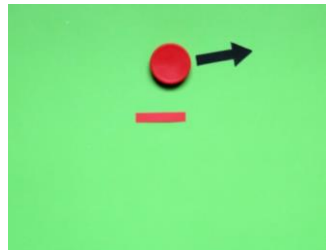
Two differences: GC		AC
<i>Finish with a deciding hoop</i>	<i>Finish by hitting the peg – 'pegging out'</i>	
<i>One shot per turn</i>	<i>Try to build a break, like snooker, by earning extra shots</i>	

Earning extra shots

- Demonstration: running a hoop = 1 extra shot:

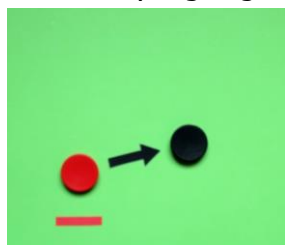


Running the hoop

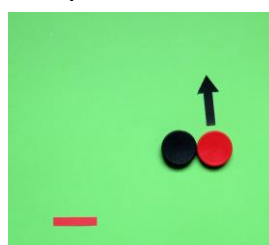


Continuation shot

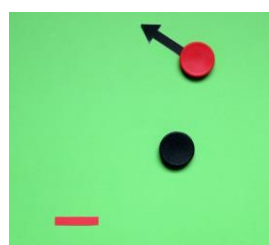
- Demonstration: hitting another ball = 2 extra shots, i.e. a croquet shot, followed by a continuation shot. Play a very simple take-off, without yet going into an explanation of how to do it:



Red roquets Black



Red takes a croquet shot



Red takes a continuation shot

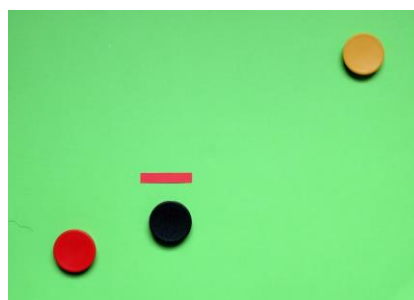
The two extra shots are **always** a croquet shot followed by a continuation shot. So the sequence to remember is

Roquet → ball in hand → croquet → continuation.

Developing your AC thinking

Set up this very simple scenario. All balls are for this hoop. Red/yellow to play.

- "What does a GC player think?" (... *Danger!* How can I *prevent* Black from running the hoop?)
- "What does an AC player think?" (... *Opportunity!* How can I *use* Black so I can run the hoop myself?)



A simple croquet shot: the take-off

"There are lots of different ways of playing the croquet shot, but we'll start with the simplest." Explanation and demonstration:

- Your ball hits another ball.
- Pick up your own ball ready to place it touching the ball it has just hit.
- Where do you want your own ball to be next? Look towards that spot, and move your ball round the other ball so that the two balls are side by side, parallel to your shoulders, at right angles to the planned line of travel, and touching each other. Look for the arrowhead [see page 10]: it points in the direction your own ball will travel in.
- You need the other ball to move or shake, so check the balls are actually touching, then hit your own ball slightly inwards. It will still travel in the direction pointed out by the arrowhead.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your own ball will "take off" across the lawn in the direction you planned. The other ball will stay close to where it started. <p>Take-off shot – individual practice</p> <p>Get round all students in a continuous brisk sequence to praise, guide, reinforce – 'catch them doing it right'.</p>	
<p>Keeping a turn going</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lay out the four balls in a very easy sequence, leading to hoop 1. Starting at the furthest ball, demo the run up to and through hoop 1, at every point talking through roquet → ball in hand → croquet shot → continuation shot. Lay out another easy sequence, leading to hoop 1. Two students now demonstrate the sequence, playing alternate stroke. Again, talk through each shot to reinforce roquet → ball in hand → croquet shot → continuation shot. <p>Individual practice</p> <p>One hoop per student, each with three balls. If there are insufficient balls, use alternate stroke doubles. Students place a ball near the hoop, and two more in easy steps leading to it, in order to run the hoop at the end of the sequence. Again, get briskly round all students, continuously reinforcing</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Roquet any ball you haven't already roqueted</i> <i>Pick up your own ball</i> <i>Place your own ball anywhere touching the other ball</i> <i>Play the shot: aim slightly in so that the other ball moves or shakes</i></p>	
<p>Optional game – 'Black Bess' (see page 38)</p> <p>Use this if your students are still hesitant about whether AC is for them. If they are fully committed to learning AC, miss it out and move straight on.</p> <p>'Black Bess' takes the GC format (start in corner 4, all move on to next hoop after any ball scores a hoop), but adds in two AC elements: roquet → ball in hand → take-off → continuation shot; and finishing at the peg.</p>	
<p>Recap key learning</p> <p>Any questions?</p>	

<p>The game in outline – 14 point version <i>(See AC in a Nutshell, page 5, for an even simpler summary)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bright colours play dark colours. So Red/Yellow play Blue/Black (or Pink/White play Green/Brown), just as in GC. With each ball, run each of the six hoops in order – 12 points. Finish by hitting each of your balls against the peg – "pegging out" – making 14 points in all. When you walk onto the lawn, decide which of your two balls you want to play. Stick with that colour until you walk off the lawn. In a timed game, the winner is the person with most points when time runs out. If it's a draw at that point, play on for the 'golden hoop'. In an untimed game, the winner is first to 14 points. 	
<p>Starting to build a break</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up a simple demo with a pilot ball a yard in front of the hoop, the striker's ball near it, and a reception ball on the far side of the hoop. Ask the group to identify the next move, and a student to play it: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roquet → ball in hand → take-off → continuation shot (<i>used to...</i>) Roquet → ball in hand → take-off → run a hoop → Continuation shot (<i>use it to roquet the reception ball</i>) 	

<p>Individual practice from different starting points. Three balls per student: one at a hoop; another nearby, with an easy roquet on it, the third ball on the other side of the hoop.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Roquet → ball in hand → take-off → run a hoop → - Continuation shot (use to roquet reception ball) <p>If there are insufficient balls for three each, use alternate stroke doubles.</p>	
<p>Croquet shot rules and lawn etiquette ... to be ready for a simple game:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Croqueted ball must move or shake [but be lenient at this stage. When a ball doesn't move, notice what has happened, but smile and play on. Keep the game flowing; don't halt a turn because of a technical shortcoming.] • Both balls must stay on the lawn after a croquet shot [but, again, be lenient at this stage. Notice what's happened, quietly replace the ball on the boundary, smile, and play on. Until players are secure and confident, don't allow a technical shortcoming to interrupt the game.] • You are your own referee. 	
<p>'Six-ball Croquet'</p> <p>See below page 36 for the rules. "We'll be playing a simple game of croquet, with extra balls to help, using only the rules and shots learned so far (roquet, take-off, hoop running)". Use Variant 2: each ball to run its hoops in order.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow all players on the lawn at all times. • First to 3, 4 or 5 points gives a short, satisfying game. • "Always try to use your continuation shots to run a hoop or roquet a different ball. Continue until things fall apart or you decide to end your turn." • "It doesn't matter whether the ball you roquet is your partner ball or one of the opposition balls. In each turn, you can use all of the other balls, once each, to try and run your next hoop. If you run a hoop, all the balls immediately become 'live' again." <p>Be continuously encouraging: keep it moving: use lots of praise! Help them enjoy the game to the full.</p>	
<p>Moving on</p> <p>Students with experience of GC should now be ready to make rapid progress. Simply now follow the standard course plan above, starting from Part 3 (page 13). Build on existing knowledge and experience wherever possible:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Stop shot</i> – many GC players will be familiar with the stance and swing. Although in GC the shot is usually played with the balls close rather than touching, the basic technique is the same. • <i>Half roll</i> – again, the stance and swing will be familiar to many from the GC roll shot. Again, in GC the shot is played with balls close rather than touching, but the basic technique is the same. • <i>Split shots</i> – a simple split may have been covered in a GC introductory course and may have been come across in play. If so, invite them to apply their GC knowledge and experience to AC. • <i>The rush</i> – the principle of aiming at a phantom ball should be very familiar to GC players. The purpose is however different – it's not simply to reposition balls, it's to be able to take croquet from a more favourable position. 	



Introducing AC to garden croquet players

Garden croquet is popular and easily learned, and makes for a straightforward route to standard AC. Some garden players taking up AC will want to start at the beginning and 'learn properly'. Others may need gentle persuasion to move from improvised technique and family rules towards the current AC Laws.

A standard set of garden croquet rules is on the CA website. Garden croquet is however played with many variations, and often to "house rules". Even so, all versions have very good overlap with 14 point AC. This gives garden croquet players a head start in the game, enabling them to master AC quickly.

Garden players looking to join a club will normally be serious enough to be happy to follow a very accelerated and tailored version of the standard course. The following are eight key differences to highlight. Rushes and breaks may also be new concepts to them, so go from where the students are at: coaching may need to be flexible until you have found their level, with more play and less chat. Above all, players may well take some time to unlearn previous habits and adjust: be patient!

- 1 ***Weight of equipment*** – garden equipment is typically much lighter. Garden players will need time to get the feel of standard balls and mallets.
- 2 ***Grip*** – many garden players have never considered how to hold the mallet and may well wish to try the three orthodox grips (see page 8).
- 3 ***Hoops*** – garden hoops being wider, players will enjoy the challenge of learning how to run straight and angled hoops at regulation width.
- 4 ***Lawns*** – garden lawns are typically smaller, and with rougher surfaces. Players will appreciate the smoother grass but may need encouraging to use backswing, rather than force, to send the ball over longer distances.
- 5 ***Opening*** – garden play normally starts a yard (or metre) in front of hoop 1. Players will enjoy the opportunity of starting from any point on A baulk or B baulk and seeing how this opens up the game to a wider variety of tactics.
- 6 ***Croquet shots*** – in the garden game, the standard rules say that 'both balls can move'. In other words, players are not required to move both balls: hitting away from the croqueted ball may be allowed. Garden players may therefore need to adjust their croquet shots accordingly. As it can be demoralising to insist on end of turn if a croqueted ball does not move, players can be led towards mastering the rule in three stages:
 - a. Notice when the croqueted ball does not move, but play on.
 - b. Allow players to retake the shot.
 - c. Once bisques are introduced, players retake the shot and lose a bisque.
- 7 ***Balls off after a croquet shot*** – the standard garden game has no penalty for balls going off the lawn after a croquet shot: balls are simply replaced on the yard line (or metre line) and play continues. Encourage garden players to see the AC rule as an engaging aspect of the game, prompting careful and thoughtful play.
- 8 ***Other differences*** – these can be picked up as play progresses:
 - a. Tossing up – in the garden game, the winner of the toss decides whether to play first or second; the other player chooses colours.
 - b. Balls off – in garden play, balls that go off the lawn are replaced on the metre line, but any ball within the metre line remains there until end of turn.
 - c. Bisques – the garden game has no formal provision for bisques.
 - d. Lawn etiquette – there is nothing in the garden rules about lawn etiquette such as the out-player leaving the lawn, or being one's own referee.

Introducing AC to younger people

Call it mallet sports to avoid preconceptions. Focus on participation and enjoyment: include fun competitions and short games liberally. If they want to play 'Pirates' over and over, go with it! The key thing is that they enjoy the sessions and are eager to come back for more.

Suggested equipment: junior mallets, push-in hoops, balls (hockey balls are light and cheap), bisque sticks... and ice cream!

On your marks...

- Target age – experience suggests a target age of 5-14, with top primary age the most receptive. Young people of this age are very unlikely to find their own way to a croquet club. Instead try approaching existing groups such as cubs/guides/scouts and Church youth groups: these may be looking for an organised activity with no changing rooms involved. Local primary schools may also be interested: seek discussion with the person in each school in charge of Years 5 or 6. Independent schools may be receptive, especially if they have a boarding element.
- It will almost certainly be necessary for you to go to where the young people are, taking push-in hoops, junior mallets and balls (hockey balls work well). You will also need to go at the time the group determines, not at the times that suit the Club.
- From these beginnings can flow an after-school club, run at the Club grounds, which may attract a small minority of those who have enjoyed the earlier sessions.
- Try advertising a Family Fun Day. Alternatively, try advertising a Summer School. Parents may wish to be there too, and learn at the same time. As the young people gain confidence, parents can join a sub-group, led by an assistant coach.
- Whatever the approach, the support of adults is key – parents, scout leaders, Head of Year, youth group leader. Get them to take part too.
- For sessions run at the Club, arrange *at least* one coach to four young people – more if younger children are involved. Coaches and assistant coaches need to be chosen carefully, to be fully in tune with young people and keen to work with them. If the sessions are regular over time, ensure each has DBS clearance (this can be done free through the CA). For 'away' sessions, discuss the number of coaches with the adults in charge.
- Do not be downhearted if, after all this, few, if any, take up croquet seriously. If the young people have enjoyed the experience, some may come back to the game later. Meanwhile you are spreading news of the Queen of Games.

Get set...

- 40 minute sessions work well. Maintain an active, encouraging, fun environment. Alternate stroke play helps things go with a swing.
- The early parts of the standard course give a general direction, but keep it light, keep it fun and keep it moving. Gamify: almost anything can be turned into a little challenge, particularly when done in pairs or threes. Some very simple examples might include:
 - In pairs, starting from a corner, see how far you can send a ball along a boundary so that at least part of the ball still overhangs the boundary line. Use bisque sticks to mark the furthest successful ball.
 - One or two players per hoop: see who can pass a single ball through the hoop back and forth most times in a minute.

- Starting from anywhere on the boundary, each player or pair of players chooses a corner hoop and plays to it six times from the boundary. Score a point for each time a ball hits any part of the hoop. Score three points if it happens to run the hoop.
- Stand in a circle round the peg and see who can hit it most times in a minute.
- Team q&a revision quiz on simple basics such as which ball is partner to Blue, which to Red; which is the first hoop, which is the last; which way is the last hoop run; a way of earning extra shots, and another way; a way of getting a more accurate aim, and another way, and another. First team to five points wins.
- Students spread out along any boundary line and place two balls along it a mallet head apart. Roquet the other ball over a distance of at least a mallet shaft: score one point if any part of the ball overhangs the boundary line, two if the ball fully covers the line.
- Using single ball shots, run all six hoops in the minimum number of shots. To maximise lawn occupancy, players can start at each of the four corner hoops, and complete the outer circle clockwise, before moving to the two hoops on the centre line. Congestion around the final two hoops adds fun!
- Particularly in a longer sequence of sessions, keep interest and engagement high by adding in more substantial challenges and games: 'Line and Length' (page 34), 'Push to the Peg' (page 34), 'Racing Croquet' (page 35), 'Ricochet' (page 36), 'Six-Ball Croquet' (page 36).
- Meanwhile, 'Pirates' (page 35) will prove an enduring favourite, and offers an ideal short closing game. Use clothes pegs to keep count: they will enjoy storing them all over their clothes or hair.

Go!

- Establish a key rule – "Look after the mallet. Don't stand on it. It is not a weapon, and not a toy. Treat it with respect and keep the head close to the ground at all times."
- Young people will be eager to get on and play. *Keep instructions very brief, ideally to less than a minute.* Less is more – don't over-explain. Let them play and have fun.
- Be guided partly by this Manual but also by their enthusiasm. Turn practice routines into fun competitions: let the competitive element emerge and drive the young people on.
- Ice cream at the end goes down a treat!

Introducing AC to University students

University and college students will be fast and confident learners. They may well be in it less for the croquet, more for the fun, the sociability, the idiocy of playing this odd game, the beer afterwards. Just go with it, at speed!

- Follow the standard plan, but at pace. Students will absorb the ideas readily and will be eager to press ahead in their learning. In a committed group the students themselves will spur each other on: go with it!
- Include plenty of competitions and plenty of brisk fun games – see pages 34-38.
- Silly rewards such as tiny chocolate bars will go a long way.
- Students may be intrigued by the jargon: do not shy away from using a limited amount where appropriate.
- Individual students may also enjoy delving briefly into how croquet relates to their specialist subject, be it maths, physics, history, linguistics or whatever. Again, go briskly with it.

- Above all, keep it fun – keep it moving. Keep instructions very short. Focus on lawn time. Make sure they enjoy it enough to want to come back for more.

If you would like students to join the Club:

- Set a very low membership fee. Your return can come later in terms of the students' enthusiasm.
- Free beer, or free food, can be a great incentive.
- Stamp down on any tendency for older members to frown. They are themselves a clique and need to value this new blood coming into the game.
- Students will normally just be passing through, not long term members. Some may take up the game later: think of it as an investment for the future of croquet, and, meanwhile, a breath of fresh air.

Introducing AC to social groups

Social groups are looking for an enjoyable hour or two in congenial company. The croquet is secondary. Keep it moving, keep it light; think of it as an afternoon of 'mallet sports'. Include plenty of fun competitions and games as a key part of the experience.

Introduce GC as a sociable, quickly learned experience of croquet, and go from there. One step on from GC is 'Black Bess' (see page 38) which introduces a couple of AC concepts very easily. From there it is a short and easy step to 'Six-Ball Croquet' (page 36). With any group, 'Pirates' (page 35) will also be an enduring favourite.

If an AC-orientated approach seems appropriate, base the time around part 1 of the standard plan (see above, page 7), plus such sections of part 2 as seem appropriate.

Very few will expect to go on to take croquet up seriously, so aim instead to give them a lively, welcoming and enjoyable time which leaves them with a warm impression of the game.

AC and dementia

AC is challenging for those with dementia because of the amount that needs to be held in the head at any one time. Someone in the very earliest stages of dementia who has played sport previously can however pick up much of the technique if introduced with patience and understanding. The tactics, on the other hand, may well prove challenging, so adopt alternate stroke doubles, with the coach as lead partner giving detailed guidance. Language may need to be very simple: "You're playing Red. Hit Red to Blue." "You're playing Red. Hit Red to here." "You're playing Red. Hit Red through the hoop."

For those in the later stages of dementia, AC will not work: the mental requirements and physical co-ordination required are too great. Instead introduce a very simple version of GC, focusing purely on enjoyment and participation. The USA initiative "Jiminy Wicket – from Hoops to Hope" offers a well-trying inter-generational model. Note however that those with embedded dementia may need reminding *at every shot* where to stand, how to hold the mallet, how to swing it, which ball to play, where to play it to – and may even so miss the ball, or try and play it sideways. Whatever the success or otherwise of a shot, encourage warmly and praise liberally.

Competitions, fun games and coaching games

For all these competitions and games use a half lawn for preference, otherwise a full lawn. Normal lawn layout. Games use only hoops 1-6, run in the conventional direction, and the peg. Keep it moving and keep it fun.

Line and Length

- Any number of players from 2 to 8. Divide the available balls between the players.
- Only one technical skill is required – hitting your own ball.

The aim is to get as close to the peg as possible. The rules can be learned in 30 seconds.

- 1 Start together, each from a separate corner. If there are between 5 and 8 players, start on the boundary a yard along from a corner.
- 2 Place each ball in turn on the corner or boundary, and hit it once, to finish as close to the peg as possible. If a ball collides with another, both balls stay where they lie.
- 3 Anyone hitting the peg wins at that point. Otherwise the winning ball is the one which finishes nearest the peg.

Variant: throw a golf ball onto the lawn, or place another suitable target at a length appropriate for those playing. Start from a boundary; land as close to the target as possible. If balls are disturbed by subsequent shots, it is the final resting place of the balls that counts.

Push to the Peg

- Any number of players from 2 to 8. Two balls per player (any colours).
- Only two technical skills are required – hitting your own ball, and roqueting another.

The aim is to be first to propel partner ball to the peg. The rules can be learned in under one minute; the game itself takes a few minutes to play. The skills required become evident as play progresses.

- 1 Start together, each from a separate corner. If there are between 5 and 8 players, start on the boundary a yard along from the corner.
- 2 Place the striker's ball on the boundary and the partner ball a mallet's head length in front.
- 3 Roquet (= Promote) the partner ball. From where the balls lie, roquet again, repeating until the partner ball strikes the peg.
- 4 First to the peg wins.

There is no croquet shot and no continuation shot, making this a good, simple, lively contest for GC and AC players alike and learners at all levels.

Variant: make a circuit from a corner, round the outside of the four outer hoops, and back home. Count the shots needed. Try to improve on your personal best.

Racing Croquet

- Up to 4 players, in two teams. See below for variants with up to eight players.
- Only two technical skills are required – hitting your own ball, and hoop running.

One ball per team (any colour). The aim is to be first to propel the ball through a series of hoops.

- 1 Team A runs hoops 1-6 in the usual order. Team B runs 3, 4, 1, 2, 6, 5.
- 2 Start 10 feet or so in front of the first hoop. Start simultaneously at a signal, and attempt to be first home.
- 3 If a player touches a ball, that team goes back to the start.

This game, developed by Bernard Hendry, is loud, highly competitive, and great fun. If teams have more than one person in them, play alternate stroke. If there are three teams, start with hoops 1, 3 and 5; if four teams, run just hoops 1-4. If and when teams collide, it's everyone for themselves.

Pirates

- Any number of players from 3 to around 8.
- Only three technical skills are required – hitting your own ball; hoop running; and roqueting.

Different versions of the rules exist. This simple version works very well as an early part of an introductory course, as a finale to a fun afternoon for community and work groups, as a light-hearted entertainment at a Club social, and as an enjoyable way of spending any spare time after a match. The game is also known as Robber.

The aim of the game is to earn points – by running hoops (in any order) and by stealing points from other players. The rules can be learned in under two minutes. Tactics become evident as play progresses.

- 1 One ball per player. Start from anywhere on the boundary. Players play in rotation.
- 2 Running a hoop earns one point and an extra shot. Hoops can be run in any order. Hoops can also be run more than once, provided the player has run another hoop in between.
- 3 Roqueting another ball 'steals' any points it may be carrying, and earns an extra shot.
- 4 Once a ball carries three points, its points are 'banked', or become 'buried treasure', and can no longer be stolen.

The length of the game can be determined by circumstances. First to five points gives a good, lively, short game for those new to croquet. A longer version of the game has a higher winning target (31 points), with points banked when they have reached 10. However, in a coaching situation, a shorter game works well. Keep it moving, and keep the accent on enjoyment in an atmosphere of friendly rivalry.

Variant 1: play to a time limit. Variant 2: run a hoop either way (but no yo-yoing).

Ricochet

- Any number of players from 2 to 5.
- Only three technical skills are required – hitting the ball; hoop running; and roqueting.

This simple game works well as an easy introduction to continuation shots and offers an easy way of giving GC players experience of a simple AC-style game without croquet shots or ball in hand. The game is six hoops plus the peg; the game ends when the first person pegs out.

- 1 Start from either baulk (if necessary, explain where they are).
- 2 One extra shot for running a hoop in order; two extra shots for hitting (roqueting) another ball. In the first of these two extra shots, the ball must stay on the lawn (penalty: end of turn). Each ball can be used once only to gain extra shots before running a hoop; all balls become 'live' again when a hoop is run and at the start of a new turn.
- 3 Extra shots cannot be accumulated.

The game was developed by John Riches as a coaching tool; the rules can be flexed to match the situation and students' learning to date. For games with two [or three] players, throw two [or one] 'neutral' balls onto the lawn before starting.

Six-Ball Croquet

- Any number of players from 2 to 6.
- The only technical skills required are hitting the ball; hoop running; and roquet → ball in hand → take-off → continuation shot.

This simple, short game works very well as an early part of an AC introductory course and provides a straightforward bridge from 'Pirates' to full AC. Played without the more challenging croquet shots, baulk lines, defensive opening moves, pegging out, rushes, and jargon, it offers a quick, easily understood and enjoyable experience of some of the core elements of Association Croquet.

The aim of the game is to earn points by running hoops (in any order), using other balls to help. The rules can be learned in two minutes. Tactics become evident as play progresses.

- 1 Use six balls: the four primary colours plus White and Pink. If there are two players, Red/Yellow play Black/Blue as usual, with White and Pink as extra balls. If there are three players, the third player plays White/Pink. For games with 4, 5 or 6 players, use alternate stroke doubles.
- 2 For a quick start in a coaching game, throw all six balls quickly onto the lawn, apparently at random; ask which side would like to go first; and start at once from where the balls lie. For a fun start, throw on White and Pink if spare; teams then simultaneously play all balls into the lawn, starting from any point a yard in from the south boundary, so all balls are quickly in play.
- 3 Run any hoop to earn one point and an extra shot as usual. Roquet another ball to earn ball in hand, a take-off shot and a continuation shot.
- 4 Hoops can be run in any order. A side can score each hoop only once.

The skill of the game is two-fold: thinking through a possible route between each of a player's balls and a hoop that has not yet been scored; and making a decision as to which ball to play, then, as appropriate, using the other five balls as simple stepping stones towards the target hoop.

Determine the length of the game by circumstances. The full game is first to 6 points, but first to 3, 4 or 5 points gives a good, lively, short game. The accent should be on enjoyment and friendly rivalry.

Variant 1: run hoops in order. Variant 2: run hoops in order with each ball.

Bringing in the Washing

- 2 players playing two balls each, or 4 players playing alternate stroke doubles.
- Only three technical skills are essential – hitting the ball; hoop running; and roquet → ball in hand → take-off → continuation shot – but other AC skills may be included as players' knowledge and experience increases.

The aim is to collect the most clips. The rules can be learned rapidly. Tactics become evident as play progresses. This is a version of '*Getting in the Washing*', devised by Martin Hodge.

- 1 Place two clothes pegs (or clips) on each hoop. Whenever you run a hoop, you take a peg.
- 2 Breaks may be started at any hoop, but the next hoop in that turn must be the next one in order.
- 3 Maximum break is two hoops.

This is another short, simple, enjoyable game, providing a straightforward bridge from 'Pirates' towards full AC. Start the game from a baulk line (or, if the baulk lines and yard line have not yet been covered, from the boundary).

Variant: experienced players familiar with peeling may add a fourth rule: if one team has fewer pegs than the other, it may peel an enemy ball through any hoop with no pegs on it. If it succeeds, it claims half the enemy's pegs, rounded down.

Scarborough

- 3 players. For variations with 2 or 4 players, see below.
- The only technical skills required are those already mastered, for example hitting the ball; roqueting; hoop running; one or more simple croquet shots.

This is a coaching game, good for developing strategic thinking such as strategic use of rushes and planning ahead for a break.

- 1 One ball per player. Blue, Red and Black are played in sequence; Yellow is a fourth ball.
- 2 At the beginning of a turn, a player can pick up the fourth ball and place it anywhere she or he likes, for example to give a simple rush, to set up a pilot, or to set up a pioneer.

The game lends itself to discussion of options, particularly at the start of a new turn. Allow all players on the lawn to encourage discussion to flow and to maximise learning. It was developed and promoted in New Zealand as a coaching tool by Brian Priestley (Christchurch CC) and Wendy Davidson (Canberra CC).

Any rules of AC that have not yet been learned may be ignored. Two players can play with three balls to develop three-ball break skills. Alternatively, with White as a fifth ball, two players may play two balls each, or four players may play alternate stroke.

Stop the Clock!

- 4 players, alternate stroke.
- A 20-minute game, suited to evenly matched pairs of any ability, and using such shots and strategy as the players have already mastered.
- A timer or smartphone is needed to keep accurate time.

The aim is to score the most points in 10 minutes using the fewest bisques. There is no peg-out: very fast pairs can simply continue with hoop 7 onwards.

- 1 Start with each ball one yard from peg at N, S, E and W.
- 2 Score two points for each hoop scored in order. Deduct one point for each bisque used.
- 3 Opponents sit out, count bisques used, and keep time. Play stops immediately after 10 minutes and the roles are reversed.

This works well as a fast, competitive game. 'Pro-am' alternate shot pairings are good for coaching and for bringing recent recruits into the heart of the club. The game also works well as a competition when personnel move round as in a whist drive.

Variation: each side plays two shorter innings.

Black Bess

- 2 or 4 players familiar with GC.
- The only technical skills required are hitting the ball; hoop running; and roquet → ball in hand → take-off → continuation shot. Introduce a simple take-off shot for those unfamiliar with it.

This is a simple game which GC players can learn in a few minutes and which provides a straightforward stepping stone to AC.

- 1 As in GC, start in corner 4 and play the balls in sequence.
- 2 As in very basic AC, a roquet leads to ball in hand and a take-off shot, followed by a continuation shot. Balls may be roqueted once only per turn, unless a hoop is run, in which case all balls becoming 'live' again.
- 3 When a hoop is run, it counts for both the striker's ball and partner ball.
- 4 Finish by hitting the peg. One successful shot at peg counts for both balls.

The game, evolved in Yorkshire, is ideal for Golf Croquet players exploring AC for the first time. It is included on page 26 as an optional part of the introductory course for GC converters, but can also offer quick relaxation at the end of a session. It retains many key elements of GC and so, for those who may be wary of AC, offers comforting familiarity.

Alternative Croquet, edited by Don Gaunt and available post free from the CA Shop, offers a lively collection of other croquet variants for all levels of handicap and experience.

Further learning for students and coaches

The three books below are some of the most immediately attractive options for newcomers to the game. These, and other recommended books, are available post free from the CA shop. Coaches will find much helpful material here too.

Meanwhile, croquet courses offer new insights and understanding and the chance to meet a wider circle of croquet players.

How to Play Croquet, a Step-by-Step Guide edited by Mike Shaw. This simple 48-page small-format book has plenty of coloured diagrams and bite-sized bits of text. It's pretty accurate (one or two small errors), easy to dip into, and covers much the same territory as the introductory course – it won't introduce any new material of significance but should offer useful consolidation and clarification.

Croquet: The Skills of the Game by Bill Lamb. This is more detailed – larger paperback book size, 122 pages, printed in black and white. It starts at the beginning and goes well beyond the introductory course. It's got plenty of text as well as pictures and diagrams, but is straightforward to read, and offers a helpful and reliable resource and reference book for anyone wanting to progress in the game.

Complete Croquet: a Guide to Skills, Tactics and Strategy by James Hawkins. 176 pages, generously sized; printed in colour; lots of diagrams; lots of photos, mainly of James Hawkins himself demonstrating the shots. It offers a comprehensive book for reference and guidance, probably the most attractive available, and is something to consider in due course as players progress onwards.

Tournaments – students will learn fast at local, regional or Fixtures Book tournaments. Coaches can take the opportunity to mix with other coaches and discuss coaching ideas and different approaches.

Online resources – try, for example, the practice routines for AC beginners on the Croquet Association website; the Basingstoke CC website for a range of rapid coaching demonstrations with commentary; short Youtube videos by Bob Kroeger on specific topics; and the Croquet North West website for signposts to some helpful AC coaching videos. Much else is available.

Coaching courses for students – clubs and/or Federations may offer coaching: encourage students to take advantage of it. The nearest Academy will offer a range of coaching courses at different levels, from near-beginners to advanced. Courses may include days on skills, tactics or mindset, one-to-one coaching, and coached games. All are valuable in widening students' experience and perspective.

Courses for coaches – UK Coaching www.ukcoaching.org offers quality not-for-profit online training for coaches, some of it free of charge, on a range of topics designed to broaden and deepen understanding of sports coaching. Look out also for courses at the nearest Croquet Academy on coach training, Laws, Refereeing, refresher courses for coaches, and becoming a graded coach. If the Academy does not have what you are looking for, suggest it!

