

Supporting narrated video (NV) demonstrations, high-speed video (HSV) clips, technical proofs (TP), and all past articles are available online at billiards.colostate.edu. Reference numbers used in the articles help you locate the resources on the website.

Recently, I posted online video [NV J.46](#) covering the Top 10 most important pattern-play principles, which deal with strategy for choosing ball run-out order and position-play options. These skills really help separate the great players from everybody else and learning to apply these principles can really help your game. In this article, I summarize important highlights from the video.

1. Keep It Simple

The first important pattern play principle is to keep things simple. As demonstrated in the video, whenever possible, look for stop shots to connect one position to the next. If the cue ball (CB) doesn't move much, not much can go wrong. Also look for opportunities to roll the CB from one shot to the next. It is very easy to visualize the natural angle and judge CB travel distance on follow shots. Try to avoid using sidespin and going off multiple rails if you don't need to. And avoid bank shots like the plague unless they are the only options or very easy (which usually isn't the case).

2. Leave Correct Angles

A very important position control and pattern play principle is to leave angles on shots. If you leave a shot straight, it dramatically reduces your CB control options. All you can do is roll forward, stop in place, or draw straight back. When you leave an angle, it is important to leave it on the correct side of the ball. **Diagram 1** shows a good example. If I used a stop shot on the 7, it would be difficult to get good shape on the 9 or 10 from the 8-ball shot. If trying to get shape on the 9, the best play on the 7 would be to roll forward to leave a natural angle off the 8 to go two rails for the 9. If trying to get shape on the 10, the best play on the 7 would be to draw back to leave a stun shot off the 8 with the tangent-line path heading two rails for the 10.

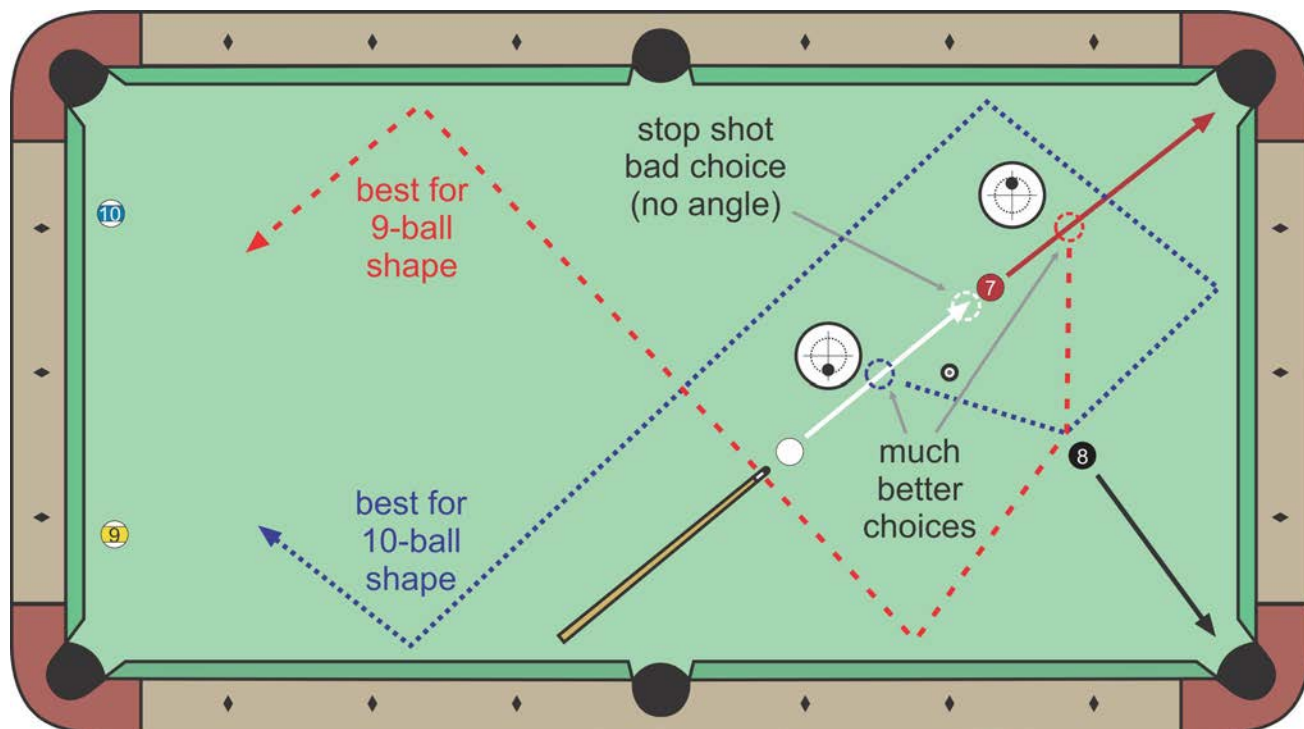


Diagram 1 Leave the correct angle

3. Plan Three Balls Ahead

Probably the most important pattern play principle is to always think at least three balls ahead and identify “key balls” for helping to get shape on important balls like the game ball. Online video [NV J.46](#) has several good examples of how to do this. Of course, this assumes you are good enough to run at least three balls in a row. If not, you should probably be reading articles and watching videos dealing more with basics.

4. Come into the Line

Whenever possible, you should try to come into the line of the next shot to increase your margin for error with shot speed. **Diagram 2** shows a good example. As you can see, the shape zone along the line of the 8-ball shot is very narrow. When possible, you don’t want to cross the line of the shot through a narrow part of the shape zone, where the margin for error is very small. Instead, whenever possible, you want to come into the fat part of the shape zone, along the line of the shot. Here, a natural-angle roll shot (red path) is much better than a stun shot (blue path). The natural angle heads right into the line of the shot and results in a look at the 8 over a wide range of shot speeds. The video has many more good examples of the important “come into the line” principle.

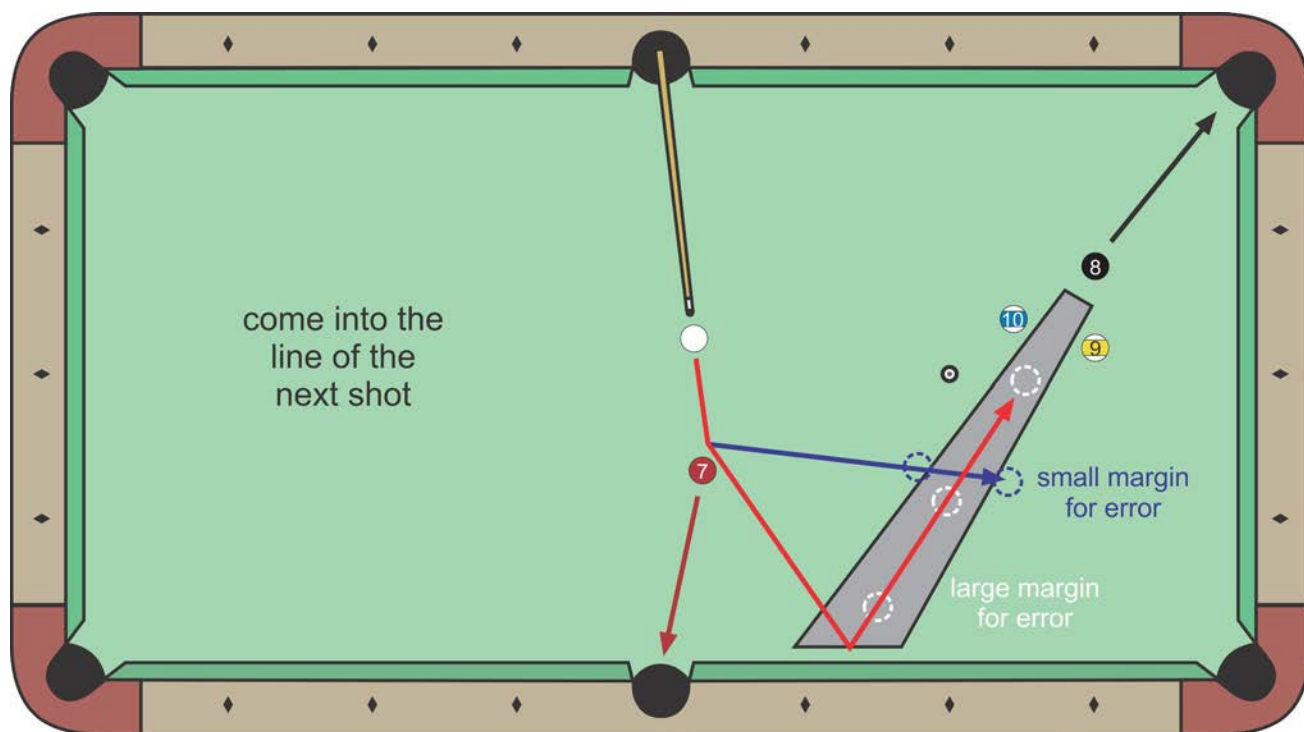


Diagram 2 Come into the line of the shot

5. Use Cushions as Brakes

It is sometimes helpful to use the cushions as brakes to help slow the CB. Online video [NV J.46](#) provides many good examples where this is the case. For example, when you need to leave the CB close to a cushion, don’t attempt to finesse shape by stopping the CB short of the cushion. It is too easy to come up short. Instead, plan to bounce off the cushion. Because the cushion kills much of the CB speed, this will give you a much larger margin for error in attaining the CB shape you want. A cushion can be a true friend.

6. Pocket Balls in Groups

Another important pattern-play principle is choosing groupings of balls wisely. Generally, it is best to pocket groups of balls that are close together to minimize CB motion. The video shows several good examples of this principle, along with how to use a “key ball” to transition from one group to another.

7. Solve Problems Early

Another smart pattern-play strategy is to solve any problems as soon as possible during the run. You don't want to break out clusters or attempt to move a problem ball late in a rack when there won't be as many options and insurance balls available. Again, see the video for examples.

8. Master the Table Center

Often, it is important to be able to get to or go through the center of the table when playing position. In these situations, it helps to know the 45° rule illustrated in **Diagram 3**. It states that if the CB heads into the end cushion at close to a 45°, the CB will head to or through the center of the table. As shown in the video, it is easy to visualize a 45° angle with reference lines through equal diamonds across a corner. The video also shows several examples of how to take advantage of the 45° rule when playing position.

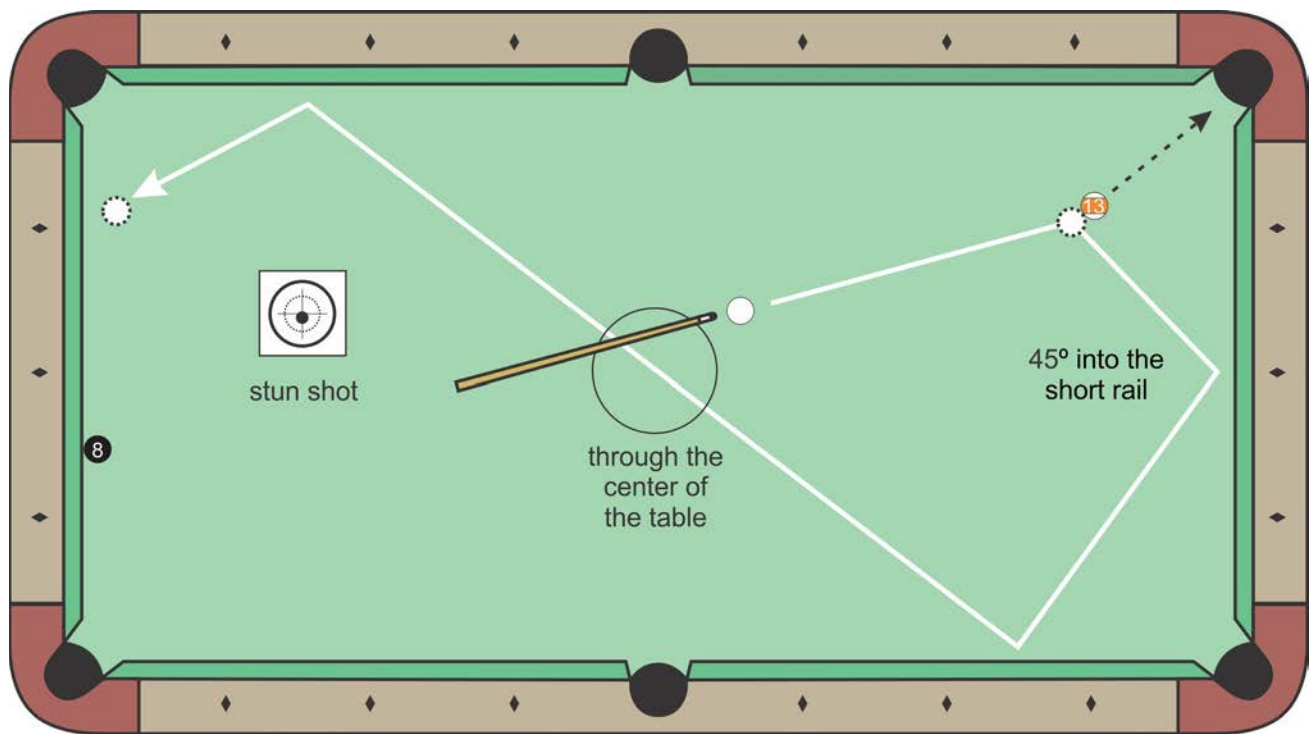


Diagram 3 45° rule

9. Play Smart Shape

Here is some advice related to playing smart shape. First, in general, it is best to play shape for corners instead of sides, unless the side pocket shape is natural and easy. Usually, it is better to play for long-side shape when possible. **Diagram 4** shows a useful CB control principle for rail cut shots. With the right amount of outside draw, it is always possible to bring the CB back along the line of the shot. Again online video [NV J.46](#) shows good examples of this. Another useful piece of position-play advice is to stay off the cushions. Also make sure you leave CB position that are easily reachable. With smart position play, you should not need to over-stretch for any shot.

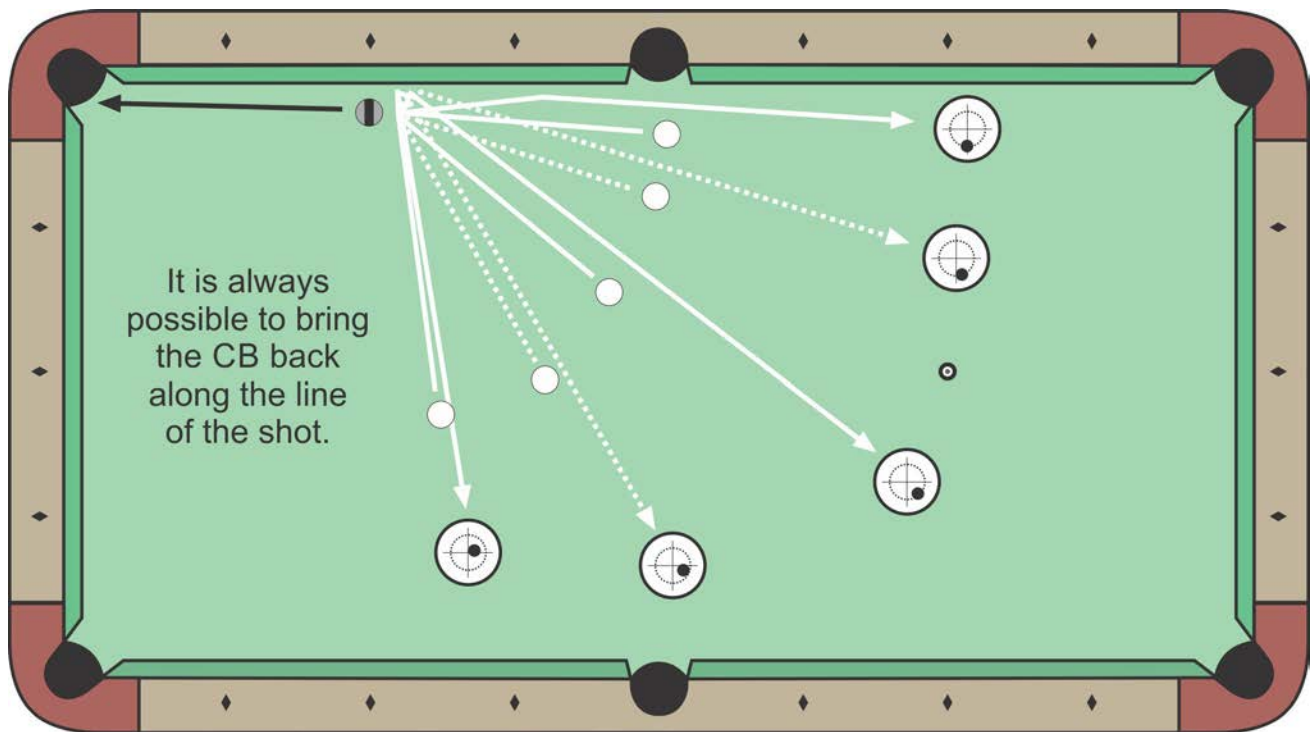


Diagram 4 Bringing the CB back along the shot line

10. Master Position Off Hangers

Playing reliable position off a pocket hanger, where the object ball (OB) is in the jaws of the pocket, is a very important skill. I have an entire video dedicated to this topic (online video [NV J.28](#)), but I'll list two useful principles here:

1. When rolling the CB toward a corner pocket along a rail, a $\frac{1}{2}$ -ball hit sends the CB leaving along a diagonal toward the opposite side pocket.
2. When coming toward a corner pocket along a diagonal, a rolling $\frac{1}{2}$ -ball hit sends the CB leaving along the rail.

Again, online videos [NV J.28](#) and [NV J.46](#) provide good examples.

I hope all the advice in this article and online videos helps you be more aware of and effective with pattern play principles. Just be aware that depending on your ability level, the options I discuss and demonstrate might not always be the best choices for you. The only way to know for sure is to practice various options on a real table. If you want to learn more and see countless game-situation examples, see Volume IV of the [Video Encyclopedia of Pool Shots \(VEPS\)](#). And if you want to learn specific advice and strategy dealing with 9-ball and 10-ball, see the [Video Encyclopedia of Nine-ball and Ten-ball \(VENT\)](#). And for specific advice and strategy dealing with 8-ball, see the [Video Encyclopedia of Eight-Ball \(VEEB\)](#). They are linked along with other useful resources in the YouTube video description of online video [NV J.28](#).

Good luck with your game from Dr. Dave.



[NV J.28](#) – POCKET HANGERS ... Everything You Need to Know
[NV J.46](#) – Top 10 PATTERN PLAY Principles and Techniques

PS:

- I know other authors and I tend to use lots of terminology, and I know not all readers are totally familiar with these terms. If you ever come across a word or phrase you do not fully understand, please refer to the [online glossary](#) at billiards.colostate.edu.

Dr. Dave is a PBIA Advanced Instructor, Dean of the Billiard University, and author of the book: [The Illustrated Principles of Pool and Billiards](#) and numerous instructional DVD series, all available at: DrDaveBilliards.com.