How to Punt a Soccer Ball:
A Basic Skill of Goalkeeper Distribution

Learn the fundamentals of punting in 15 minutes

Easy step-by-step instructions

Text by Ann Gleason
Photos by C. Gilman
In soccer, the goalkeeper, (also goalie or keeper), is responsible for defending their team's goal. This is accomplished when a goalie makes a save, or prevents the ball from entering the goal. After the save, the goalkeeper is responsible for getting the ball back into play. Since a goalkeeper is allowed to handle the ball in their own 18-yard box, a variety of methods exist to get the ball to their team.

Once the goalkeeper has made a save and gained full possession of the ball, they have 6 seconds to release it from their hands, or distribute the ball. Distribution can be accomplished by hand with a throw, by feet with a kick, or using a punt. When the keeper releases the ball from their hands and their foot makes contact with the ball before it hits the ground, the distribution used is called a punt.

The punt is arguably the most common form of distribution used by goalkeepers. If done well, it can be a dangerous weapon for a team to maintain possession and gain good field position. Thus, learning how to punt is a vital skill for any goalkeeper.

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**Soccer Ball Sizes:**

Youth players ages 8-12 use a ball 25-26 inches in diameter called a size 4. All players greater in age use a size 5 ball with a 27-28 inch diameter.

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The Punt

The Necessities

Few items are required when learning to punt. Primarily, you will need:

- A soccer ball
- Athletic shoes
  (Note: soccer cleats are recommended outside for better performance and traction)
- A soccer field or soccer net

Mastering the punt may seem overwhelming, but the technique can be broken down into six main steps:

1. The Approach
2. The Ball Drop
3. The Plant Foot
4. The Forward Swing
5. The Foot to Ball Connection
6. The Follow Through

While learning the basic steps and techniques of punting will only take 15 minutes, refinement is achieved through continued practice. More accurate and consistent punts will not only help the team, but increase a goalkeeper’s confidence.

**Caution:**
Prior to completing these steps to punting, proper warm-up and stretching is suggested.
Step 1: The Approach

Before a punt can begin, the goalkeeper must have clear possession of the ball. Upon achievement, the first step to a punt, or the approach, can begin. This approach is necessary to properly establish momentum going into the kick and to align the body correctly.

To complete a basic 3-step approach, first step forward with your right foot. Hold the ball in both hands around waist height. Step forward with your left foot about two feet. Shift the ball to your right hand. Then, step forward about three feet with your right foot. Lean your upper body forward and extend your right arm down toward the ground. The ball should be resting in the upwards facing palm of the right hand at knee height.

After practice, these steps should become fast and fluid. This approach creates the forward momentum your body needs to power your kick. As a beginner, it is okay to go through this approach slowly at first. But know your punts may not travel far until you speed up this step.

Where should I start my punt from?

For beginners, the objective should be to aim the punt straight down the center of the soccer field. To ensure you don’t exit the box during your punt, you need to start far enough back in the box so you can complete the entire punt. While each goalkeeper has a different total length to their punt, start roughly ten yards out from the goal, or right before the penalty mark to begin. You can start further up in the box if after practice you determine you don’t need this entire distance.

Note: It is important to note these instructions will detail a punt for a right footed kick. Use these same steps to achieve a left footed kick by replacing right with left, and vice-versa.

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Step 2: The Ball Drop

After the kick approach has been made, the **ball drop** must occur to allow contact with the kicking foot. A good drop will make striking the ball easier.

This drop will require a few steps that need to occur simultaneously. Your left foot will leave the ground and begin its next step forward. The right arm will be fully extended down, almost perpendicular to the ground. The ball rests on the fingertips facing upwards. Additionally, your weight is still forward over the ball and your head and the ball are on the same vertical plane.

Once the above body mechanics are completed, the ball can be released from your hand. Remove your right hand from underneath the ball by a quick lateral movement to the right. The ball should fall or roll off the hand toward the ground. Note the forward path the ball takes upon release is due to the forward momentum established in the approach.

**Why do some goalkeepers drop the ball differently?**

Some right footed goalkeepers might be seen dropping the ball with both hands or the left hand. While a two-handed drop may be easier to control, it causes the goalkeeper to lose some balance and momentum gained from a free arm. The timing is more difficult to establish for a left-handed drop. Because the ball is dropped across the body, the motion required to complete the kick is not natural. Here, we will use the same drop hand as the kicking foot.
When the ball drop occurs, the left foot is already in motion forward. This foot is called the **plant foot** when it contacts the ground. This planted foot will stay firmly planted and anchors the body to the ground for the resulting kick.

To provide your body with ample support for the kick, finish your large forward step with the left foot. The heel should contact the ground slightly before the rest of the foot. The angle of your left foot will determine the path your right leg will take when swinging forward. Thus, if you are aiming to kick the ball straight down the field, your foot should also point straight down the field.

**Note:** The left foot should be planted just slightly behind the path of the ball, shown in red at left. Additionally, it should be less than a hip distance away from the ball, or approximately a foot to the side of the ball.

The beginning of the plant foot is seen in the corresponding picture. Additionally, the positioning of the rest of the body should be noted. Your body weight should be shifted back and your torso is more upright. Furthermore, your right leg should be fully outstretched backwards, but with a slight bend in the knee. This can be thought of as the “wind-up” portion of the kick. The power in the kick will be achieved from the forward swing of this leg. Lastly, the left arm is swinging backward and providing an additional source of balance and momentum for the goalkeeper.
Step 4: The Forward Swing

Swinging the kick foot forward to make contact with the ball will provide the power for the punt. The **forward swing** is accomplished after the left foot is securely planted, and the right leg starts its path forward towards the ball.

For a strong forward swing, start your kicking leg in a forward path to the ball. Your right leg should be bent at the knee. Power will come from snapping this knee forward, in addition to the power from the hips from the leg swing itself. Additionally, this bend also prevents the right foot from hitting the ground while travelling forward. During this swing, shift your body weight backward. Leaning back allows your foot to contact under the ball and give the ball the upward trajectory desired from your punt.

Both of these items are seen in the picture at left. The body now has a slight backward lean compared to the upright posture seen in Step 3. It is important to note the leg should swing directly forward and not veer right or left. If not on a straight path, the foot may not be able to make solid contact with the ball in the following step.

**What should the trajectory of my punt look like?**

The path your ball travels should be high enough to clear any players, but not so vertical that it does not travel very far. These high kicks will also be unpredictable on windy days, so balls that are more driven are preferred.

This rather than this.
Step 5: The Foot to Ball Connection

Once the forward swing of the kicking foot has begun, the next step is for the foot to make contact with the ball. The **foot to ball connection** occurs once the forward arc of the leg swing intersects the path of the dropped ball. Many actions must occur simultaneously to achieve a good strike of the ball. We will call this the “**PLC**.”

**Point** the toes of your kicking foot. This creates the surface area for the foot to contact the ball.

**Lock** the kicking foot ankle. Locking the ankle means you tighten all of muscles in that leg below the knee. The ankle is held in that position regardless of how the rest of the leg moves. This is necessary as an unlocked ankle will not provide a solid force behind the ball and could result in injury.

**Contact** the center of the ball, slightly under the ball with the “laces” of the shoe. Any contact other than this will lose power behind the ball or cause unwanted spin on the ball.

The “laces” of the shoe. This is the top of the kicking foot and the surface of the foot that should contact the ball.
Step 6: The Follow Through

After contact with the ball has been made, the punt might seem completed. But this thought is incorrect. To cause the ball to travel further distances, momentum was established during the approach. This momentum must be continued after the ball has been struck, and is known as the follow through.

To follow through after the ball is struck, allow yourself to leave both feet and enter the air. The forward motion of the kicking leg should be great enough to propel you off the ground. To ensure your weight has followed through the entire kick, land on your kicking foot.

At the end of the kick, your head should not be up watching the path of the ball. Your eyes should never leave the ball for the entire kick. Now, the punt has been completed and the ball is successfully back into play.

Can I step outside the box during the punt?
It is ok to land outside the box after you have completed your punt, as long as the ball left your hands before you crossed the line. If you cross the line but are still holding the ball, you will be called for a handball. Then, a foul is awarded to the opposing team.
**Problem:** The ball has sideways rotation when it leaves my foot. It veers sharply to either the right or left.

**Solution:** Make sure you are striking the ball on the center of your foot.

As mentioned in Step 5: The Foot to Ball Connection, the part of your foot that contacts the ball is key for any straight kick. A kick veering to the right with clockwise spin likely indicates you are striking the ball too far on the right side of your foot, or striking the left side of the ball. Likewise, a ball sharply careening to the left is probably hit too far to the inside or left of the foot, or on the right side of the ball. Practice striking the ball on the center or “laces” of your foot to eliminate this sideways ball spin.

**Problem:** My punt is not straight down the field but the spin on the ball looks correct.

**Solution:** Check where your plant foot is pointing. The plant foot needs to point in the path you want the ball to travel as discussed in Step 3: The Plant Foot. Additionally, check your hips are square to the direction you want the ball to travel. A good judge of this is evaluating where you are facing when the punt is finished. You should be facing the path the ball just traveled.

**Problem:** I am having difficulty making solid contact with the ball.

**Solution:** Try altering when you drop the ball. Dropping it early or late may result in the ball hitting off your shin or the ground. Each goalkeeper must establish their own rhythm of when to drop the ball. There is no exact timing that applies to everyone so practice and experimentation is needed to find the perfect time. Be sure you are not throwing the ball up in the air either. Simply let the ball roll off your hand.

Also, verify your eyes are not leaving the ball at any time during the kick. Any distractions where you may lose focus on the ball could cause a poor punt.
Beginning punters may want to start learning and practicing punting by kicking the ball into the back of a soccer net. Follow the same steps for punting, but rather than facing up-field, turn 180-degrees and kick into the goal instead. This way, beginners can get more repetitions in without having to chase the ball all over the field. This allows the punter to focus on the mechanics versus the distance or accuracy of the punts.

Once you feel comfortable with the basic technique, you can begin practicing on a larger scale. Try to have a few balls for practicing if possible or someone willing to chase after the balls for you.

One drill you can use to practice your punting accuracy and distance is a target game. Set up the three grids shown at right on the soccer field. Punt as you would in a game from the 18-yard box. Punt ten balls and aim for the targets you have set up on the field. To get the points for any grid, the punt must land in that grid on the first bounce (it cannot roll there). Also, it is okay if the ball bounces in the grid but then out. Sum your points after ten punts and repeat again aiming for a higher score. This drill can also be used with multiple goalkeepers. They can compete against each other for ten punts to see who gets the greatest score. After your accuracy improves with practice, make the grids smaller on the field for a greater challenge.

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Winner!
For additional information on punting, visit the following websites:

http://www.elitesoccerconditioning.com/Keepers/steptopunting.htm
http://www.livestrong.com/article/85356-punt-soccer-ball/
http://www.mastersoccer.net/content/soccer-skills/how-to-punt-a-soccer-ball