

How to Throw a Boule

There are technically no right or wrong ways to throw a boule (provided you don't break any rules in doing so), and so you will see experienced players use a wide variety of techniques and playing styles which have evolved over the years (and some bad habits too no doubt). There are, however, a few techniques which you can use to improve your chances of success.

Stance

Before you even pick up a boule you should practice the way you stand. A variety of stances are used in Petanque and there is no right or wrong way. You will notice some players play standing upright, some are bent forward at the waist, some have their knees bent slightly in a semi-crouch and some players play from a squatting position. How you play will depend predominantly on what feels most natural and comfortable to you. That being said there are two fundamental elements which you need to be sure of:

- Both feet must touch the ground inside the confines of the circle at all times while the boule is in the air. Your stance should be comfortably 'grounded'.
- You must have good balance to ensure your throw is not influenced by any adverse body movements. A common fault is when throwing a long shot, in order to maintain balance, that one foot takes a step forward, or some will leap. Not only are the chances of throwing a straight shot vastly reduced, but your foot may leave the circle which is not allowed.

The key is in the position of the feet and the distribution of your body weight. Commonly players will either stand square, with feet placed slightly less than shoulder width apart (not touching the edge of the circle). If you feel you are likely to lose balance forward, you may want to place your leading foot (i.e. your right foot if you throw with your right hand) slightly in front of your other foot. This adds stability and prevents the urge to step forward mid-throw, but beware, it can introduce a 'twist' in your body as you throw.

Grip

In almost all situations in Petanque it is desirable to generate some back spin on the thrown boule. This gives you control over how far your boule rolls after it has struck the ground and also aids the boule to travel in the correct direction. Many novice players are tempted to roll their boules as if they were playing grass bowls. It is almost impossible to impart back spin using this throwing action and should be avoided as it will inhibit your chances of success substantially.

To impart back spin on the boule we have to be able to throw with what feels at first a very unnatural, 'underhand' technique. Much like a golfer's swing this technique requires practice to build muscle memory so it becomes second nature.

First, hold out your playing hand (generally the hand you write with) with the palm facing up the way, fingers extended but touching each other (as if you were begging for money!). Rest the boule on your palm and curl your fingers around the boule (imagine your hand is a suction cup). The fingers should touch each other gently. Your thumb should generally rest gently to the side, if the thumb is in strong contact with the boule it can cause problems with throwing straight.

Now that the boule is comfortably cupped in your playing hand, rotate your hand so your knuckles point directly upwards and the boule 'hangs' from your hand. The boule should remain comfortably nestled in the suction cup. If you find that you have to grip hard to avoid dropping the boule your boules may be too big or heavy and you should consider using smaller or lighter boules. If the fingers extend well beyond half way around the boule you may wish to consider larger boules as you may have problems releasing the boule effectively. There should be no strain or tension in the hand at all.

Swing

Now that the boule is securely cupped in your hand, with the knuckles facing up the way, rotate your arm backwards about your shoulder joint and swing it forward and back like a pendulum. Don't release the boule at this stage, this is purely designed to get your body used to the pendulum action. Again make sure that throughout the swing you are comfortably cupping the boule in your hand. Avoid twisting your hand during the back and forward swings as this will impart side-spin. Deliberate side spin is an advanced technique and at this stage we just want to concentrate on throwing the boule straight.

As you swing your arm forward far enough you will feel the urge to release the boule from your hand, so let it emerge from your hand down the terrain. The forward motion of the boule as it rolls along your fingers will impart natural back spin on the boule. Try and concentrate on releasing the boule in the same plane as the backswing (i.e. try to avoid throwing across your body as this will cause your boule to travel in the wrong direction)

You will need to practice this often. It is the cornerstone of all shots you play in Petanque. You can experiment releasing the boule at different heights to see what it does to your shot. Lower trajectory shots will roll more, higher trajectory shots roll less and stop quicker. You can experiment with the length of the back swing, a long backswing will create greater forward momentum and your shot will carry further, a short backswing will have less carry. By combining different trajectories and backswings you will soon discover how to control the distance your boule flies and how quickly it stops. This is key to controlled play.