

Batting basics; this is taken from a compilation of professional hitting instructors and online write-ups / videos. Note that minor variations to this are ok and batters often have their unique stance, to an extent. But some major variations will cause problems with the swing.

The basics to the batting stance:

- Feet
- Knees
- Hips
- Hands

Feet:

- A bit more than shoulder width. Same as if getting ready to field a grounder; want a good athletic stance.
- Toes pointing toward home plate.
- Proper distance from home plate should allow for the barrel of the bat to cover inside and outside pitches over the plate. This is usually having feet close to, but not directly on, the batters box line by home plate.
- Weight is more on the balls of feet (vs. heels).
- Feet should be pretty even vs. a very open or closed stance, where one foot is farther away from the plate than the other.

Knees: Slightly bent, again; athletic stance, same as if getting ready to field a grounder.

Hips: Facing home plate; slight bend forward in the waste, not bending backwards.

Hands:

- Hands are holding the bat near chest level (at the top of the strike zone), not a lot lower, and not above chin level. A grip too low can encourage an exaggerated upper-cut swing. A grip too high and it's hard to get a level swing through the strike zone, unless the batter drops their hands right as the pitch is thrown.
- Hands are together (touching).
- When gripping the bat, focus on keeping the handle in the pads of the fingers and not gripping the bat too tight. A relaxed and loose grip will allow for full extension and maximum bat speed.
- Grip fingers, then thumb, which will allow to align the "door-knocking knuckles" (the 2nd set of knuckles). This will encourage the wrists to be "cocked" or bent in (vs. being bent out, which would hinder the swing).
- The hands / wrists should be higher than both the front and back elbows. Otherwise, it will hinder a level swing through the strike zone. Think of the hands as the top of the triangle and the elbows as the bottom of the triangle in the stance.

Overall Stance:

- Start in a relaxed, balanced stance with weight on both legs.
- Shoulders should be fairly level or this can hinder a level swing through the strike zone.
- Hips facing the plate.
- Head and both eyes looking at the pitcher / ball coming in. Only having one eye on the ball instead of two is bad for depth-perception!
- Bat is hovering over the back shoulder (not resting on the shoulder), at about a 45 degree angle, with the bat barrel higher than the hands. Don't hold like a flag-pole and holding the bat flat (barrel is level with hands) is also not good.

- Elbows should be bent enough so that the hands are around six inches from the body. If elbows aren't bent much and hands are a lot further out, this will encourage the batter to extend arms before contact, which is bad.

The swing:

- Head still, both eyes on the ball, look at ball up to contact and even a split second after contact; don't move head early. It sounds obvious "two eyes on the ball" but this is a common problem, including looking away too soon.
- Initial lead with the front elbow and hands to where the ball is going in the strike zone.
- Bat going straight toward ball and not dropping hands before starting the swing. Elbows bent until contact, then extend arms. The bat hitting the ball should be more like a hammer than a golf club.
- Trying to swing fairly level through the strike zone, then finish coming up, so can complete a full swing and not worry about hitting themselves in the back or abruptly stopping the swing.
- Beginning of swing; looking over front shoulder. End of swing; looking over the other shoulder, watching the line drive hit go through the defense. Hips should be facing the pitcher at the end of the swing.
- Some "load" is good, weight and bat shift back slightly as the pitch is being delivered, to get a bit more power, before going forward with the swing. Too much load can cause problems, especially with younger / inexperienced batters; it can throw off balance and greatly increase the distance from bat to ball. The batter shouldn't be "wrapping" the bat behind their helmet.
- Weight generally balanced on both legs, batter should not be leaning forward/lunging at the ball. Batter should not pick up the back foot (common problem). Batter should not be doing a Cinderella spin (common 8U problem). Center of gravity should remain head down to belly through the swing.
- The front foot; can take a small, "baby-step" toward the pitcher. This helps get the momentum going toward where the ball will be hit and helps encourage full use of legs and core in the swing. Having said that, a front step is not critical to a good swing. Any front step should be subtle and not a big "stepping into a bucket" motion.
- The back foot can do a subtle "squish the bug" move, where the front half of the back foot stays on the ground but the foot does a slight turn, no more than 90 degrees, toward the pitcher/ball. This also helps encourage full use of legs and core in the swing, so not just their arms. But too big of a turn with the back foot can lead to problems with balance or encourage the head to move.
- The batter should stay balanced and upright through the swing with some knee bend but not too much, especially with the front leg. Too much knee bend (e.g. back knee near the ground) will reduce power in the swing and generally make it harder to hit the ball.

The strike zone: Generally, this is a 3-D cube, over home plate, from knees to chest. If the ball passes inside any part of this cube, that is a strike (of course each umpire has their own idea of a strike zone).

Common things that throw off the swing for younger/inexperienced batters and how to fix:

- **Problem: Exaggerated step with the front foot**, where the step is too big, or batter is stepping toward the plate vs. toward the pitcher, or the batter has a "high knee-stepping into a bucket" routine.
 - Fix: Can lay out a small towel or something similar. Tell the batter not to step on the towel. They then practice their step and swing. If the batter is stepping into the plate, lay the towel between their feet and the plate. If they are stepping too far out, put the towel 1-2 feet out from their front foot.
- **Problem: Batter is extending arms too early**, before contact, making it harder to adjust to the ball and near impossible to hit an inside fastball.
 - Fix #1: Set a ball on a tee. Have the batter get in their stance with their front elbow in front of the ball. Then they move toward the ball, leading with front elbow and knock the ball off the

- tee with the front elbow. This gets them more used to keeping the arms bent longer and the initial lead with the front elbow and wrists toward the ball.
- Fix #2: Put the batter near a fence, about a bat length away. Have them practice their swing; first at 2/3 speed, then work up to full speed. If they extend too early, they will hit the fence with their bat. Focus on keeping arms bent up to contact and turning the hips.
 - Fix #3: Have the batter squeeze something small in their back arm pit (a balled up sock or a tennis ball) while in their stance. They need to keep squeezing for a split second after they start their swing. This will make them keep their elbows bent longer.
 - Fix #4: Have batter hit off a tee but not a full swing; have them slide their top hand a few inches, up to the top of the bat grip. They will focus on leading with the end of the bat and front elbow, turn their hips, and hit the ball with the barrel of the bat squarely, with elbows still bent, then stop in that position.
 - **Problem: Exaggerated uppercut swing** (causes can include too long of a stride, hands too low, or back elbow being too high, thus over-compensating):
 - Fix #1: Two-tee drill; the first tee in the line of fire is set lower, with the idea that the batter has to swing high enough to not hit this tee. The second tee with the target ball is set higher. This forces the batter to reduce the uppercut swing. Can start at 2/3 speed and work to full speed.
 - Fix #2: Set up a target in front of the batter at waist level. They need to drive the ball with a fairly level swing to have any chance to hit the target.
 - **Problem: Bat is way too light/short or too heavy.** The latter is a bigger problem and will hinder the batter's swing.
 - Fix: The bat should be the biggest, heaviest bat that the batter can still swing fast / easily. A typical 8u player will want a bat size of 25"-28". A typical 18U player will want 31"-33".
 - **Problem: Swinging too early or too late.**
 - Fix: For 8u players, it could be yelling "swing" during live pitching, to help them learn the timing. For older players, soft toss drills are good to help with timing. It also depends on the speed of the pitcher, as to when to start the swing.
 - **Other various problems**, including chopping down at the ball, lunging forward, etc.
 - Fix #1: Work on hitting off the tee. Since the ball isn't moving, the main focus is working on form. Good, balanced stance and swing, keeping head still. Encourage the batter to swing at live pitching with the same form as they use for the batting tee. As a variation, can practice with the tee but with no ball or even no bat in their hand.
 - Fix #2: With the batter at the tee in the proper stance, grab the barrel of their bat with two hands and guide them through the proper swing in slow motion a few times, including hip turn and going straight to the ball vs. dropping their hands.

The following videos are each about 4 minutes (these are just a few good videos out of 100s):

The stance: <https://monkeysee.com/softball-batting-skills-stance/>

Stance and swing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HFXIONfyjek>

The swing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3NL2Fd797I>

Soft toss drill: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leDfLWdAZQk>

Additional video that covers everything (about 7 minutes):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2S_uh20nvc