

How to Hit a Tennis Serve



Figure 1 Novak Djokovic serving. www.zimbio.com

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Introduction

The serve is the most important shot in tennis, starting the point and giving control to the server. Whereas any other shot will be affected by the shot of your opponent, you as the server hold full control over your motion from the toss to the swing. This allows you to make decisions about your strategy and start off the point on the right foot.

Most serves fall into one of **three categories**: topspin, flat, and slice.

- The **topspin** serve creates forward rotation on the ball, allowing it to bounce higher and arc more over the net. Because of the arc, the topspin serve creates a larger margin of error, making it the most consistent serve.
- The **flat** serve creates little to no rotation on the ball, forcing the ball to travel in a straight line into the court. This reduces the margin for error, but allows the server to generate high speeds on the serve.
- The **slice** serve creates sideways rotation on the ball, making the ball bounce away from the returner. This serve has a higher level of difficulty than the topspin and flat serves, so most players only attempt it once becoming proficient in the other two categories.

This guide will outline and explain the steps for hitting a successful **topspin serve**. The topspin serve generally comes easiest to beginning players due to the large margin of error. Much of the motion remains the same for flat and slice serves, so learning the topspin process allows a player to easily transition to the other serves.

Note:

This guide will provide instructions for a RIGHT-HANDED player. For left-handed players, most of the information will still apply, but the “right” and “left” terms will be reversed.

Materials:

- Tennis ball(s)
- Tennis racquet
- Tennis court and net

Steps for a Topspin Serve

Step 1: Gripping the racquet

Hold the racquet in your right hand in a Continental grip (index finger knuckle on short corner of grip. See Figure 2). The edge of the racquet should be facing you.

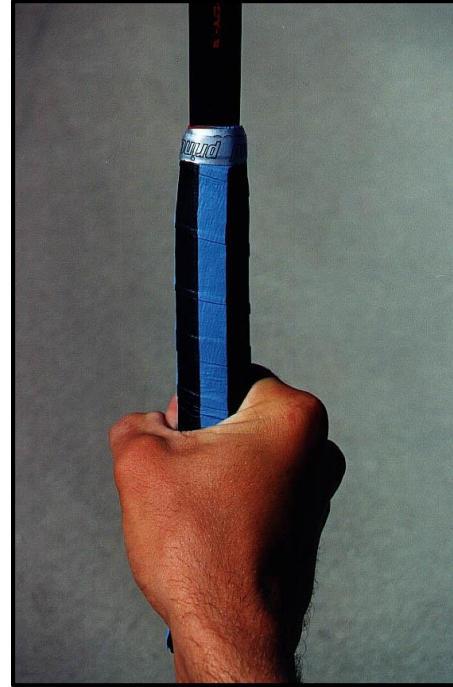


Figure 2 Continental Grip. www.tennisserver.com

Step 2: Positioning yourself on the court

- **In singles:** Stand near the center-line of the court, behind the baseline.
- **In doubles:** Stand near the alley, behind the baseline.
- **Note:** Be sure to stand **behind the baseline**, not on it, as standing on the line results in a “fault” and loses you the service point.

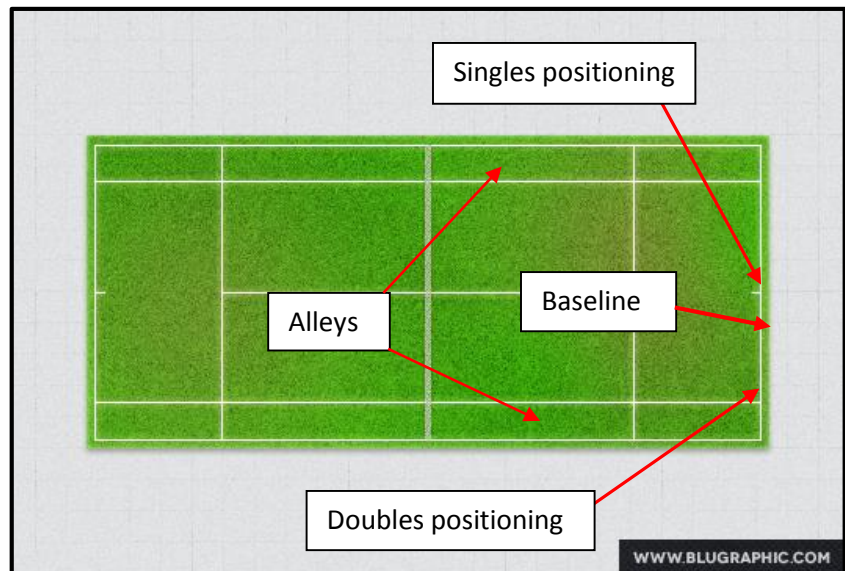


Figure 3- Tennis court and positioning. www.blugraphic.com

Step 3: Performing the Backswing and Toss

- Start with the racquet in front of you at waist level, with the ball in your left hand right next to the racquet. (Figure 4)
- Toss the ball up, slightly in front of you and centered to your torso, moving your left arm straight up in the air, and bring the racquet back to your shoulder.

- **CAUTION:** *If you toss the ball too far behind your head, do not attempt to hit it. Simply catch the ball instead. **Bending too far backwards to strike the ball may lead to severe injury**, as your spine will have to curve to reach the ball.*

- **Tip:** *If you are struggling to place your toss in the right spot, try tossing the ball up and catching it without holding your racquet.*



Figure 4- Racquet preparation for backswing. www.optimumtennis.net

Step 4: Holding the “Trophy Pose”

- Move your racquet back behind your body and point your left arm straight up in the air.
- Bend your knees to generate additional power and “load” your weight onto your legs.
- **Tip:** *To practice your serve, you can skip much of Step 3, starting in the “trophy pose” and tossing the ball straight up. Eliminating the backswing will allow you to focus on practicing the toss and the hit.*



Figure 5- "Trophy Pose". www.tenniswarehouse.com

Step 5: Swinging up to the ball

- Swing your racquet up to the ball, swinging from left to right and from bottom to top simultaneously.
- Push off with your legs, adding extra power to the serve by using your whole body.
- **Tip:** Try to “skim” the back of the ball instead of hitting the full body of the ball. This will create more spin on the ball and generate a greater bounce.
- **Tip:** Hit the ball at the highest point you can reach with the racquet.
- **Tip:** Bring your left arm in close to your stomach, keeping it out of the way of your swing. (See Figure 6)



Figure 6- Andy Roddick swinging up to the ball.
www.wordpress.com, Megan Adams.

Step 6: Finishing the swing

- After contacting the ball, bring the racquet down in front of your body, with the tip pointing at the ground.
- **Note:** You can step inside the baseline after making contact with the ball, so do not hesitate to lean forward and step into the court.



Figure 7- Finishing the service motion.
www.usopen.org.

Conclusion

Improving your serve will help you win more matches, and building a consistent topspin serve will help you win as many points on your serve as possible. The serve can seem very complicated and difficult to learn, and it takes a lot of practice to build a reliable motion. Work on each aspect individually (the toss, the backswing, the swing forward, etc) before trying to put the whole motion together.

General Tips for learning the Serve:

- *Ask an experienced player or coach to critique your serve and help you improve.*
- *Ask a friend to videotape your serve, and watch the video to identify strengths and weaknesses.*
- *Limit your practice time based on your muscle condition and physical fitness. The serve motion places large amounts of stress on the shoulders and back, so serving for too long can lead to severe injury.*
- *Watch videos of pros serving or watch matches, noting differences and similarities between your motion and that of the pros. Use these observations to critique your serve and improve.*