How to spike a volleyball: checklist

Approach, arm swing, contact and shot choice on one page. By Ryan Walker

The approach

- **Footwork:** right-handers go right, left, right-left. Left-handers go left, right, left-right. A 3-step approach drops the first step.
- **Rhythm:** slow, faster, fast-fast. Each step is longer and quicker than the last.
- **When to go:** on a high outside set, take the first step when the ball peaks. On faster sets, step as the setter touches it.
- **Plant:** last two steps land heel-first, almost together, hitting shoulder turned slightly away from the net. Both arms swing back, then up.

The arm swing and contact

- **Bow and arrow:** non-hitting arm points at the ball, hitting elbow pulled back high, at or above shoulder height.
- **Swing fast, not hard:** a loose arm moves faster than a tight one. Lead with the elbow, then whip the hand through.
- **Contact:** full reach, slightly in front of the hitting shoulder, open hand, fingers spread.
- **Wrist:** snap over the top of the ball for topspin. Topspin is what brings a hard swing down inside the court.

Which shot? (right-handed outside hitter, zone 4)

Situation	Shot	Aim
Good set, line closed	Cross-court (angle)	Deep zone 5
Good set, angle closed	Line	Deep zone 1
Gap between blockers	Seam	Zone 6
Big block	Tool the outside hand, or roll deep	Off the hands, or zone 5
Set tight to the net	Tip or wipe off the block	Short zones 2-4
Set off the net	Roll shot or high deep swing	Deep zones 1, 5, 6

Common mistakes and quick fixes

Mistake	Usual cause	Fix
Ball into the net	Contact behind the shoulder or too low	Start sooner, contact in front at full reach
Ball sails long	Flat hand, no wrist snap	Palm, not heel; snap over the top
Blocked again and again	Same shot every time, shoulders square	Vary shots; turn late
No power	Tight arm, rushed or short approach	Swing fast and loose; longer last two steps
Under or past the ball	Approach timing	Adjust step 1, not the last two steps

Hitting tracker

Hitting % = (kills - errors) / total attempts. A tip or roll shot counts as an attempt too.

Team: _____ **Opponent:** _____ **Date:** _____

Player	Kills	Errors	Attempts	Hit %	Tips	Best shot / notes

Rough guide for high school and club: .200 is solid for an outside hitter, .300 is excellent. Middles usually hit higher on quick sets.

Coach's tip: an error costs you a point; a kept-in-play roll shot costs nothing.
On a bad set, choose the shot that keeps the rally alive. Use the calculator at playingvolley.com for season totals.