

# A Typology of Tennis Shots

In designing this typology, the most important choice was the basis for groupings. Choosing *the way the ball is struck* had a profound effect on the result. For example, return of serve, a vitally important shot, does not even appear. A typology based on purpose or placement would have been quite different.

Most of the names given below are widely recognized. Other terms are marked with an asterisk (\*).

Note that all of the definitions assume a right-handed player, and the directions of bounces and curves are from the perspective of the player who produced the shot.

# Groundstrokes

Forehands and backhands hit after the ball bounces, but not with an overhead motion.

This category includes several shots often classified as SPECIALTY SHOTS. These are denoted with this marker: (SS).

## Flat - Hit without spin

- Drive -** Hit hard and fairly low.
- Lob -** Hit high and preferably deep.
- Dump (SS) -** Hit very short, usually just tapped over from a contact point above the net.

## Topspin - Hit by brushing up the back of the ball.

- Drive -** Hit hard and relatively low, but has more margin of clearance than flat.
- Lob (SS) -** Compared to flat lob: has a lower trajectory, more difficult to execute, and much more difficult to chase down.
- Buggy Whip (SS) -** A forehand hit with heavy topspin and the follow-through on the same side as the hitting arm. The classic buggy whip was hit from well inside the baseline at an extreme angle, but the term has broadened to apply to all shots hit with this swing path.
- Dipper\* -** hit fairly low, using topspin to make ball land near incoming net attacker's feet.
- Hook -** hit with some sidespin. Primarily used to curve the ball around the net attacker.

## Slice - Commonly synonymous with backspin, hit by brushing down the back of the ball, but see *true slice* below.

- Drive -** hit fairly hard; lower than flat and much lower than topspin.
- Lob (SS) -** used less frequently than flat or topspin; hangs in the air longer than other lobs of equal height.
- Drop Shot (SS) -** hit very short; backspin adds to effective shortness by keeping the ball from bouncing forward.
- Sliced Approach -** hit especially low as the hitter moves toward the net; designed to force the opponent to hit up.
- Chip -** Sometimes synonymous with a sliced approach, but often hit with less forward drive; also used to make ball land softly at incoming net attacker's feet.
- Chop -** A more defensive, downward cut at the ball.
- Squash Shot\* -** A wristy, stretching chop used to retrieve balls otherwise out of reach.
- True Slice\* -** Hit by brushing underneath the ball and sharply left-to-right on backhands or right-to-left on forehands.
- Half Volley (SS) -** Hit just as the ball is coming up from its bounce, usually with a short forward swing that produces natural backspin because the ball brushes up on the string bed

## Serves

*Hit before the ball bounces; used to start each point.*

- Flat** - Hit without spin.
- Topspin** - Hit by brushing up the back of the ball; usually has high trajectory and bounce.
- Twist** - Hit by brushing up and left-to-right; similar to topspin, but curves to the server's left, then kicks right.
- Slice** - Hit by brushing the right side of the ball; curves left in the air and on the bounce.
  
- Reverse Slice** - Very rarely used; hit by brushing the left side of the ball.
- Underhand Sidespin\*** - Rarely used; hit by brushing underneath the ball from right to left; curves and bounces sharply right.
- Reverse Underhand Sidespin\*** - Rarely used; hit by brushing underneath the ball from left to right; curves and bounces sharply left.

## Volleys

*Any shot hit before the ball bounces, but not with an overhead motion.*

- Drop** - Hit very softly, short, and with backspin.
- Stab/High** - Hit with an extreme stretching lunge, without much force. [net-½ SL]
- Drive** - Hit with a long forward swing, usually from farther back in the court. [SL-BL]
- Swinging Topspin** - Hit with a powerful topspin swing, usually from farther back in the court. [SL-BL]

## Overheads

*Any shot (other than a serve) hit with the racquet's long axis close to vertical and the point of contact above the player's head.*

- Smash** - Hit flat the ball over the head
- Backhand** - Hit on the player's backhand side.
- Squat** - Hit at a point of contact too low for full extension at the player's normal height, thus hit in a squatting position.
- Bounced** - Hit after the ball bounces.