

At-Home Introduction to Tactics & Patterns

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Patterns

Every point in tennis can be broken down into some simple patterns that are easy to identify and train.

We will separate them by game situation: patterns when both players are back, patterns when a player is approaching or passing, and patterns off of the serve and return.

Both Back

Take a look at these clips to gain a better understanding of how each pattern works in each phase of play.

- Control the Middle
 - [Offence](#)
 - [Neutral](#)
 - [Defence](#)
- Win the Crosscourt
 - [Offence](#)
 - [Neutral](#)
 - [Defence](#)
- Change Direction
 - [Offence](#)
 - [Neutral](#)
 - [Defence](#)
- Open Up the Court
 - [Offence](#)
 - [Neutral](#)
- Dropshot-Lob
 - [Offence](#)

Note that there can be different versions of each pattern (e.g. attack with power/precision/time; change direction line into cross/cross into line). For simplicity, only one version of each is presented here.

Both Back

There are also some patterns which are a little bit more adaptable – that is, they can be applied with one of the basic patterns from the previous slide.

Watch [this match](#) and see if you can find an example of each pattern (both the ones below and the ones from the previous slide). Write down when they occur and email the times in. If you don't find them all, that's ok too. Maybe that tells you something?

- **Push the Opponent Back**

can be done in Control the Middle, Win the Crosscourt, or Change Direction

- **Wrong-foot the Opponent**

can be done in Control the Middle, Win the Crosscourt, Open Up the Court, or Dropshot-Lob

- **X-Pattern**

is a combination of Open Up the Court & Change Direction

Approaching & Passing

There are 3 main ways to come to the net:

- Approach (you decide before you hit)
 - This is the typical “approach shot”
- Attack & follow (you decide after you hit)
 - This is when you hit an attack, see that it is good, and decide to follow it in
- Attack & sneak (you decide after they hit)
 - This is when you hit an attack, recover, and then see that their ball is high and slow and intercept

There are 4 main ways to pass:

- Play at the feet
- Pass with power
- Pass with precision
- Lob

Homework:

Watch [this match](#) and take notes on the approaching and passing.

1. Try to find a timestamp for each of the ways to approach & pass (7 total).
2. What is the most common way out of the 3 for these players to come to the net?
3. What happens most often after they come in?
4. What type of passing shots are they attempting?
5. Any other observations?

Email your answers in.

Serve & Return

The “both back” patterns can be integrated with the serve and return. One simply chooses a pattern to execute based on whether the serve/return lands in the middle or to the sides. There are only a few options:

Serve (1st & 2nd)

- If the return is middle
 - Control the middle
- If the return is down the line
 - Change direction (go crosscourt)
 - Wrong-foot (go back down the line)
- If the return is crosscourt
 - Win the crosscourt
 - Change direction

Return of 2nd

- If the serve is T
 - Control the middle
- If the serve is wide
 - Win the crosscourt (attack crosscourt)
 - Change direction (attack down the line)

Homework:

Watch [this match](#) and take notes on the serving and returning.

1. Of the returns of 1st serve, what % go a) middle b) crosscourt c) down the line?
2. Of the returns of 2nd serve, what % go a) middle b) crosscourt c) down the line?
3. After a 1st serve, break down what % of the time:
 - a) Serve is not returned
 - b) Server is attacking after the return
 - c) Server is rallying after the return
 - d) Server is defending after the return
4. Do the same for 2nd serves.

Email your answers in.

Tactics

While the distinction between gamestyles is fading away on the pro tours, at the junior level, players can still have clear tendencies, strengths, and weaknesses, and it is important to be able to recognize them in order to formulate a game plan.

The Main Tactics

- Time

- Take time away
 - This is usually someone who likes to take the ball early (on the rise, close to the baseline) or who likes to come to the net
- Buy time
- Change the rhythm

- Space

- Create space (move the opponent)
 - This is usually used by players with good hands/precision, or by players who like to run
- Take space away
 - This is usually done by hitting deep up the middle or by standing closer to the baseline, and is usually used by players who don't like to run, or who want to overpower their opponent

- Shots

- Maximize your strength
 - This is often used by a player with a particularly good shot (e.g. big forehand)
- Exploit the opponent's weakness

How to Play Against the Tactics

Against any tactic, there are 3 options:

1. Execute their tactic better than them
 - For example, if they are trying to move you around, but you think you can do a better job than them, then you can use the same tactic.
2. Execute a contradictory tactic from the same category (time, space, shots)
 - This is when you use a tactic that can neutralize the one your opponent is using.
 - For example, if they are taking time away, you can buy time. If they are moving you around, you can take space away. If they are using their strength, you can try to hit to their weakness.
3. Execute a proactive tactic from another category
 - This is when you use a tactic that will allow you to impose your game and prevent your opponent from executing their tactic.
 - For example, if they are taking time away, you could try to move them or use your strength.
 - If they are moving you, you could try to take time away, to change the rhythm, or to use your strength.

Tactics - Homework

Watch a match of yourself (preferably a difficult one). Identify the main tactics you used. Identify the main tactics your opponent used. Upload your video somewhere online, and email in the following:

1. The link to the video
2. Five timestamps for each tactic that you used
3. Five timestamps for each tactic that your opponent used
4. Knowing what you now know, do you think you should/could have done anything differently tactically?

If you are unsure of what tactic you or your opponent is using, ask yourself **this**: how am I trying to hurt my opponent? Is it through power, through precision, or by targeting a weakness/using a strength? **This should usually give you your answer.**

Tactical Anticipation

Being able to anticipate what an opponent will or will not do is an essential skill for any high level player, as good anticipation can reduce anxiety, increase the effectiveness of your shots, and allow you to construct points.

There are three types of anticipation: geometrical, technical, and tactical. We will only look at the latter in this document.

Anticipation – Key Concepts

Anticipation is being able to predict what will happen **before** the opponent hits the ball.

- **Geometrical** anticipation is predicting based on the opponent's court position and the angles of the court.
- **Technical** anticipation is predicting based on the opponent's grip, stance, preparation, or impact point.
- **Tactical** anticipation is predicting based on the opponent's known tendencies or preferences.

There are also two categories of anticipation:

- **Total** anticipation is knowing exactly what the opponent **will** do.
- **Partial** anticipation is knowing only what the opponent **won't** do.

Factors

There are a few factors you can use to tactically anticipate. They are:

- Shot/stroke
 - E.g. “He always goes down the line when he gets an easy ball to his backhand.”
 - E.g. “She never hits a dropshot on her backhand.”
- Court position
 - E.g. “She never goes down the line when she’s outside the singles line.”
- Game situation
 - E.g. “He always hits drop volleys.”
 - E.g. “She never serves to my forehand.”
- Phase of play
 - E.g. “He always attacks crosscourt.”
 - E.g. “She never counter-attacks.”
- Score
 - E.g. “He always pushes on big points.”
 - E.g. “She always serves wide at 30-all.”

Tactical Anticipation – Homework

1. Watch [this match](#) if you're a girl and [this match](#) if you're a guy. Find one thing you can anticipate (total or partial) for **each** player. Provide at least 3 timestamps for each.

Note: The timestamps should prove your point – for example, if you say that the player never attacks down the line, you should show at least 3 situations where they *could* have hit down the line, but didn't. If you say that the player always hits a drop volley when being passed, you should show at least 3 situations where they could have done something else but chose to drop volley.

2. Watch one of your own matches, and find **two** trends you can anticipate for your **opponent**. Provide at least 3 timestamps for each trend, following the guidelines above.

Charting

While charting is mainly used by coaches, it is a useful skill for a player to have simply because it trains the eye. Learning to chart will teach you to notice more, and this will in turn come in handy when you need to solve problems in competition.

Although the possibilities are endless, we will look at a few different methods of charting.

1. The Aggressive Margin

(developed by Bill Jacobsen)

The Aggressive Margin is a single number given to each player. This number is calculated as follows:

$$(\text{Winners} + \text{Forced Errors}) - \text{Unforced Errors} = \text{Aggressive Margin}$$

The higher the score, the better the tennis. The pros can usually score around +20 for a match. A good junior will be able to score +10 consistently.

To chart the aggressive margin, see the next slide.

At the end of every point, place either a \checkmark (for a winner or forced error) or an X (for an unforced error) in the appropriate column of the appropriate player. For example, if Player 1 hit a good forehand and forced Player 2 to miss, you would put a \checkmark in Player 1's forehand column.

Player 1					Player 2				
Net play	Backhand	Forehand	2 nd Serve	1 st Serve	1 st Serve	2 nd Serve	Forehand	Backhand	Net play

1. The Aggressive Margin - Homework

Watch one of your own matches. Before you start, if you remember the match, take a guess at what your and your opponent's aggressive margins were. Then chart both you and your opponent.

Email in your score as well as the answers to the following questions:

1. What, if anything, surprised you about the scores?
2. What was your best and worst category? Same for your opponent.
3. As a whole (S1 score + S2 score) was your serve an asset or a liability for you?

2. Serve and Return Effectiveness

As we know, approx. 70% of points at most levels of tennis finish in the first 4 shots. It goes without saying, therefore, that being effective off of the 1st and 2nd serve, and their returns, is of utmost importance.

There are usually 3 stats that you will want to measure for both players. They are:

- 1st serve %
- 1st serve points won % (when the 1st serve goes in, what % of points are won)
- 2nd serve points won % (when the 2nd serve goes in, what % of points are won)

Keeping these stats for both players will naturally give you all the information you need for the return.

To compare with the pros, here are their norms:

	WTA	ATP
1 st serve %	61.7%	62.6%
1 st serve points won %	66.6%	73.7%
2 nd serve points won %	53.9%	57.7%

2. Serve and Return Effectiveness - Homework

Watch one of your matches (if possible, a different one) and chart:

1. 1st serve %
2. 1st serve points won %
3. 2nd serve points won %
4. Double faults

for both you and your opponent.

Email in your stats.

3. Situation Effectiveness

This is a generic chart that allows you to measure a player's effectiveness in any chosen situation, as well as break down where any flaws might be. It looks like this:

Situation	Attempted	In	Effective	Won

- Situation: put a \checkmark every time the player is in the situation
- Attempted: put a \checkmark if the player attempts a smart shot when in that situation
- In: put a \checkmark every time the player makes the shot they attempted
- Effective: put a \checkmark every time the player's shot was not just in, but also of the right quality
- Won: put a \checkmark if the player wins the point

3. Situation Effectiveness

Once the data is collected, you can assess where any flaws are:

- If there is a drop off from Sit to Att, then there is a **decision-making** problem.
- If there is a drop off from Att to In, there is a **consistency** problem.
- If there is a drop off from In to Eff, there is a **quality** problem.
- If there is a drop off from Eff to Won, then there is a problem with the **follow-up** shot(s).

3. Situation Effectiveness - Homework

Pick a situation you have been working on with your private coach. Watch one of your matches and chart your effectiveness in that situation. Email in the following:

1. Your stats
2. Which category was the worst (e.g. attempted, in, effective, won)
3. Your assessment of why that category was the worst and what you could do to fix it