



How to throw a boule

some ideas for how to practice

Adopted from the website

<https://petanque.wordpress.com/how-to/ferq-method-1/>

Pétanque exercises for beginners

Two useful web sites about petanque

- The [Winning Petanque](#) web site, especially the *Practice Pointing* and *Practice Shooting* pages. Several of the exercises were inspired by, adapted from, or copied from this web page.
- The [Petanque Training Course](#) (especially Lesson 3) available at the Seattle Petanque Club web site.

Equipment you will need

You should have a bucket of practice boules. You need enough boules so you can throw several boules before having to go retrieve them.

You can make circles the traditional way, by drawing them on the ground. I recommend [making your own inexpensive circles](#) out of plastic tubing.

For the first few exercises you will need a hammer, a few big nails, and some string or cord (like nylon clothes-line). The post on [how to lay out a piste using strings](#) will tell you how to install them.

You want to practice throwing at different distances. Having a [10-meter tape measure](#) isn't absolutely necessary to measure those distances, but it helps. You can always step it out.

Overview of the exercises

The exercises are:

1. the direction, or "Where?"
2. the *donnée*, or "How far?"
3. the lob, or "How high?"
4. pointing to the "front porch"
5. throwing the jack
6. inspecting the terrain
7. putting left and right spin on the ball

(1) Direction, or “Where?”

Take two lengths of string and stretch them out in parallel and about 18” apart so that they form a sort of corridor. The corridor should be about 10 meters (33 feet) long.

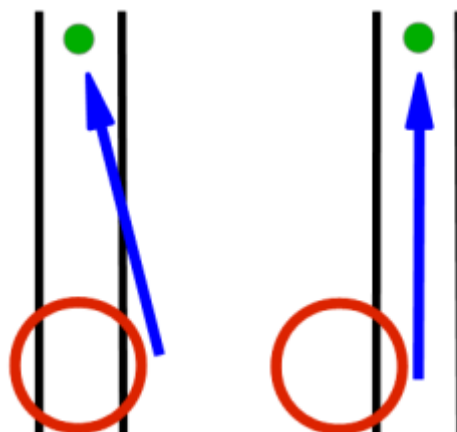
As an optional convenience, place distance indicators outside the corridor at one-meter intervals. The round metal or plastic tops of food containers (pickle jars, cottage-cheese containers, etc.) work nicely as distance indicators.

Place one throwing circle at one end of the corridor, and the other circle at the other end of the corridor. The idea is that you will practice by throwing boules from the first circle down the corridor in one direction, then walk down the corridor, pick up the boules, and throw the boules from the second circle down the corridor in the opposite direction. You move back and forth, from end to end, much as you would in an actual game.

Place two markers across the corridor— one marker 6 meters in front of one circle, and the other marker 6 meters in front of the other circle. A marker should be an easily-visible bar extending across the corridor. For a marker, you can use a piece of wood, a length of clothes line, a strip of old carpet.

Now, stand in the first circle and throw however many practice boules you have. Your goal is to throw each boule straight down the middle of the corridor, so that it lands (strikes the earth) past the 6-meter marker and between the two strings. The place where the boule finally comes to a stop doesn’t matter. What matters is that the boule should hit the ground inside the corridor and beyond the 6-meter marker.

Place the circle so that when you stand in it, your throwing arm is roughly in the middle of the corridor. That way, you can throw your boule in a straight line right down the middle of the corridor. The drawing below (left) shows the wrong way to position the circle. The drawing on the right shows the correct way. The green dots indicate the *donnée* — the place where the boule hits the ground.



As you get used to throwing straight down the corridor, you will learn to position yourself correctly, get your stance right, and swing your arm along a line pointing directly at the boule. By adjusting your back swing, you will be able to land inside the corridor at any distance. In real play, of course, there will be no guide strings and no corridor. But with practice you will be able to see the corridor in your mind's eye, and adjust your position until you feel comfortable.

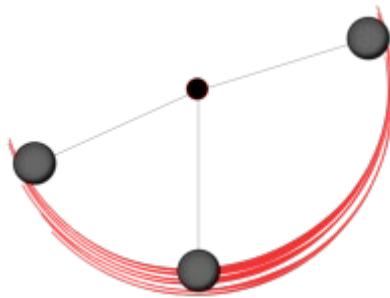
Play (say) twenty boules down the corridor. Give yourself one point for each boule that lands past the wooden marker and between the lines. This means that you must pay attention to where the ball lands. Play back and forth, in both directions.

When you find that 80% or 90% of your throws are successful, move the markers so that they are 7 (rather than 6) meters from their respective throwing circles. And do the practice again. Try it again for distances of 6, 7, 8, and 9 meters.

You will notice that as you move the marker to 7, and then 8, and then 9 meters, things get more difficult.

There are three reasons for this.

The first is that you need to throw this heavy metal ball farther and farther. It takes more effort. Rather than simply trying to muscle your way to greater distance, pay attention to your form and your swing. Try to [turn your arm into a pendulum](#), and make the weight of the boule work for you.



The second is that as your target gets farther away, your throwing has to become more precise because your "viewing angle" actually gets smaller as the distance increases.

The third is that, when you change the distance, the point in your swing when you need to release the ball changes. Immediately after you change the distance, you will find that for a while your body won't know exactly when to release the ball. Some throws will be ludicrously short while others will be wildly long.

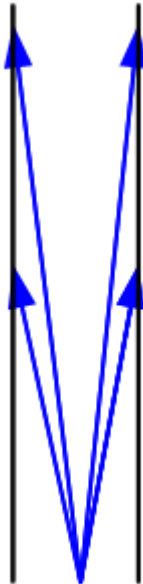
When you find that you can get 80% or 90% of your throws inside the corridor at a distance of 9 meters, it will be time to make the corridor smaller, more narrow. Move one of the strings

closer to its mate by six inches or three inches or whatever seems appropriate to you. Move the markers back to the original 6-meter distance. Go through the practice again at 6, 7, 8, and 9 meters.

The basic idea is that as you practice and get better, the corridor gets narrower and narrower.

A good way to make this practice more challenging, and more realistic, is to move to a different distance for each boule. Throw one boule from 6 meters, the second from 8 meters, the third from 7 meters, the fourth from 9 meters, and so on. Mix it up in any way that you feel like it.

Another way to mix things up is to pay attention to different parts of your form rather. Don't worry about where the boule lands. For (say) six boules, throw and pay attention getting a nice high backswing. Then maybe six more, paying attention to keeping your arm straight during your follow-thru. Then maybe a few while thinking about how your fingers grip the boule, and so on.



(2) The *donnée*, or “How far?”

When you are comfortable that you can make the boule go in roughly the desired direction, you will be ready to move from *direction* to *distance*.

When you point (as opposed to shoot) three things happen. (1) You throw. (2) The ball hits the ground. (3) The ball rolls and finally comes to rest.

For the purpose of this next exercise, we’re going to concentrate on the place where the ball hits the ground. I call it the “landing spot”; the French call it the *donnée* (DUN-ay). For now, we’ll concentrate on hitting the landing spot, and we won’t worry about where the boule ultimately comes to rest.

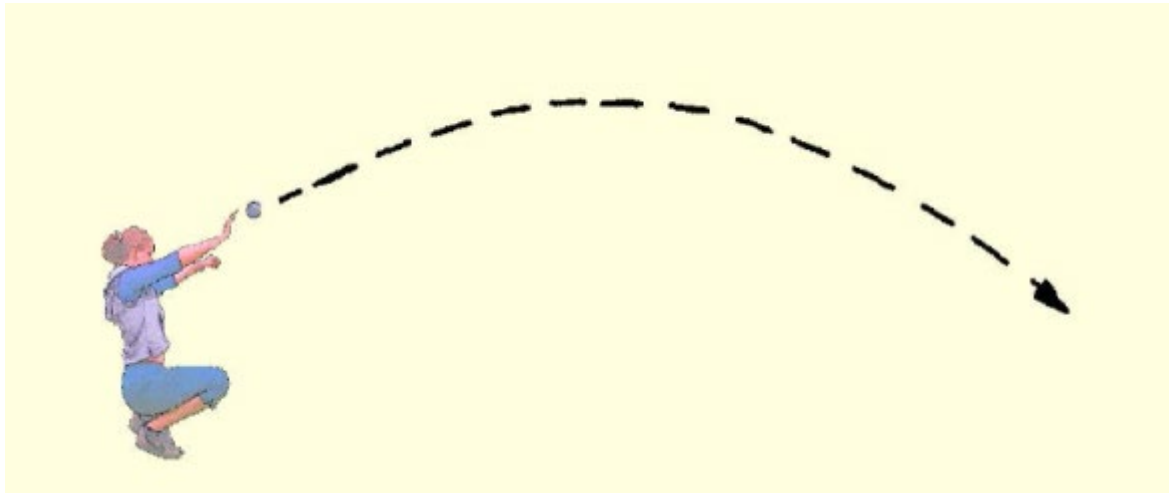
This exercise is the same as the previous one... EXCEPT we will now have **two** markers, a front one and a rear one.

We start as before, with the corridor about 18” wide, and the front marker placed at about 6 meters. Then we add a rear marker about 3 feet behind the front marker. The rear marker should be something that the boules can roll over, like a string or a strip of carpet. Our new goal will be to make the boule land in the box formed by the sides of the corridor and the front and rear markers. For every boule that meets that goal, score 1 point.

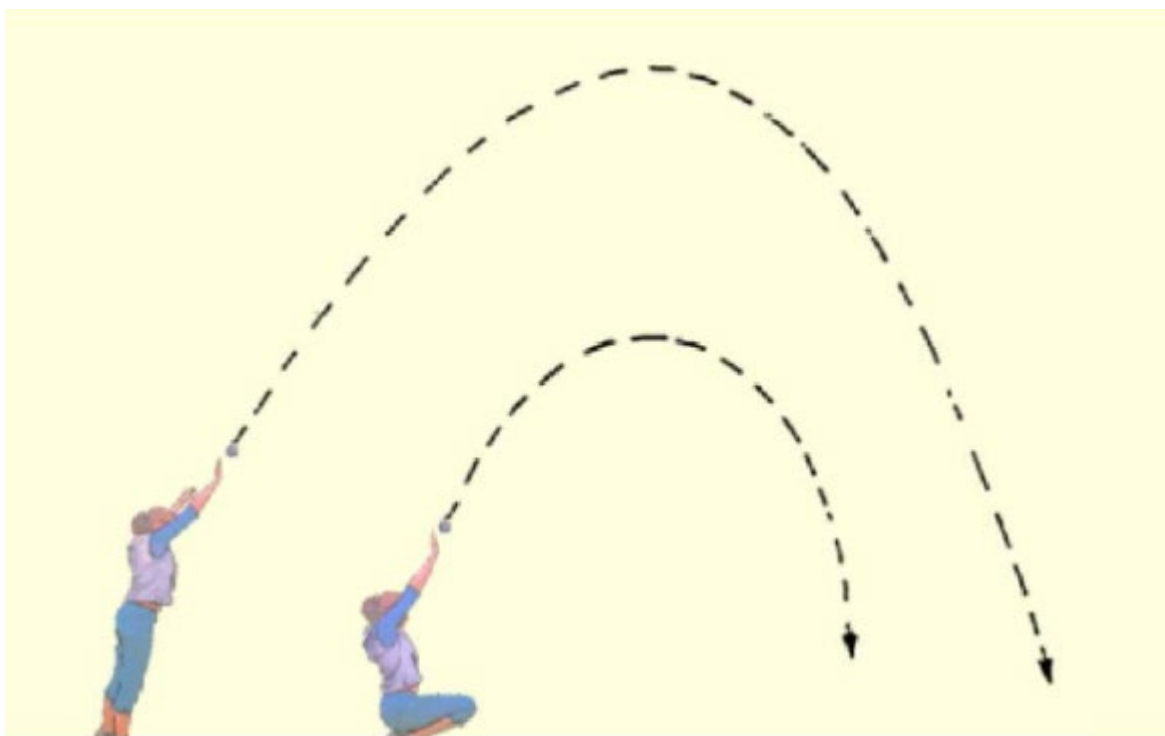
As before, as you get better, reduce the size of the target box— make it narrower, or shorter. As you practice, be patient. Hitting your intended landing spot, your *donnée*, is one of the most difficult goals in pétanque. It takes a lot of practice to get good at it.

3) The lob, or “How high?”

Your bread-and-butter way to throw a boule is the half-lob. You toss the boule in a gentle arc so that it lands about half-way or two-thirds of the way to the jack. After landing, the boule continues to roll until it stops just where you wanted it to. You can throw a half-lob from a standing position, or from a squatting position as in this picture.



One day, in an experiment to discover how the height of the throw affects the distance of the roll-out after the boule hits the ground, I threw a VERY high lob. The boule went almost straight up and came almost straight down. It hit the earth with a solid THUMP... and hardly rolled. It stayed almost exactly where it landed.



Wow! I thought that I had discovered THE perfect pointing throw. But, as I tried to make every pointing throw a high lob, I discovered problems. Accuracy with a high lob is very difficult. Throwing very high lobs is very tiring for even the strongest player. A high lob into soft ground can be a powerful tool, but if a high lob comes down onto hard ground, or onto a stone, the boule's behaviour is completely unpredictable. It can bounce any distance in any direction.

The French word for a lob is *portée*. A lob that is so high that it comes straight down is a *plombée*, it drops like lead. My conclusion is that there are not many times when it is a good idea to try to throw a *plombée*. A useful high lob is less extreme. It is more like a demi-lob, but just a little higher and a little farther. It lands perhaps a meter in front of the jack and then rolls close. Unlike with a *plombée*, the thrown boule has a little OUT as well as UP, and that keeps it moving in the right direction (forward) after it hits the ground.

So here we will practice **the lob**.

The basic way to learn to lob is to practice throwing at a target *donnée* **over** some kind of obstacle, so that you are forced to throw *high* to clear the obstacle. You can use almost anything as your target. A throwing circle or an old wash-cloth will work.

For your obstacle, don't use something that you'll regret hitting with a boule. Go to the hardware store and buy a 6-foot length of PVC pipe. That will cost only a few Euros. Set up your PVC pipe so that it lies across your practice area, roughly half way between your throwing circle and your target area. You can lay it across just about anything... the backs of two lawn chairs will work.

This picture shows the basic setup of PVC pipe across the practice area. But you don't need anything this elaborate.



Once you've got your obstacle set up, practice throwing boules as close to the target as you can, while clearing the top of the barrier. As with the earlier exercises, once you start having a reasonable degree of success, vary the distance between the circle and the target.

To increase the height of your lob, you can raise your obstacle/bar, or move the obstacle closer to the target.

(4) The front porch, or “Form and backspin”

The old pétanque adage is *boule devant; boule d’argent...* “a ball in front is a money ball”, a blocking boule is golden.

When you are pointing, the ideal place for your boule is 6 inches directly in front of the jack. A little farther away, or a little to the left or right, still creates a problem for the opposing team.

To set up this exercise, position the jack. Then draw a semi-circle in front of the jack, so the semi-circle forms a sort of “front porch” that looks like a capital “D”,

with the jack in the middle of the straight side and the rounded side facing the throwing circle. Needless to say, the semi-circle should have a radius of about 12 inches (or a little more, the first time you try this exercise).

Practice pointing into the D. You can score the session by scoring 1 point for any boule inside or touching the D, but no points for any boule outside the D... even if they are only two inches behind the jack.

In the picture, the two boules behind the D score zero points. Only the boule inside the D scores. This exercise is taken from [Winning Petanque](#), Practice Pointing, #4.



(5) throwing the jack



Throwing the cochonnet is very important. It should be thrown like a small boule, with some backspin and a gentle loop in the air. The picture shows how to hold the jack... The middle finger is used as a guide and the jack is held between index and ring finger.

— [Winning Petanque](#), Practice Pointing

(6) Inspecting the terrain

This exercise has nothing to do with throwing. Practice it by playing on new terrains. Get into the habit of *reading the terrain*.

Before you throw the jack... inspect the terrain. Look for irregularities in the surface, and look for spots that appear to be hard or soft. A deep, soft surface can be advantageous to a pointer who likes to lob. If you like to lob, you want to throw the jack into a soft area. If your opponents like to lob, you want to throw the jack onto a thinner, harder surface.

When the opposing team throws the jack and their boules... watch what they do when they land. If they are consistently curving to the right, say, that may indicate that the piste has a slight tilt or a small hump or depression. You can take that into account when your turn comes to throw your boules.

Before you point your own first boule... walk to the head and look back, over the jack, toward the circle. Inspect the terrain. This can often give you useful information about the terrain that you can't get any other way.

Sometimes when you're pointing, you wish you could make your boule *go around* some boules that are in the way. This CAN be done. It is like throwing a curve ball in baseball.

Because of the way that petanque boules are thrown, boules naturally come out of the hand with a certain amount of backspin. If, as you throw, you rotate your arm and tilt your hand, some of that backspin becomes sidespin. For a right-handed player—

- Tilting your hand to the right (rotating it clockwise, so the thumb points up) moves some of the backspin from the bottom of the boule to the bottom-left side. The result is that the boule will try to curve to the left when it hits the ground.
- Tilting your hand to the left (rotating it counter-clockwise, so the thumb points down) will make the boule try to curve to the right.

A simple rule-of-thumb (for both right-handed and left-handed players) is that the boule will try to go in the direction of your palm.

For a right-handed player, rotating the hand clockwise is a much more natural motion than rotating it the other way. So it is much easier for a right-handed player to make a boule curve to the left than to the right.

This video is of Marco Foyot giving a demo to the Zanefield Petanque Club. The quality of the video is good, and it's just fun to watch. It is good to learn how to throw a boule.

<https://youtu.be/PM6FYEB-QVA>