RESOURCE

Build a Better Golf Bag Map

A golf bag is a coverage system, not a collection of individually impressive clubs. Fourteen slots have to work together to give you a reasonable option at as many yardages as possible, without wasting slots on clubs that duplicate each other's distance. Gapping is the practice of looking at the bag this way, and it is revealed through your own personal carry bands and how you actually use each club, not through club-number conventions or a manufacturer's stated loft.

Reading a carry-band map

A carry-band map sorts your clubs from longest to shortest carry and shows the interval between each adjacent pair. GolfVectorLab's Bag Gapping Map builds this automatically from carries you enter, and flags any interval larger than a target spacing you choose as a gap, and any interval smaller than an overlap threshold you choose as an overlap. Reading the map means looking at the size of each interval, not just the raw carry numbers, since two clubs that both sound reasonable individually can still leave an awkward yardage window between them.

Gaps versus overlaps: not automatically good or bad

A gap means a yardage window where your longer club is a partial swing and your shorter club is a full swing, neither of which is as repeatable as a comfortable full swing with the right club. An overlap means two clubs cover nearly the same distance. Neither is automatically a problem. A deliberate overlap between two wedges with different bounce angles for different turf conditions can be a sound choice. An unintentional large gap in the middle of your set, discovered only when you are standing over a shot with no good option, is the pattern worth fixing.

How the wedge matrix relates to bag-level gapping

Full-swing gapping tells you about the difference between clubs at a full swing. Inside the scoring zone, most golfers use partial swings with their wedges far more than a full swing, which a single

carry number per wedge cannot capture. The Wedge Distance Matrix handles that layer separately, storing carries by named shot length for each wedge, so your short-game gapping is not forced into the same one-number-per-club model that works fine for a 6-iron but not for a 56-degree wedge played at three different swing lengths.

The 14-club limit is a real constraint, not a suggestion

Rule 4 of the Rules of Golf limits a player to 14 clubs during a round. Every gapping decision happens inside that hard ceiling: adding a club to fill a gap means either accepting 14 clubs exactly or removing one you already carry, usually the one contributing the least unique coverage, often a redundant overlap. Treat the limit as a forcing function that makes gapping a genuine tradeoff exercise, not a wish list.

Before-and-after change discipline

Before swapping a club, map your current bag's gaps and overlaps, then map what the bag would look like with the proposed change, using the same measured or clearly labeled estimated carries both times. Comparing two real maps side by side is far more informative than reasoning about the change in the abstract, and it protects you from a change that looks good on paper (a lower loft number, a longer stated distance) but actually creates a new problem elsewhere in your set.

Top-end versus scoring-end tradeoffs

Extra coverage at the top of the bag, for example carrying both a 3-wood and a 5-wood, competes for slots with extra coverage at the scoring end, such as a third wedge. Neither end of the bag has an inherent claim on more slots; the right balance depends on how many of your shots come from each range. A golfer who reaches par 5s in two shots more often benefits from top-end coverage; a golfer who is usually laying up and relies on precise scoring-zone shots benefits more from a third wedge. Your own carry-band map, not a generic rule, should decide which tradeoff is right for you.

Common false-precision errors

Treating a club's stated loft as a guarantee of a specific gap from the next club is the most common mistake. Loft is one input into carry distance, not the only one; shaft length, swing speed with that specific club, and your own tendencies all matter. Two clubs four degrees of loft apart can produce a 20-yard gap for one golfer and an 8-yard gap for another. Always gap from your

own measured or honestly estimated carries, covered in more depth in the carry versus total distance resource, rather than from loft numbers alone.

A worked bag scenario

Consider a bag with a driver at 230, a 5-wood at 195, a 5-iron at 170, a 7-iron at 150, and a 9-iron at 130. The gaps are 35, 25, 20, and 20 yards respectively. The 35-yard gap between driver and 5-wood is the largest and the one worth investigating first, perhaps with a 3-wood or hybrid to split it, before worrying about the more evenly-spaced iron gaps further down the set.

Where to go from here

Start with the Bag Gapping Map using your own carries, add wedge-specific detail with the Wedge Distance Matrix and the Wedge Setup Analyzer, and if you have not yet measured every club, the Club Carry Estimator can provisionally fill gaps using a gap size you specify rather than a guess. Compare full alternative sets against your coverage with the Bag Composition Planner, check a specific proposed swap with Bag Change Impact, confirm you are still within the rules with the Golf Bag Limit Checker, and turn a coverage gap into generic research questions with the Club Category Finder.