How To Serve In Tennis

How To Serve In Five Steps:

1. Grip
2. Ball Toss
3. Trophy Position
4. Pronation
5. Follow Through and Finish

Please Share This PDF!

If you enjoy this serve PDF, please share it with your tennis friends.

We want to help as many tennis players around the world, by sharing this PDF, you're helping us to do exactly that!

Step One - The Grip

The grip you use to serve with will dictate your entire swing. Large numbers of club players tend to use a forehand grip to serve with, which causes many problems as they progress and want more power and spins on their serve.

The majority of pro players use the continental grip to serve with and the pros who don't use an exact continental grip will use some sort of variation of it. The continental grip is also known as the chopper grip. This is the same grip we use to hit slices, both the forehand and backhand volleys and the overhead smash. This grip allows you to impart both power and spin on the serve.

If you use a forehand grip to serve with, you might be able to get lots of power because the grip allows you to hit the ball very flat, however your consistency and accuracy will suffer greatly and generating spins will be very hard, if not impossible.
As you will learn later in this PDF, supination and pronation on the serve will help you generate extra control, power and spins and this action is only able to occur if we're using the continental grip.

Step Two - The Ball Toss

The ball toss on the tennis serve should be a very simple and straightforward action, yet millions of tennis players around the world struggle with it.

One of the best ways to "tame your toss" is to toss the ball around 4-6 inches higher than your ideal contact point. Most players that struggle with their ball toss throw the ball way too high, which causes erratic and inconsistent tosses.

By tossing the ball high, it tends to:

1. Break the momentum on your service motion, often causing players to have to stop in the trophy pose or when they drop the racket behind their head and wait for the ball to drop down to their contact zone.
2. Causes the ball to go all over the place, especially in the wind. The higher you toss the ball, the faster your arm will be travelling up prior to the release, which causes you to lose control of the toss, making it unreliable.

So to have a consistent ball toss on your serve, try to have a steady tossing arm with a down-up motion and aim to toss no higher than six inches above the contact point. Hold the ball in your fingers (not fingertips) instead of in the palm of your hand and release the ball when the hand reaches head height.

Step Three - The Trophy Position

Reaching a good trophy position on your serve is fundamental to having a good serve. The trophy position is a lot like a normal throwing pose. Imagine yourself about to throw a tennis ball, that position you reach just prior to launching forward, is the same action we want to achieve on the serve. Now imagine yourself throwing the ball upwards, as opposed to forwards.

A good trophy position should include:

- The tip of your racket pointing up towards the sky
- Your non-hitting hand pointing towards the ball
- The right shoulder dropped back and down
- A good knee bend, ready to launch the body off the ground
- Your head looking up towards your target - the ball

Step Four - Pronation

The biggest servers all use supination and pronation during their service motions. Prior to contact the forearm, if relaxed and the player is using the continental grip, should supinate. When in supination the palm of the hand and the strings (side you will hit the ball with) will be facing the left side of the court, if you supinate further your palm will be facing slightly backwards also.
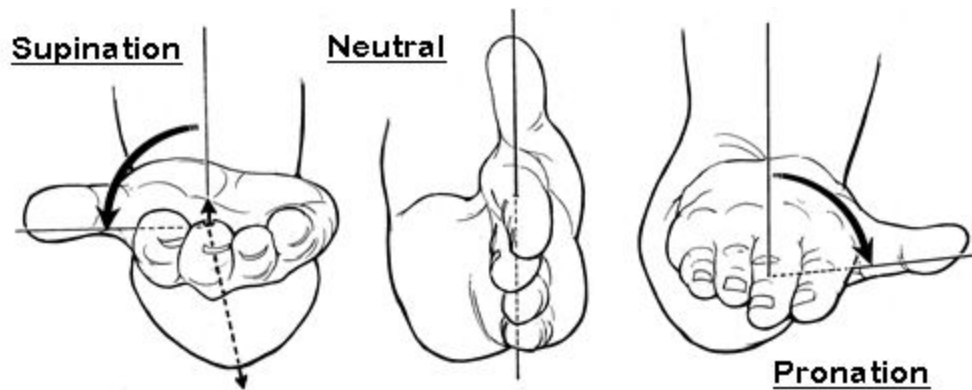
The more supination occurs prior to contact, the more you can "snap" your racket through the contact zone using pronation.
Some players will use very little supination prior to contact and then go straight through with pronation, however Pete Sampras used a great deal of supination on serve to generate more "whip" through contact. The racket is now "on edge" and it looks like the player will hit the ball with the side of the racket.

From this position, the strings start to open up and the player pronates their forearm and upper arm.

At contact the palm faces towards the target. This twist with the forearm and racket will continue if done correctly to the point of full pronation where the palm and strings face the right side of the court. For many WTA players this is the main issue they face on serve, not achieving the full range of motion with pronation. They tend to pronate up until the contact point but then stop pronating after contact and finish the swing with their arm in a neutral position and the strings facing down the court.

Notice that Roger Federer's strings go from facing the left side of the court prior to contact to facing the right side of the court after contact. On kick serves, Federer will finish with his strings facing the back of the court as he doesn't open up his shoulders.

Step Five - The Finish

One of the main causes of serve breakdown or even worse, injury from the serve is an incorrect finish or follow through. When you hit your serve, your body should be in a relaxed state and the follow through should be relaxed and allow the arm and body to slow down in a natural way using the correct muscle groups.

If we swing the racket at high speeds during the contact zone, then suddenly stop altogether or finish in the wrong way, the stress will be felt greatly in the shoulder, elbow and wrist.

If this is done time and time again, the result can be serious injury.
A natural, relaxed follow through should take the racket all the way to the left hip, a great way to remember this finish is to imagine your racket is a gun and you are placing it back into a holster. The elbow should be bent when you are finishing to take the stress off your shoulder joint, a straight arm places a great deal of stress there.

By Coach Simon
Top Tennis Training