The push is a passive backspin shot done against backspin. It's generally done against a backspin serve or push that you don't feel comfortable attacking, either for tactical reasons or because pushing is a more consistent way of returning backspin. The trick is to push so your opponent can't attack effectively. Keep the ball low, place it well, and give it a good backspin.

First I'll cover the basic push with a variation included for the Seemiller grip, then the more advanced pushes: the spin push, fast push, and short push.

**WHY IS THE PUSH IMPORTANT?**

The simplest way to return a ball with backspin is with a backspin push. The push is valuable for returning backspin serves or for returning backspin balls that you aren't ready to attack. A push can be attacked, but a good push can make that attack difficult.

**HOW TO EXECUTE THE PUSH**

Face the table (see Figure 6.1a). Rotate your upper body slightly to the right for a forehand push. Face the table directly for a backhand push. Point your elbow forward, away from your body; open your racket and bring it back and slightly up, pivoting at the elbow. Your elbow shouldn't move much during the stroke. Cock your wrist back (see Figure 6.1b).

Rotate the racket forward and slightly down. Let the ball fall onto the racket, grazing the bottom back of the ball to create backspin (see Figure 6.1c). Snap your wrist forward and slightly down at contact.

Follow through by straightening your arm until it's almost fully extended (see Figure 6.1d). Return to ready position.

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**Figure 6.1  Keys to Success: Forehand and Backhand Pushes**

| Preparation Phase |  
| :---: | :---: | :---: |
| **Forehand Push** | **Backhand Push** |  
| 1. In ready position |  
| 2. Move into position |  

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### Table Tennis: Steps to Success

#### Execution Phase

**Backswing**

**Forehand Push**

1. Open racket
2. Bring arm backward and slightly up, pivoting at elbow
3. Cock wrist back

**Backhand Push**

1. Move racket forward from elbow
2. Snap wrist at contact

**Forward Swing**

**Forehand Push**

1. Move racket forward from elbow
2. Snap wrist at contact
3. Contact the ball in front and slightly to the right of your body

**Backhand Push**

1. Move racket forward from elbow
2. Snap wrist at contact
3. Contact the ball directly in front of your body
4. Graze back bottom of ball
Follow-Through
Phase

**Forehand Push**

1. Follow through forward and downward
2. Return to ready position

**Backhand Push**

**SEEMILLER GRIP PUSH**

With the Seemiller grip you’ll have to vary your grip for the backhand push, because it’s awkward to open the racket on that side. Many players who use this grip bring their thumb around to the nonhitting side of the racket to open it (see Figure 6.2).

![Figure 6.2 The Seemiller grip push.]

**Detecting Forehand and Backhand Push Errors**

Pushing is a control shot; the most common mistake for beginners is to be too aggressive. Until you reach an advanced level, make the ball travel slowly when you push. Concentrate on consistency, placement, and spin.
1. The ball goes into the net or off the end, or pops up.
2. You’re not getting enough backspin.
3. You don’t have control of the ball.

**ADVANCED PUSHES**

Advanced pushes can help you get an edge over your opponent. Top players use three types of pushes. The spin push (and its no-spin variation) is used against an opponent who has trouble with heavy backspin. The fast push gives an opponent less time to attack. A short push can be used to stop an opponent’s attack.

**Spin Push**

A spin push is the same as a basic push except that the backspin is more severe. The purpose of a spin push is to either force an opponent into an error due to the heavy backspin, or to make your opponent hesitate to attack the push because of the heavy backspin, often allowing you to attack instead. To produce a spin push, take the ball as it drops and just graze it, using a lot of wrist. Contact the very bottom of the ball with a wide open racket. The ball should not travel fast—racket speed must be converted into spin. Keep the ball low and deep and many opponents won’t be able to attack it effectively.

A variation of the spin push is the no-spin push, where you fake heavy backspin but give very little. There are two ways to achieve this. The first way is to contact the ball near the handle, since this part of the paddle moves slower than the rest of the hitting surface. (The tip, the farthest point from your wrist, moves fastest.) Even if you graze the ball, the ball will have less spin. If the opponent sees the grazing motion, your opponent may think there is more spin on the ball than there is. The other method is to fake a grazing motion but just pat the ball over instead, hitting it straight on softly. Follow through vigorously to fake heavy spin.

**Fast Push**

This is a very fast, off the bounce push. It’s used to keep an opponent from having time to attack effectively. It can be done with almost as much backspin as the spin push and is the most common deep push at the high levels of table tennis.

Contact the ball right off the bounce and push the racket forward quickly. The idea here is to push as quickly as possible. Push mostly to the backhand to keep your opponent from attacking with the forehand. Because there is backspin on the ball, if you push too fast the ball will go off the end. Nevertheless, if done properly, an opponent will have a hard time getting into position to attack with the forehand, and even a backhand attack will be rushed.

**Short Push**

At the highest levels of the game, many serves and returns are short. This is because any ball that is returned deep (where the ball goes past the table’s endline after the first bounce) can be attacked easily. At the lower levels, this isn’t as important, but as you advance, you’ll want to be able to push short both to stop an opponent’s attack and as a drop shot against defensive players. A ball that lands short on the table is difficult to attack because the table is in the way, while a push that lands deeper allows an opponent to take a full backswing.

Drop shots (a very short shot where the ball is just tapped over the net) against defensive play-
ers who back off the table too much should land as short on the table as possible, but other short pushes should usually go a little deeper, so that the second bounce on the far side of the table is near the endline. This makes it difficult for the opponent to attack effectively.

Take the ball right off the bounce with a soft touch. The racket should open slightly at contact, so start with the racket slightly more closed than you want. The stroke should be mostly downward with a slightly open racket. If your racket is too open, you’ll pop the ball up. Because you’re taking the ball on the rise, when it hits your racket it will bounce up, so you have to aim relatively low.

At first, you should just try to keep the ball low and short. With practice, you’ll learn to do so with some backspin on the ball. Pushing short is a tricky shot, and at first you’ll either go long or pop the ball up. You’ll improve as your “touch” gets better.

If you’re short and have trouble reaching a short push to the forehand side, you’ll need to learn to step in for this shot. See Step 9 for a description of flipping (returning short balls) and stepping-in footwork.

**Pushing Drills**

Note: For all pushing drills, start with a backspin serve.

### 1. Crosscourt and Down the Line Pushing

You and your partner push backhand to backhand crosscourt, then forehand to forehand crosscourt, then forehand to backhand, down the line, and down both lines. Try to keep the ball low and with a good backspin. Don’t try to load up the spin too much, however. The ball should travel slowly—this is not a speed shot. This drill teaches you to push to either side against any type of push.

**Success Goal** = 25 consecutive backhand and forehand pushes, both crosscourt and down the line

**Your Score** =

- (#) ____ consecutive crosscourt backhand pushes
- (#) ____ consecutive crosscourt forehand pushes
- (#) ____ consecutive down the line backhand pushes
- (#) ____ consecutive down the line forehand pushes

### 2. Random Pushing

You and your partner push anywhere. Try to keep the ball low and with a good backspin. Mix up your placement as much as possible; try not to let your partner know where your next push is going. This drill simulates a game situation, so you can learn to return with a push even if you don’t know where the next shot will be.
**Success Goal** = 30 consecutive pushes done randomly with either the forehand or the backhand

**Your Score** = (#) ____ consecutive pushes, randomly with either forehand or backhand

### 3. Spin Push

Push backhand to backhand, practicing spin pushes. Concentrate on getting good backspin. Then do the same with the forehand. This drill gives you the skill to put extra backspin on the ball. You will have an obvious advantage if you master this skill and your opponent is weak against heavy backspin.

**Success Goal** = 20 consecutive backhand and 20 consecutive forehand spin pushes

**Your Score** =

(#) ____ consecutive backhand spin pushes

(#) ____ consecutive forehand spin pushes

### 4. Fast Push

Fast push backhand to backhand as many times as you can. Concentrate on pushing as quick off the bounce as possible. Then do the same with the forehand. This drill teaches you to push fast against a slow opponent.

**Success Goal** = 20 consecutive backhand and 20 consecutive forehand fast pushes

**Your Score** =

(#) ____ consecutive backhand fast pushes

(#) ____ consecutive forehand fast pushes

### 5. Short Push

Push short backhand to backhand as many times as you can. Concentrate on keeping the ball short and low but still with a little backspin. Then do the same with the forehand. Have your partner let some of your pushes go by so that you can see if they bounce twice or not. This drill teaches you how to use the length of the table against your opponent. You can stop an attack by pushing the ball so short your opponent has to reach over the table.
Success Goal = 15 consecutive backhand and 15 consecutive forehand short pushes

Your Score =
(#) ____ consecutive backhand short pushes
(#) ____ consecutive forehand short pushes

6. Pushing Footwork

Have your partner push backhands side to side, one to the left and one to the right. You push them back, alternating forehand and backhand and using two-step footwork. This drill gets you in the habit of moving to each ball rather than reaching for it. It also increases ball control.

Success Goal = 20 consecutive repetitions of two-step footwork combined with push

Your Score = (#) ____ consecutive repetitions of two-step footwork combined with pushes

7. Random Pushing Game

Play games to 11 points, push only. Use all types of pushes. For example, use long, short, fast, or spin pushes in varying sequences. This adds an element of surprise to your game while you try to force your opponent into error.

Success Goal = Win at least half of the games played

Your Score = (#) ____ games won, (#) ____ games lost

8. Serve and Attack Against Backspin

You serve backspin. Partner pushes to your backhand. You attack with your backhand drive and play out the point. Next, do the same sequence, but this time use two-step footwork and step around your backhand corner, attacking the push with your forehand drive from the backhand corner.

Success Goal = 20 points scored after attacking a push with a backhand drive, and 20 points scored after attacking a push with a forehand drive from backhand corner

Your Score =
(#) ____ points scored after attacking push with backhand drive
(#) ____ points scored after attacking push with forehand drive from backhand corner
9. Random Attack Against Push

You and your partner push all over the table, using all types of pushes. Try to force a weak or high push return. When you get one, attack with either forehand or backhand drive. If you can, smash. This drill teaches you to judge which ball to attack. Be patient; wait for the right ball to attack.

**Success Goal** = 20 points scored after attacking a push with either a forehand or backhand drive

**Your Score** = (#) ____ points scored after attacking a push with either a forehand or backhand drive

10. Attacking Backspin Game

Play a game with the following rules. Server always serves backspin. Receiver pushes it back to spot specified by server (usually backhand corner). Server attacks, either with forehand or backhand drive. Attack with forehand from forehand side of table; attack with forehand or backhand from backhand side of table. Games are to 11 points. This drill helps you incorporate attacking backspin into your game.

**Success Goal** = Win at least half of the games played

**Your Score** = (#) ____ games won, (#) ____ games lost

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**Pushing Keys to Success Checklist**

For you to be a proficient player, it is critical you master the various types of pushes. In this step you have learned both beginning and advanced pushes. Knowing the pushes will make it difficult for your opponent to attack effectively. Have your instructor or practice partner use the Keys to Success checklist (see Figure 6.1) to make sure you’re doing the push stroke correctly. Then, practice Drill 7, the Random Pushing Game, to help you learn the short, long, heavy backspin, and fast pushes. Pay particular attention to using the wrist properly and grazing the ball. Ask your partner to critique your pushes, and use his or her comments as a way to improve.