

Rules of Golf – Revised as of January 1, 2019

(Plus Etiquette and Pace of Play Helpful Hints)

Definitions

Abnormal Course Condition – animal hole, ground under repair, immovable obstruction, temporary water, etc.

Advice – comment or action intended to influence a player. Does not include public knowledge, such as distances, location of things or the Rules.

Areas of the Course – comprised of the following 5 areas:

General Area – All areas except the following:

Teeing Area – rectangle 2 club lengths deep behind the tee markers

Penalty Area – area from which relief with a one stroke penalty is allowed

Bunkers – hollowed out filled with sand

Putting Green

Boundary Object – Out of bounds markers (fence, wall, railings, stakes) from which free relief is not allowed. Treated as immovable even if they could be moved.

Club Length – the longest club in your bag which is not a putter. (*Change*)

General Penalty – loss of hole in Match Play – 2 penalty strokes in stroke play

Ground Under Repair – Any part of the course the Committee defines as such as well as:

Holes made by the Committee or maintenance staff;

Grass cuttings or leaves, etc. piled up for later removal;

Animal habitat – birds' nest but not worm or insect holes

Known or Virtually Certain – conclusive evidence or 95% likely the event happened (eg. The ball wasn't seen entering the 'penalty area' but 95% likely that's where it lies.) (*Change*)

Loose Impediment – Any unattached natural object (except if it is attached to the ball).

Not loose impediments: Sand and loose soil; dew, frost and water.

Snow and natural ice are either loose impediments, or when on the ground 'temporary water'.

Lost – status of a ball not found within 3 minutes of looking.

Movable Obstruction – an obstruction that can be moved with reasonable effort and without damaging it or the course.

Nearest Point of Complete Relief – the reference point for taking free relief from an abnormal course condition, dangerous animal condition, wrong green or no play zone.

It is the estimated point where the ball would lie that is:

- Nearest to the ball's original spot, but not nearer the hole
- In the required area of the course, and
- Where the condition does not interfere with the stroke the player would have to make from the original spot if the condition was not there (*Change*)

Estimating this reference point requires the player to identify the choice of club, stance, swing and line of play they would have used for that stroke.

This relief may be in another condition from which the player is entitled relief (eg. GUR to a car path) and the player will have a nearest point of complete relief from the new condition.

No Play Zones – Committee determines these zones – e.g. flower beds, staked trees, environmentally sensitive area.

Obstruction – Any artificial object **except** for integral objects or boundary objects. Examples: cart paths; buildings; sprinkler heads; golf carts; waste baskets & benches; player equipment; flagsticks and rakes.

Outside Influence – Any of these people or things that can affect what happens to a player's ball or equipment or to the course.

- Any person (including another player) **except** the player and caddie or partner or opponent and any of their caddies
- Any animal
- Any natural or artificial object or anything else (including another ball in motion **except** for natural forces).

Point of Maximum Available Relief – In bunker or on a green – If complete relief isn't available and where the abnormal course condition least interferes with the stroke the player would have made from the original spot (e.g. Shallowest water in the bunker or putting through the shallowest water on the green.)

Provisional Ball – Another ball played in case the ball just played by the player may be Out of Bounds or Lost inside a Penalty Area.

Relief Area – The area where a player must drop a ball when taking relief under a Rule. Each relief Rule requires the player to use a specific relief area whose size and location are based on these three factors:

- Reference point – the point from where the size of the relief area is measured
- Size of Relief Area Measured from Reference Point - the relief area is either one or two club lengths from the Reference Point, but with certain limits
- Limits on Location of Relief Area - The location of the relief area may be limited in one or more ways so that, for example: » It is only in certain defined areas of the course, such as only in the general area, or not in a bunker or a penalty area, » It is not nearer the hole than your reference point or must be outside a penalty area or a bunker from which you are taking relief, or» It is

where there is no interference (as defined in the particular Rule) from the condition from which you are taking relief.

Stroke – The forward movement of the club made to strike the ball **BUT** a stroke has not been made if the player:

- Decides during the downswing not to strike the ball and stops the swing or deliberately misses the ball
- Accidentally strikes the ball when making a practice swing or while preparing to make a stroke.

There are different consequences when you do this in different areas of the course:

- **In the Teeing Area** – You may re-tee the ball and play it – no stroke - no penalty
- **On the Putting Green** – You may replace the ball to its' original position – no stroke - no penalty.
- **Anywhere else** – A stroke is not counted but you must replace the ball to its original position and add a penalty stroke.

If you play from the 'wrong place' on the Putting Green or Anywhere Else – you incur a two stroke penalty. If you play from a 'wrong place' that provides a distinct advantage, it is considered a 'serious breach' and you are disqualified.

Temporary Water – Any temporary accumulation of water on the surface of the ground which can be seen before or after the player takes a stance.

Rule 1 – The Game

Play the course as you find it and play the ball as it lies. It is a game of honour.

You are expected to count your score fairly and assess penalties if you incur them.

Rule 2 – The Course

5 areas of the course:

1. The General Area – everywhere except the following 4
2. Teeing Area
3. All Penalty Areas
4. All Bunkers
5. Putting Greens

Rule 3 – The Competition

Match or Stroke Play – we will mostly speak to stroke play in the interest of time

Individual or Team

Scoring by gross (Total) or net scores (adjusted for handicap)

Rule 4 – The Players Equipment

Must use conforming clubs and balls. Limited to no more than 14 clubs. More than 14 clubs incurs the General Penalty (2 strokes) for each hole in violation up to a total of 4 strokes.

A player may continue to use a damaged club no matter how it was damaged but may not replace it if the club was damaged in anger.

Rule 5 – Playing the Round

Start each round on time.

Play continuously and at a prompt pace – when it is a player's turn to play, it is recommended that they make the stroke in no more than 40 seconds (should be less).

Stroke play – can't practice on the course on the day of competition until after the round except in designated practice areas. Penalty – disqualification.

Rule 6 – Playing a Hole

Ball is in play from 'teeing ground' to 'hole out.

The ball is not in play until the player makes a stroke at it.

The player should put an identifying mark on their ball.

Finish the hole with the same ball unless lost or damaged.

There is a penalty for hitting a wrong ball **AND** the mistake must be corrected.

The player furthest from the hole should play first but with mutual agreement any player may play.

PLAYING THE BALL (Rules 7-11)

Rule 7 – Ball search: Finding & Identifying Ball

You may move or bend things to look for a ball but not do anything to purposely improve the lie. You may lift the ball to identify it (**must** mark it first) but may not clean it.

Rule 8 – Course Played as It Is Found

a. Actions not allowed:

(1) Move, bend or break any:

- Growing or attached natural object
- Immovable object, integral object or boundary object
- Tee marker

(2) Move anything to build a stance or to improve the lie

(3) Alter the surface of the ground, including by:

- Replacing divots in a divot hole
- Removing or pressing down divots that have already been replaced or other cut turf that is already in place, or
- Creating or eliminating holes, indentations or uneven surfaces

(4) Remove or press down sand or loose soil

(5) Remove dew, frost or water

b. Actions that are allowed

(1) Fairly search for the ball

(2) Take reasonable actions to remove loose impediments and movable obstructions

(3) Take reasonable actions to mark the spot of the ball and to lift and replace the ball

(4) Ground the club lightly in front of or behind the ball (not pressing down and not touching sand in a bunker)

(5) Firmly place the feet in taking a stance

(6) Fairly take a stance by taking reasonable actions to get to the ball and take a stance. **But** when doing so the player: is not entitled to a normal stance or swing; must use the least intrusive course of action

(7) Make a stroke or the backswing for a stroke which is then made **But** when the ball is in a bunker you cannot touch the sand on your backswing

(8) In the teeing area: put tee in the ground; move objects; alter the ground

(9) In a bunker, smooth the sand after the ball is out of the bunker

(10) On the putting green – remove sand and loose soil and repair damage

(11) Move a natural object to see if it is loose, but if it's not, return it to its natural condition.

8.1.c If you have improved the conditions affecting the stroke but fix it before you play there is no penalty.

8.1.d If the conditions affecting your ball are worsened by another person or animal or artificial object you may restore the original conditions as nearly as possible.

Rule 9 – Ball Played as it Lies; Ball at Rest Lifted or Moved

If the player's ball comes to rest and is then moved by natural forces such as wind or water, the player normally must play it from its new spot. (e.g. Rickie Fowler-placed ball later rolled into the penalty area)

If a ball at rest or moved by anyone or any outside influence before the stroke is made, the ball must be replaced on its original spot.

The penalty for lifting or deliberately touching your ball and causing it to move is one stroke.

4 Exceptions to the Penalty are:

- (1) When the rules allow you to move it
- (2) Accidental Movement Before Ball is Found or in Identifying Ball
- (3) Accidental Movement on the Putting Green
- (4) Accidental Movement Anywhere Except Putting Green while Applying Rule

Rule 10 – Preparing for and Making a Stroke; Advice and Help; Caddies

A stroke is made by fairly striking at a ball with the head of the club.

If the player's club accidentally hits the ball more than once, there has been only 1 stroke and there is no penalty (*Change*)

Advice – a player may not give or ask for advice or touch another player's bag to see what club is being used.

Rule 11 – Ball in Motion Accidentally Hits Person, Animal or Object; Deliberate Actions to Affect Ball in Motion

Purpose: When a ball in motion hits a person, animal, equipment or anything else on the course....If accidental, no penalty and play ball where it comes to rest. This is true even if the ball hits the player, the opponent or any of their caddies or equipment. (*Change*)

On the putting green – if you stroke your ball on the putting green and hit another person's ball at rest, you incur a 2 stroke penalty.

Rule 12 – Bunkers

You may remove loose impediments and movable obstructions. Restrictions on touching sand – can't deliberately touch sand with anything including a club in making a practice swing or on the back swing.

No penalty for *(multiple changes)*:

- Digging in feet in preparation for a swing
- Smoothing the bunker to care for the course
- Placing clubs or equipment or other objects in the bunker
- In taking actions under a Rule
- Leaning on club to rest, stay balanced or prevent a fall
- Striking the sand in frustration or anger

General Penalty for improving conditions affecting the stroke. No restrictions after the ball is played out of the bunker.

Rule 13 – Putting Greens *(Multiple Changes)*

You may remove sand or dirt on the putting green and repair prior damage.

If the ball or marker is accidentally moved – replace with no penalty

No deliberate testing of greens

Relief must be taken from a wrong green.

The Flagstick – The player may remove the flagstick, leave it in the hole, or have it attended (held in the hole until the ball has started to move) *(Change)*

Penalty if player or caddie deliberately moves or removes the flagstick to affect where the player's ball in motion might come to rest.

Penalty to other player if they or their caddie move the pin on purpose and the player is not aware or does so after the ball is in motion. (Not if they are not aware that the player is about to play or that the player's ball is in motion.)

Ball resting against flagstick – If any part of the ball is below the surface – it is in. If no part is below the surface the ball must be placed on the lip of the hole whether or not it fell in when the flagstick was removed.

Rule 14 – Procedures for Ball: Marking, Lifting and Cleaning; Replacing on Spot; Dropping in Relief Area; Playing from Wrong Place

A ball lifted from the putting green may always be cleaned. A ball lifted for any other purpose may not be cleaned.

Ball must be dropped by the player from 'knee height' (the height of your knee in a standing position) and remain in the Relief Area.

The ball must be marked with a ball mark (or club) right behind or next to the ball and be removed before the stroke. Penalty – one stroke.

When a ball is lifted to take relief under a Rule, the player is not required to mark the spot before lifting the ball.

The ball may be lifted under the Rules by the player, or anyone the player authorized **but** such authorization must be given each time before the ball is lifted.

Cleaning Lifted Ball

A ball lifted from the putting green may always be cleaned

A ball lifted from anywhere else may always be cleaned **EXCEPT**

- When lifted to see if it is cut or cracked
- To identify it
- Because it interferes with play
- To see if it lies in a condition where relief is allowed

Penalty of one stroke for any of the above

Original Ball Must be Used – pretty much except when it's lost or the ball is dropped under a Rule.

Ball must be dropped straight down from 'standing knee height equivalent' in the Relief Area. If it rolls out of the relief area-redrop. If it rolls out of the relief area again, place it on the spot where it hit the ground.

If the ball is dropped in a 'wrong way' and is played from the relief area – one penalty stroke.

If the ball is played from outside the relief area – General Penalty

Rule 15 – Free Relief from Loose Impediments and Movable Obstructions

Loose impediments may generally be removed but if the ball moves in the process of doing so, the ball must be replaced and the player incurs a one stroke penalty.

Movable Obstructions – Generally movable obstructions can be moved. If the ball moves in the process, replace the ball on its original place. (e.g. ball at rest against a rake)

Ball Anywhere on Course Interfering with play – A player may require another player to mark their ball and lift it (without cleaning) if it interferes with stance, swing or line of play. A player may not mark and lift their ball based on only their opinion their ball might interfere.

On the Putting Green – marker may be moved by ball owner if it interferes with another player by measuring a club head or two length from the original mark. Marker must be replaced to the original place before playing. General Penalty assessed if ball not replaced or other player refuses to lift their ball or marker when required to do so.

Rule 16 – Relief from Abnormal Course Conditions (Including Immovable obstructions, Dangerous Animal Condition, Embedded Ball, Ground Under Repair and Temporary Water)

Relief is given for any of the above but not if the ball is in a penalty area or when clearly unreasonable to play the ball. (e.g. a players stance is in temporary water but the ball is in a bush).

Relief in a bunker – the nearest point of complete relief and the relief area must both be in the bunker. If there is no nearest point of relief in the bunker, the player may still take relief from the bunker by using the maximum available relief in the bunker as a reference point.

For one penalty stroke, the player may drop in a relief area that is based on a reference line going straight back from the hole through the spot of the original ball.

No Play Zones – the player must take complete relief

Dangerous Animal Condition – free relief except if playing the ball is unreasonable because of something other than the dangerous animal condition. (e.g. ball in bush)

Embedded Ball – Relief allowed if ball is embedded in the general area. If the ball is embedded on the green – mark the spot, lift and clean the ball, repair the damage and replace the ball. Relief is not allowed when the ball is embedded in sand in a part of the general area not cut to fairway height or when interference by anything other makes the stroke unreasonable (e.g. ball is in a bush).

Rule 17 – Penalty Areas

Bodies of water or other areas defined by the Committee where a ball is often lost or unable to be played. For one penalty stroke you may use specific relief options to play a ball outside the penalty area.

Yellow – played from relief area where the shot was taken or relief area based on where the ball crossed the edge of the penalty area.

Red – same two options as Yellow plus lateral relief option which is two club lengths from the point where the ball entered the penalty area no closer to the hole.

You may play the ball as it lies out of a penalty area.

Rule 18 – Stroke and Distance Relief Ball Lost or Out of Bounds; Provisional Ball

Rule covers taking relief under penalty of stroke and distance.

At any time the player may take stroke and distance relief. Once you put another ball in play under penalty of stroke and distance, your original ball is no longer in play. This is true even if your original ball is found within the 3 minute limit.

Your ball is lost if it is not found in 3 minutes after you begin to search for it.

Your ball is out of bounds only when all of it is outside the boundary edge of the course.

If your ball is lost or out of bounds you must take stroke-and-distance relief by adding one penalty stroke and playing a ball from where the previous stroke was made.

Provisional Ball – If your ball might be lost outside a penalty area or be out of bounds, to save time you may play another ball provisionally under penalty of stroke-and-distance. **But** if you are aware the only possible place your original ball could be lost is in a penalty area, a provisional ball is not allowed and a ball played from where the previous stroke was made becomes the ball in play. You **must** announce it is a provisional ball and describe it (e.g. Titleist 2 with red dots). It must be notably different than the original ball. You may continue to play with your provisional ball so long as it is played from a spot that is the same distance or farther from the hole than where your original ball is estimated to be.

If you find your original ball or it is virtually certain it is in a penalty area, it becomes the ball in play and you pick up the provisional.

Rule 19 – Unplayable Ball

You alone decide whether your ball is unplayable and can then choose to take relief anywhere except a Penalty Area. Under penalty of one stroke, options are:

- (1) Play from the spot the previous shot was taken
- (2) Play from anywhere back-on-the-line relief
- (3) Using the ball position as the Reference Point – two club lengths either direction no closer to the hole.

Bunker – four options:

- (1) One penalty stroke, stroke-and-distance relief
- (2) One penalty stroke, back-on-the-line relief in the bunker
- (3) One penalty stroke, lateral relief in the bunker
- (4) Two penalty strokes, back-on-the-line relief outside the bunker

Rule 20 – Resolving Rules Issues During Round

If a referee is not available you must decide what to do and play on.

You may protect your rights by asking for a ruling in match play or by playing two balls in stroke play.

Stroke Play – You have no right to decide a Rules issue by agreement and any such agreement you make is not binding.

You should raise any rules issues with the Committee before returning your score card.

You should protect other players in the competition. If you know or believe that another player has breached the Rules and does not recognize or is ignoring this, you should tell that player, the player's marker, a referee or the Committee. You should do this promptly, certainly before the player turns in their scorecard. Your failure to do so could be serious misconduct resulting in disqualification.

Playing Two Balls – If you are uncertain about the right procedure while playing a hole, you may complete the hole with two balls without penalty:

1. You must decide to play two balls after the situation arises and before you make a stroke.
2. You should choose which ball will count if the Rules allow the procedure, by announcing that choice to your marker or another player before making a stroke.
3. If you don't choose in time, the ball you played first is treated as the ball chosen.
4. You must report the facts to the Committee before returning your scorecard, even if you score the same with both balls. You are *disqualified* if you fail to do so.

Etiquette

Try to arrive at least 20 minutes before your tee time – to allow time for getting ready to play and to check in at the pro shop.

Before you begin play – put some tees, a couple of ball markers and a green repair tool in your pocket.

Mark your ball for ease of identification with a permanent felt marker.

Introduce yourself and shake hands with the members of your group when you start and when you finish.

Be ready to play when it's your turn. Figure out your yardage and your club selection while the other person is hitting. We strongly encourage you to visit mwlgc.ca and read 'The Rules of Ready Golf'.

When someone else is hitting, be quiet, and stand off to one side – not behind the player or on the other side of the hole. (Approximately 5 yards is good)

Be careful not to step on the line of anyone's putt (on either side of the hole).

Remember the 3 R's – rake bunkers, replace divots and repair ball marks.

Leave your bag at the side or back of the green so you can leave quickly once everyone has puttied out. (Never at the front!)

If you take a divot on a tee box, or anywhere else on the course, fill the divot with sand if provided.

Pace of Play

Here are some of the behaviors you can adopt to help keep the pace.

1. You should generally play using the **honour system**, but you also need to use some common sense. For example if the person who has the honour is not ready to play someone else should!
2. Develop a **pre-shot routine** with only one practice stroke.
3. If you are on the opposite side of the fairway to a player whose ball is 5-10 yards further from the hole, **go right up to your ball** and be ready to play.
4. **Think about your next shot** while approaching your ball. Save your conversations for when you are walking or waiting on the tee box.
5. Without interfering with your fellow competitors, **line up your putt** while another player is lining up hers.
6. If your group falls behind the group ahead **send the first 2 players** to hole out on to the next tee box. Your mission is to keep up to the group ahead!
7. If on a cart, you don't need to wait until your partner has hit and drive to your ball – grab a club and **walk to your ball**. Either of you can drive the cart.
8. It's not necessary to put your club in your bag immediately after your shot. Drive (or walk) to the next ball and then put your club away.
9. **Mark your score on the next tee box** – if it's your turn, mark your score after your tee shot.
10. You don't have to mark your ball on the green when someone else is chipping on unless you are asked to do so.
11. If you're a novice golfer (not in a tournament), here's a way to speed up play. If you're really struggling on a hole, pick up your ball and drop it on or near the green. Your score will be determined by equitable stroke control and you still get to practice chipping and putting.