

The Rules of Golf

A Quick Guide to the Rules in Brief

As golf is a self-regulating game, all golfers should have a good understanding of the fundamental Rules, as contained in this guide. However, this guide is not a substitute for the Rules of Golf, which should be consulted whenever any doubt arises. For more information on the points covered in this guide, please refer to the relevant Rule.

General Points

Before commencing your round:

- Read the Local Rules on the score card or the notice board.
- Put an identification mark on your ball. Many golfers play the same brand and model of ball and if you can't identify your ball, it is considered lost. (Rules 12-2 and 27-1)
- Count your clubs. You are allowed a maximum of 14 clubs. (Rule 4-4)

During the round:

- Don't ask for "advice" from anyone except your partner (i.e. a player on your side) or your caddies. Don't give advice to anyone except your partner. You may ask for information on the Rules, distances and the position of hazards, the flagstick, etc. (Rule 8-1)
- Don't play any practice shots during play of a hole. (Rule 7-2)

At the end of your round:

- In match play, ensure the result of the match is posted.
- In stroke play, ensure that your score card is completed properly and return it as soon as possible. (Rule 6-6)

The Rules of Play

Tee Shot (Rule 11)

Play your tee shot from between, and not in front of, the tee-markers. You may play your tee shot from up to two club-lengths behind the front line of the tee-markers.

If you play your tee shot from outside this area, in match play there is no penalty, but your opponent may require you to replay your stroke; in stroke play you incur a two-stroke penalty and must correct the error by playing from within the correct area.

Playing the Ball (Rules 12, 13, 14 and 15)

If you think a ball is yours but cannot see your identification mark, with the permission of your marker or opponent, you may mark and lift the ball to identify it. (Rule 12-2)

Play the ball as it lies. Don't improve your lie, the area of your intended stance or swing, or your line of play by moving, bending or breaking anything fixed or growing, except in fairly taking your stance or making your swing. Don't improve your lie by pressing anything down. (Rule 13-2)

If your ball is in a bunker or a water hazard, don't touch the ground in either type of hazard, or touch water in the water hazard, with your hand or club before your downswing and don't move loose impediments. (Rule 13-4)

You must swing the club and make a stroke at the ball. It is not permissible to push, scrape or spoon the ball. (Rule 14-1)

If you play a wrong ball, in match play you lose the hole; in stroke play you incur a two-stroke penalty and you must then correct the mistake by playing the correct ball. (Rule 15-3)

On the Putting Green (Rules 16 and 17)

You may mark, lift and clean your ball on the putting green; always replace it on the exact spot. (Rule 16-1b)

You may repair ball marks and old hole plugs, but not any other damage, such as spike marks. (Rule 16-1c)

When making a stroke on the putting green, you should ensure that the flagstick is removed or attended. The flagstick may also be removed or attended when the ball lies off the putting green. (Rule 17)

Ball at Rest Moved (Rule 18)

Generally, when the ball is in play, if you accidentally cause your ball to move, lift it when not permitted or it moves after you have addressed it, add a penalty stroke and replace your ball. However, see the exceptions under Rule 18-2a. (Rule 18-2)

If someone else moves your ball at rest or it is moved by another ball, replace it without penalty to you.

Ball in Motion Deflected or Stopped (Rule 19)

If a ball struck by you is deflected or stopped by you, your partner, your caddie or your equipment, add a penalty stroke and the ball is played as it lies. (Rule 19-2)

If a ball struck by you is deflected or stopped by another ball at rest, there is no penalty and the ball is played as it lies, except in stroke play where you incur a two-stroke penalty if your ball and the other ball were on the putting green before you played. (Rule 19-5a)

Lifting, Dropping and Placing the Ball (Rule 20)

Before lifting a ball that has to be replaced (e.g. when the ball is lifted on the putting green to clean it), the position of the ball must be marked. (Rule 20-1)

When the ball is being lifted in order to drop or place it in another position (e.g. dropping within two club-lengths under the unplayable ball Rule), it is not mandatory to mark its position although it is recommended that you do so.

When dropping, stand upright, hold the ball at shoulder height and arm's length and drop it.

A dropped ball must be re-dropped if it rolls to a position where there is interference from the condition from which free relief is being taken (e.g. an immovable obstruction), if it comes to rest more than two club-lengths from where it was dropped, or if it comes to rest nearer the hole than its original position, the nearest point of relief or where the ball last crossed the margin of a water hazard.

There are nine situations in total when a dropped ball must be redropped and they are covered in Rule 20-2c.

If a ball dropped for a second time rolls into any of these positions, place it where it first struck the course when re-dropped. (Rule 20-2c)

Ball Assisting or Interfering with Play (Rule 22)

You may lift your ball or have any other ball lifted if you think the ball might assist another player.

You must not agree to leave a ball in position in order to assist another player.

You may have any ball lifted if it might interfere with your play. A ball that is lifted due to it assisting or interfering with play must not be cleaned, unless it is lifted from the putting green.

Loose Impediments (Rule 23)

You may move a loose impediment (i.e. natural loose objects such as stones, detached leaves and twigs) unless the loose impediment and your ball are in the same hazard. If you remove a loose impediment and this causes your ball to move, the ball must be replaced and (unless your ball was on the putting green) you incur a one-stroke penalty. (Rule 23-1)

Movable Obstructions (Rule 24-1)

Movable obstructions (i.e. artificial movable objects such as rakes, tin cans, etc.) located anywhere may be moved without penalty. If the ball moves as a result, it must be replaced without penalty.

If a ball is on a movable obstruction, the ball may be lifted, the obstruction removed and the ball dropped, without penalty, on the spot directly under where the ball lay on the obstruction, except that on the putting green, the ball is placed on that spot.

Immovable Obstructions and Abnormal Ground Conditions (Rules 24-2 and 25-1)

An immovable obstruction is an artificial immovable object such as a building or an artificially-surfaced road (but check the Local Rules for the status of roads and paths).

An abnormal ground condition is either casual water, ground under repair or a hole, cast or runway made by a burrowing animal, a reptile or a bird.

Except when the ball is in a water hazard, free relief is available from immovable obstructions and abnormal ground conditions when the condition physically interferes with the lie of the ball, your stance or your swing. You may lift the ball and drop it within one club-length of the "nearest point of relief" (see Definition of "Nearest Point of Relief"), but not nearer the hole than the nearest point of relief.

If the ball is on the putting green, it is placed at the nearest point of relief.

There is no relief for intervention on your line of play unless both your ball and the condition are on the putting green.

As an additional option when the ball is in a bunker, you may take relief from the condition behind the bunker under penalty of one stroke.

Water Hazards (Rule 26)

If your ball is in a water hazard (yellow stakes and/or lines) you may play the ball as it lies or, under penalty of one stroke:

- play a ball from where you hit the ball into the hazard, or
- drop any distance behind the water hazard keeping a straight line between the hole, the point where the ball last crossed the margin of the water hazard and the spot on which the ball is dropped.

If your ball is in a lateral water hazard (red stakes and/or lines), in addition to the options for a ball in a water hazard (see above), under penalty of one stroke, you may drop within two club-lengths of, and not nearer the hole than:

- the point where the ball last crossed the margin of the hazard, or
- a point on the opposite side of the hazard equidistant to the hole from the point where the ball last crossed the margin.

Ball Lost or Out of Bounds; Provisional Ball (Rule 27)

Check the Local Rules on the score card to identify the boundaries of the course.

If your ball is lost outside a water hazard or out of bounds you must play another ball from the spot where the last shot was played, under penalty of one stroke, i.e. stroke and distance.

You are allowed 5 minutes to search for a ball, after which, if it is not found or identified, it is lost.

If, after playing a shot, you think your ball may be lost outside a water hazard or out of bounds you should play a 'provisional ball'. You must state that it is a provisional ball and play it before you go forward to search for the original ball.

If it transpires that the original ball is lost (other than in a water hazard) or out of bounds, you must continue with the provisional ball, under penalty of one stroke. If the original ball is found in bounds, you must continue play of the hole with it, and must stop play with the provisional ball.

Ball Unplayable (Rule 28)

If your ball is in a water hazard, the unplayable ball Rule does not apply and you must proceed under the water hazard Rule if taking relief.

Elsewhere on the course, if you believe your ball is unplayable, you may under penalty of one stroke:

- play a ball from where the last shot was played, or
- drop a ball any distance behind the point where the ball lay keeping a straight line between the hole, the point where the ball lay and the spot on which the ball is dropped, or
- drop a ball within two club-lengths of where the ball lies not nearer the hole.

If your ball is in a bunker you may proceed as above, except that if you are dropping back on a line or within two club-lengths, you must drop in the bunker.