

# QUICK GUIDE TO THE RULES OF GOLF

## **Rule 1: The Game**

- The holes on the course **must** be played in **order** (1 through 9, or 1 through 18) unless the committee says otherwise.
- You **must** always play by the **Rules**. You are **not** allowed to change or ignore them.

## **Rule 2: Match Play**

- In **match play**, each hole is a separate contest. If you win the first hole, you are "one-up"; if you lose it, you are "one-down"; if you halve it, you are "all-square."
- You have won the **match** when you are more holes up than there are left to play. For example, if you are three-up and there are only two holes left to play, you have won "three and two".
- Anyone you are playing against is your "opponent."

## **Rule 3: Stroke Play**

- In **stroke play**, the competitor with the lowest total score for the round (or rounds) is the winner.
- You **must** play your ball into the hole before starting the next hole.
- Anyone you are playing with is a "fellow-competitor".
- It is **not** possible to **play match play** and **stroke play** at the same time.

## **Rule 4 & Rule 5: Clubs and the Ball**

- You may carry **no more than fourteen clubs**.
- You may **not change balls** during the play of a hole unless a **Rule** allows it. However, if you damage your ball or it goes out of shape, you may change the ball **after** first consulting your opponent or fellow competitor.

## **Rule 6: Player's Responsibilities**

- **Read** the notices given to you by the tournament officials.
- **Always** use your correct handicap.
- **Know** your tee-time or starting time, and **be there ready to play** at that time.
- Make sure you can **identify** your own ball (put a mark on the ball in case someone else is using an identical ball).
- In **stroke play**, make sure your score for each hole is correct and sign your card before returning it.
- Do **not unduly delay play** – keep up with the group in front. Keep playing unless there is danger from lightning, you become ill, or an official tells you to stop.

## **Rule 7: Practice**

- You may **not** hit a practice shot while playing a hole, or from any hazard. Normally, practice is **not allowed** on the course before a **stroke** event, but **is allowed** before a **match**. However, a committee may alter this rule so always check the conditions of competition.

## **Rule 8: Advice on How to Play**

- **During a round**, you may **not** ask anyone **except** your caddie or partner for advice on how to play. However, you may ask anyone about the Rules or the position of hazards or the flagstick.
- You may **not give advice** to your opponent or fellow-competitor.
- Do **not position** any marker to indicate your line of play.

## **Rule 9: Advising Opponent on Strokes Taken**

- In **match play**, you **must tell** your opponent the number of strokes, **including penalties**, you have taken if you are asked.

### **Rule 10: The Order of Play**

- The player who has the lowest score on a hole has the right to play his/her ball first on the next hole. This is called the "honor."
- While playing a hole, the player whose ball is farthest from the hole plays first.
- In **match play**, if you play out of turn, your opponent may make you **replay your shot**. This is **not so** in **stroke play**.

### **Rule 11: Teeing Ground**

- Tee your ball between the tee-markers or a little behind them. You may tee your ball as far as two club lengths behind the markers.
- If your ball accidentally falls off the tee before making your first stroke, you may **replace it without penalty**.

### **Rule 12: Searching for and Identifying Ball**

- A hazard is any **bunker** (a hollow area containing sand) or water hazard (lake, stream, drainage ditch, etc).
- **Anywhere on the course**, if **sand** (or loose impediments in a hazard) completely cover your ball, you may **remove** enough of the sand or impediments during a search to be able to see a part of the ball.
- You may lift your ball to **identify it anywhere on the course**. You **must tell** your opponent or fellow competitor before you lift your ball to **identify it**.

### **Rule 13: Playing the Ball as It Lies**

- You **must** play the **ball as it lies**. You may **not move** it to a better spot.

- You may **not improve** your **lie** by pressing down behind or in front of the ball. The club may be grounded only lightly behind the ball.
- You may **not improve** the area of your **stance**, intended **swing**, or **line of play** by bending or breaking anything growing, such as tree branches or long grass.
- In a **bunker** you may **not touch** the **sand**, or in a **water hazard** you may **not touch** the ground or water, with your club before or during your back swing.
- In **any hazard**, you may **not remove** loose impediments (natural things such as leaves or twigs) but you may remove **obstructions** (artificial objects such as bottles or rakes.)
- You may rake parts of the **bunker** before playing your ball **solely** for the purpose of caring for the course and keeping it tidy, and for no other reason. It would be good practice **not** to rake close to your ball or on the line of intended play.

### **Rule 14: Striking the Ball**

- You **must strike** the ball fairly with the head of the club. You may **not push**, **scrape**, or **rake** the ball, and **not accept** any **assistance** or use any artificial aid in making your stroke. **Neither** may you use an 'anchoring point' against your body in making a stroke.
- You **must not hit** your ball while it is **moving** (**except in water**).

### **Rule 15: Playing a Wrong Ball**

- If you play a ball that is **not yours**, you **lose the hole** in **match play**, or incur a **two-stroke penalty** in **stroke play**.

### **Rule 16: The Putting Green**

- If any part of your ball is **touching** the **green**, it is **on the green**.
- When your ball is **on the green**, you may brush away leaves and other loose impediments, but otherwise do **not touch** your **line of putt**.

- You may **repair** ball marks or old hole plugs, but do **not repair** marks made by spikes or shoes before playing.
- You may **not test** the surface of the green by rolling a ball or scraping the surface.
- **Always mark your ball** by putting a small coin or other marker behind it when you want to pick it up to clean it or get out of another player's way.
- If your ball **overhangs the edge** of the hole you can wait **ten seconds** to see if it drops in. If it **falls in after 10 seconds, add a penalty stroke** to your hole score.

### **Rule 17: The Flagstick**

- If your ball is played from **off the green**, there is **no penalty** if your ball **strikes** the **flagstick**, provided **no one** is attending it.
- If your ball is **on the green**, do **not putt** with the flagstick in the hole. Either take the flagstick out or ask another player to hold it and take it out when you play your ball. In **match play**, if you putt and your ball hits the flagstick when it is in the hole, you **lose the hole**. In **stroke play**, you must **add two penalty strokes** to your hole score.

### **Rule 18: Ball is Moved**

- If you or your partner **touches** or **moves** your ball on **purpose** or **accidentally**, **add a penalty stroke** to your hole score and **replace** the ball. If you do **not replace** it, **add a total of two penalty strokes** to your hole score.
- If someone or something else **moves** your ball there is **no penalty**, but you **must replace** it.
- **Exception:** If the ball is **moved** by **wind** or **water**, you **must play it as it lies**.

### **Rule 19: Ball in Motion Deflected or Stopped**

- If your ball **hits** you, your partner, your caddie, or your equipment you are **penalized one stroke** and you **must play your ball as it lies**.

- In **match play**, if your ball hits your opponent, his caddie, or his equipment, there is **no penalty**; you may **play the ball as it lies** or **replay** the shot.
- In **stroke play**, if your ball hits a fellow competitor, caddie, his equipment or anything else there is **no penalty** and the ball is **played as it lies**.
- **If your ball hits another ball and moves it**, you **must play** your **ball as it lies**. The **owner of the other ball must replace** it. If your ball is **on the green** when you play and the ball that your ball hits is also **on the green**, you are **penalized two strokes in stroke play**. Otherwise, there is **no penalty**.

### **Rule 20: Lifting and Dropping the Ball**

- If you are going to lift your ball under a Rule and the Rule **requires** that the ball be **replaced**, you **must put a ball-marker by the ball before you lift it**.
- When you **drop** a ball, **stand erect, shoulder height**, and hold your **arm out straight** when dropping it.
- If a dropped ball hits the ground and rolls into a hazard, out of a hazard, comes to rest more than two club-lengths from where it first struck a part of the course, nearer the hole or, if you are dropping away from an **immovable obstruction** or **ground under repair**, etc., back where the **obstruction** or **ground under repair** still interferes with your stance or swing, you **must re-drop**. If the same thing happens when you re-drop, you **must place** the ball **where** it struck the ground when it **was re-dropped**.
- If you play a ball from a **wrong place**, you **lose the hole** in **match play**, or **two penalty strokes** in **stroke play**.

### **Rule 21: Cleaning the Ball**

- You may **clean** your ball when you lift it, with a few **exceptions**: when you are checking if it is **unfit** for play, **identifying** it, or if it either **interferes** with or **assists** another player's play.

### **Rule 22: Ball Interfering with or Assisting Play**

- If another ball **interferes** with your swing or is on your line of play, you may ask the owner of the ball to lift it.
- If your ball is near the hole and might **assist** another player, you may lift your ball.

### **Rule 23: Loose Impediments**

- **Loose impediments** are **natural objects** that are **not growing** or **fixed** - such as loose leaves, twigs, fallen branches, stones, and insects. You may remove a **loose impediment** **except** when **your ball** and the **loose impediment** lie in a **bunker** or **water hazard**. (**Exception** see Rule 12-1)
- If your **ball moves** as a result of **removing a loose impediment**, you incur a **penalty of one stroke** **unless** **your ball is on the putting green**.

### **Rule 24: Obstructions**

- **Obstructions** are **artificial** or **man-made objects**. Bottles, cans, rakes, etc., are **movable** obstructions. Sprinkler heads, shelters, cart paths, etc., are **immovable** obstructions.
- **Movable obstructions** anywhere on the course may be **removed**. If the **ball moves** when moving an **obstruction**, there's **no penalty** and the ball **must** be **replaced**.
- You may **drop** your ball away from an **immovable obstruction** if it **interferes** with your **swing** or **stance**. Find the nearest point **not** nearer the hole where the ball could be played without interference with your swing or stance. **Drop** the ball within one club-length of that point. **Note:** It is good practice **not** to pick up the ball until you have established the nearest point of relief.

### **Rule 25: Casual Water; Ground Under Repair; Animal Holes**

- **Casual water** is any temporary water caused by rain or over-watering. **Ground under repair** is any damaged area, which the Committee has marked as such.

- If your **ball** or your **stance** is in **casual water, ground under repair** or a **burrowing animal hole**, you may either **play the ball as it lies** or find the nearest **place** not nearer the hole which gives you **relief**, and **drop** the ball **within one club-length of that place**.
- If your ball is in **casual water**, etc., and you **cannot find** it, determine where the ball **entered** the area and **drop** a ball within one club-length of that place **without penalty**.
- If your ball is on the **wrong putting green**, find the nearest place **off the green**, **not** nearer the hole, and **drop** the ball within one club-length of that place.

### **Rule 26: Water Hazards**

- **Water hazard margins** are identified by **yellow stakes** or **lines**. **Lateral water hazard margins** are identified by **red stakes** or **lines**.
- If your ball **is in a water hazard** or a **lateral water hazard**, you may **play it as it lies**. If you **cannot find it** or do **not wish to play it**, add a **penalty stroke** and do one of the following:
  - a. **drop** and **play another ball** from where you **last** played;
  - b. **drop a ball behind the water hazard** as far back as you wish on a straight line from the hole, keeping where your ball **last** crossed the hazard margin between the hole and where you **drop** the ball (“FLAG LINE”);
  - c. if it’s a **lateral water hazard**, you may also **drop** a ball within two club-lengths of where the ball **last** crossed the hazard margin, **no** nearer to the hole; or, a point on the opposite margin **equidistant** from the hole.

### **Rule 27: Ball Lost or Out of Bounds**

- A ball is **lost** if it is **not found within five minutes** after you first begin to search or you **have put another ball into play**.



- A ball is **out of bounds** when **all** of it lies beyond the inside line of objects such as white stakes, or a fence or wall that marks the boundary of the course.
- If your ball is **lost** or **out of bounds**, you must **add a penalty stroke** to your hole score and **play another ball** from where you played your last shot (known as “**stroke and distance**”)
- If you think your ball may be **lost** or **out of bounds**, you may play a **provisional ball** from the place where your first ball was played. You **must tell** your opponent or fellow-competitor that you are playing a **provisional ball** and play it **before** you leave the area to look for the first ball. If you **cannot find** your first ball or if it is **out of bounds**, you must count all the strokes with the **first ball** and **provisional ball**, **add a penalty stroke** and play out the hole with the **provisional ball**. However, IF you **find** your **first ball in bounds**, you **must continue** play with the **first ball** and **pick up** the **provisional ball**.

### **Rule 28: Ball Unplayable**

- If your ball is under a bush or in some other bad situation and **you decide you cannot play it**, **add a penalty stroke** and do one of the following:
  - a. Go back to where you played the **last shot** and play a ball from there;
  - b. Go back on a straight line as far as you wish, keeping where the unplayable ball lay between the hole and where you **drop** the ball (“FLAG LINE”);
  - c. Measure **two club-lengths** from where the unplayable ball lay, **drop** a ball and play from there.

### **Rules 29, 30, 31, 32: Other Forms of Play**

- **Threesomes, foursomes**: Partners play alternately at one ball. If you play out of turn, you **lose the hole** in **match play** (or incur **two penalty strokes** in **stroke play**). **Penalties do not alter the order of play.**

- **Three-ball, four-ball, better-ball:** Each player plays his own ball. A player may play alone if his partner **cannot** be there. Partners may choose to **play in any order**.
- **Stableford:** A stroke play event using a points-scoring system rather than total strokes. It is **not necessary to hole out on every hole**.