

10 GOLDEN RULES OF GOLF

If all golfers were to learn these 10 Golden Rules, it is estimated that they may be able to resolve 90% of the Rules situations that golfers routinely encounter in the course of an 18-hole round.

These are some of the most basic principles of the game:

1. Play the ball as it lies.
2. **Do NOT** move, bend, or break anything growing or fixed, *except* in fairly taking your stance or swing. **Do NOT** press anything down.
3. You **may** lift "natural" objects **NOT** fixed or growing, *except* in a water hazard or bunker. **NO penalty.**
4. Movable man-made objects **may** be moved. For immovable objects, you **may** take relief by dropping away from them within one club-length of the **nearest point of relief**, **no** nearer the hole, *except* in a water hazard or if the object defines out of bounds. In a bunker, you **must drop** in the bunker. **NO penalty.**
5. You **may** take relief from casual water, ground under repair, burrowing animal holes or casts, anywhere *except* in a water hazard. **On** the **putting green**, place at the **nearest point of relief**, **no** nearer the hole; *otherwise* drop within one club-length of the **nearest point of relief**, **no** nearer the hole. In a bunker, you **MUST drop** in the bunker. **NO penalty.**
6. In a water hazard or bunker, **do NOT** touch the water or ground with your hand or club *before* the stroke.
7. If you hit your ball into a **water hazard** and **CANNOT find** or **play** it, either drop at the place where you played the previous shot, or drop behind the point where the ball last crossed the

hazard margin ("FLAG LINE"). *On the tee*, you **may** tee the ball. **One penalty stroke**.

If you hit into a **lateral water hazard**, you **may** also **drop** within two club-lengths of the point where the ball **last** crossed the hazard margin, *or*, within two club-lengths of a point equidistant from the hole on the opposite margin. **One penalty stroke**.

8. When you hit your ball **OB** *or* **CANNOT find** it *after* 5 minutes of searching (**lost ball**), **add a penalty stroke**, go back *and* **drop** a ball at the place where you played the previous shot. *On the tee*, you **may** tee the ball. If you think you have hit your ball **OB** *or* **lost it outside a water hazard**, play a **provisional ball** *before* searching for the first one.

9. When you have an **unplayable lie**, (a) you **may drop** a ball at the place where you played the previous shot, adding a **penalty stroke**. *On the tee*, you **may** tee the ball. *Alternatively*, (b) drop any distance behind the unplayable spot, keeping it between you *and* the hole ("FLAG LINE"), *or* (c) drop within two club-lengths, **no** nearer the hole. If the ball is **in** a **bunker**, you **MUST drop** **in** the **bunker**, under **either** of the **alternative options**. You **MAY NOT** declare your ball **unplayable** that is in a water hazard, see Golden Rule #7.

10. You **may** repair **ball marks** *and* **old hole plugs** that are **on** the **putting green** that are on the line of your putt, *but not* spike marks.

This list omits one of the **Rules** that is often **breached** in amateur golf *and* that is **purposely touching a ball in play**, such as in identifying a ball in the rough. This often happens when a ball lies in long grass *and* the player wants to ensure that it is theirs before they make a stroke at it. *Instead* of following the procedure set down in **Rule 12-2** they bend down *and* rotate their ball *until* they can see their identification mark *or* the brand *and* number that they are playing. This action incurs a **penalty of one stroke**. A player **may NOT touch** their ball in

these circumstances *unless* they announce their intention to their **opponent(s) in match play, or marker or fellow-competitor in stroke play**, and then mark the position of their ball *before* touching it. The player **MUST mark** the position of their ball to **avoid a penalty** even if they **do NOT actually lift** the ball **when they touch it** (Decision 12-2/2).

Note: There is **NO penalty** when a player accidentally touches their ball while removing a loose impediment lying close to it, *providing* the **ball does NOT move** (Decision 18-2a/31).

Of course, a ball at rest **on** a **putting green** may be lifted and cleaned **without** notifying anyone else, *but* again **it MUST be marked first**. If a player rotates their ball **on** the **putting green** to line-up the trademark with the hole, **without** marking it, they still incur the **one stroke penalty** for touching the ball other than as provided for in Rule 18-2a. Under **Rules 16-1b and 20-1**, a ball **on** the **putting green** may be lifted (*or touched and rotated*) **only after** its position has been marked (Decision 18-2a/33).

You will sometimes hear golfers claim that touching a ball with the club-head incurs a **penalty**. This is **NOT correct**. *Providing* the ball **does NOT move** there is **nothing** in the **Rules to prohibit this**. In fact, **Decision 13-4/12** confirms that **even in a bunker or water hazard** there is **no penalty** if a player accidentally touches their ball with their club-head, *providing* it **does NOT move**.