

BASIC RULES OF GOLF

THE BALL

"The Game of Golf consists in playing a ball from the teeing ground into the hole by a stroke or successive strokes in accordance with the rules." That's pretty easy, however, playing a ball means playing one ball. You're not supposed to substitute another during the play of a hole. If you have any questions you can't answer during that hole, play a second ball, scoring that one as well, until you can come into the clubhouse and ask the correct ruling on that hole.

THE STROKE

A stroke is a forward movement of the club made with the intention of striking the ball. Intention is the key word here. If you voluntarily stop your forward stroke halfway down, it's not a stroke, because your intention died. If you go through with the swing it's a stroke, even if you miss the ball. There is no penalty if a ball falls or is nudged off a tee before the forward stroke begins. Also you can't push, scrape or "spoon" the ball. There has to be a back swing, no matter how short, and a forward swing.

HAZARDS

Hazards are just that. They can be hazardous to your score. They also may swallow your golf ball. There are technically two and actually three kinds of hazards. Following is the list and how to deal with them.

Water hazards - Any body of water or ditch (even if there is no water in it) marked by yellow lines or stakes. Everything within those boundaries is the hazard. A water hazard also includes a *lateral water hazard*, which is marked by red lines or stakes. A water hazard is a lake, pond, river, stream or whatever that lies in your path to the green. You have to hit your ball over it. If you don't do that and your ball drowns, you must drop a ball keeping that point between the hole and where you drop the ball. You can drop as far back as you want, providing you follow that provision, and, unfortunately, you have to add a penalty stroke to your score.

A lateral water hazard - (the red line for stakes, remember) is one that generally runs parallel to the hole. You can't drop behind it, so you must drop within two club-lengths outside the point where the ball last crossed the hazard line. Or you can drop in the same way on the opposite side of the hazard, as long as it's the same distance from the hole. Again, tack on that extra stroke.

If your ball ends up within the confines of a hazard but not in the water and you can play it, make sure you don't ground your club, which means letting it rest on the surface. That's a no-no and costs you a penalty stroke. Touching the grass but not the ground is okay.

Bunker - As you already know, this is the sand trap. You don't have to drop out of it and take a penalty, but you have to play out of it. The basic rule here is that, as in a water hazard, you can't touch the sand with your club before you make the stroke.

OUT OF BOUNDS

Out of bounds areas are usually defined by white stakes, sometimes by a line on the ground and sometimes by a fence or wall. The entire ball must lie out of bounds. If any part of it is in bounds, you can play it if possible. You cannot, however, remove the stakes, dismantle the fence or remove the wall even if it interferes with your swing. You can stand out of bounds to play a ball that is in bounds.

If your ball goes out of bounds, you must count the stroke and replay the shot, adding a penalty stroke. This is called the stroke and distance penalty. You count the stroke, you lose the distance and add another stroke. In other words, go back to where you hit the original shot and do it again. In the case of a drive, you're now hitting your third shot from the tee.

LOST BALL

If you hit your ball into rough, bushes, trees or other trash and aren't sure where it is, you have no more than five minutes to look for it. If you can't find it within that time, the ball is lost and you have to replay. The rule is the same as for a shot out of bounds, count the stroke, return to the original spot, add a penalty strike and hit it again.

PROVISIONAL BALL

If you think your ball may be lost or out of bounds, you're allowed to hit a provisional ball to save you the time and effort of trekking back to hit another. If your first ball is indeed out of bounds or can't be found, play the provisional. If your first ball is found and in play, put the provisional back in your pocket.

When you hit a provisional ball, you're supposed to announce, "I'm going to hit a provisional ball." If you're in a tournament and you don't do it that way, the provisional ball becomes the one in play even if you find your first ball.

UNPLAYABLE LIE

Sad to say, we all sometimes hit balls into places where we can't play them, usually lodged against a tree or under a pine or imbedded in a bush. When this happens to you, you have three options: (remember the player becomes the sole judge of whether a ball is unplayable)

1. You can drop within two club-lengths of the spot where the ball lay, not closer to the hole, which is the most commonly used and best option if you can get adequate relief from your predicament:
2. You can proceed under the same rule as for a ball that is lost or out of bounds, returning to the original spot and replaying:
3. You can drop as far back as you want from the point where your ball lay, keeping that point between you and the hole.

In each case you count the stroke that got you in all this trouble and add a penalty stroke.

ON THE PUTTING GREEN

There are a few special rules here that you should know. You can repair ball marks or old plugs on the putting surface. Watch out for other balls on the putting green. If your ball is on the green and strikes another ball on the green, you incur a two-stroke penalty in stroke play. If it's your ball that is hit, by the way, you replace it without penalty. In any event, it's always a good idea for everybody to mark his ball when it is on the green.

If your ball is on the green and it strikes the flagstick in the hole you are penalized two strokes in stroke play.

If your ball is off the green and you hit onto the green and any of the above happens, you will not be penalized.

CART PATHS

If your ball lands on the cart path, you may remove it one club length, no closer to the hole, using the closest spot of relief. You will not receive a stroke penalty for this terrible injustice.

ETIQUETTE

There are many etiquette items that you will need to know, such as the following:

On the golf course

- Be sure to be patient and respect other players on the course as you wish to be respected.
- Don't produce any loud noise. Normal speaking or conversation is ok; shouting or loud laughing is not!
- Don't make practice swings on the teeoff zone.
- Do not stand too close behind, near or in front of any other player.
- Be absolutely quiet while any other player wants to make his shot.
- Always be prepared to play your ball in order to avoid any delay in the game.
- Don't play your stroke if other players intend to do their puts on any green in the neighborhood.
- Don't play your shot as long as any player in front of you may be in hit distance to you.
- Replace divots and step it into place, repair any damage caused e.g. by your spikes, pitch marks etc. immediately. After any bunker play be sure to use the rake and leave the bunker in perfect condition.
- Before putting be sure to leave your bag somewhere beside the green, preferably in an area beside the next teeoff zone.
- Adapt your walking speed to that of your flight partners. Neither walk too fast nor too slow, try to stand somewhere beside the player who has to do the next shot.
- While walking to your ball, try to consider how to play it best.
- If possible, try to observe not only your own but also the balls of the other players in your flight. This will help to save time in case one of your partners may not be able to find his ball immediately after his shot.

On the Green

- The ball with the longest distance to the hole has to be played first.
- Don't step on putting lines of your flight partners.
- Mark your ball as soon as it lies on the green.
- When holding the flagstick, don't stand too close to the hole. Watch for any shadow your body may produce in the sun because this may interfere other players in their game.
- Don't stay too close to your flight partners when they want to take their puts.
- Don't move or speak as long as your flight partners play their balls.
- Avoid any damage of the green! (flag hole, spikes, pitching holes!) Remove all traces before leaving the green.
- Replace flagstick carefully. Do not damage the hole!
- Leave the green as soon as possible. There is time to note your score while waiting for tee-off on the next tee.

These are the general rules and the proper etiquette that every golfer should know before playing on a course. Knowing these rules and the proper etiquette will help you save strokes and make the game much more enjoyable for both you and your playing partners

