

# A Quick Reference Guide to the Rules of Golf

## Rule 1 -- The Game and Player Conduct

- A. The holes on the course must be played in order (1 through 9, 10 through 18 or 1 through 18).
- B. Play with Integrity, Consideration of others and take care of the course.
- C. You must always play by the Rules. You are not allowed to change them.

## Rule 3 -- Stroke Play

- A. In stroke play, the competitor with the lowest total score for the round (9 or 18 holes) is the winner.
- B. You must play the ball into the hole before starting the next hole. No "gimmies!"
- C. Anyone you are playing with is a fellow-competitor

## Rules 4 -- Clubs and the Ball

- A. You may carry no more than fourteen clubs.
- B. Normally, you may not change balls during the play of a hole. However, if you damage or cut your ball, you may change the ball after first asking your opponent or fellow competitor.

## Rule 5 -- Playing the Round

- A. Read the notices given to you by the tournament officials.
- B. You may not hit a practice shot while playing a hole, or from any hazard. Note: Always read the local rules about practice.
- C. Know your tee-time or starting time.
- D. Make sure you play your own ball (put a mark on the ball in case someone else is using an identical ball).
- E. In stroke play, make sure your score for each hole is correct before you turn in your card.
- F. Keep playing unless there is lightning, you are ill or an official tells you to stop.

## Rule 6 -- Playing the Hole

- A. 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.
- B. If your ball accidentally falls off the tee, you may replace it without penalty.

## Rule 7 -- Finding and Identifying the Ball

- A. During a round, you may not ask anyone for advice on how to play. However, you may ask about Rules or the position of hazards or the flagstick.
- B. You may not give advice to your opponent or fellow-competitor

## Rule 8 -- Course Played as it is Found

- A. 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."
- B. While playing a hole, the player whose ball is farthest from the hole plays first.

## Rule 9 -- Ball Played as it Lies

- A. If your ball comes to rest and is then moved by natural forces such as wind or water, you generally play it from its new spot
- B. If your ball is lifted or moved by an outside agency (person or animal) it must be replaced on its original spot
- C. Be careful not to move a ball at rest. If you move your own ball, you will likely receive a penalty (except on the putting green).

## Rule 10 -- Making a Stroke, Anchoring Clubs, Advice and Help

- A. You must strike the ball fairly with the head of the club. You may not push, scrape or rake the ball.

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- B. You must not hit your ball while it is moving.
- C. During a round, you may not ask anyone for advice on how to play. However, you may ask about Rules or the position of hazards or the flagstick.
- D. You may not give advice to your opponent or fellow-competitor
- E. Your coach **CANNOT** help you lineup a shot.

## Rule 11 – Ball in Motion

- A. If your ball hits an outside agency, (bird, rake, etc.), it is called a "rub of the green." There is no penalty and the ball is played as it lies.
- B. If your ball hits you, or your equipment you there is no penalty and you must play your ball as it lies.
- C. If your ball hits a fellow competitor or their equipment in stroke play, there is no penalty and the ball is played as it lies. These are the same as outside agencies in stroke play.
- D. 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 which your ball hits is also on the green, you are penalized two (2) strokes in stroke play. Otherwise, there is no penalty.

## Rule 12 -- Bunkers

- A. A hazard is any bunker (area of sand)
- B. In a bunker, you may remove loose impediments and moveable obstructions.
- C. You may lift your ball to identify it. You must tell your opponent or fellow competitor before you lift your ball to identify it.

## Rule 13 – Putting Greens and Flagsticks

- A. If any part of your ball is touching the green, it is on the green.
- B. When your ball is on the green, you may brush away leaves and other loose impediments within your line of putt with your hand or a club.
- C. You should repair ball marks or old hole plugs if they are within your line of putt, but you may not repair marks made by spikes or shoes.
- D. You may not test the surface of the green by rolling a ball or scraping the surface.
- E. Always mark your ball by putting a small coin or other marker behind it when you want to pick it up to clean or get it out of another player's way.
- F. You may Putt with the flagstick in the hole.

## Rule 14 – Lifting the Ball and Returning Ball to Play

- A. Ball must be marked before lifting
- B. Ball may be cleaned when lifted on green.
- C. You may clean your ball when you are allowed to lift it. On the green a ball may be cleaned when lifted except when it has been lifted to determine if it is unfit or for identification purposes because it interferes with play.
- D. When you drop a ball, drop it from knee height.
- E. If a dropped ball hits the ground and rolls into a penalty area, 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 into the obstruction or ground under repair, 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.

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## Rule 15 & 16 – Loose Impediments and Free Relief

- A.** Loose impediments are natural objects that are not growing or fixed -- such as leaves, twigs, branches, worms 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)
- B.** Obstructions are artificial or man-made objects. Bottles, tin cans, rakes, etc., are movable obstructions. Sprinkler heads, shelter houses, cart paths, etc., are immovable obstructions.
- C.** Movable obstructions anywhere on the course may be removed. If the ball moves when moving an obstruction, it must be replaced without penalty.
- D.** 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 you can play without interference with your swing or stance. Drop the ball within one club-length of that point. (You may move your ball away from an immovable obstruction if it interferes with your swing or stance.) Note: You should not pick up the ball from an obstruction until you have established the nearest point of relief.

## Rule 17 – Penalty Areas

- A.** Penalty Areas identified by yellow stakes by red stakes or lines.
- B.** If your ball is in a penalty, you may play it as it lies. If you cannot find it or do not wish to play it, add a penalty stroke and drop and play another ball from where you last played; or drop a ball behind the penalty area as far back as you wish. If you decide to drop behind the Penalty area, drop the ball so that there is a straight line between the hole, where your ball last crossed the hazard margin and where you drop the ball. If your ball is in a lateral water hazard, you may drop a ball within two club-lengths of where the ball last crossed the penalty area, no nearer to the hole.

## Rule 18 – Stroke and Distance

- A.** A ball is lost if it is not found within **three (3)** minutes after you first begin to search.
- B.** 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 playing area.
- C.** If your ball is lost or out of bounds, you must add a penalty stroke to your score and play another ball from where you played your last shot.
- D.** If you think your ball may be lost or out of bounds, you may play another ball (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 look for the first ball. If you cannot find your first ball or if it is out of bounds, you must count the strokes with the first and provisional balls, add a penalty stroke and play out the hole with the provisional ball. If you find your first ball in bounds, continue play with it and pick up the provisional ball.

## Rule 19 – Unplayable Ball

- A.** If your ball is under a tree 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. Measure two club-lengths from the unplayable lie, drop a ball and play from there.
  - c. Keep the unplayable lie between where you drop the ball and the hole, go back as far as you wish on a straight line and drop and play the ball.
- B.** If your ball is in a bunker and unplayable:
  - a. Go back to where you played the last shot from (one penalty stroke)
  - b. Two club-lengths from the ball (one penalty stroke)
  - c. In the bunker on a line with the flag (one penalty stroke)
  - d. Outside the bunker on a line with the flag (two penalty strokes)

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## Rule 20 -- Rulings

- A. If another ball interferes with your swing or is in your line of putt, you may ask the owner of the ball to lift it.
- B. If your ball is near the hole and might serve as a backstop for another player, you may lift your ball.

**General Rule of Drops** -When dropping your ball from a penalty (Unplayable lie, Penalty area, etc), measure 2 club lengths from the point of the penalty then drop ball. When dropping your ball from relief under the rules (Cart path, casual water etc), measure 1 club length from the point of relief then drop the ball.

Consult the 2019-2020  
USGA Rules of Golf for  
complete rules.

