

A Quick Guide to the Rules of Golf




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This guide focuses on commonly encountered Rules situations and attempts to provide a simple explanation of these Rules. 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, please refer to the relevant Rule.

General Points

The game of golf should be played in the correct spirit and to understand this you should read the Etiquette Section in the Rules of Golf. In particular:

- show consideration to other players
- play at a good pace and be ready to invite faster moving groups to play through, and
- take care of the course by smoothing bunkers, replacing divots and repairing ball marks on the greens.

Before starting your round you are advised to:

- read the Local Rules on the score card and the notice board
- put an identification mark on your ball; many golfers play the same brand 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)
- don't use any artificial devices or unusual equipment, unless specifically authorised by Local Rule (Rule 14-3).

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 (including being signed by you and your marker) and return it to the Committee 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 provided he does so immediately;
- in stroke play you incur a two-stroke penalty and must play a ball from within the correct area.

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

If you think a ball is yours but can't see your identification mark, after notifying your marker or opponent, you may mark the position of the ball and lift it 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, or
- pressing anything down (Rule 13-2).

If your ball is in a bunker or a water hazard, don't:

- touch the ground (or the water in a water hazard) with your hand or club before your downswing, or
- move loose impediments (Rule 13-4).

If you play a wrong ball:

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

On the Putting Green (Rules 16 and 17)

On the putting green, you may:

- mark, lift and clean your ball (always replace it on the exact spot), and
- repair ball marks and old hole plugs, but not any other damage, such as spike marks (Rule 16-1).

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 your ball is in play, if:

- you accidentally cause it to move
- you lift it when not permitted, or
- it moves after you have addressed it

add a penalty stroke and replace your ball (but see the exceptions under Rules 18-2a and 18-2b).

If someone other than you, your partner or your caddies moves your ball at rest, or it is moved by another ball, replace your ball without penalty.

If a ball at rest is moved by the wind or moves of its own accord, play it as it lies without penalty.

Ball in Motion Deflected or Stopped (Rule 19)

If a ball struck by you is deflected or stopped by you, your partner, your caddies or your equipment, you incur a penalty of one stroke and play the ball as it lies (Rule 19-2).

If a ball struck by you is deflected or stopped by another ball at rest, there is normally no penalty and the ball is played as it lies. However, in stroke play only

if both balls lay on the putting green before you made your stroke, you incur a two-stroke penalty (Rule 19-5a).

Lifting, Dropping and Placing the Ball (Rule 20)

Prior to lifting a ball that has to be replaced (e.g. when you lift a ball 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 erect, hold the ball at shoulder height and arm's length and drop it.

The most common situations where a dropped ball must be re-dropped are when the ball:

- rolls to a position where there is interference from the condition from which free relief is being taken (e.g. an immovable obstruction)
- comes to rest more than two club-lengths from where it was dropped, or
- 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 re-dropped and they are covered in Rule 20-2c.

If a ball dropped for a second time rolls into any of these positions, you place it where it first struck the course when re-dropped.

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, or
- have any ball lifted if it might interfere with your play.

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

A ball that is lifted because it is assisting or interfering with play must not be cleaned, except when 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.

Movable Obstructions (Rule 24-1)

Movable obstructions (i.e. artificial movable objects such as rakes, bottles, 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 in or 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 object on the course that cannot be moved (e.g. a building) or cannot readily be moved (e.g. a firmly embedded direction post). Objects defining out of bounds are not treated as obstructions.

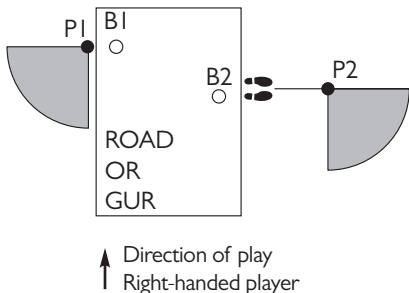
An abnormal ground condition is casual water, ground under repair or a hole, cast or runway made by a burrowing animal, a reptile or a bird.

Except when the ball is in a water hazard, relief without penalty 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 (see diagram below). If the ball is on the putting green, it is placed at the nearest point of relief, which may be off the putting green.

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 by dropping the ball outside and behind the bunker under penalty of one stroke.

The following diagram illustrates the term “nearest point of relief” in Rules 24-2 and 25-1 in the case of a right-handed player.



B1 = position of ball on road, in ground under repair (GUR), etc.

P1 = nearest point of relief

P1 shaded area = area within which ball to be dropped, radius of one club-length from P1, measured with any club

B2 = position of ball on road, in ground under repair (GUR), etc.

☞ = notional stance required to play at P2 with club with which player would expect to play the stroke

P2 = nearest point of relief

P2 shaded area = area within which ball to be dropped, radius of one club-length from P2, measured with any club

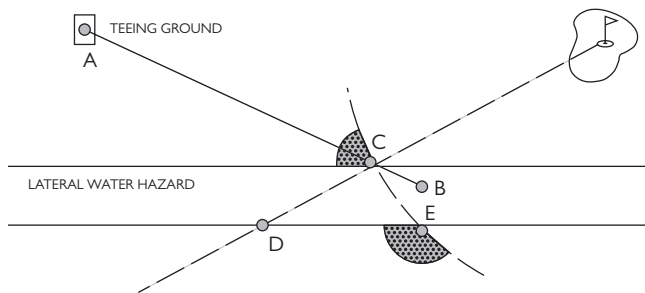
Water Hazards (Rule 26)

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

- play a ball from where your last shot was played, or
- drop a ball 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 a ball 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 played from teeing ground at Point A comes to rest in lateral water hazard at Point B having last crossed the margin of the hazard at Point C.

Player's options are as follows:

- play ball as it lies without penalty at Point B, or under penalty of one stroke:
- play another ball from teeing ground
- drop a ball behind the hazard anywhere on the broken line from Point D backwards
- drop a ball in the shaded area at Point C (i.e. within two club-lengths of point C but not nearer the hole than Point C), or
- drop a ball in the shaded area at Point E (i.e. within two club-lengths of point E but not nearer to the hole than Point E).

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. These are normally defined by fences, walls, white stakes or white lines.

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. If it is not found within 5 minutes, 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.

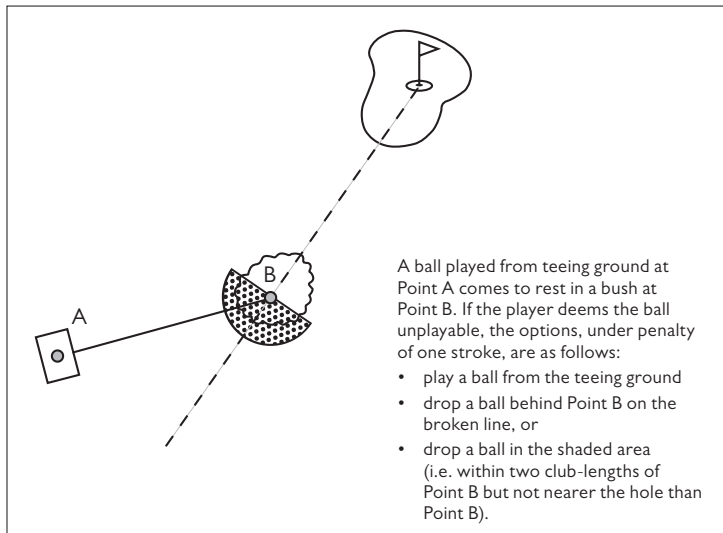
If the original ball is lost (other than in a water hazard) or out of bounds, you must continue with the provisional ball, under penalty of one stroke. If the original ball is found in bounds, you must continue play of the hole with it, and must stop playing the provisional ball.

Ball Unplayable (Rule 28)

If your ball is in a water hazard and you do not wish to play it as it lies, you must proceed under the water hazard Rule – the unplayable ball Rule does not apply. Elsewhere on the course, if you believe your ball is unplayable, you may, under penalty of one stroke:

- play a ball from where your 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 a ball in the bunker.



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