



Golf Rules in Brief

A summary of some principal Rules of Golf. In case of doubt, refer to the complete Rules published by the United States Golf Association and the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews.

Match and Stroke Play

Put an identification mark on your ball. If you can't identify it as yours, it's lost. (27) If your ball becomes unfit for play, you may replace it, without penalty, on the hole where it becomes unfit or between holes. (5-3)

Count your clubs. No more than 14. (4-4)

Don't use an artificial device or unusual equipment for gauging or measuring distance or conditions, or to give artificial aid in gripping. (14-3)

Don't ask for advice from anyone except your partner or your caddie. Don't give advice to anyone except your partner. (8-1)

During a hole you may practice swing but not play a practice stroke. Between holes you may practice chip and putt on or near the putting green of the hole last played or the tee of the next hole but not from a hazard. (7-2)

Play without delay. (6-7)

Order of Play

On the first tee the honor is determined by the order of the draw or, in the absence of a draw, by lot. (10)

In match play, the ball farther from the hole is played first. The winner of a hole tees off first on the next hole. If a player plays out of turn anywhere on the course, his opponent may require him to replay. (10-1)

In stroke play, the ball farthest from the hole is played first. The competitor with the lowest score on a hole tees off first on the next hole. There is generally no penalty for playing out of turn. (10-2)

In four-ball competitions, partners may play in the order they consider best. (30-3c and 31-5)

Teeing Ground

Tee off within two club-lengths behind the front edges of the tee-markers.

If you tee off outside this area, in match play there is no penalty but your opponent may require you to replay the stroke. In stroke play you incur a two-stroke penalty and must then play from within the proper area. (11-4)

Playing the Ball

Play the ball as it lies. (13-1) Don't touch it unless a Rule permits. (18-2)

Play the course as you find it. Don't improve your lie, the area of your intended swing or your line of play or a reasonable extension of that line beyond the hole by moving, bending or breaking anything fixed or growing except in fairly taking your stance or making your swing. Don't press anything down. (13-2)

Don't build a stance. (13-3)

If your ball is in a bunker or a water hazard, don't touch the ground in the bunker or the ground or water in the water hazard before the downswing. (13-4)

Strike at the ball with the clubhead. Don't push or scrape it. (14-1) If your club strikes the ball more than once in a single stroke, count the stroke and add a penalty stroke. (14-4)

If you play a wrong ball (except in a hazard), in match play you lose the hole. In stroke play you incur a two-stroke penalty and must then play the correct ball. (15)

Putting Green

Don't touch the line of your putt unless a Rule permits. (16-1a) You may repair ball marks and old hole plugs on the line but not spike marks. (16-1c)

You may lift, and if desired clean, your ball on the putting green. Always replace it on the exact spot. (16-1b)

Don't test the surface by scraping it or rolling a ball. (16-1d)

If your ball played from the putting green strikes the flagstick, in match play you lose the hole or in stroke play you incur a two-stroke penalty. (17-3)

Always hole out unless in match play your opponent concedes your putt. (2-4, 3-2, 16-2)

Ball At Rest Moved

If your ball is moved by you, your partner or your caddie except as permitted by the Rules or if it moves after you have addressed it, add a penalty stroke and replace your ball. (18-2)

If your ball is moved by someone else or another ball, replace it without penalty to you. (18)

Ball In Motion Deflected or Stopped

If your ball in motion is deflected or stopped by you, your partner or your caddie, in match play you lose the hole. In stroke play you incur a two-stroke penalty and the ball is played as it lies. (19-2)

If your ball in motion is deflected or stopped by someone else, play your ball as it lies without penalty, except (a) in match play, if an opponent or his caddie deflects your ball, you may play it as it lies or replay it or (b) in stroke play, if your ball is deflected after a stroke on the putting green, you must replay. (19)

If your ball in motion is deflected or stopped by another ball in play and at rest, play your ball as it lies. In match play, you incur no penalty. In stroke play, you incur a two-stroke penalty if your ball and the other ball were on the green before your stroke. (19-5)

Lifting, Dropping and Placing

If a ball to be lifted is to be replaced, its position must be marked. (20-1)

When dropping, stand erect, hold the ball at shoulder height and arm's length and drop it. A ball to be dropped in a hazard must be dropped, and stay, in the hazard. (20-2a)

If a dropped ball strikes the player or his partner, caddie or equipment, it must be re-dropped without penalty. (20-2a)

A dropped ball must be re-dropped if it rolls into a hazard, out of a hazard, onto a putting green, out of bounds or to a position where there is interference by the condition from which relief is taken (in case of immovable obstructions, abnormal ground conditions, embedded ball and wrong putting green) or comes to rest more than two club-lengths from where it first struck a part of the course or nearer the hole than its original position or other reference point under Rule 25-1c or 26-1. If the ball when re-dropped rolls into any position listed above, place it where it first struck a part of the course when re-dropped. (20-2c)

If the original lie of a ball to be replaced has been altered, place it in the nearest similar lie within one club-length not nearer the hole, except in a bunker recreate the original lie and place it in that lie. (20-3b)

Interference

You may lift your ball if it might assist any other player. (22)

You may have any other ball lifted if it might interfere with your play or assist any other player. (22)

Loose impediments

Loose impediments are natural objects (such as stones and leaves) not fixed or growing, not solidly embedded and not adhering to the ball. (23)

You may move them unless the loose impediment and your ball lie in or touch the same hazard. (23-1)

If you move a loose impediment within one club-length of your ball and your ball moves, the ball must be replaced and (unless your ball was on the putting green) you incur a penalty stroke. (18-2c)

Obstructions

Obstructions are artificial (i.e., man-made) objects. Objects defining out of bounds such as fence posts or stakes and immovable artificial objects out of bounds are not obstructions. (24)

Movable obstructions anywhere may be moved. If your ball moves, replace it without penalty. (24-1)

If an immovable obstruction interferes with your stance or swing, you may, except when your ball is in a water hazard, drop within one club-length of the nearest point of relief not nearer the hole. In a bunker drop in the bunker, and on the putting green place in the nearest position which affords relief, not nearer the hole. There is no relief for intervention on your line of play unless your ball and the obstruction are on the green. (24-2)

If your ball is lost in an immovable obstruction (except in a water hazard) take the same relief based on the point where the ball entered the obstruction. (24-2c)

Abnormal Ground Conditions

If your ball is in casual water, ground under repair or, except in a water hazard, a hole, cast or runway made by a burrowing animal, you may drop without penalty within one club-length of the nearest point of relief not nearer the hole, except (a) in a hazard drop in the nearest position in the hazard which affords maximum relief and is not nearer the hole or, under penalty of one stroke, drop any distance behind the hazard or (b) on the putting green place in the nearest position which affords maximum relief and is not nearer the hole. (25-1b)

If your ball is lost in such condition (except in a burrowing animal hole in a water hazard), take the same relief based on the point where the ball last crossed the margin of the area. (25-1c)

Water Hazards

You may play the ball as it lies or, under penalty of one stroke, drop any distance behind the water hazard keeping the point at which the original ball last crossed the margin of the water hazard directly between the hole and the spot on which the ball is dropped, or replay the shot. (26-1a,b)

In a lateral water hazard, you may also, under penalty of one stroke, drop within two club-lengths of (a) the point where the ball last crossed the hazard margin or (b) a point on the opposite hazard margin equidistant from the hole. (26-1c)

Lost or Out of Bounds

If your ball may be lost outside a water hazard or out of bounds, you may play a provisional ball before you go forward to look for the original, provided you announce your intention to do so. If your original ball turns out to be in a water hazard or is found outside a water hazard, you must abandon the provisional ball. (27-2)

If your ball is lost outside a water hazard or is out of bounds, add one penalty stroke and play the provisional or, if you did not play a provisional, replay the shot. (27-1)

Unplayable

If you believe your ball is unplayable outside a water hazard you may add one penalty stroke and (a) drop within two club-lengths of where the ball lies not nearer the hole, (b) drop any distance behind the point where the ball lay (keeping that point directly between the hole and the spot on which the ball is dropped), or (c) replay the shot. If your ball is in a bunker you may proceed under (a), (b) or (c), however, if you elect to proceed under (a) or (b), you must drop in the bunker. (28)

Etiquette

Don't move, talk or stand close to or directly behind a player making a stroke.

Don't play until the group in front is out of the way.

Always play without delay. Leave the putting green as soon as all players in your group have holed out.

Invite faster groups to play through.

Replace divots. Smooth out footprints in bunkers.

Don't step on the line of another's putt.

Don't drop clubs on a putting green.

Replace the flagstick carefully in an upright position.

Leave the course in the condition in which you'd like to find it.