

Summary of Most Common Rules of GOLF

(check with USGA for current and complete rules, reviewed 09/20/2024)

1. You know or are virtually sure that your ball went into a water hazard. What are your options?

A. Yellow Water Hazard

Option 1 – Play it as it lies from the hazard. No penalty.

Option 2 – Replay the shot from the original position. Add 1 stroke penalty

Option 3 – Draw a virtual line from the hole to where the ball last crossed the margin of the hazard and drop anywhere behind (not sideways) that point, keeping the point between you and the hole. Add 1 stroke penalty.

B. Red Lateral Hazard

Same Options 1, 2 & 3 as for the Yellow Lateral Hazard, plus Option 4 – Go to the point where the ball last crossed the margin of the hazard and drop within 2 club length, not nearer the hole. Add 1 stroke penalty.

Note: it's not OK to “assume” your ball went into the hazard to use the hazard rule. In the absence of knowledge or virtual certainty that a ball struck toward a water hazard, but not found, is in the hazard, the player must proceed under the lost ball/OB rule.

2. Ball Lost or Out-of-Bounds (white stakes)

- a) If your ball is not found after a 3 minutes search, you may go back to where the shot was originally played from, and replay. Add 1 stroke penalty.
- b) Apply the Stroke and distance rule. Add 2 strokes penalty.

GOLF'S NEW RULES: STROKE AND DISTANCE

A new Local Rule will provide an alternative to stroke-and-distance relief for a ball that is lost outside a penalty area or out of bounds. This new Local Rule will be available beginning January 1, 2019.

BALL OUT OF BOUNDS



LOST BALL



If the Local Rule is in effect, you can still take stroke-and-distance relief, but you will now have the following additional option that comes with a penalty of two strokes:

- A DETERMINE SPOT** where your ball went out of bounds (left diagram) or is likely to be lost (right diagram).
- B FIND NEAREST FAIRWAY EDGE** no closer to the hole.
- C DROP YOUR BALL IN SHADED AREA** as defined on one side by a line from the hole through point A and on the other side by a line from the hole through point B, and not nearer the hole. The relief area is extended on both sides by two club-lengths.

This Local Rule is not intended for higher levels of play, such as professional or elite amateur level competitions.

c)

4. Unplayable Lie

The player is the sole judge as to whether his ball is unplayable, except in a water hazard.

Option 1 – Take 2 club lengths (from the ball) not closer to the hole. Add 1 stroke.

Option 2 – Replay the shot from the original position. Add 1 stroke.

Option 3 – Take the ball back as far as you want keeping the point where the ball lays between you and the hole. Add 1 stroke.

5. Unplayable Lie in a Bunker

Option 1 – Replay the shot from the original position. Add 1 stroke penalty.

Option 2 – Take a drop of no more than 2 club lengths no closer to the hole, must drop in the bunker. Add 1 stroke penalty.

Option 3 – Go back as far as you like in the bunker and drop (in the bunker) keeping that spot where your ball laid between you and the hole. Add 1 shot penalty

Option 4 – Go on the line from the hole through your ball, no closer to the pin and drop outside the bunker. Add two shot penalty

6. Removing Objects in a Bunker

You may move or remove any loose impediments in the bunker unless they are foreign to the area. Example – you may remove a candy wrapper or a pine cone or tree branch. NO penalty.

Note: Local rules may allow some exceptions.

7. Improving Your Swing Path

You cannot bend, break, hold or hack anything growing or fixed if it improves you lie, your stance, or your area of intended swing. Add 2 stroke penalty.

8. Grounding Your Club in a Hazard

Practice swings may be taken inside a hazard (bunker as well). If you accidentally touch the ground, sand or water with your club it is no longer a penalty. The top of the grass may be touched during a practice swing. No penalty in stroke play.

9. Number of Allowed Clubs

You are only allowed to carry 14 clubs in your bag. Penalty: 2 strokes per hole up to a maximum of 2 holes or 4 strokes.

10. Changing Club Characteristics

Clubs may not be altered in any way once play has begun. The penalty is disqualification, whether match or stroke play. Tightening up a loose club head is OK.

11. Casual Water

Find your nearest point of relief no closer to the hole where neither you or your ball lie in water that can be seen without pressing your feet up and down. You may then drop your ball within 1 club length from that point not nearer to the hole. No penalty.

Note: water overflowing from a water hazard, is casual water.

12. Accidentally Moving Your Ball

On the green: (2017 new local rule) No penalty for accidentally moving your ball, and it must be replaced in its original position before hitting. If wind caused ball to move, play ball as it lies, no need to replace it.

On the tee: No penalty for accidentally moving the ball when on the tee. However, swinging at the ball with the intent to hit it does count as one stroke.

Ball in play: If you accidentally move a ball in play with a practice swing, it's not a penalty. You must replace the ball to its original position and play it correctly. Failing to replay the ball from its original position results in a total penalty of two strokes in stroke play or loss of hole in match play. Note that SIRs rule allows a 6" lie bump, so no penalty here, but whiffing the ball with the intent to strike it, is one stroke penalty..plus a laughter from your playing partners.

13. Removing Loose Impediments (LI)

LI are natural loose objects not fixed or growing. Player can remove any LI on the green, with no penalty, regardless if the ball is on the green or off the green.

14. Asking for Advice

It's against the rules of golf to ask an opponent what club they have hit. Two strokes penalty.

15. Nearest Point of relief (NPR)

In plain language, when does it happen and how do you play it? It's an option, i.e. you are not required to claim NPR, but if you do, here is the procedure.

If your ball comes to rest in one of the following circumstances, and one of these situations interferes with your lie, stance or area of intended swing, then you may take relief without penalty:

- a. Interference from an immovable obstruction: Any obstruction that can't be moved, such as a cart path or maintenance road.
- b. Abnormal ground condition: For example, casual water, areas marked ground under repair, gopher holes.
- c. Wrong putting green: that's right you are playing the 15th hole and your ball wounds up on the 14th green, you are not allowed to play from the green.

When it's been determined your golf ball is sitting in a place that allows you free relief then what?

- a. Determine the shot you would play from that spot if the obstruction wasn't in the way, and which club you'd use. Then pull this club out of your bag.
- b. What direction can you move the ball? You can't move it closer to the hole, so forward is out; you can go left, right or behind. Using this same club, try setting up for a shot (or picture doing so) in each direction it is possible to do so. Make sure you are taking full relief from the original location (i.e. feet off the path, path not interfering with your swing, or not in casual water, etc..) and look at where your ball would sit in that case.

The spot that is closest to the original position without being closer to the hole is your nearest point of relief. Once you find the NPR, put a tee in/on the ground at that spot. Using any club (you don't have to stick with the original club), measure one club-length over and one club-length behind the NPR. This is the area within which you must take your free drop - a radius of one club-length, no closer to the hole, from the NPR. Follow normal dropping procedure from this point.

Note: Only lift your ball AFTER you've decided to use the NPR. If you lift your ball first, then discover the NPR is in a bad spot and decide not to take relief, you incur a penalty, whether you marked your ball or not.

16. How to Drop the Ball

After determining the nearest point of relief, stand outside the drop area, no closer to the hole, and extend your hand to the side dropping the ball from knee height. The ball may roll up to 2

club lengths no closer to the hole. If the ball rolls farther than that you must re-drop. If after dropping 2 times the ball continues to roll past 2 club lengths, you must place the ball where it first touched the ground.

17. Ball on a Cart Path

The cart path is a man-made surface that meets the definition of immovable obstruction. You are entitled to free relief.

Step 1 – Determine the “nearest point of relief”. This is the point where the ball would lay affording the player both swing and stance from the cart path.

Step 2 – Take 1 club length relief from the point where the ball would lie once full relief is taken.

Step 3 – After dropping, the ball may roll up to 2 club lengths no closer to the hole.

NOTE: The dirt or dirt path alongside the cart path where the grass has been worn away by cart traffic is neither artificial nor an obstruction. No free relief in this case.

17. Repairing the Line of your Putt

You may repair any ball marks and remove loose impediments, provided you do not press anything down.

18. Hitting the Wrong Ball

Stroke play: The penalty for hitting the wrong ball for either player is 2 strokes and the original ball must be replayed from its original position.

Match play: The penalty for hitting the wrong ball is loss of hole. If both players hit the wrong ball, only the first player to do so would be penalized as that would be the end of the hole.