

Golf Rules in Brief

INTRODUCTION

There are three important principles to remember when playing golf:

Play the course as you find it. Play the Ball as it lies.

And if you can't do either, do what's fair."

To do what's fair you need to know the Rules. The following is a summary of the Rules of Golf, simplified where possible.

ETIQUETTE

Etiquette covers both Courtesy and Priority on the Course as well as Care of the Course. Whilst the following points are not Rules as such they are an important part of the game.

1. Don't move, talk or stand close to a player making a stroke.
2. Don't play until the group in front is out of the way.
3. Always play without delay. Leave the putting green as soon as all players in your group have holed out.
4. Invite faster groups to play through, if you loose a hole on the group in front you are required to let the group behind though.
5. Replace divots, Rake the bunkers as you leave them.
6. Don't step on the line of another player's putt.
7. Don't drop clubs on the putting green.
8. Replace the flagstick carefully.

DEFINITIONS

The Definitions section of the Rules of Golf contains over forty Definitions which form the foundation around which the Rules of play are written. A good knowledge of the defined terms will help in the correct application of the Rules. These include:

Teeing Ground - the starting place for the hole, defined by two tee-markers.

Through the Green - the whole area of the golf course except the teeing ground and putting green of the hole being played and all hazards.

Hazards - any bunker or water hazard.

Putting Green - an area specially prepared for putting and containing a 4 1/2 inch diameter hole.

Out of Bounds - ground on which play is prohibited i.e. not part of the course. A ball is out of bounds when all of it lies out of bounds.

Loose Impediments - natural objects such as stones, leaves and twigs provided they are not fixed or growing, are not solidly embedded and are not sticking to the ball.

Obstructions - any man-made object, except:

- (1) objects defining out of bounds
- (2) any part of an immovable man-made object which is out of bounds; and
- (3) any construction declared by the Committee in the Local Rules to be an integral part of the course.

Casual Water - any temporary accumulation of water on the course which is visible before or after the player takes his stance (dew and frost are not casual water).

Ground Under Repair - Any part of the course so marked by the Committee.

Also includes material piled for removal and a hole made by a greenkeeper, even if not so marked.

SUMMARY OF THE RULES OF PLAY

TEEING OFF,

Tee off between and not in front of the tee-markers. You may tee off up to two club-lengths behind the front line of the tee-markers.

Teeing off outside this area - in match play there is no penalty but your opponent may ask you to replay your stroke; in stroke play you incur a two-stroke penalty and must then play from within the proper area.

PLAYING THE BALL,

Play the ball as it lies. Don't improve your lie, the area of your intended 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. Don't press anything down or build a stance.

If your ball lies in a bunker or a water hazard don't touch the ground with your club in the bunker, or the ground or water in the water hazard, before your downswing.

The ball must be fairly struck, not pushed or spooned. If you swing and miss the ball, it will count as a stroke. If the ball falls off the tee before you take a swing you may replace it without penalty.

If you make a bad swing and top the ball off the tee it still counts as a stroke and must be played where it lies

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

ON THE PUTTING GREEN,

You may repair ball marks and old hole plugs on the line of your putt but not any other damage, including spike marks.

You may mark, lift and clean your ball on the putting green. Always replace it on the exact spot.

Don't test the putting surface by scraping it or rolling a ball over it.

Ball played from putting green strikes flagstick - in match play you lose the hole; in stroke play you incur a two-stroke penalty.

The ball must be putted out in general stroke play, A Gimme is only allowed in a match play game, and still has to be COUNTED as a shot.

BALL AT REST MOVED,

If your ball is at rest and it 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.

If your ball is at rest and is moved by someone else or another ball, replace it without penalty to you.

BALL IN MOTION DEFLECTED OR STOPPED

Ball struck by you is deflected or stopped by you, your partner - you incur a one-stroke penalty and the ball is played as it lies.

Ball struck by you 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 the ball you have an option to replay the stroke or (b) in stroke play, if the ball is deflected after a stroke from on the putting green, you must replay it.

Ball struck by you is deflected or stopped by another ball at rest- in matchplay, no penalty and the ball is played as it lies except. In stroke play you incur a two-stroke penalty if your ball and the other ball were on the putting green before you played.

LIFTING, DROPPING AND PLACING THE BALL

If a lifted ball is to be replaced, its position must be marked. If a ball is to be dropped or placed in any other position (e.g. taking relief from GUR, etc.) it is recommended that the ball's original position be marked.

When dropping, stand erect, hold the ball at shoulder height and arm's length and drop it. If a dropped ball strikes you or your partner, caddie or equipment it must be re-dropped without penalty.

There are eight instances where a dropped ball rolls to such a position that it must be re-dropped - see Rules of Golf Rule 20 - 2c

BALL INTERFERING WITH OR ASSISTING PLAY,

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

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

LOOSE IMPEDIMENTS,

You may move a loose impediment unless it and your ball are in a hazard. However, if you have touched 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.

OBSTRUCTIONS,

Check the Local Rules on the score card for guidance on immovable obstructions (e.g. surfaced roads and paths etc.) .

Movable obstructions (e.g. rakes, tin cans etc.) anywhere on the course may be moved. If the ball moves it must be replaced without penalty.

If an immovable obstruction (e.g. a water fountain) interferes with your stance or swing, you may drop the ball within one club-length of the nearest point of 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 putting green.

CASUAL WATER, GROUND UNDER REPAIR etc.

If your ball is in casual water, ground under repair or a hole or cast made by a burrowing animal e.g. a rabbit, you may drop without penalty within one club-length of the nearest point of relief not nearer the hole.

WATER HAZARDS,

Check the Local Rules on the score card to establish whether the sea, lake, river etc. is a 'water hazard' or a 'lateral water hazard'.

Ball in watery hazard - play the ball as it lies or, under penalty of one stroke, (a) drop any distance behind the water hazard keeping a straight line between the hole, the point where the ball crossed the margin of the water hazard and spot on which the ball is dropped, or (b) play again from where you hit the ball into the hazard.

Ball in lateral water hazard - in addition to the options for a ball in a water hazard (see above), under penalty of one stroke, you may drop within two club-lengths of (a) the point where the ball crossed the margin of the hazard or (b) a point on the opposite side of the hazard equidistant from the hole.

BALL LOST OR OUT OF BOUNDS,

Check the Local Rules on the score card to identify the boundaries of the course. 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, after which if it is not found or identified it is lost. If, after playing a shot, you think your ball may be lost outside a water hazard or out of bounds you may 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 or out of bounds you must continue with the provisional ball under penalty of one stroke. If the original ball is not lost or out of bounds, you must continue play of the hole with it and the provisional ball must be abandoned.

BALL UNPLAYABLE,

If you believe your ball is unplayable outside a water hazard (and you are the sole judge), you may under penalty of one stroke, (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 a straight line between the hole, the point where the ball lay 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) and (c). However, if you elect to proceed under (a) or (b) you must drop in the bunker.

CONCLUSION,

A good score may be spoiled, or a match lost, due to a penalty incurred through ignorance or confusion concerning the Rules. A sound knowledge of the above summary should aid the golfer in tackling a "Rules problem". Nevertheless, the complete Rules of Golf as approved by the Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews