

GOLF'S NEW RULES

Major Changes

The following are the main changes to the Rules of Golf taking effect January 1, 2019 that are expected to have the most impact on the game and to be of most interest to golfers. The items covered on this page are organized into eight categories.

Ball at Rest

Ball Moved During Search

No penalty for accidentally moving your ball during search.

2019 Rule: Under **Rule 7.4**, if a player accidentally moves his or her ball while searching for it:

- The player gets no penalty for causing it to move, and
- The ball is always replaced; if the exact spot is not known, the player replaces the ball on the estimated original spot (including on, under or against any attached natural or man-made objects which the ball had been at rest under or against).

No Penalty for Moving Ball on the Putting Green

No penalty for accidentally moving your ball or ball-marker on the putting green.

2019 Rule: Under **Rule 13.1d**, there is no longer a penalty if a player (or opponent) accidentally causes the player's ball to move on the putting green.

The substance of this Rule change has already been implemented as of 1 January 2017 by authorizing Committees to adopt a Local Rule that eliminates the penalty for accidentally moving a ball on the putting green.

Standard for Deciding Why a Ball Moved

New standard to determine if you caused your ball to move.

2019 Rule: Under **Rule 9.2**, the "known or virtually certain" standard (meaning at least 95% likely) applies to all questions of fact about why a ball at rest moved:

- A player, opponent or outside influence will be found to have caused the ball to move if the player, opponent or outside influence was known or virtually certain to have caused it to move; otherwise it is assumed that natural forces caused it to move.

Replacing Ball When Original Spot is Not Known

When the original location of the ball is not known, it is replaced on its estimated spot.

2019 Rule: Under **Rule 14.2c**, in that same situation:

- The ball is always placed on a spot rather than being dropped.
- If the exact original spot is not known, the player is required to replace the ball on its estimated spot (including on, under or against any attached natural objects that the ball had been at rest on, under or against).

GOLF'S NEW RULES

Ball in Motion

Ball in Motion Accidentally Deflected

No penalty if a player's ball in motion is accidentally deflected by the player, the player's equipment, or caddie.

2019 Rule: Under [Rule 11.1](#), for all accidental deflections, including when the ball hits the player or opponent or their equipment or caddies:

- There is no penalty and the ball is played as it lies (with limited exceptions).
- To address any concern that a player might deliberately position equipment to act as a backstop and potentially deflect his or her ball, there is a penalty if the ball hits equipment that was positioned for that purpose ([Rule 11.2a](#)).

Taking Relief

Measuring the Size of the Relief Area Where a Ball Must Be Dropped and Played

The relief area for dropping a ball is a fixed size of either one or two club-lengths using the longest club in the bag, other than a putter.

2019 Rule: Players still drop a ball when taking relief, but the dropping procedure is changed in several ways as detailed in [Rule 14.3](#):

- The focus of the dropping procedure is on a specific "relief area" set by the Rule under which relief is being taken and is either one or two club-lengths from a reference point (and may have certain other limitations).
- The relief area is a fixed size for each player and is pre-determined based on the clubs the player has selected for play.

New Procedure for Dropping a Ball

The ball must be let go from knee height and fall through the air without touching any part of the player's body or equipment.

2019 Rule: Players will continue to drop a ball when taking relief, but the dropping procedure is changed in several ways as detailed in [Rule 14.3](#):

- How a ball may be dropped is simplified; the only requirement is that the ball be let go from knee height so that it falls through the air and does not touch any part of the player's body or equipment before it hits the ground.
- The ball must be dropped in and come to rest in the relief area; and there will be no re-drop requirement if the dropped ball accidentally hits a person or object after hitting the ground but before coming to rest in the relief area.
- If the dropped ball comes to rest outside the relief area, it must be dropped a second time; if it comes to rest outside the relief area after being dropped a second time, it must be placed where it first touched the ground.
- If the placed ball does not come to rest on that spot after two attempts, the player must then place the ball on the nearest spot (not nearer the hole) where it will come to rest.

GOLF'S NEW RULES

Fixed Distances to be Used for Measuring

A fixed distance of the longest club in your bag, other than your putter, will be used in measuring.

2019 Rule: A club-length is defined as the length of the longest club in the player's bag, except that this cannot be his or her putter. (**Definition of Club-Length**)

- The relief area for dropping a ball is a fixed size of either one or two club-lengths depending on which relief Rule is being used.
- The relief area is a fixed size for each player and is pre-determined based on the clubs the player has selected for play.

Time for Search Before Ball is Lost

A player's ball is lost if not found in three minutes (rather than the current 5 minutes).

2019 Rule: Under **Rule 18.2**, the time for a ball search (before the ball becomes lost) is reduced from 5 minutes to 3 minutes.

Substitution of Ball Always Allowed When Taking Relief

A ball may always be substituted when taking relief.

2019 Rule: Under **Rule 14.3**, when taking relief, the player is always allowed the choice to substitute a ball or to use the original ball, including:

- When taking penalty relief as well as when taking free relief (**Rules 15-19**).

Relief for an Embedded Ball

Relief is allowed without penalty for an embedded ball anywhere (except in sand) in the "general area" (a new term for "through the green").

2019 Rule: The current default position in the Rules is reversed:

- **Rule 16.3** allows relief for a ball embedded anywhere in the "general area" (that is, the area currently known as "through the green"), except when embedded in sand.
- But a Committee may adopt a Local Rule restricting relief to a ball embedded in those parts of the general area cut to fairway height or less.
- In taking relief, the player drops the original ball or a substituted ball within one club-length of (but not nearer the hole than) the spot right behind where the ball was embedded.

Procedure for Taking Back-on-a-Line Relief

One of the options for relief from either a red or yellow penalty area will be called back-on-a-line relief.

2019 Rule: Players still drop a ball when taking relief, but the dropping procedure is changed in several ways as detailed in **Rule 14.3**:

- The focus of the dropping procedure is on a specific "relief area" set by the Rule under which relief is being taken and is either one or two club-lengths from a reference point (and may have certain other limitations).

GOLF'S NEW RULES

- The ball needs only to be dropped in and come to rest in the relief area; and there will be no re-drop requirement if the dropped ball accidentally hits a person or object after hitting the ground but before coming to rest in the relief area.
- If the dropped ball comes to rest outside the relief area, it must be dropped a second time; if it comes to rest outside the relief area after being dropped a second time it must be placed where it first touched the ground.
- If the placed ball will not come to rest on that spot after two attempts, the player must then place the ball on the nearest spot (not nearer the hole) where it will come to rest.

Areas of the Course

When to Replace a Ball That Moves on the Putting Green

After a player's ball has been lifted and replaced on the putting green, the player must always replace the ball on its original spot, even if it was blown by the wind or moved for no clear reason.

2019 Rule: Rule 13.1d, revises the procedure for when a ball on the putting green is moved by wind, water or other natural forces, so that it must sometimes be replaced and sometimes is played from its new spot:

- If the ball had been lifted and replaced on its original spot before it moved, the ball must always be replaced on its original spot, regardless of what caused it to move.
- The ball must be played from its new spot only if the ball had not been lifted and replaced before it moved.

Repairing Damage on the Putting Green

Repair of almost any damage is allowed on the putting green (including spike marks and animal damage).

2019 Rule: Rule 13.1c(2) allows repair of almost any damage on the green:

- "Damage on the putting green" is defined to include all types of damage (such as ball-marks, shoe damage, indentations from a club or flagstick, animal damage, etc.), **except** aeration holes, natural surface imperfections or natural wear of the hole.

Touching Line of Play on a Putting Green

No penalty for touching line of play on the putting green so long as doing so does not improve the conditions for the stroke.

2019 Rule: The prohibition of touching the line of play on the putting green is eliminated:

- There is no penalty for touching the line of play on the putting green (the term "line of play" will apply everywhere on the course including the putting green, and the term "line of putt" is no longer used).
- The player will be subject to the prohibition on improving his or her line of play on the putting green (see [Rule 8.1a](#), as limited by [8.1b](#)).

GOLF'S NEW RULES

Ball Played from Green Hits Unattended Flagstick in Hole

No penalty if a ball played from the putting green (or anywhere else) hits the unattended flagstick in the hole.

2019 Rule: Under **Rule 13.2b(2)**:

- There is no penalty if a ball played from the putting green hits an unattended flagstick left in the hole.
- Players are not required to putt with the flagstick in the hole; rather, they have the choice to have it removed (which includes having someone attend the flagstick and remove it after the ball is played).

Areas the Committee May Mark as Penalty Areas

Areas of desert, jungle, lava rock, etc. (in addition to areas of water) may now be marked as red or yellow "penalty areas."

2019 Rule: Under the new Rules, "Water hazards" will be superseded by the expanded concept of "penalty areas", and **Rule 17** will provide the same basic options for relief that exist under the current Rules:

- A penalty area includes both (1) all areas currently defined in the Rules as a water hazard or a lateral water hazard and (2) any other areas the Committee chooses to define as penalty areas (with recommended guidelines to be provided in the guidebook).
- Penalty areas may therefore include areas such as deserts, jungles, lava rock fields, etc.
- The term "hazard" is no longer used in the Rules.

Touching Loose Impediments or Ground in a Penalty Area

No penalty for moving loose impediments, touching the ground, or grounding your club in a penalty area.

2019 Rule: Under **Rule 17**:

- There will be no special restrictions when a ball is in a "penalty area" (the expanded designation for the area that includes what are now called water hazards).
- A player may touch or move loose impediments and touch the ground with hand or club (such as grounding the club right behind the ball) for any reason, subject only to the prohibition on improving conditions for the stroke (see new **Rule 8.1a**).

Expanded Use of Red-Marked Penalty Areas

Committees are given the discretion to mark any penalty area as red so that lateral relief is always allowed.

2019 Rule: Under the new Rules, "Water hazards" will be superseded by the expanded concept of "penalty areas", and Rule 17 will provide the same basic options for relief that exist under the current Rules:

- A penalty area will include both (1) all areas currently defined in the Rules as a water hazard or lateral water hazard and (2) any other areas the Committee chooses to define as penalty areas (with recommended guidelines to be provided in the guidebook).

GOLF'S NEW RULES

- Penalty areas may therefore include areas such as deserts, jungles, lava rock fields, etc.
- The term “hazard” will no longer be used in the Rules.

Elimination of Opposite Side Relief for Red Penalty Areas

Relief from a red penalty area no longer allowed on the opposite side from where the ball last entered the penalty area.

2019 Rule: Rule 17.1d does not provide the option to take relief on the opposite side of a red penalty area:

- This means that, when a ball is in a red penalty area, the player will have three options for relief (all for a one-stroke penalty) rather than four options as today.
- But a Committee could still adopt a Local Rule allowing opposite side relief on those holes where it believes the other relief options are not viable.

ELIMINATION OF OPPOSITE-SIDE RELIEF FOR RED PENALTY AREAS

2019 Rule

You no longer have the option of taking relief on the opposite side of the point where your ball last crossed the edge of the penalty area.



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Moving or Touching Loose Impediments or Touching Sand in a Bunker

2019 Rule: Under Rules 12.2a and 12.2b, the player may touch or move loose impediments in a bunker and will be generally allowed to touch the sand with a hand or club; but a limited prohibition continues so that the player must not:

- Deliberately touch the sand in a bunker with a hand, club, rake or other object to test the condition of the sand to learn information for the stroke, or
- Touch the sand in a bunker with a club in making a practice swing, in grounding the club right in front of or behind the ball, or in making the backswing for a stroke.

GOLF'S NEW RULES

Unplayable Ball in Bunker

Relief allowed outside a bunker for an unplayable ball for two penalty strokes.

2019 Rule: The player will have an extra option allowing relief outside the bunker using the back-on-the-line procedure, but for a total of two penalty strokes (**Rule 19.3b**).

Equipment

Use of Clubs Damaged During Round

A club damaged during a round can continue to be used, even if damaged in anger.

2019 Rule: Under **Rule 4.1**:

- A player is allowed to keep using and/or to repair any club damaged during the round, no matter what the damage and even if the player damaged it in anger.
- A player will not be allowed to replace a damaged club, except when it is damaged during the round by an outside influence or natural forces or by someone other than the player or his or her caddie.

Use of Distance-Measuring Devices

2019 Rule: The current default position in the Rules is reversed:

- **Rule 4.3** permits players to use DMDs to measure distance.
- But a Committee may adopt a Local Rule prohibiting such use of DMDs.

Playing a Ball

Caddie Standing Behind a Player to Help Line the Player Up

A caddie is not allowed to stand on a line behind the player while the player is taking a stance and until the stroke is made.

2019 Rule: Under **Rule 10.2b(4)**:

- The current prohibition is extended so that, once the player begins taking a stance for the stroke, and until the stroke is made, the player's caddie must not deliberately stand on or close to an extension of the line of play behind the ball for any reason.
- There is no penalty if the caddie accidentally stands on or close to an extension of the line of play behind the ball, rather than in trying to help in lining up.

Caddie Lifting Ball on the Putting Green

A caddie may lift and replace the player's ball on the putting green without specific authorization to do so.

2019 Rule: Under **Rule 14.1b**:

- The player's caddie will be allowed to mark and lift the player's ball on the putting green any time the player is allowed to do so, without needing authorization.
- The caddie is allowed to replace the player's ball, but only if the caddie was the one who had lifted or moved the ball.

GOLF'S NEW RULES

Ball Accidentally Struck More Than Once During a Stroke

2019 Rule: Under [Rule 10.1a](#), if the player's club accidentally hits the ball more than once during a single stroke, there is no penalty and the ball is played as it lies.

When to Play During a Round

Encouraging Prompt Pace of Play

2019 Rule: [Rule 5.6](#) encourages prompt pace of play by recommending that:

- Players should recognize that their pace of play affects others and they should play promptly throughout the round (such as by preparing in advance for each stroke and moving promptly between strokes and in going to the next tee),
- A player should make a stroke in no more than 40 seconds (and usually in less time) after the player is able to play without interference or distraction, and
- Committees should adopt a Pace of Play Policy (rather than only say they may do so).

In addition, new [Rule 6.4](#) expressly allows playing out of turn in match play by agreement, and for stroke play, will affirmatively allow and encourage players to play out of turn in a safe and responsible way to save time or for convenience (also known as "ready golf").

Maximum Score Form of Stroke Play

A new "Maximum Score" form of stroke play is recognized, where your score for a hole is capped at a max score.

2019 Rule: "Maximum Score" will be a new, additional form of stroke play: ([Rule 21.2](#))

- A player's score for each hole is capped at a maximum set by the Committee, which may be fixed (such as 6, 8, 10, etc.), related to par (such as two times par or triple bogey), or related to the player's handicap (such as net double bogey).
- A player who does not complete a hole (often referred to informally as "picking up") will not be disqualified, but simply gets the maximum score for the hole.

Player Behavior

Code of Player Conduct

Committees are given authority to adopt their own code of player conduct and to set penalties for breaches of that code.

2019 Rule: Under [Rule 1.2b](#), a Committee is allowed to adopt a "Code of Conduct" that:

- Sets the Committee's own standards for how players should conduct themselves, and
- May set penalties less than disqualification (such as a one-stroke penalty or a two-stroke penalty/loss of hole penalty) for a player's breach of those standards.

The Committee is still able to disqualify a player for serious misconduct that is contrary to the spirit of the game, as emphasized in new [Rule 1.2a](#).

GOLF'S NEW RULES

Expected Standards of Player Conduct

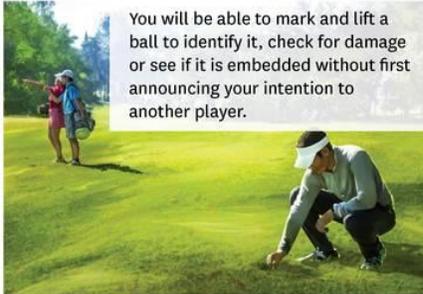
The proposed new Rules speak to the high standards of conduct expected from play

GOLF'S NEW RULES: PLAYER CONDUCT AND INTEGRITY

Golfers have always held themselves to high standards of conduct on the golf course. See below for some of the adjustments to Rules relating to player conduct and integrity, which will take effect on January 1, 2019.



The new Rules directly address the high standards of conduct expected from players.



You will be able to mark and lift a ball to identify it, check for damage or see if it is embedded without first announcing your intention to another player.



So long as you do all that can be reasonably expected under the circumstances to make an accurate estimation or measurement, your reasonable judgment will be accepted even if later shown to be wrong by other means (such as video technology).



A Committee will have the authority to adopt its own code of conduct and to set penalties for breaches of that code.

For more information on golf's new Rules, please visit usga.org or randa.org.

The new Rules will go into effect on January 1, 2019.



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Elimination of the Requirement to Announce the Player's Intent to Lift a Ball

When a player has a good reason to mark and lift a ball, the player is not required to first announce his or her intention.

2019 Rule: In all three situations under the Rules (that is, **Rule 4.2c**, **Rule 7.3** and **Rule 16.4**):

- A player is allowed to mark and lift the ball and proceed under the Rule without needing first to announce this intention to another person or to give that person a chance to observe the process.
- But the player will still get a one-stroke penalty if he or she marked and lifted the ball without good reason to do so under that Rule.

Reasonable Judgment in Estimating and Measuring

A player's reasonable judgment will not be second-guessed based on later evidence.

2019 Rule: **Rule 1.3b(2)** protects the player when the player estimates or measures a spot, point, line, area or other location, using his or her reasonable judgment:

- If the player did all that could be reasonably expected under the circumstances to make a prompt and accurate estimation or measurement.
- This means that the player's reasonable judgment is upheld even if later shown to be wrong by other information (such as video technology).