



# New Rules for golf in 2019

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# Ball Accidentally Struck Multiple Times During Stroke

- **Current Rule**: If a player accidentally strikes his or her ball two or more times when making a single stroke:
- The player gets a one-stroke penalty in addition to the stroke that was made, regardless of the number of times the ball is struck.
- The ball is played as it lies.
- **2019 Rule**: Under Rule 10.1a, if the player's club accidentally hits the ball more than once during a single stroke:
- There will be no penalty and the ball will be played as it lies.
- If the player deliberately strikes the ball more than once while it is in motion, in addition to counting the stroke, he or she will also get the general penalty under Rule 11.3 for deliberately deflecting a ball in motion.

# Ball in Motion Accidentally Deflected

- **Current Rule**: If a player's ball in motion is accidentally deflected, the outcome depends on what caused the deflection:
  - If the ball hits the player or his or her equipment or caddie, the player gets a one-stroke penalty and the ball is played as it lies (with limited exceptions).
  - If the ball hits an opponent or his or her equipment or caddie, there is no penalty but the player has a choice to play the ball as it lies or to cancel the stroke and play again.
  - If the ball is deflected by any other person, animal or object, there is no penalty and the ball is played as it lies.
- **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 will be no penalty and the ball will be 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 will be a penalty if the ball hits equipment that was positioned for that purpose (Rule 11.2a).

# Ball Moved During Search

- **Current Rule**: If a player moves his or her ball while searching for it:
- The player generally gets a one-stroke penalty (there are four limited exceptions), and
- When the player does not know the ball's exact original spot, he or she must return it to play by dropping it as near as possible to that estimated spot.
- **2019 Rule**: Under Rule 7.4, if a player accidentally moves his or her ball while searching for it:
- The player will get no penalty for causing it to move, and
- The ball will always be replaced; if the exact spot is not known, the player will replace 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).

## Ball Played from Green Hits Unattended Flagstick in Hole

- **Current Rule**: Under Rule 17-3, if a player makes a stroke on the putting green and the ball then hits the unattended flagstick that was left in the hole, the player gets the general penalty.
- **2019 Rule**: Under Rule 13.2b(2):
- There will no longer be a penalty if a ball played from the putting green hits a flagstick left in the hole.
- Players will not be required to putt with the flagstick in the hole; rather, they will continue to have the choice to have it removed (which includes having someone attend the flagstick and remove it after the ball is played).

# Code of Player Conduct

- **Current Rule**: A Committee may penalize a player for improper conduct (such as dishonesty, offensive remarks, damaging equipment or the course, etc.) only in one way:
- If the player is guilty of a “serious breach of etiquette”, the Committee may disqualify the player from the competition under Rule 33-7.
- But unless some other specific Rule is breached, the Committee has no authority to impose any lesser penalty for a player’s misconduct.
- **2019 Rule**: Under Rule 1.2b, a Committee will be 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 will also still be able to disqualify a player for serious misconduct that is contrary to the spirit of the game, as emphasized in new Rule 1.2a (see Explanation for Proposed Rule Change – *Expected Standards of Player Conduct*).

# Concept of “Penalty Areas” to Supersede “Water Hazards”

- **Current Rule**: Rule 26-1 allows relief with penalty when a ball is in a “water hazard” (marked yellow) or a “lateral water hazard” (marked red).
- These hazards are limited to areas with water or where water may flow; no other areas may be marked as water hazards, even if they might present similar obstacles to play.
- Water hazards are intended as the norm; lateral water hazards are to be used only when it is impracticable to drop a ball behind a water hazard under Rule 26-1b.
- **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).
- Penalty areas may therefore include areas such as deserts, jungles, lava rock fields, etc.
- The two types of penalty areas will be known by the colour of their marking: red penalty areas (today called lateral water hazards) and yellow penalty areas (today called water hazards); and Committees will be given the discretion to mark all penalty areas as red so that lateral relief will always be allowed.
- The term “hazard” will no longer be used in the Rules.

# Elimination of Opposite Side Relief for Red Penalty Areas

- **Current Rule**: Rule 26-1c provides two extra options for taking relief from a lateral (red) water hazard; the player may drop a ball within two club-lengths of (and not nearer the hole than):
  - The point where the original ball last crossed the margin of the lateral water hazard, or
  - A point on the opposite margin of the hazard equidistant from the hole (Rule 26-1c(ii)).
- **2019 Rule**: Rule 17.1d will remove the option to take relief on the opposite side of a red penalty area (the new term that will include what is today called a lateral water hazard):
  - 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 the Requirement to Announce the Player's Intent to Lift a Ball

- **Current Rule**: A special procedure applies when a player intends to mark and lift a ball in three specific situations under the Rules:
  - Before lifting the ball, the player must announce the intention to do so to the opponent in match play or another player or the marker in stroke play, and then allow that person to observe the process of lifting and replacing the ball.
- This procedure applies when a ball will be lifted (1) for identification (Rule 12-2), (2) to see if it has become unfit for play (Rule 5-3), or (3) to see if it lies in a condition from which relief is allowed, such as when the ball might be embedded (Decision 20-1/0.7).
- **2019 Rule**: In all three situations under the Rules (that is, Rule 4.2c, Rule 7.3 and Rule 16.4):
  - A player will be 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.

# Encouraging Prompt Pace of Play

- **Current Rule**: Although intended to support pace of play, the Rules do not affirmatively emphasize this issue or encourage players to play promptly:
- Rule 6-7 provides only that “undue delay” is prohibited and that players must follow any pace of play guidelines if established by the Committee to prevent “slow play.”
- Although players are allowed to play out of turn to save time, this is neither highlighted nor particularly made clear in the text of the Rules.
- **2019 Rule**: Rule 5.6 will encourage 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 will expressly allow 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”).

# Expected Standards of Player Conduct

- **Current Rule**: The Rules address player conduct in only a limited and muted way:
- They set out no standards of conduct, except indirectly when giving the Committee discretion to disqualify players for a “serious breach of etiquette” (Rule 33-7).
- The Rules do not explain what “breach of etiquette” means, leaving that to Decision 33-7/8 and a few other Decisions.
- Although a separate Etiquette Section is published in the same book along with the Rules, it is not made part of the Rules (other than through a few Decisions).
- **2019 Rule**: Rule 1.2a will consolidate the expected standards of player conduct:
- It will declare that players are expected to play in the spirit of the game by acting with integrity, showing consideration to others and taking good care of the course.
- It will unequivocally state the Committee’s authority to disqualify a player for any serious misconduct that is contrary to the spirit of the game.
- In place of the unclear concept of “breach of etiquette”, it will use the more direct and stronger phrases “misconduct” and “serious misconduct.”
- Rule 1.2b will also give the Committee authority to adopt its own Code of Conduct and to set penalties for its breach (see Explanation for Proposed Rule Change – *Code of Player Conduct*).

# Fixed Distances Used for Measuring

- **Current Rule**: Club-lengths are used to measure the limits of many areas under the Rules:
- There is no fixed definition of a club-length, therefore when measuring a player may choose any club in his or her bag to measure a club-length.
- Players with long putters can drop in areas other players cannot reach.
- **2019 Rule**: A club-length will be defined as the length of the longest club in the player's bag, except that this cannot be his or her putter.
- The relief area for dropping a ball will be 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.

# Moving or Touching Loose Impediments or Touching Sand in a Bunker

- **Current Rule**: When a player's ball is in a bunker, Rule 13-4 provides (with exceptions) that the player must not:
  - Test the condition of the bunker,
  - Touch the ground in the bunker with a hand or club, or
  - Touch or move loose impediments that are in the bunker.
- **2019 Rule**: Under Rules 12.2a and 12.2b, the player will be allowed to 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.

## No Penalty for Moving a Ball on the Putting Green

- **Current Rule**: Under Rule 18-2, if a player (or opponent) accidentally causes the player's ball to move anywhere on the course, there is a one-stroke penalty (unless one of several exceptions applies).
- **2019 Rule**: Under Rule 13.1d, there will no longer be 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.

# Procedure for Dropping and Playing a Ball from a Relief Area

- **Current Rule**: When taking relief (with or without penalty) under many of the Rules, the player is required to use this dropping procedure:
- The player must drop the ball while standing erect and holding the ball at shoulder height and arm's length; or else it must be re-dropped (Rule 20-2a).
- The ball must first strike the course in a specified place and must not strike any person or equipment before coming to rest; or else it must be re-dropped (Rule 20-2b).
- The ball is then to be played from where it comes to rest, **except** that if it ends up in any of 9 specific locations (such as nearer to the hole or more than 2 club-lengths from where it struck the course), it must be re-dropped (Rule 20-2c).
- If the ball comes to rest in any of those 9 locations when dropped a second time, the player must place the ball where it first struck the course on the second drop.
- **2019 Rule**: Players will continue to drop a ball when taking relief, but the dropping procedure will be changed in several ways as detailed in Rule 14.3:
- How a ball may be dropped is simplified; the only requirement will be 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 focus of the dropping procedure will be on a specific "relief area" set by the Rule under which relief is being taken and will be either one or two club-lengths from a reference point (and may have certain other limitations).
- The ball will need 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 will be dropped a second time; if it comes to rest outside the relief area after being dropped a second time it will 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 will then place the ball on the nearest spot (not nearer the hole) where it will come to rest.

# Reasonable Judgment in Estimating and Measuring

- **Current Rule**: Before April of 2017, when estimating or measuring under a Rule:
  - The player's judgment in doing so was normally given no particular weight or regard; if the player ended up playing from a wrong place based on a wrong estimate or measurement, even if only by a small amount, the player would have been penalized.
  - An exception was when a player used his or her best judgment to estimate where a ball entered a water hazard, played the ball and then learned that the judgment was wrong; in that case, there was no penalty if it was an honest judgment (Decision 26-1/17).
- In April 2017, a new decision was introduced (Decision 34-3/10) so that when the player estimates or measures a spot, point, line, area or other location, his or her reasonable judgment is accepted:
- 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).
- **2019 Rule**: Decision 34-3/10 will be incorporated into the Rules as Rule 1.3b(2).

# Relief for an Embedded Ball

- **Current Rule**: In certain circumstances, a player is allowed to take relief when his or her ball is embedded in its own pitch-mark:
- Rule 25-2 allows relief only when a ball is embedded in a closely-mown area (that is, an area cut to fairway height or less) that is through the green.
- But a Committee may adopt a Local Rule that extends this relief to a ball embedded anywhere through the green, whether or not in a closely-mown area (except when embedded in sand).
- In taking relief, the player must drop the original ball as near as possible to where it was embedded and not nearer the hole.
- **2019 Rule**: The current default position in the Rules will be reversed:
- Rule 16.3 will allow 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 will drop 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.

# Repairing Damage on Putting Green

- **Current Rule**: Rule 16-1c allows only limited repair of damage on the putting green:
- A player may repair any old hole plug or ball-mark on the green on his or her line of play, whether the ball is on or off the putting green (this is an exception to Rule 13-2).
- But a player must not repair any other damage on the green (such as spike marks, animal damage, etc.) if it might assist in his or her subsequent play of the hole.
  
- **2019 Rule**: Rule 13.1c(2) allows repair of almost any damage on the green:
- “Damage on the putting green” will be 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.
- The player is allowed to repair damage only with his or her hand, foot or other part of the body or a ball-mark repair tool, tee, club or similar item of normal equipment and must not unreasonably delay play.

# Replacing Ball When Original Spot Not Known

- **Current Rule**: If a player's ball at rest anywhere off the putting green is lifted or moved under a Rule that requires the ball to be replaced:
  - The ball must be replaced by placing it on its original spot (Rule 20-3a).
  - But if the ball's exact original spot is not known, the player must get the ball back into play not by placing it but by dropping it as near as possible to the ball's estimated original spot (Rule 20-3c).
- **2019 Rule**: Under Rule 14.2c, in that same situation:
  - The ball will always be placed on a spot rather than being dropped.
  - If the exact original spot is not known, the player will be 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).

# Standard for Deciding Why a Ball Moved

- **Current Rule**: The “weight of evidence” standard is used to decide whether a player (or an opponent) caused the player’s ball to move:
- The decision must be made in the light of all relevant circumstances, evaluating the weight of the evidence and the balance of probabilities (Decision 34-3/9).
- The player will be found to have caused the ball to move if the weight of the evidence indicates that it is more likely than not that he or she was the cause (Decision 18-2/0.5).
- But a higher standard (“known or virtually certain”) applies in deciding whether an outside agency (such as an animal, spectator or another player in stroke play) caused a ball to move.
- **2019 Rule**: Under Rule 9.2, the “known or virtually certain” standard (meaning at least 95% likely) will apply 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 will be assumed that natural forces caused it to move.

# Substitution for a Ball Damaged During Play of a Hole

- **Current Rule**: Under Rule 5-3:
  - A player is allowed to substitute another ball if during the play of a hole his or her ball in play becomes unfit for play – that is, if it is visibly cut, cracked or out of shape.
  - Before lifting a ball to see if it is unfit for play, the player must:
    - Announce his or her intention to the opponent in match play or to the marker or another player in stroke play, and
    - Give that person an opportunity to observe the lifting and replacement and to examine the ball, and if that person wishes to dispute a claim of unfitness, it must be done before the player plays another ball.
- **2019 Rule**: Rule 4.2 will revise two aspects of this procedure:
  - The player will be allowed to substitute a ball only if the ball in play has become cut or cracked during the play of the hole – not if it is just “out of shape”.
  - The player will no longer be required to announce the intention to lift to another person or to give that person a chance to observe the process or examine the ball.

# Substitution of Ball Always Allowed When Taking Relief

- **Current Rule**: A player is allowed to substitute a ball only when taking relief under certain Rules:
- Substitution is allowed when taking penalty relief, such as when a ball is in a water hazard, is unplayable or is lost or out of bounds (Rules 26-1, 27-1, 28).
- Substitution is not allowed when taking free relief, such as relief from obstructions or abnormal ground conditions (Rules 24-2 and 25-1); this means the player must use the original ball (except when that ball is not immediately recoverable).
- **2019 Rule**: Under Rule 14.3, when taking relief, the player will always be 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), and
- Any other time the player is required to drop and play a ball, such as when returning to play from where a previous stroke was made after the stroke is cancelled.

## Time for Search Before Ball is Lost

- **Current Rule**: If a player's ball is not found within 5 minutes after the player or his or her caddie began searching for it:
  - The ball is treated as "lost", and
  - The player gets a one-stroke penalty and must play another ball from the spot of the previous stroke (that is, must play under penalty of stroke and distance). (Definition of "Lost Ball"; Rule 27-1c.)
- **2019 Rule**: Under Rule 18.2, the time for a ball search (before the ball becomes lost) will be reduced from 5 minutes to 3 minutes.

# Touching Line of Play on Putting Green

- **Current Rule**: Under Rule 16-1a, when a player's ball is on the putting green:
  - The player is generally prohibited from touching his or her line of putt.
  - But there are seven exceptions (such as when removing loose impediments or movable obstructions, when lifting or replacing a ball, when repairing ball marks, etc.).
- **2019 Rule**: The prohibition of touching the line of play on the putting green will be eliminated:
  - There will no longer be a penalty for merely 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" will no longer be used).
- But the player will still 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).

# Touching Loose Impediments or Ground in a Penalty Area

- **Current Rule**: When a player's ball is in a water hazard, Rule 13-4 provides (with exceptions) that the player must not:
  - Test the condition of the water hazard,
  - Touch the water or the ground in the water hazard with a hand or club, or
  - Touch or move loose impediments that are in the water hazard.
- **2019 Rule**: Under Rule 17:
  - There will no longer be any 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 will be allowed to 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).

# Unplayable Ball in Bunker

- **Current Rule**: When taking relief for an unplayable ball in a bunker (Rule 28), the player may:
  - Drop and play a ball only in the bunker itself, if taking relief back on a line from the hole to the ball (Rule 28b) or within two club-lengths of the ball (Rule 28c), or
  - Take relief outside the bunker only by taking stroke and distance relief from where the previous stroke was made from outside the bunker (Rule 28a); if the previous stroke was made from the bunker, there is no option for relief outside the bunker.
- **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).

# Use and Replacement of Clubs Damaged During Round

- **Current Rule**: Rule 4 sets out two complex standards to be applied in sequence for determining whether a player may continue to use or replace a club that is damaged during the round:
- A damaged club may be used only if it was damaged in the “normal course of play”.
- A club damaged in the normal course of play may be replaced with another club only if the damaged club meets an additional test of being “unfit for play”.
- A club damaged outside the normal course of play (such as when slammed against something in anger) must be declared out of play, must not be used for the rest of the round, and must not be replaced even if unfit for play; or else the player is disqualified.
- **2019 Rule**: Under Rule 4.1:
- A player will be 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

- **Current Rule**: Rule 14-3b, Appendix IA (section 7) and Appendix IV (section 5) cover distance-measuring devices (DMDs):
  - The Rule itself prohibits use of DMDs to measure distance during a round.
  - But a Committee may adopt a Local Rule allowing such use of DMDs.
- **2019 Rule**: The current default position in the Rules will be reversed:
  - Rule 4.3 will allow players to use DMDs to measure distance.
  - But a Committee may adopt a Local Rule prohibiting such use of DMDs.

# When to Replace Ball that Moves on the Putting Green

- **Current Rule**: If a player's ball on the putting green moves before the stroke is made:
  - The player must replace the ball if it was moved by any player, caddie or outside agency (such as an animal, spectator or moving object).
  - But the moved ball must always be played from its new spot if the ball was moved by wind, water or other natural forces (including when the ball moves for no apparent reason because of the effects of gravity).
- **2019 Rule**: Rule 13.1d, will revise 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 be 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.

# Questions and Resources

- <http://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/rules-hub/rules-modernization/golfs-new-rules-downloadable-resources.html>
- <https://www.usga.org/rules-hub/rules-modernization/text/modernizing-golf-s-rules--faqs.html>
- Steve Taylor: firehog\_89@yahoo.com