

KEY CHANGES TO GOLF'S RULES – EFFECTIVE 1/1/2019

What to know about terminology changes for the defined areas of the course

General Area

This is a new term. It replaces “through the green.”

The general area covers the entire area of the course except for the following:

- 1 - The **Teeing Area** of the hole being played
- 2 - All **Bunkers**
- 3 - All **Penalty Areas**
- 4 - The **Putting Green** of the hole being played

1. Dropping Procedure:

Ball must land in and come to rest in relief area

There is a New Dropping Height

- The ball must be dropped straight down from knee height.
- “Knee height” means the height of your knee when in a standing position.
- You do not need to be standing when the ball is dropped.
- A drop does not count if the ball touches you or your equipment before hitting the ground.
- A drop does count if the ball accidentally hits you or equipment after it has already hit the ground.
- Dropping procedure: Ball must land in and come to rest in relief area.
- For your relief procedure to be completed, your ball must be dropped so it:
 - ▶ First strikes the ground in the relief area,
 - ▶ AND THEN comes to rest in the relief area.

2. **Loose impediments in a bunker or penalty area.** Removal of loose impediments in a bunker or a penalty area now allowed.
3. In all forms of Stroke Play, the new Rules actively encourage **Ready Golf**. It is recommended that you play each stroke in no more than 40 seconds – and usually more quickly than that.
4. **Time reduced for ball search to 3 minutes.** Your ball is lost if you do not find it within 3 minutes of search.
5. **Ball accidentally moved** while searching. Replace with no penalty.
6. **When a ball moves**, and the exact original spot is not known, the ball is no longer replaced by dropping it; instead, the ball is placed on its estimated original spot, and this includes placing it on, under or against any growing or fixed objects it had been on, under or against.
7. **Flagstick can remain in the hole.** You are allowed to hit the unattended Flagstick when putting
8. **Ball or ball-marker accidentally moved on green.** Replace with no penalty.
9. Anywhere on the course, in deciding whether/why a ball moved: (a) a ball will now be found to have moved only if it is **known or virtually certain** (meaning at least 95% likely) that it did, and (b) a ball will now be found to have moved due to natural causes unless it is known or virtually certain that a person or outside influence caused it to move.
10. If a ball on the putting green **was lifted and replaced** and it then moves, it is always replaced even if moved by natural forces such as wind or moved for no clear reason.
11. **Touching line of play on green.** Touching your line of play on the green is now allowed.
12. Spike mark repairs allowed on green. You are allowed to **repair almost any damage** to the green, including spike marks and animal damage.
13. The club to be used for measuring purposes in all relief situations is the **longest club** in your bag, **other than your putter.**

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14. A **new unplayable ball option** allows a player to drop outside the bunker (back on a line) for a total of 2 penalty strokes.
15. **Ball change allowed in all situations when taking relief.** In free-relief situations, as well as in penalty situations, you are entitled to change your ball.
16. Use of **clubs damaged** during round. A club damaged during a round can continue to be used, even if you damaged it in anger. You are still not allowed to replace a damaged club during a round if you were responsible for the damage.
17. New procedure for taking **back-on-the line relief.** When taking back-on-the-line relief you drop a ball in a relief area that is based on a line going straight back from the hole from either where the ball was lying if it is an unplayable ball situation; or where the ball last crossed the edge of the penalty area if it is a penalty area situation.

You should pick a point on this line, and drop a ball within one club-length of the point (but not nearer the hole than the point). You should indicate the point by using an object (such as a tee). It is also acceptable to pick a reference point by using a loose impediment or a mark on the grass.

ADDITIONAL CHANGES THAT ARE HELPFUL TO KNOW

Two Important Terms to Understand

Deliberate or Deliberately

An action intentionally taken or intentionally not taken by the player; the player had a choice, e.g., a player lifts a ball thinking it is a stray ball, and it is his or her ball. The lifting was deliberate. The ball was not accidentally lifted.

Also, a person authorized to attend the flagstick fails to remove the flagstick from the hole, as he or she believed the attended flagstick did not need to be removed when attended, and the ball strikes the flagstick in the hole. The person chose to leave the flagstick in the hole.

Accidental or Accidentally

An unintentional act by the player; the player did not choose to perform the (specific) act, the act was not planned or considered, e.g., a player, while marking the location of ball on the putting green, accidentally causes the ball to move.

Rules Changes

- A) It is no longer a penalty if a player improves conditions for his or her stroke by moving, bending or **accidentally** breaking growing or fixed things while fairly searching for the ball.
- B) It is no longer a penalty for a player to touch the sand with a hand or club (even if done intentionally or in anger), except when done
 - (1) with his or her hand or club to test the conditions of the bunker or
 - (2) with the club in the area right behind or in front of the ball, in making a practice swing or in making the backswing for the stroke.
- C) There is no longer a penalty if a player makes a stroke when another ball is in motion after making a stroke on the putting green.
- D) A **player no longer needs to announce** to another player or the marker that he or she intends to lift a ball to identify it or to give that person an opportunity to observe the process.
- E) There is no longer a penalty if a player's equipment moves his or her ball (unless the player caused the equipment to move the ball). Equipment is not included in the Rule as it was before 2019.
- F) There is no longer a penalty if an opponent **accidentally** moves the player's ball on the putting green.

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- G) If the player's ball **accidentally** hits an opponent or opponent's caddie or equipment, there is no longer an option to cancel and replay the stroke; the ball must be played from where it comes to rest, except that when the ball was played from the putting green the stroke is canceled and replayed.
- H) If a ball played from anywhere on the course **accidentally** hits the flagstick when it has been removed, attended or held up or the person attending it. The ball is played as it lies.
- I) When a ball is **deliberately** deflected or stopped by anyone (whether a player or some other person), it is always played from a relief area based on where it is estimated it would have come to rest (except when the stroke was made on the putting green where the stroke will still be canceled and replayed).
- J) There is a penalty if a player's ball in motion strikes any object or person that was **deliberately** positioned or left in position by the player for that purpose.
- K) The penalty for playing a ball from a non-conforming tee is now the general penalty for the first breach rather than disqualification.
- L) In Four-ball or Foursomes, **either partner is now allowed to take any action his or her partner** could take, including dropping a ball.
- M) In Stroke Play, when playing two balls because of uncertainty about the Rules, if a player does not choose in time which ball he or she wishes to count, the ball played first is treated as the ball chosen by default, for purposes of the Committee's decision on which of the two balls played will count in the player's score.
- N) The penalty for agreeing to leave a ball in position to help another player on the putting green is changed to a **two-stroke penalty for both players** rather than disqualification for both players.
- O) Once a player begins to take a stance for a stroke and until the stroke is made, the player's caddie is **not allowed to stand on or close to an extension of the line of play behind the ball** (prior to 2019 that was allowed so long as the caddie moves out of the way before the stroke is made).
- P) However, when the player's ball is on the putting green, there is no penalty under this Rule if the player backs away from the stance and does not begin to take the stance again until after the caddie has moved out of that location.
- Q) It is now a penalty anywhere on the course (not just on the putting green) to make a stroke with one foot deliberately placed on each side of, or with a foot deliberately touching, the line of play or an extension of the line behind the ball (a "croquet style" stroke).