



USGA GOLF RULES AT A GLANCE (2023)

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DEFINITIONS: The building blocks for all the Rules. If you don't know what a relief area, general area, penalty area, bunker, green, teeing area, abnormal course condition etc. is, you will not know how to proceed when taking relief.

BEFORE STARTING YOUR ROUND: ALWAYS COUNT YOUR CLUBS AND MAKE SURE YOU PUT AN IDENTIFYING MARK ON YOUR GOLF BALL.

In stroke play only, if there is ever a question as to your rights or how to proceed in a situation, declare and play a second ball (Rule 20.1c). Before proceeding, be sure to **declare which ball you want to count to your marker or another player before making a stroke**. Record the scores of both balls. You must report the facts of the situation to the committee before returning your scorecard, even if your score is the same for both balls. You are **disqualified** if you fail to do so.

BEFORE TAKING RELIEF IN ANY SITUATION ALWAYS SEE WHERE THE RELIEF WILL TAKE YOU BEFORE TAKING ANY ACTION, INCLUDING PICKING UP YOUR BALL, YOU MAY BE BETTER OFF TO PLAY THE BALL AS IT LIES.

Searching time: You have **three (3)** minutes to find your ball after either you, your partner or either of your caddies begin searching for it. If it is not found within these three minutes the ball is lost even if it is found on the course.

Relief Area (Definition): Area where the player must drop a ball when taking relief under a rule. Each relief area requires the player to use a specific relief area whose size and location are based on three factors.

1. Reference Point: The point from which the size of the relief area is measured.
2. Size of relief area measured from reference point: the relief area is either one or two club-lengths from the reference point, but with certain limits.
3. Limits on location of relief area:
 - a. It is only in certain defined areas of the course, such as only in the general area, or not a bunker or penalty area.
 - b. It is not nearer the hole than the reference point and must be outside a penalty area or a bunker from which relief is being taken.
 - c. It is where there is no interference from the condition from which relief is being taken.

4. Back-on-the-Line Relief Procedure

The back-on-the-line relief procedure is amended to provide that the player is required to drop on the line. The spot on the line where the ball first touches the ground when dropped creates a relief area that is one club-length **in any direction** from that point. This amendment is reflected in changes to Rules 14.3b(3), 16.1c(2), 17.1d(2), 19.2b and 19.3, and the definition of relief area.

Club-length to measure: the length of the longest of the 14 (or fewer) clubs you **have** during the round, other than **your** putter.

Ball Must Be Dropped in Right Way

You must drop a ball in the right way, which means all three of these things:

You must drop the ball (neither your caddie nor anyone else may do so).

You must let go of your ball from a location at knee height so that the ball:

Falls straight down, without you throwing, spinning or rolling it or using any other motion that might affect where your ball will come to rest, and does not touch any part of your body or equipment before it hits the ground.

"Knee height" means the height of your knee when in a standing position.

The ball must be dropped in the relief area. You may stand either inside or outside the relief area when dropping your ball. If your ball is dropped in a wrong way in breach of one or more of these three requirements, you must drop your ball again in the right way, and there is no limit to the number of times you must do so.

A ball dropped in the wrong way does not count as one of the two drops required before your ball must be placed.

Provisional Ball (Rule 18.3a): If your ball might be lost outside a penalty area or be out of bounds, to save time you may play another ball provisionally under penalty of stroke and distance. But if you are aware that the only possible place your original ball could be lost is in a penalty area, a provisional ball is not allowed and a ball played from where the previous stroke was made becomes your ball in play under a penalty of stroke and distance. You must declare a provisional ball and you can return and play a provisional ball before your three-minute search **time** has elapsed. **Provisional balls save time! Make** sure you can tell the difference between your original ball and your provisional ball. If your original ball is found within a three-minute search and it is not out of bounds, you must abandon the provisional ball and continue play with the original ball.

Out of Bounds (Rule 18.2): If your ball is out of bounds you must play your next stroke from where your previous stroke was played, dropping a ball in the relief area as near as possible to where that stroke was made and no nearer the hole (if it was a tee shot you may re-tee a ball). There is a one- stroke penalty under Rule 18.2b. A ball is out of bounds when the entire ball is out of bounds, but you may stand out of bounds to play a ball that is in bounds.

Ball Lost (Rule 18.2b): Your ball is lost if you put a ball into play under stroke and distance, play a stroke with a provisional ball from a place where your original ball is likely to be or a place nearer the hole than that place or if your ball is not found within 3 minutes after you or your partner, or your caddies have begun search in the area where the ball is **likely to be**. You must add a penalty stroke and continue with your provisional, or if a provisional ball was not played you must go back and play from where your last stroke was played. If your ball, which has not been found within 3 minutes, was **known or virtually certain** to be lost in a movable obstruction or in an abnormal course condition, you may proceed under the applicable Rule 16. If it is **known or virtually certain** that the ball that was not found was moved by an outside agency Rule 9.6 or is in a penalty area, you must proceed under the applicable Rule 17.

YOU CANNOT DECLARE YOUR BALL LOST.

Penalty Area (Rule 17): Defined by red or yellow stakes and/or lines.

Penalty Area:

If there are stakes and lines present, the lines define the **edge** of the penalty area and the stakes identify it. If there are only stakes, they identify and define the **edge**. If your ball lies in a penalty area you may ground your club, touch the water if present, remove loose impediments.

You do not have the option to drop the ball on the opposite side of a penalty area (unless introduced in a local rule).

Relief Options (Rule 17.1d): If player's ball is in a penalty area, including when it is known or virtually certain to be in a penalty area even though not found, the player has these options. Each is a one stroke penalty.

1. Stroke and distance relief
2. Back-on-the-line relief
3. Lateral relief (only the red penalty area).

Movable Obstruction (Definition): An obstruction that can be moved with reasonable effort and without damaging the obstruction or the course. If part of an immovable obstruction or integral object (such as a gate or door or part of attached cable) meets these two standards, that part is treated as a movable obstruction. But

this does not apply if the movable part of an immovable obstruction or integral object is not meant to be moved (such as loose stone that is part of a stone wall).

Relief (Rule 15.2a); Without penalty, a player may remove a movable obstruction anywhere on or off the course and may do so in anyway. Two exceptions:

Exception 1: Tee markers must not be removed when ball will be played from teeing area.

Exception 2: Restriction on deliberately removing movable obstruction to affect a ball in motion. Relief when ball is in or on movable obstruction. The player may take free relief by lifting the ball, removing the movable obstruction and dropping the original ball or another ball in the relief area (see Rule 14.3).

Abnormal Course Condition/Immovable Obstruction (Definition); Abnormal Course Condition is any of these four defined conditions: Animal hole, Ground under repair, Immovable obstruction, or Temporary water. Immovable obstruction: any obstruction that cannot be moved without unreasonable effort or without damaging the obstruction or the course and otherwise does not meet the definition of a movable obstruction. Relief (Rule 16.1b, 16.1c, 16.1d)

Wrong Green: If your ball lands on any green other than the green of the hole you are playing you must take complete **free** relief for the stroke and stance.

Embedded Ball Rule (16.3a): Relief is allowed only when your ball is embedded in the general area. But if your ball is embedded on the putting green, you may mark the spot of your ball lift and clean it, repair the damage, and replace your ball on its original spot. Relief (Rule 16.3b).

Identifying your ball (Rule 7.2): You must identify your ball anywhere on the golf course. If you need to lift your ball to identify it you must mark the position, lift it to identify it and replace it. **Important, you cannot clean it.**

Ball Unplayable (Rule 19.1): You are the only person who may decide to treat your ball as unplayable by taking penalty relief under 19.2 or 19.3.

Unplayable ball relief is allowed anywhere on the course, except in a penalty area.

If a ball is unplayable in the penalty area, the player's only relief option is to take penalty relief under Rule 17.

Relief (Rule 19.2): A player may take unplayable ball relief using one of the three options in Rule 19.2a, 19.2b or 19.2c adding 1 penalty stroke.

The player may take stroke-and-distance relief under 19.2a even if the original ball has not been found or identified.

But to take back-on-line relief under Rule 19.2b or lateral relief under Rule 19.2c, the player must know the spot of the original ball.

Flagstick (Rule 13.2): The player may leave the flagstick in the hole, or have it removed (which includes having someone attend the flagstick and remove it after your ball is played), but the player must decide this before making a stroke. There is normally no penalty if a ball in motion hits the flagstick.

Substituted Ball (Rule 6.3b): When taking relief by dropping or placing, you may use either the original ball or another ball.

When playing again from where a previous stroke was made, you may use either the original ball or another ball.

When replacing a ball on a spot, you are not allowed to substitute a ball and must use the original ball, with the below exceptions contained in Rule 14.2a.

Exceptions:

- You cannot recover your original ball with reasonable effort and in a few seconds
- Your original ball is cut or cracked.
- You are resuming play after a suspension
- Your ball was played by another player as a wrong ball.

There is no penalty for:

Double-hit (striking the ball more than once)

Removing loose impediments, etc. from bunker/penalty area

Leaving and/or hitting the flagstick in the hole

When accidentally moving your ball during a search

Ball striking yourself or your equipment

Round finished: MAKE SURE YOUR HOLE-BY-HOLE SCORES ARE CORRECT. Have marker and you sign scorecard and return it. You should keep your scores on another card to verify accuracy. If you sign for a lower score on a hole, you are disqualified. If you sign for a higher score on a hole, you must accept the score. **Once your score is posted your score is final. Scoring will be done on the MHSAA app.**

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR DISPUTES, DO NOT TURN IN YOUR SCORECARD UNTIL YOU CONTACT ONE OF THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS TO HELP RESOLVE ANY QUESTIONS OR DISPUTES.