

# Official Guide to the Rules of Golf 2023

## Definitions and Their Clarifications

There are 74 defined terms (some with clarifications), and these form the foundation around which the Rules are written. A sound knowledge of the definitions is essential for the correct application of the Rules.

### A

#### Abnormal Course Condition

Any of these four defined conditions:

- Animal Hole,
- Ground Under Repair,
- Immovable Obstruction, **or**
- Temporary Water

#### Advice

Any verbal comment or action (such as showing what club was just used to make a stroke) that is intended to influence a player in:

- Choosing a club,
- Making a stroke, **or**
- Deciding how to play during a hole or round.

**But advice** does **not** include public information, such as:

- The location of things on the course such as the hole, the putting green, the fairway, penalty areas, bunkers, or another player's ball,
- The distance from one point to another,
- Wind direction, **or**
- The Rules.

[Advice/1](#)

[Advice/2](#)

[Advice/3](#)

#### Animal

Any living member of the animal kingdom (other than humans), including mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates (such as worms, insects, spiders and crustaceans).

## Animal Hole

Any hole dug in the ground by an animal, **except** for holes dug by animals that are also defined as loose impediments (such as worms or insects).

The term **animal hole** includes:

- The loose material the animal dug out of the hole,
- Any worn-down track or trail leading into the hole, **and**
- Any area on the ground pushed up or altered as a result of the animal digging the hole underground.

An **animal hole** does not include animal footprints that are not part of a worn-down track or trail leading into an **animal hole**.

## Areas of the Course

The five defined areas that make up the course:

- The general area,
- The teeing area the player must play from in starting the hole they are playing,
- All penalty areas,
- All bunkers, **and**
- The putting green of the hole the player is playing.

## B

### Ball-Marker

An artificial object when used to mark the spot of a ball to be lifted, such as a tee, a coin, an object made to be a **ball-marker** or another small piece of equipment.

When a Rule refers to a **ball-marker** being moved, this means a **ball-marker** in place on the course to mark the spot of a ball that has been lifted and not yet replaced.

### Boundary Object

Artificial objects defining or showing out of bounds, such as walls, fences, stakes and railings, from which free relief is not allowed.

This includes any base and post of a boundary fence, **but** does not include:

- Angled supports or guy wires that are attached to a wall or fence, **or**
- Any gate, steps, bridge or similar construction used for getting over or through the wall or fence.

**Boundary objects** are treated as immovable even if they are movable or any part of them is movable (see [Rule 8.1a](#)). **Boundary objects** are not obstructions or integral objects.

[Boundary Object/1](#)

## Bunker

A specially prepared area of sand, which is often a hollow from which turf or soil was removed.

These are not part of a **bunker**:

- A lip, wall or face at the edge of a prepared area and consisting of soil, grass, stacked turf or artificial materials,
- Soil or any growing or attached natural object inside the edge of a prepared area (such as grass, bushes or trees),
- Sand that has spilled over or is outside the edge of a prepared area, **and**
- All other areas of sand on the course that are not inside the edge of a prepared area (such as deserts and other natural sand areas or areas sometimes referred to as waste areas).

**Bunkers** are one of the five defined areas of the course.

A Committee may define a prepared area of sand as part of the general area (which means it is not a **bunker**) or may define a non-prepared area of sand as a **bunker**.

When a **bunker** is being repaired and the Committee defines the entire **bunker** as ground under repair, it is treated as part of the general area (which means it is not a **bunker**).

The word “sand” as used in this definition and [Rule 12](#) includes any material similar to sand that is used as **bunker** material (such as crushed shells), as well as any soil that is mixed in with the sand.

## C

### Caddie

Someone who helps a player during a round, including in these ways:

- Carrying, Transporting or Handling Clubs: A person who carries, transports (such as by cart or trolley) or handles a player’s clubs during play is the player’s **caddie** even if not named as a **caddie** by the player, **except** when done to move the player’s clubs, bag or cart out of the way or as a courtesy (such as getting a club the player left behind).
- Giving Advice: A player’s **caddie** is the only person (other than a partner or partner’s **caddie**) a player may ask for advice.

A **caddie** may also help the player in other ways allowed by the Rules (see [Rule 10.3b](#)).

### Club-Length

The length of the longest club of the 14 (or fewer) clubs the player has during the round (as allowed by [Rule 4.1b\(1\)](#)), other than a putter.

A **club-length** is a unit of measurement used in defining the player’s teeing area on each hole and in determining the size of the player’s relief area when taking relief under a Rule.

For the purpose of measuring these areas, the length of the entire club is used, starting at the toe of the club and ending at the butt end of the grip. **But** any attachment to the end of the grip is not part of the **club-length**.

[Club-Length/1](#)

## Committee

The person or group in charge of the competition or the course.

[Committee/1](#)

## Conditions Affecting the Stroke

The lie of the player's ball at rest, the area of intended stance, the area of intended swing, the line of play and the relief area where the player will drop or place a ball.

- The "area of intended stance" includes both where the player will place their feet and the entire area that might reasonably affect how and where the player's body is positioned in preparing for and making the intended stroke.
- The "area of intended swing" includes the entire area that might reasonably affect any part of the backswing, the downswing or the completion of the swing for the intended stroke.
- Each of the terms "lie," "line of play" and "relief area" has its own definition.

## Course

The entire area of play within the edge of any boundaries set by the Committee:

- All areas inside the boundary edge are in bounds and part of the **course**.
- All areas outside the boundary edge are out of bounds and not part of the **course**.
- The boundary edge extends both up above the ground and down below the ground.

The **course** is made up of the five defined areas of the course.



## D


### Drop

To hold the ball and let go of it so that it falls through the air, with the intent for the ball to be in play.

If the player lets go of a ball without intending it to be in play, the ball has not been **dropped** and is not in play (see [Rule 14.4](#)).

Each relief Rule identifies a specific relief area where the ball must be **dropped** and come to rest

In taking relief, the player must let go of the ball from a location at knee height so that the ball:

- Falls straight down, without the player throwing, spinning or rolling it or using any other motion that might affect where the ball will come to rest, **and**
  - Does not touch any part of the player's body or equipment before it hits the ground (see [Rule 14.3b](#)).
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## E

### Embedded

When a player's ball is in its own pitch-mark made as a result of the player's previous stroke and where part of the ball is below the level of the ground.

A ball does not necessarily have to touch soil to be **embedded** (for example, grass and loose impediments may be between the ball and the soil).

### Equipment

Anything used, worn, held or carried by the player or the player's caddie.

Objects used for the care of the course, such as rakes, are **equipment** only while they are being held or carried by the player or caddie.

Objects, other than clubs, carried by someone else for the player are not **equipment**, even if they belong to the player.

### Equipment Rules

The specifications and other regulations for clubs, balls and other equipment that players are allowed to use during a round.

The **Equipment Rules** are found at: [RandA.org/EquipmentStandards](http://RandA.org/EquipmentStandards).



## F

### Flagstick

A movable pole provided by the Committee that is placed in the hole to show players where the hole is. The **flagstick** includes the flag and any other material or objects attached to the pole.

When an artificial or natural object, such as a club or a stick, is being used to show the position of the hole, that object is treated as if it is the **flagstick** for the purpose of applying the Rules.

The requirements for a **flagstick** are stated in the Equipment Rules.

### Four-Ball

A form of play where sides of two partners compete, with each player playing their own ball. A side's score for a hole is the lower score of the two partners on that hole.

**Four-Ball** may be played as a match-play competition between one side of two partners and another side of two partners or a stroke-play competition among multiple sides of two partners.

## Foursomes (also known as "Alternate Shot")

A form of play where two partners compete as a side by playing one ball in alternating order on each hole.

**Foursomes** may be played as a match-play competition between one side of two partners and another side of two partners or a stroke-play competition among multiple sides of two partners.

## G

### General Area

The area of the course that covers all of the course **except** for the other four defined areas: (1) the teeing area the player must play from in starting the hole they are playing, (2) all penalty areas, (3) all bunkers, and (4) the putting green of the hole the player is playing.

The **general area** includes:

- All teeing locations on the course other than the teeing area, **and**
- All wrong greens.

### General Penalty

Loss of hole in match play or two penalty strokes in stroke play.

### Ground Under Repair

Any part of the course the Committee defines to be **ground under repair** (whether by marking it or otherwise). Any defined **ground under repair** includes both:

- All ground inside the edge of the defined area, **and**
- Any grass, bush, tree or other growing or attached natural object rooted in the defined area, including any part of those objects that extends up above the ground outside the edge of the defined area, **but** not any part (such as a tree root) that is attached to or below the ground outside the edge of the defined area.

**Ground under repair** also includes the following things, even if the Committee does not define them as such:

- Any hole made by the Committee or the maintenance staff in:
  - Setting up the course (such as a hole where a stake has been removed or the hole on a double green being used for the play of another hole), **or**
  - Maintaining the course (such as a hole made in removing turf or a tree stump or laying pipelines, **but** not including aeration holes).
- Grass cuttings, leaves and any other material piled for later removal.  
**But:**
  - Any natural materials that are piled for removal are also loose impediments, **and**
  - Any materials left on the course that are not intended to be removed are **NOT ground under repair** unless the Committee has defined them as such.
- Any animal habitat (such as a bird's nest) that is so near a player's ball that the player's stroke or stance might damage it, **except** when the habitat has been made by animals that are defined as loose impediments (such as worms or insects).

The edge of **ground under repair** should be defined by stakes, lines or physical features:

- **Stakes:** When defined by stakes, the edge of the **ground under repair** is defined by the line between the outside points of the stakes at ground level, and the stakes are inside the **ground under repair**.
- **Lines:** When defined by a painted line on the ground, the edge of the **ground under repair** is the outside edge of the line, and the line itself is in the **ground under repair**.
- **Physical Features:** When defined by physical features (such as a flower bed or a turf nursery), the Committee should say how the edge of the **ground under repair** is defined.

When the edge of **ground under repair** is defined by lines or physical features, stakes may be used to show where the **ground under repair** is located.

When stakes are used to define or show the edge of **ground under repair**, they are obstructions.

[Ground Under Repair/1](#)  
[Ground Under Repair/2](#)  
[Ground Under Repair/3](#)

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## H

### Hole

The finishing point on the putting green for the hole being played:

- The **hole** must be 4 ¼ inches (108 mm) in diameter and at least 4 inches (101.6 mm) deep.
- If a lining is used, its outer diameter must not exceed 4 ¼ inches (108 mm). The lining must be sunk at least 1 inch (25.4 mm) below the putting green surface, unless the nature of the soil requires that it be closer to the surface.

The word “hole” (when not used as a definition in italics) is used throughout the Rules to mean the part of the course associated with a particular teeing area, putting green and **hole**. Play of a hole begins from the teeing area and ends when the ball is holed on the putting green (or when the Rules otherwise say the hole is completed).

### Holed

When a ball is at rest in the hole after a stroke and the entire ball is below the surface of the putting green.

When the Rules refer to “**holing out**” or “**hole out**,” it means when the player’s ball is **holed**.

For the special case of a ball resting against the flagstick in the hole, see [Rule 13.2c](#) (ball is treated as **holed** if any part of the ball is below the surface of the putting green).

[Holed/1](#)  
[Holed/2](#)

### Honour

The right of a player to play first from the teeing area (see [Rule 6.4](#)).

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## 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.

The Committee may define any obstruction to be an **immovable obstruction**, even if it meets the definition of movable obstruction.

[Immovable Obstruction/1](#)

## Improve

To alter one or more of the conditions affecting the stroke or other physical conditions affecting play so that a player gains a potential advantage for a stroke.

## In Play

The status of a player's ball when it lies on the course and is being used in the play of a hole:

- A ball first becomes **in play** on a hole:
  - When the player makes a stroke at it from inside the teeing area, **or**
  - In match play, when the player makes a stroke at it from outside the teeing area and the opponent does not cancel the stroke under [Rule 6.1b](#).
- That ball remains **in play** until it is holed, **except** that it is no longer **in play**:
  - When it is lifted from the course,
  - When it is lost (even if it is at rest on the course) or comes to rest out of bounds, **or**
  - When another ball has been substituted for it, even if not allowed by a Rule.

A ball that is not **in play** is a wrong ball.

The player cannot have more than one ball **in play** at any time. (See [Rule 6.3d](#) for the limited cases when a player may play more than one ball at the same time on a hole.)

When the Rules refer to a ball at rest or in motion, this means a ball that is **in play**.

When a ball-marker is in place to mark the spot of a ball **in play**:

- If the ball has not been lifted, it is still **in play**, **and**
- If the ball has been lifted and replaced, it is **in play** even if the ball-marker has not been removed.

## Integral Object

An artificial object defined by the Committee as part of the challenge of playing the course from which free relief is not allowed.

**Integral objects** are treated as immovable (see [Rule 8.1a](#)). **But** if part of an **integral object** (such as a gate or door or part of an attached cable) meets the definition of movable obstruction, that part is treated as a movable obstruction.

Artificial objects defined by the Committee as **integral objects** are not obstructions or boundary objects.



## K

### Known or Virtually Certain

The standard for deciding what happened to a player's ball – for example, whether the ball came to rest in a penalty area, whether it moved or what caused it to move.

**Known or virtually certain** means more than just possible or probable. It means that either:

- There is conclusive evidence that the event in question happened to the player's ball, such as when the player or other witnesses saw it happen, **or**
- Although there is a very small degree of doubt, all reasonably available information shows that it is at least 95% likely that the event in question happened.

"All reasonably available information" includes all information the player knows and all other information they can get with reasonable effort and without unreasonable delay.

When searching for a ball, only information discovered within the three-minute search time is considered when determining whether **knowledge or virtual certainty** exists.

[Known or Virtually Certain/1](#)  
[Known or Virtually Certain/2](#)  
[Known or Virtually Certain/3](#)

## L

### Lie

The spot on which a ball is at rest and any growing or attached natural object, immovable obstruction, integral object, or boundary object touching the ball or right next to it.

Loose impediments and movable obstructions are not part of the **lie** of a ball.

### Line of Play

The line where the player intends their ball to go after a stroke, including the area on that line that is a reasonable distance up above the ground and on either side of that line.

The **line of play** is not necessarily a straight line between two points (for example, it may be a curved line based on where the player intends the ball to go).

### Loose Impediment

Any unattached natural object such as:

- Stones, loose grass, leaves, branches and sticks,
- Dead animals and animal waste,
- Worms, insects and similar animals that can be removed easily, and the mounds or webs they build (such as worm casts and ant hills), **and**
- Clumps of compacted soil (including aeration plugs).

Such natural objects are not loose if they are:

- Attached or growing,
- Solidly embedded in the ground (that is, cannot be picked out easily), **or**
- Sticking to the ball.

#### Special cases:

- **Sand and Loose Soil** are not **loose impediments** (this does not include a mound built by a worm, insect or similar animal).
- **Dew, Frost and Water** are not **loose impediments**.
- **Snow and Natural Ice** (other than frost) are either **loose impediments** or, when on the ground, temporary water, at the player's option.
- **Spider Webs** are **loose impediments** even though they are attached to another object.
- **Live Insect on a Ball** is a **loose impediment**.

[Loose Impediment/1](#)

[Loose Impediment/2](#)

[Loose Impediment/3](#)

[Loose Impediment/4](#)

## Lost

The status of a ball that is not found in three minutes after the player or their caddie (or the player's partner or partner's caddie) begins to search for it. A ball does not become **lost** as a result of the player declaring it to be lost.

If a player deliberately delays the start of the search in order to allow other people to search on their behalf, the search time starts when the player would have been in a position to search had they not delayed getting to the area.

If the search begins and is then temporarily interrupted for a good reason (such as when the player stops searching when play is suspended or needs to stand aside to wait for another player to play) or when the player has mistakenly identified a wrong ball:

- The time between the interruption and when the search resumes does not count, **and**
- The time allowed for search is three minutes in total, counting the search time both before the interruption and after the search resumes.

[Lost/1](#)

[Lost/2](#)

## M

## Mark

To show the spot where a ball is at rest by either:

- Placing a ball-marker right behind or right next to the ball, **or**
- Holding a club on the ground right behind or right next to the ball.

This is done to show the spot where the ball must be replaced after it is lifted.

## Marker

In stroke play, the person responsible for entering a player's score on the player's scorecard and for certifying that scorecard. The **marker** may be another player, **but** not a partner.

The Committee may identify who will be the player's **marker** or tell the players how they may choose a **marker**.

## Match Play

A form of play where a player or side plays directly against an opponent or opposing side in a head-to-head match of one or more rounds:

- A player or side wins a hole in the match by completing the hole in fewer strokes (including strokes made and penalty strokes), **and**
- The match is won when a player or side leads the opponent or opposing side by more holes than remain to be played.

**Match play** can be played as a singles match (where one player plays directly against one opponent), a Three-Ball match or a Foursomes or Four-Ball match between sides of two partners.

## Maximum Score

A form of stroke play where a player's or side's score for a hole is capped at a maximum number of strokes (including strokes made and any penalty strokes) set by the Committee, such as two times par, a fixed number or net double bogey.

## Movable Obstruction

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 an 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 a loose stone that is part of a stone wall).

Even when an obstruction is movable, the Committee may define it to be an immovable obstruction.

## Moved

When a ball at rest has left its original spot and come to rest on any other spot, and this can be seen by the naked eye (whether or not anyone actually sees it do so).

This applies whether the ball has gone up, down or horizontally in any direction away from its original spot.

If the ball only wobbles (sometimes referred to as oscillating) and stays on or returns to its original spot, the ball has not **moved**.

[Moved/1](#)

[Moved/2](#)

# N

## Natural Forces

The effects of nature such as wind, water or when something happens for no apparent reason because of the effects of gravity.

## Nearest Point of Complete Relief

The reference point for taking free relief from an abnormal course condition ([Rule 16.1](#)), dangerous animal condition ([Rule 16.2](#)), wrong green ([Rule 13.1f](#)) or no play zone ([Rules 16.1f](#) and [17.1e](#)), or in taking relief under certain Local Rules.

It is the estimated point where the ball would lie that is:

- Nearest to the ball's original spot, **but** not nearer the hole than that spot,
- In the required area of the course, **and**
- Where there is no interference (under the Rule being used) from the condition from which relief is being taken for the stroke the player would have made from the original spot if the condition were not there.

Estimating this reference point requires the player to identify the choice of club, stance, swing and line of play they would have used for that stroke.

The player does not need to simulate that stroke by taking an actual stance and swinging with the chosen club (**but** it is recommended that the player normally do this to help in making an accurate estimate).

The **nearest point of complete relief** relates solely to the particular condition from which relief is being taken and may be in a location where there is interference by something else:

- If the player takes relief and then has interference by another condition from which relief is allowed, the player may take relief again by determining a new **nearest point of complete relief** from the new condition.
- Relief must be taken separately for each condition, **except** that the player may take relief from both conditions at the same time (based on determining the **nearest point of complete relief** from both) when, having already taken relief separately from each condition, it becomes reasonable to conclude that continuing to do so will result in continued interference by one or the other.

[Nearest Point of Complete Relief/1](#)

[Nearest Point of Complete Relief/2](#)

[Nearest Point of Complete Relief/3](#)

[Nearest Point of Complete Relief/4](#)

[Nearest Point of Complete Relief/5](#)

## No Play Zone

A part of the course where the Committee has prohibited play. A **no play zone** must be defined as part of either an abnormal course condition or a penalty area.

The Committee may use **no play zones** for any reason, such as:

- Protecting wildlife, animal habitats, and environmentally sensitive areas,
- Preventing damage to young trees, flower beds, turf nurseries, re-turfed areas or other planted areas,
- Protecting players from danger, **and**
- Preserving sites of historical or cultural interest.

The Committee should define the edge of a **no play zone** with a line or stakes, and the line or stakes (or the tops of those stakes) should identify the **no play zone** as different than a regular abnormal course condition or penalty area that does not contain a **no play zone**.

### [No Play Zone/1](#)



## Obstruction

Any artificial object **except** for integral objects and boundary objects.

Examples of **obstructions**:

- Artificially surfaced roads and paths, including their artificial borders,
- Buildings and rain shelters,
- Sprinkler heads, drains and irrigation or control boxes,
- Stakes, walls, railings and fences (**but** not when they are boundary objects that define or show the boundary edge of the course),
- Golf carts, mowers, cars and other vehicles,
- Waste containers, signposts and benches, **and**
- Player equipment, flagsticks and rakes.

An **obstruction** is either a movable obstruction or an immovable obstruction. If part of an immovable obstruction (such as a gate or door or part of an attached cable) meets the definition of movable obstruction, that part is treated as a movable obstruction.

Paint dots and lines, such as those used to define boundaries and penalty areas, are not obstructions.

**See Committee Procedures, [Section 8: Model Local Rule F-23](#)** (Committee may adopt a Local Rule defining certain obstructions as temporary immovable obstructions for which special relief procedures apply).

## Opponent

The person a player competes against in a match. The term **opponent** applies only in match play.

## Outside Influence

Any of these people or things that can affect what happens to a player's ball or equipment or to the course:

- Any person (including another player), **except** the player or their caddie or the player's partner or opponent or any of their caddies,
- Any animal,
- Any natural or artificial object or anything else (including another ball in motion), **except** for natural forces, **and**
- Artificially propelled air and water, such as from a fan or irrigation system.

## Out of Bounds

All areas outside the boundary edge of the course as defined by the Committee. All areas inside that edge are in bounds.

The boundary edge of the course extends both up above the ground and down below the ground:

- This means that all ground and anything else (such as any natural or artificial object) inside the boundary edge is in bounds, whether on, above or below the surface of the ground.
- If an object is both inside and outside the boundary edge (such as steps attached to a boundary fence, or a tree rooted outside the edge with branches extending inside the edge or vice versa), only the part of the object that is outside the edge is **out of bounds**.

The boundary edge should be defined by boundary objects or lines:

- **Boundary objects:** When defined by stakes or a fence, the boundary edge is defined by the line between the course-side points of the stakes or fence posts at ground level (excluding angled supports), and those stakes or fence posts are **out of bounds**.

When defined by other objects such as a wall or when the Committee wishes to treat a boundary fence in a different way, the Committee should define the boundary edge.

- **Lines:** When defined by a painted line on the ground, the boundary edge is the course-side edge of the line, and the line itself is **out of bounds**.

When a line on the ground defines the boundary edge, stakes may be used to show where the boundary edge is located.

When stakes are used to define or show the boundary edge, they are boundary objects.

Boundary stakes or lines should be white.



## P

### Par/Bogey

A form of stroke play that uses scoring as in match play where:

- A player or side wins or loses a hole by completing the hole in fewer strokes or more strokes (including strokes made and any penalty strokes) than a fixed target score for that hole set by the Committee, **and**
- The competition is won by the player or side with the highest total of holes won versus holes lost (that is, adding up the holes won and subtracting the holes lost).

### Partner

A player who competes together with another player as a side, in either match play or stroke play.

## Penalty Area

An area from which relief with a one-stroke penalty is allowed if the player's ball comes to rest there.

A **penalty area** is:

- Any body of water on the course (whether or not marked by the Committee), including a sea, lake, pond, river, ditch, surface drainage ditch or other open watercourse (even if not containing water), **and**
- Any other part of the course the Committee defines as a **penalty area**.

A **penalty area** is one of the five defined areas of the course.

There are two different types of **penalty areas**, distinguished by the colour used to mark them:

- Yellow **penalty areas** (marked with yellow lines or yellow stakes) give the player two relief options ([Rules 17.1d\(1\) and \(2\)](#)).
- Red **penalty areas** (marked with red lines or red stakes) give the player an extra lateral relief option ([Rule 17.1d\(3\)](#)), in addition to the two relief options available for yellow **penalty areas**.

If the colour of a **penalty area** has not been marked or indicated by the Committee, it is treated as a red **penalty area**.

The edge of a **penalty area** extends both up above the ground and down below the ground:

- This means that all ground and anything else (such as any natural or artificial object) inside the edge is part of the **penalty area**, whether on, above or below the surface of the ground.
- If an object is both inside and outside the edge (such as a bridge over the penalty area, or a tree rooted inside the edge with branches extending outside the edge or vice versa), only the part of the object that is inside the edge is part of the **penalty area**.

The edge of a **penalty area** should be defined by stakes, lines or physical features:

- **Stakes**: When defined by stakes, the edge of the **penalty area** is defined by the line between the outside points of the stakes at ground level, and the stakes are inside the penalty area.
- **Lines**: When defined by a painted line on the ground, the edge of the **penalty area** is the outside edge of the line, and the line itself is in the **penalty area**.
- **Physical Features**: When defined by physical features (such as a beach or desert area or a retaining wall), the Committee should say how the edge of the **penalty area** is defined.

When the edge of a **penalty area** is defined by lines or by physical features, stakes may be used to show where the **penalty area** is located.

When stakes are used to define or show the edge of a **penalty area**, they are obstructions.

If a Committee has mistakenly excluded an area of water that is clearly part of a **penalty area** when defining its edge (such as by placing stakes in a location that means there is a portion of water from the **penalty area** that appears to be in the general area), that area is part of the **penalty area**.

When the edge of a body of water is not defined by the Committee, the edge of that **penalty area** is defined by its natural boundaries (that is, where the ground slopes down to form the depression that can hold the water).

If an open watercourse usually does not contain water (such as a drainage ditch or run-off area that is dry except during a rainy season), the Committee may define that area as part of the general area (which means it is not a **penalty area**).

## Point of Maximum Available Relief

The reference point for taking free relief from an abnormal course condition in a bunker ([Rule 16.1c](#)) or on the putting green ([Rule 16.1d](#)) when there is no nearest point of complete relief.

It is the estimated point where the ball would lie that is:

- Nearest to the ball's original spot, **but** not nearer the hole than that spot,
- In the required area of the course, **and**
- Where that abnormal course condition least interferes with the stroke the player would have made from the original spot if the condition was not there.

Estimating this reference point requires the player to identify the choice of club, stance, swing and line of play the player would have used for that stroke.

The player does not need to simulate that stroke by taking an actual stance and swinging with the chosen club (**but** it is recommended that the player normally do this to help in making an accurate estimate).

The **point of maximum available relief** is found by comparing the relative amount of interference with the lie of the ball and the player's area of intended stance and swing and, on the putting green only, the line of play. For example, when taking relief from temporary water:

- The **point of maximum available relief** may be where the ball will be in shallower water than where the player will stand (affecting the stance more than the lie and swing), or where the ball is in deeper water than where the player will stand (affecting the lie and swing more than the stance).
- On the putting green, the **point of maximum available relief** may be based on the line of play where the ball will need to go through the shallowest or shortest stretch of temporary water.

## Provisional Ball

Another ball played in case the ball just played by the player may be:

- Out of bounds, **or**
- Lost outside a penalty area.

A **provisional ball** is not the player's ball in play, unless it becomes the ball in play under [Rule 18.3c](#).

## Putting Green

The area on the hole the player is playing that:

- Is specially prepared for putting, **or**
- The Committee has defined as the **putting green** (such as when a temporary green is used).

The **putting green** for a hole contains the hole into which the player tries to play a ball.

The **putting green** is one of the five defined areas of the course. The **putting greens** for all other holes (which the player is not playing at the time) are wrong greens and part of the general area.

The edge of a **putting green** is defined by where it can be seen that the specially prepared area starts (such as where the grass has been distinctly cut to show the edge), unless the Committee defines the edge in a different way (such as by using a line or dots).

If a double green is used for two different holes:



- The entire prepared area containing both holes is treated as the **putting green** when playing each hole.
- **But** the Committee may define an edge that divides the double green into two different **putting greens**, so that when a player is playing one of the holes, the part of the double green for the other hole is a wrong green.

## R

### Referee

An official named by the Committee to decide questions of fact and apply the Rules.

In match play, a **referee's** duties and authority depend on their assigned role:

- When a **referee** is assigned to one match for the entire round, the **referee** is responsible for acting on any breach of the Rules that they see or are told about (see [Rule 20.1b\(1\)](#)).
- When a **referee** is assigned to multiple matches or to certain holes or sections of the course, they have no authority to become involved in a match unless:
  - A player in a match asks for help with the Rules or requests a ruling (see [Rule 20.1b\(2\)](#)).
  - A player or players in a match may be in breach of [Rule 1.2](#) (Standards of Player Conduct), [Rule 1.3b\(1\)](#) (Two or More Players Agree to Ignore any Rule or Penalty they Know Applies), [Rule 5.6a](#) (Unreasonable Delay of Play) or [Rule 5.6b](#) (Prompt Pace of Play).
  - A player arrives late to their starting point (see [Rule 5.3](#)), **or**
  - A player's search for a ball reaches three minutes (see [Rule 5.6a](#) and definition of lost).

In stroke play, a **referee** is responsible for acting on any breach of the Rules they see or are told about. This applies whether the **referee** is assigned to one group for the entire round or to monitor multiple groups, certain holes or parts of the course.

A **referee's** duties may be limited by the Committee in match play and stroke play.

### Relief Area

The area where a player must drop a ball when taking relief under a Rule. With the exception of back-on-the-line relief (see [Rules 16.1c\(2\)](#), [17.1d\(2\)](#), [19.2b](#) and [19.3](#)), each relief Rule requires the player to use a specific relief area whose size and location are based on these three factors:

- Reference Point: The point from which the size of a **relief area** is measured.
- 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:
- Limits on Location of Relief Area: The location of the **relief area** may be limited in one or more ways so that, for example:
  - It is only in certain defined areas of the course, such as only in the general area, or not in a bunker or a penalty area,
  - It is not nearer the hole than the reference point or must be outside a penalty area or a bunker from which relief is being taken, **or**
  - It is where there is no interference (as defined in the particular Rule) from the condition from which relief is being taken.

With back-on-the-line relief, the player must drop on the line in a location allowed by the Rule being used and the spot where the ball first touches the ground when dropped creates a relief area that is one club-length in any direction from that point.

When a player is required to drop again or for a second time using back-on-the-line relief, the player may:

- Change the spot on which the ball is dropped (such as dropping nearer to or farther from the hole), and the **relief area** changes based on that point, and
- Drop in a different area of the course.

But doing so does not change how [Rule 14.3c](#) applies. In using club-lengths to determine the size of a **relief area**, the player may measure directly across a ditch, hole or similar thing, and directly across or through an object (such as a tree, fence, wall, tunnel, drain or sprinkler head), **but** is not allowed to measure through ground that naturally slopes up and down.

See **Committee Procedures, Section 2I** (Committee may choose to allow or require the player to use a dropping zone as a **relief area** when taking certain relief).

[Relief Area/1](#)

## Replace

To place a ball by setting it down by hand and letting it go, with the intent for it to be in play.

If the player sets a ball down without intending it to be in play, the ball has not been **replaced** and is not in play (see [Rule 14.4](#)). Whenever a Rule requires a ball to be **replaced**, the Rule identifies a specific spot where the ball must be **replaced**.

See [Rules 25.3d](#) and [25.4e](#) (for players who are amputees or use an assistive mobility device, the definition is modified to allow replacing the ball by using equipment).

## Round

18 or fewer holes played in the order set by the Committee.



## S

### Scorecard

The document where a player's score for each hole is entered in stroke play.

The **scorecard** may be in any paper or electronic form approved by the Committee that allows:

- The player's score to be entered for each hole, **and**
- The marker and the player to certify the scores either by physical signature or by a method of electronic certification approved by the Committee.

A **scorecard** is not required in match play but may be used by the players to help keep the match score.

### Serious Breach

In stroke play, when playing from a wrong place could give the player a significant advantage compared to the stroke to be made from the right place.

In making this comparison to decide if there was a **serious breach**, the factors to be taken into account include:

- The difficulty of the stroke,

- The distance of the ball from the hole,
- The effect of obstacles on the line of play, **and**
- The conditions affecting the stroke.

The concept of a **serious breach** does not apply in match play, because a player loses the hole if they play from a wrong place.

## Side

Two or more partners competing as a single unit in a round in match play or stroke play.

Each set of partners is a **side**, whether each partner plays his or her own ball (Four-Ball) or the partners play one ball (Foursomes).

A **side** is not the same as a team. In a team competition, each team consists of players competing as individuals or as **sides**.

## Stableford

A form of stroke play where:

- A player's or side's score for a hole is based on points awarded by comparing the player's or side's number of strokes on the hole (including strokes made and any penalty strokes) to a fixed target score for the hole set by the Committee, **and**
- The competition is won by the player or side who completes all rounds with the most points.

## Stance

The position of a player's feet and body in preparing for and making a stroke.

See [Rule 25.4d](#) (for players who use an assistive mobility device, the definition is modified to include the position of the assistive mobility device in preparing for and making a stroke).

## Stroke

The forward movement of the club made to strike the ball.

**But** a **stroke** has not been made if the player:

- Decides during the downswing not to strike the ball and avoids doing so by deliberately stopping the clubhead before it reaches the ball or, if unable to stop, by deliberately missing the ball.
- Accidentally strikes the ball when making a practice swing or while preparing to make a **stroke**.

When the Rules refer to "playing a ball," it means the same as making a **stroke**.

The player's score for a hole or a round is described as a number of "strokes" or "strokes taken," which means both all **strokes** made and any penalty strokes (see [Rule 3.1c](#)).

[Stroke/1](#)

## Stroke and Distance

The procedure and penalty when a player takes relief under [Rule 17](#), [18](#) or [19](#) by playing a ball from where the previous stroke was made (see [Rule 14.6](#)).

The term **stroke and distance** means that the player both:

- Gets one penalty stroke, **and**
- Loses the benefit of any gain of distance towards the hole from the spot where the previous stroke was made.

## Stroke Play

A form of play where a player or side competes against all other players or sides in the competition.

In the regular form of **stroke play** (see [Rule 3.3](#)):

- A player's or side's score for a round is the total number of strokes (including strokes made and any penalty strokes) to hole out on each hole, **and**
- The winner is the player or side who completes all rounds in the fewest total strokes.

Other forms of **stroke play** with different scoring methods are Stableford, Maximum Score and Par/Bogey (see [Rule 21](#)).

All forms of **stroke play** can be played either in individual competitions (each player competing on their own) or in competitions involving sides of partners (Foursomes or Four-Ball).

## Substitute

To change the ball the player is using to play a hole by having another ball become the ball in play.

Another ball has been **substituted** when that ball has been put in play in any way (see [Rule 14.4](#)) to take the place of the original ball, whether the original ball was:

- In play, **or**
- No longer in play because it had been lifted from the course or was lost or out of bounds.

A **substituted** ball is the player's ball in play even if:

- It was replaced, dropped or placed in a wrong way or wrong place, **or**
- The player was required under the Rules to put the original ball back in play rather than to **substitute** another ball.

## T

## Tee

An object used to raise a ball above the ground to play it from the teeing area. It must be no longer than four inches (101.6 mm) and conform with the Equipment Rules.

## Teeing Area

The area the player must play from in starting the hole they are playing.

The **teeing area** is a rectangle that is two club-lengths deep where:

- The front edge is defined by the line between the forward-most points of two tee-markers set by the Committee, **and**
- The side edges are defined by the lines back from the outside points of the tee-markers.

The **teeing area** is one of the five defined areas of the course.

All other teeing locations on the course (whether on the same hole or any other hole) are part of the general area.

## Temporary Water

Any temporary accumulation of water on the surface of the ground (such as puddles from rain or irrigation or an overflow from a body of water) that:

- Is not in a penalty area, **and**
- Can be seen before or after the player takes a stance (without pressing down excessively with their feet).

It is not enough for the ground to be merely wet, muddy or soft or for the water to be momentarily visible as the player steps on the ground; an accumulation of water must remain present either before or after the stance is taken. Special cases:

- **Dew and Frost** are not **temporary water**.
- **Snow and Natural Ice** (other than frost) are either loose impediments or, when on the ground, **temporary water**, at the player's option.
- **Manufactured Ice** is an obstruction.

## Three-Ball

A form of match play where:

- Each of three players plays an individual match against the other two players at the same time, **and**
- Each player plays one ball that is used in both of their matches.

## W

## Wrong Ball

Any ball other than the player's:

- Ball in play (whether the original ball or a substituted ball),
- Provisional ball (before it is abandoned under [Rule 18.3c](#)), or
- Second ball in stroke play played under [Rules 14.7b](#) or [20.1c](#).

Examples of a **wrong ball** are:

- Another player's ball in play,
- A stray ball, **and**
- The player's own ball that is out of bounds, has become lost or has been lifted and not yet put back in play.

### Wrong Ball/1

## Wrong Green

Any green on the course other than the putting green for the hole the player is playing. **Wrong greens** include:

- The greens for all other holes that the player is not playing at the time,
- The normal putting green for a hole where a temporary green is being used, **and**
- All practice greens for putting, chipping or pitching, unless the Committee excludes them by Local Rule.

**Wrong greens** are part of the general area.

## Wrong Place

Any place on the course other than where the player is required or allowed to play their ball under the Rules.

Examples of playing from a **wrong place** are:

- Playing a ball after replacing it on the wrong spot or without replacing it when required by the Rules,
- Playing a dropped ball from outside the required relief area,
- Taking relief under a wrong Rule, so that the ball is dropped in and played from a place not allowed under the Rules, **and**
- Playing a ball from a no play zone or when a no play zone interferes with the player's area of intended stance or swing.

A player has not played from a **wrong place** in the following situations:

- When a ball has been played from outside the teeing area in starting play of a hole or in trying to correct that mistake (see [Rule 6.1b](#)), **or**
- When a ball has been played from where it comes to rest after the player has failed to replay a stroke when required to do so.



"You always tell me it's only a game."