

2019 Rules Changes

Category	Sub-category	Topic	Description of change
★ Ball at rest	Ball moved	Player accidentally moves his or her ball during search	New rule: No penalty. Current rule: 1-stroke penalty.
	Ball moved	Player accidentally moves his or her ball or ball-marker on the putting green	New rule: No penalty. Current rule: 1-stroke penalty (with exceptions).
	Ball moved	Standard for deciding whether the player caused his or her ball to move	New rule: The player will be found to be the cause only when it is known or virtually certain (meaning at least 95%) to be the case. Current rule: Weight of the evidence/more likely than not.
	Ball replaced	How to replace a ball lying off the putting green when it moves and its exact original spot isn't known	New rule: Replace the ball on its estimated spot; if that spot was on, under or against attached natural objects, replace the ball on that spot on, under or against those objects. Current rule: Drop the ball as near as possible to the estimated spot.
★ Ball in motion	Accidental deflection	Player's ball in motion accidentally hits the player, his or her caddie, the person attending the flagstick or the attended or removed flagstick	New rule: No penalty. Current rule: 1-stroke penalty (except it is a 2-stroke penalty when the accidental deflection relates to the flagstick or the attendant).
	Double hit	Player accidentally hits the ball more than one during a stroke.	New rule: No penalty. Current rule: 1-stroke penalty.
★ Taking relief	Dropping procedure	Where a ball must be dropped	New rule: Drop in a defined relief area. Current rule: Sometimes the drop is in a specified area, sometimes it is on or as near as possible to a spot or a line.
	Dropping procedure	Where a dropped ball must come to rest	New rule: The ball must come to rest in the relief area where it was dropped. If the ball comes to rest outside of the relief area, the player will drop a second time in the relief area. If the ball again comes to rest outside the relief area, the player will place it where the ball first touched the ground on the second drop. Current rule: The ball must be re-dropped if it rolls to any of the nine specified areas (Rule 20-2c), such as rolling more than 2 club-lengths from where the dropped ball struck the ground.

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Taking relief (continued)	Dropping procedure	Measuring the size of the relief area where a ball must be dropped and played	New rule: The relief area is measured by measuring 1 or 2 club lengths (which is defined as the longest club the player has during the round, other than a putter). Current rule: Measured by using 1 or 2 club-lengths (with any club the player selects).
	Dropping procedure	How to drop a ball	New rule: The ball must be dropped straight down from knee height (the height of the player's knee when in a standing position). Current rule: Stand erect, hold the ball at shoulder height and arm's length.
	Lost ball	Time allowed for a ball search	New rule: A ball is lost if not found in three minutes. Current rule: A ball is lost if not found in five minutes.
	Substituting ball	Substituting ball when taking relief	New rule: A player may always substitute a ball when taking relief. Current rule: The player must use the original ball when taking free relief (with exceptions); a substituted ball is allowed only when taking penalty relief.
	Embedded ball	Taking relief for a ball embedded in its own pitch-mark	New rule: A player may take relief without penalty for an embedded ball anywhere in the "general area" (new term for "through the green"), unless a Local Rule has been adopted restricting relief only to areas cut to fairway height or less. The general area is the new term for "through the green". Current rule: Relief is allowed only in areas cut to fairway height or less, unless a Local Rule has been adopted allowing relief anywhere (except in sand) through the green.
Areas of the course	Putting green	Replacing a ball on the putting green when it moves from its spot after it already had been lifted and replaced	New rule: The ball must always be replaced on its original spot, even if it was blown by the wind or moved for no clear reason. Current rule: The ball is replaced only if a player or outside agency caused it to move; otherwise, the ball is played from its new location.

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	Putting green	Repairing damage on the putting green	<p>New rule: A player may repair almost any damage (including spike marks and animal damage but not including natural imperfections) on the putting green.</p> <p>Current rule: A player may only repair ball-marks or old hole plugs on the putting green.</p>
	Putting green	Player touches the line of putt or touches the putting green in pointing out a target	<p>New rule: No penalty, so long as doing so does not improve the conditions for the player's stroke.</p> <p>Current rule: Loss of hole/2-stroke penalty (with exceptions).</p>
	Putting green	Putting with an unattended flagstick left in the hole	<p>New rule: No penalty if a ball played from the putting green (or anywhere else) hits the unattended flagstick in hole.</p> <p>Current rule: Loss of hole/2-stroke penalty if the ball is played from the putting green and hits the unattended flagstick in hole.</p>
	Penalty areas	Areas the Committee may mark as a penalty area (where relief with 1-stroke penalty is allowed)	<p>New rule: Red- and yellow-marked "penalty areas" may now cover areas of desert, jungle, lava rock, etc, in addition to areas of water.</p> <p>Current rule: The Committee may only mark an area of water as a "water hazard".</p>
	Penalty areas	Player moves loose impediments, touches the ground with hand or club or grounds the club in a penalty area when the ball is in the penalty area	<p>New rule: No penalty.</p> <p>Current rule: Loss of hole/2-stroke penalty (with exceptions).</p>
Areas of the course (continued)	Penalty areas	Expanded use of red-marked penalty areas	<p>New rule: Committees are given the discretion to mark all penalty areas as red so that lateral relief is always allowed (but they may still mark penalty areas as yellow where they consider it appropriate).</p> <p>Current rule: All water hazards should be marked yellow, except where their location on the course makes it impossible or unreasonable to drop behind the hazard; only when this is the case may these water hazards be marked red as lateral water hazards.</p>

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	Penalty areas	Elimination of the opposite side relief option for red penalty areas	New rule: A player is no longer allowed to take relief from a red penalty area on the opposite side from where the ball last entered that penalty area, unless the Committee adopts a Local Rule allowing it. Current rule: A player is always allowed to take relief from the opposite side of a red-marked lateral water hazard.
	Bunkers	Player moves or touches a loose impediment in a bunker when the ball is in the bunker	New rule: No penalty. Current rule: Loss of hole/2-stroke penalty (with exceptions).
	Bunkers	Player touches sand in a bunker with his or her hand or a club when the ball is in the bunker	New rule: No penalty except when a player touches sand (1) with his or her hand or club to test the conditions of the bunker, (2) in making a practice swing, (3) with the club in the area right behind or in front of the ball or (4) in making the backswing for the stroke. Current rule: Any touching of sand with hand or club results in loss of hole/2-stroke penalty (with exceptions).
	Bunkers	Unplayable ball relief options	New rule: A player may take relief outside the bunker back on the line from the hole through where ball was at rest for 2 penalty strokes. Current rule: No relief outside the bunker (other than in playing from where the player's last stroke was made).
Equipment	Damaged clubs	Use of clubs damaged during round	New rule: A player may keep using any damaged club, no matter the nature or cause of the damage, even if the player damaged it in anger. Current rule: A player may use the damaged club only if it was damaged in the "normal course of play."
	Damaged clubs	Adding clubs to replace a club damaged during round	New rule: A player may not replace a damaged club, unless the player was not responsible for the damage. Current rule: A player may replace a damaged club if it is "unfit for play" and was damaged in the "normal course of play."



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	Other equipment	Use of distance-measuring devices (DMDs)	New rule: The use of DMDs is allowed, unless a Local Rule has been adopted prohibiting their use. Current rule: DMD use is prohibited, unless a Local Rule has been adopted allowing their use.
Playing a ball	Advice and help	Caddie standing behind a player to help with that player's alignment	New rule: A caddie is not allowed to deliberately stand on or close to the extended line of play behind a player while the player is taking his or her stance until the stroke is made. Current rule: A caddie is allowed to stand on a line behind a player while the player is taking a stance and preparing to play, but must not stand there while the player makes the stroke.
	Advice and help	Caddie lifts and replaces the player's ball on the putting green	New rule: A caddie may lift and replace the player's ball on the putting green without the player's specific authorization to do so. Current rule: 1-stroke penalty if done without the player's specific authorization.
When to play during a round	Pace of play	Recommendations on how to play promptly	New rule: Recommends that players make each stroke in no more than 40 seconds, and usually in less time. Current rule: No recommendations are given.
When to play during a round (continued)	Pace of play	Playing out of turn in stroke play	New rule: No penalty (as today), and "ready golf" is encouraged when it can be done in a safe and responsible way. Current rule: No penalty, but the current Rule is written in a way that may imply that playing out of turn is wrong or is not allowed.
	Pace of play	Other changes to help pace of play	Other new rules: Reduced time for search, allowing more areas to be marked as penalty areas, expanded use of red penalty areas, the simplified dropping procedure and allowing a player to putt with the flagstick in the hole.

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	Pace of play	New alternative form of stroke play	<p>New rule: A new “Maximum Score” form of stroke play is recognized, where a player’s score for a hole is capped at a maximum score (such as two times par, a fixed number or net double bogey) that is set by the Committee.</p> <p>Current rule: In standard individual stroke play, players must hole out at every hole; the only recognized alternative forms of stroke play where holing out is not required are Stableford, Par and Bogey.</p>
Player behavior	Standards of conduct	Playing in the spirit of the game	<p>New rule: Explains and reinforces the high standards of conduct expected from players and gives Committees the discretion to disqualify players for serious misconduct.</p> <p>Current rule: The Rules set out no standards of conduct, except indirectly in giving Committees discretion to disqualify players for a serious breach of etiquette.</p>
	Standards of conduct	Code of player conduct	<p>New rule: Committees are given authority to adopt their own code of player conduct and to set penalties for the breach of the standards in that code.</p> <p>Current rule: Committees may disqualify players for a serious breach of etiquette, but are not allowed to impose lesser penalties such as a 1-stroke penalty or a loss of hole/2-stroke penalty.</p>
Player behavior (continued)	Integrity	Eliminating announcement requirements before lifting a ball under certain Rules	<p>New rule: When a player has good reason to mark and lift a ball to identify it, check for damage or see if it lies in a condition where relief is allowed (such as to see whether it is embedded), the player is no longer required first to announce to another player or his or her marker the intent to do so or to give that person an opportunity to observe the process.</p> <p>Current rule: Before lifting in these cases, the player must announce to another player or the marker that he or she is doing so and allow that person to observe the process.</p>



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	Integrity	Player's reasonable judgment in estimating and measuring under a Rule	<p>New rule: When determining a spot, point, line, area or other location under a Rule, a player's reasonable judgment will not be second-guessed based on later evidence (such as video review) if the player did all that could be reasonably expected under the circumstances to make an accurate estimation or measurement.</p> <p>Current rule: A player's judgment is given no particular weight or deference; the Committee decides any issue about the accuracy of the estimation or measurement based on a review of all facts.</p>