

The New Rules of Golf, Adopted January 2019

Dropping procedure:

When taking relief (from an abnormal course condition or penalty area, for example), golfers will now drop from knee height. This will ensure consistency and simplicity in the dropping process while also preserving the randomness of the drop.

Measuring in taking relief:

The golfer's relief area will be measured by using the **longest club** in his/her bag (other than a putter) to measure one club-length or two club-lengths, depending on the situation, providing a consistent process for golfers to establish his/her relief area.

Ball to be dropped in and played from relief area.

Removing the penalty for a double hit:

The penalty stroke for accidentally striking the ball more than once in the course of a stroke has been removed. Golfers will simply count the one stroke they made to strike the ball.

Elimination or reduction of "ball moved" penalties: There will be no penalty for accidentally moving a ball on the putting green or in searching for a ball; and a player is not responsible for causing a ball to move unless it is "virtually certain" that he or she did so.

Relaxed putting green rules: There will be no penalty if a ball played from the putting green hits an unattended flagstick in the hole; players may putt without having the flagstick attended or removed. Players may repair spike marks and other damage made by shoes, animal damage and other damage on the putting green and there is no penalty for merely touching the line of putt. If the ball is moved by wind it is to be replaced without penalty.

No penalty for ball moved while searching :

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).

No penalty for accidental deflection:

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).

Relaxed rules for "penalty areas" (currently called "water hazards"):

Red and yellow-marked penalty areas may cover areas of desert, jungle, lava rock, etc., in addition to areas of water; expanded use of red penalty areas where lateral relief is allowed; and there will be no penalty for moving loose impediments or touching the ground or water in a penalty area.

Relaxed bunker rules:

There will be no penalty for moving loose impediments in a bunker or for generally touching the sand with a hand or club. A limited set of restrictions (such as not grounding the club right next to the ball) is kept to preserve the challenge of playing from the sand; however,

Penalty relief always allowed from bunker:

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

Relying on player integrity:

A player's "reasonable judgment" when estimating or measuring a spot, point, line, area or distance will be upheld, even if video evidence later shows it to be wrong; and elimination of announcement procedures when lifting a ball to identify it or to see if it is damaged.

Pace-of-play support:

Reduced time for searching for a lost ball (**from five minutes to three**); affirmative encouragement of "ready golf" in stroke play; recommending that players take no more than 40 seconds to play a stroke and other changes intended to help with pace of play.

Ball change always allowed when taking relief :

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).

Replacing ball when original spot unknown:

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).

Determining why ball moved:

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.

Expanded use of red-marked penalty areas:

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 term "hazard" will no longer be used in the Rules.