

New Rules to commence on 1 January 2019

The Rules of Golf will be changed significantly next year following extensive consultation over the past 6 years by R&A and the USGA.

The new rules have been reduced from 34 to 24 and the language used has been simplified. The overall objectives of the rule changes were to make them simpler and to increase the pace of play. Only time will tell if that has been achieved.

Members are encouraged to do their own research to gain a better understanding of the new rules which will come into effect on 1 January 2019. Several websites have videos and diagrams that demonstrate the new rules. A new rule books to be distributed to players sometime later this year will also contain diagrams. The book will be known as ***The Player's Edition of the Rules of Golf***, an abridged set of rules, written in the second person, that's intended to be the primary publication for golfers.

Some of the more significant changes include:

- **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.
- **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.
- **Balls Lost or Out of Bounds:** Alternative to Stroke and Distance: A new **Local Rule** will now be available in January 2019, permitting committees to allow golfers the option to drop the ball in the vicinity of where the ball is lost or out of bounds (including the nearest fairway area), under a two-stroke penalty. It addresses concerns raised at the club level about the negative impact on pace of play when a player is required to go back under stroke

and distance. The Local Rule is not intended for higher levels of play, such as professional or elite level competitions.

- **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.
- **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, an extra relief option is added for an unplayable ball in a bunker, allowing the ball to be played from outside the bunker with a two-stroke penalty.
- **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.