

Etiquette Basics

There are some “unwritten rules” or “best practices” that aren’t in the rule book for golf but are important for you to know. Here are 10 to get your started:

1. Dress Appropriately. Some golf courses have a stricter dress code (collared shirt, shirts must be tucked in, no spaghetti straps for girls tops, etc...), some have a more relaxed dress code (just wear a shirt please) so it’s always a good idea to check (the course’s website is a great place to start) before you head to a course. If you’re unsure what the dress code is your best bet is to error on the side of being better dressed.
2. Arrive a little early. If you have a 10am tee time that is the time you should be hitting your ball on the first tee... not the time you start walking to the first tee and certainly not the time you’re checking in at the pro shop. Hitting a few balls on the range and rolling a few putts on the practice green usually help get your ready to play. Make sure you’ve planned your time accordingly.
3. Be ready to play golf. Have tees a ball marker and a divot repair tool in your pocket or easily available to you. Bring extra balls. Put your phone in silent mode or maybe even (I know this might be a crazy idea for some of us) turn it off.
4. Be ready to hit when it’s your turn. Most importantly stay safe by not standing near another player where you could possibly be hit by their golf club when they swing and by not standing anywhere that another player’s errant shot could hit you because even the best players hit a bad shot occasionally. That said, if you can safely get to where your ball is while another player is hitting their shot you should do that. Start thinking about all the things you might want to consider before playing your shot (yardage, lie, wind, etc...) before it’s your turn to play so that when it is your turn to play you’ll be ready to go.
5. Don’t be a slow player. This goes with the previous tip... you don’t want to be the slow player in your group. If you have a long walk to your ball from a cart and you’re not sure what club you’re going to want to use then take 2 or 3 clubs that might be the one you will want. That way you won’t get to your ball with 1 club, realize it’s not the one you want and then have to run back to the cart to get the one you need. In terms of your group the key is to keep up with the group in front of you.
6. Fix your divots in the fairway or use the sand mix to fill them if the golf course provides sand bottles. Fix your ball mark on the green. Best advice, fix your mark and then fix one more. Over the long term I think you’ll find that if you take care of the golf course it will take care of you.
7. Once you’re on the green mark your ball. Place a flat object like a quarter behind your ball so that your ball is directly between that mark and the hole. When you do this however... (next tip)
8. Don’t step in the line of the other player’s putt. The line of the other player’s putt is the line that their ball will travel from where it is on the green to the hole. Sometimes that’s a straight line but a lot of times it isn’t. Some putts will turn quite a bit. If you’re not sure if where you’re going to walk is in another player’s line just ask them.
9. Walk or drive away from the green before you write down your scores so that you don’t hold up the group behind you. This is also for your safety. Remember even the best players hit a bad one now and then and if you’re standing by the green... that’s where the group behind you is trying to hit their balls. Key word in that last sentence. Trying.

10. Have fun. The golf course is usually a pretty nice place. You aren't in your room doing homework or mowing the lawn or washing the car or pulling weeds. You're out playing golf! Sometimes you'll play good. Sometimes you'll play bad. Most times you'll hit some good and hit some bad. If you can enjoy being out playing, hanging out with friends, working on your game and getting better... you've already won.

Rules of Golf:

Golf is a game of rules... a lot of rules. Why? One of the big reasons is because we play golf on courses that are all different. It's not like basketball where the size of the court is always the same and the rim is always 10 feet off the ground. The USGA is the organization in the United States that is in charge of the rules of golf. Below are links to their main website, their main rules page, their Rules 101 program and links to their rules app for iPhone and Android. If you're going to be a golfer, you gotta learn the rules of the game. You're not going to learn them all in one day but you gotta start somewhere and the section below is a great place to start.

USGA:

USGA Home Page: <https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page.html>

USGA Rules Page: <https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/rules-hub.html>

USGA Rules 101: <https://rules.usga.org/product/rules-101/>

USGA Rules App:

For iPhone: <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/the-rules-of-golf/id347349889>

For Android: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.usga.rulesofgolf>

Okay, here's a good place to start. Each section has a link to the USGA website with a quick video that shows you a little bit about the rule / procedure related to that topic. Once you've watched them all don't stop there. Sign up for a USGA account and start on the Rules 101 program. It's definitely more in depth than the videos below and if you're younger it's probably a good activity to do with mom and dad. If you're new to golf remember the whole goal is to learn the rules. When you're learning something you're going to get things wrong at first... probably a lot of things wrong. That's all part of learning something new. Keep with it and you'll get it.

Playing Course as You Find It: A quick video about the basic on concept of one of the core concepts in the game of golf: playing the ball as you find it.

<https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/video-hub.html#brightcoveId=5833561305001&pageTitle=Rules%20of%20Golf%20Explained%3A%20Playing%20the%20Course%20As%20You%20Find%20It&playlist=rules-experts-explain>

Playing a Provisional Ball: What do I do if I think I hit my ball out of bounds or somewhere that I think I might not be able to find it like?

<https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/video-hub.html#brightcoveId=5833566594001&pageTitle=Rules%20of%20Golf%20Explained%3A%20Playing%20a%20Provisional%20Ball&playlist=rules-experts-explain>

Ball Lost or Out of Bounds: What do I do if I know for sure I hit my ball out of bounds or I thought I knew where my ball went but I can't find it?

<https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/video-hub.html#brightcoveId=5833696591001&pageTitle=Rules%20of%20Golf%20Explained%3A%20Ball%20Lost%20or%20Out%20of%20Bounds&playlist=rules-experts-explain>

Bunkers: What can I do and/or what can I not do if I hit my ball into a bunker?

<https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/video-hub.html#brightcoveId=5833696710001&pageTitle=Rules%20of%20Golf%20Explained%3A%20Bunkers&playlist=rules-experts-explain>

Abnormal Course Conditions: What is an "abnormal course condition" and what do I do if my ball is in or on an "abnormal course condition"?

<https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/video-hub.html#brightcoveId=6285033766001&pageTitle=Historic%20Belmont%20Golf%20Course%20Gets%20New%20Lease%20on%20Life&playlist=carousel>

Loose Impediments: Can I move this stick that's right by my ball? What if my move the stick and my ball moves?

<https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/video-hub.html#brightcoveId=5833568616001&pageTitle=Rules%20of%20Golf%20Explained%3A%20Loose%20Impediments&playlist=rules-experts-explain>

Ball Unplayable: What if my ball ends up somewhere that I can't hit it? Can I move it? Is there a penalty?

<https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/video-hub.html#brightcoveId=6285033766001&pageTitle=Historic%20Belmont%20Golf%20Course%20Gets%20New%20Lease%20on%20Life&playlist=carousel>

Nearest Point of Complete Relief: My ball is on the cart path. My ball is in a puddle in the fairway. What do I do?

<https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/video-hub.html#brightcoveId=6285033766001&pageTitle=Historic%20Belmont%20Golf%20Course%20Gets%20New%20Lease%20on%20Life&playlist=carousel>

Penalty Areas: What do these red and yellow stakes around this pond mean? My ball went in there. What do I do?

<https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/video-hub.html#brightcoveId=6285033766001&pageTitle=Historic%20Belmont%20Golf%20Course%20Gets%20New%20Lease%20on%20Life&playlist=carousel>

Putting Green: Are there special things I can and can't do on the putting green?

<https://www.usga.org/content/usga/home-page/video-hub.html#brightcoveId=5833559270001&pageTitle=Rules%20of%20Golf%20Explained%3A%20Putting%20Green&playlist=rules-experts-explain>