

Common Rules and Recommendations

Here are a few rules you need to be familiar with for your first game:

1. Don't carry more than 14 clubs in your golf bag. You'll suffer a 2-stroke penalty if you do so.
2. Always play your ball as it lies, and always play fairly.
3. Observe basic rules for lost balls. You can use another ball to play from your original position but you'll have to add one stroke, if you think you can't find your ball. However, if the original ball was found, you are obligated to play the original.
4. Playing a wrong ball gets you two strokes for every shot played. Playing a wrong ball in a match play costs you the hole.
5. If your ball gets into casual water or a ground that's under repair, you are given a free drop within one club length to the nearest point of relief.
6. Play the ground as it lies. This means you can't move leaves, twigs, or stones in a bunker. However, if the obstructions are man-made (sprinkler heads, cart paths or power lines), you are allowed to place the ball at the nearest point of relief but without putting it nearer the hole.
7. The ball can only be cleaned of mud or dirt in the putting green, and not while it is in play in other places in the course. However, the ball must be marked before it is picked up and must be put back in the exact same spot.
8. In the event that your ball hits another ball in the fairway, bunker or hazard, no penalty is given and the displaced ball is placed in its original position. In the putting green however, the situation is different. If your ball is putted from the green and happens to strike another while in the putting area, you incur a two-stroke penalty.
9. Colored stakes mark certain areas of the course. White stakes are out-of-bounds markers. Yellow stakes mark a water hazard while red ones indicate a lateral water hazard.
10. If your ball rests within bounds, you can still hit it even if you have to stand out of bounds. However, if your ball goes beyond the marked stakes, you are given a penalty stroke and must return to the spot of your last hit.

Golf Etiquette

As golf is still considered to be "the gentleman's game" or "lady's game", it is important to understand what behavior on the golf course is frowned upon. As golf is played without close supervision, it is up to the individual golfer to show integrity, honesty, and sportsmanship. This is what golf etiquette is all about - it is the spirit of the game of golf. Here are some more specific golf etiquette rules:

- * Safety - Don't swing your club when someone is standing nearby and could be hit by your club, ball, or some other object.
- * Don't tee off or hit your approach shot to the green until the group in front is well out of reach or have departed the green.
- * When your ball is hit in the direction of someone and there is a danger that it may hit them, you are obliged to shout a warning such as "fore".
- * If you lose your ball or think that it may be lost, you should first declare and play a provisional ball. When looking for your ball, you should spend no more than five minutes doing so, and you should signal the group behind to play through if you are holding them up.
- * Once your group has finished on the green, you should immediately vacate it to let the group behind play. Don't fill in your scorecard on the green, wait until you are well clear of the green to do so.
- * If your group is consistently playing slower than the group behind, then let them play through. You should always be ready to play your shot when it is your turn.
- * Show consideration to other golfers - don't make any noises, cast a shadow, or make movements when they are taking their shots.
- * Tending the pin - if you are nearest to the pin when another player is taking their putt, it is customary to tend the pin.
- * After hitting out of a bunker, you should rake away your footmarks and any other marks you make. In fact, golf etiquette dictates that you should leave the bunker in a better condition than you found it.
- * On the green, you should repair the mark your ball made when it landed with your divot tool, plus one other mark.
- * You should always replace or fill in your divots on the fairway.

Basic Rules Of Golf

If you don't want to annoy your golf partners, you should learn the following basics:

- * Golf club rules - the maximum number of clubs that you are allowed to carry is fourteen. There is nothing to say that you can't have two drivers or two different types of putter, just that the total number of clubs is limited to fourteen.
- * Order of play - the player who tees off first has the "honors". In other words, the player who scored the lowest score on the previous hole. If it is the first hole, you can decide amongst

yourselves or toss a coin. On the fairway or green, the player who is furthest from the green or hole goes first.

* When the ball is in play (after teeing off), you are not allowed to touch or move the ball until it is holed out. The exceptions being; on the green you can mark your ball to clean it before putting; when taking a drop, you have to lift your ball; or you have hit the ball out of bounds and you remove the ball.

* When on the fairway or especially in the rough or amongst trees, you can remove loose twigs and leaves from around your ball but the ball must not move when doing so.

* When teeing off, you have to place the ball between the two markers and never in front of them. You can stand outside of the teeing area to hit a ball that is inside, but you can't move the markers if they are in your way.

* When addressing the ball on the tee and the ball falls off, you may replace it without a penalty.

* On the green, you can remove any loose objects from your line of putt.

* When it is your turn to putt, you must wait until the previous player's ball has stopped moving.

* You will be penalized if you hit the flag stick with your ball while putting from on the green, but not from off the green.

* If you hit your ball into a water hazard or out of bounds, you must play another ball from the designated drop zone or from a position any distance behind the hazard (including the original position of where your ball was) but no closer to the hole - you will be penalized a stroke.

Penalty & Free Drops

When dropping a ball a free drop is one club length and a penalty drop is two club lengths.

You must drop the ball at the nearest point of relief not nearer to the hole.

If your ball is in a bush you get a penalty drop of two club lengths from where your ball lies, if that still puts you into the bush then you take one of the other two options available to you. You can go back in line with your ball and the flag as far as you like (One penalty stroke). Or you can go back and play from where you played your last shot. (One penalty stroke).

If your ball lands on a bridge over a hazard you do not get a free drop unless it is a local rule of that course, you must play the ball as it lies or take a penalty drop.

If you cannot find your ball, you cannot go back and play a provisional ball whilst your playing partners carry on looking for your original ball. You cannot play a provisional ball once you have left the last place you played your shot. If you do go back and play a second ball that is the

ball in play even if you or your playing partners find your original ball, once you play that second ball that is the ball you complete the hole with. With a penalty of one stroke.

Tree basins are not a free drop, unless it is on the scorecard under local rules.

Hazards

The following details the difference in the color of the stakes and what they mean.

White stakes means out of bounds and you have to go back to where you last played your ball and play another stroke (one penalty stroke).

Yellow stakes means a hazard across the playing area, you have three options:

1. Play the ball as it lies, do not ground your club or touch or clear away any debris i.e. stones twigs etc
2. Take a line from point of entry and the flag and drop as far back as you like.
3. Go back to where you last played your shot.

Options 2 & 3 will cost you a penalty stroke.

Red stakes means a lateral "water" hazard (not necessarily with water) you have five options to choose from.

1. Play the ball as it lies, do not ground your club or touch or clear away any debris i.e. stones twigs etc.
2. Drop a ball at the point of entry into the hazard (two club lengths) no nearer to the hole.
3. Drop a ball on the other side of the hazard equidistant from the hole.
4. Take a line from point of entry and the flag and drop as far back as you like.
5. Go back to where you last played your shot.

Options 2, 3,4 & 5 will cost you a penalty stroke.

If you see your ball go into a hazard you cannot play a provisional ball. You must follow the rules above for yellow or red stakes.

If your ball is in a sand bunker and it is in a machine made mark or a footprint, you do not get a free drop. The bunker is a hazard and the rules are the same as a staked hazard, the only one exception is if the ball is in water in a bunker then you get a free drop but it must be dropped in the bunker not nearer to the hole.

Putting Green

A ball may be lifted and cleaned on the putting green providing the position of the ball is marked before it is lifted.

If you or your caddie marks the ball on the green in the wrong position, i.e. not directly behind the ball, you will incur a two stroke penalty

You can repair hole plugs and damage made by the impact of a ball on the putting green, whether or not your ball is on the green. Any other damage may not be repaired as it might assist you in subsequent play.

Not knowing the rules of golf is no excuse, if you break the rules then you have to give yourself the necessary penalty strokes. If you are in doubt about what to do, whilst playing in a competition, you can play a second ball and put down two scores and the rules committee of the day will make a judgment.

The above just skims the rule book and as you get more involved in the game you will need to read up on all the rules, particularly if you plan to play at a competitive level.

Sand Shots

One of the short game shots you need to know how to hit with some skill is an explosion shot from a green side bunker. This is an easy shot because there is a margin of error that does not exist with shots from ground. You will need to hit the sand 2 inches behind the ball, but if you hit 3 or 4 inches behind the ball you will still move the ball and, probably, out of the bunker.

Sand shots are not the most important shots in your bag because they happen infrequently. Further, as you improve your skills, sand shots will automatically improve as well. We'll cover two shots: the explosion from the green-side bunker and the long shot from a fairway bunker.

As an aside, the term "sand trap" is not a real term in golf. The rulebook deems it a hazard, specifically a bunker. The phrase "sand trap" is also quite negative in that the word "trap" gives one the sense that he is "trapped" and escape is difficult, if not impossible.

How to make those sand shots.

The explosion shot from a green-side bunker is an easy shot. It uses the same principles as the short wedge shot, with a few small changes. Your number one objective is to get your ball out of the bunker in one swing. You can get fancy later on, but for now you want to get out of the bunker on a reliable basis, with one swing.

Here's the address position for the explosion shot: stand as if the shot was a full swing, but with the line through your toes being 45 degrees left of the target. You do this to compensate for the more open clubface you will create. Your feet should be wide apart. Hold the club at the end. The ball is positioned just forward of center. Place slightly more weight on your left foot. Open the club face by spinning the club in your hands. Note: do not change the face angle by holding the club and twisting your hands. To provide stability during the swing, work your feet into the sand so that the insides of your feet are deeper.

The swing technique is the same as with all other clubs. Weight transfer is the foundation, so go to the right foot and then to the left foot. Keep the right leg flexed and the knee pointed at the ball. Make sure your shoulders are relaxed during the swing. The swing is a full-size swing that is more gentle than a driver swing. Your mindset should be to make a swing that would hit the ball about 50 yards from the grass. Hitting the sand, and not the ball, will deaden the shot more than you expect.

The sand wedge is constructed so that the trailing edge is higher than the leading edge to prevent it from digging deep into the sand. With the clubface open, you want the club to enter the sand about two inches behind the ball. Many students are timid about this shot, thinking the ball will go too far. To remedy this fear, go to a fairway bunker and explode a shot with a full swing. Even with a full swing, it won't go very far when you hit two inches of sand first.

If the pin is just beyond the bunker, you need a high, soft, short shot. To hit that shot open the face of the sand wedge until it is wide open, almost parallel to the ground. Use the same full swing, hit two inches behind the ball and expect it to go only a few yards.

With the pin on the far edge of the green, 15 or 20 yards away, you need a long sand shot. Simply square up the face of your sand wedge, use the same full swing, hit two inches behind the ball and you will get the distance you need.

The answer in these two situations is simple - adjust the angle of the face of the club. Rather than adjusting the swing effort and the amount of sand, all you need to do is change the angle of the face and all the adjustments are taken care of for you.

There is another sand situation you need to know about. **The 30-40 yard explosion shot.** There are situations with a bunker in front of the green that can leave you with that loooong bunker shot. In this case, the pitching wedge, not the sand wedge, may be your best club to use. You will get the distance you need and the control that comes from a blast as opposed to trying to pick the ball off the sand. You can blast with the PW, 9-iron, 8-iron and maybe the 7-iron. Practice the shot and you will add another valuable shot to your arsenal.

The fried egg. In golf that means a ball that has tried to bury itself in the sand of a bunker. Your ball flew in to the sand and buried in its own mark. To hit a buried ball, close your sand wedge to a 45 degree angle. It will look odd, as if the ball will fly across your front foot. The objective is to make a chopping motion rather than a swing. There is no follow through to the chop you need for this shot. With the club face closed, it will push the ball against the front lip of the ball's depression causing the ball to pop up and forward. The ball will come out with over spin, not backspin, and will want to roll a long way. Getting it close is a trick that requires some practice. Just getting it on the green is a good shot.

How about the **fairway bunker** shot? The address position is basically the same as from the grass, except that you work your feet into the sand, with the insides of your feet deeper for stability. Place the ball more towards your back foot than your front foot by a couple inches. The objective here is to hit the ball and then some sand, but never sand and then the ball. This is in contrast to the green-side bunker, where you hit sand first. The swing is the same as if you were

on grass. Weight transfer is still the dominant idea. Swing at about 80% effort to avoid your feet slipping. Take one club more than you would for this shot from the grass. You are going to aim the bottom line of the club at the middle of the ball and try to cut the ball in half. The idea is to not hit any sand before you hit the ball. Some practice will be helpful.

Rules note: The rules say you cannot touch the sand with the club before making the swing.

Choosing your wedges

It is estimated that 75% of shots during a round are played within 100 feet of the pin. As a consequence, over the past decade, wedges have become increasingly sophisticated, and dexterity with these instruments will certainly both lower your score and add to your enjoyment of the game.

Many golfers, including pros, now carry 2 to 4 wedges in their bag, yet what sets them apart is their mastery, through practice. The pros spend hours every day honing their skills with their wedges.

Grooves in irons channel moisture and grass away from the club surface, thereby allowing for better, cleaner contact with the golf ball much like treads on a tire.

Effective this year there have been rules to limit groove volume. This basically means the limits on grooves on all clubs, excluding drivers and putters, are going to be reduced and they will become shallower and narrower, but these arguably will have a minimal effect for the average golfer. Grooves are either of the U-groove, Square-groove or V-groove nature. Larger grooves allow for more spin.

The sharpness of the edges of the grooves will also be more stringently regulated on all clubs will a loft of 25 degrees or more (roughly your 5 iron through to your wedges) which will also help to preserve your golf balls for slightly longer.

My personal belief is that limiting the size of grooves will bring more skill back into the game and force ball manufacturers to produce a different ball. All of which will dilute the 'Bomb and Gauge' mentality prevalent in today's game, AND it will also bring back a lot of golf courses, which technology today has necessitated increasing their lengths, to normality.

Non-professionals will have until 2024 to change their clubs which at this point in time, should not present a problem as the existing clubs will be outdated and old models.

Particular grinds, like a C grind, are becoming increasingly popular with short-game artistes. This is where the heel and toe are ground down on the trailing side of the sole. This allows the sole and leading edge to lay flat on shots where the face needs opening, while still providing bounce relief on full shots. In actuality, these wedges can give the best of both worlds to golfers of all levels.

Gap Wedges

Gap wedges were designed to fill the gap that exists between your pitching and sand wedge. A gap wedge allows you more opportunity to play full shots when you are faced with those difficult in-between distances.

Today's pitching wedges have lofts from 44° to 48° and sand wedges from 54° to 58°. That's a difference of around 10. The loft differential between a standard nine iron and pitching wedge is 4, so the gap between a pitching wedge and a sand wedge is almost 2.5 club lengths.

One is therefore forced to choke down on the wedge shots much of the time, and we all know that 3/4 shots are much tougher to play than full shots.

Gap wedges generally have 51° or 52° degrees of loft, which places them nicely in the middle. Most of the premium manufacturers produce gap wedges that match their sets. There are also specific companies that specialize in wedges, in all lofts, such as Feel Golf, Vokey wedges, Bettinardi Golf and Eidolon Golf.

Unfortunately, one of the best wedge manufacturers, Sonartec, closed up shop, due to a company raider, rather than the quality of the wedges.

Gap wedges have "bounce", but the measurement or degree of bounce isn't that relevant because gap wedges are mainly used for full shots. Bounce is where the trailing edge of the wedge sits below the leading edge at the address position.

If possible, look for a gap wedge with a similar face profile and shaft weight o your existing wedges.

Sand Wedges

Sand wedges are designed to slice through bunker sand and can also be used for approach shots and chipping around the greens.

They too have "bounce" which allows the club head to slide smoothly through the sand without digging.

Sand wedges are available in different "degrees' of bounce:

Low handicaps - may prefer a little less bounce (around 8). This enables a low handicapper to judge shots more accurately from all sand conditions. However, it requires more skill to benefit from the low bounce - you must be able to hit the selected spot behind the ball with good precision, especially in softer sand where the sole will not slide that easily.

High handicaps - are most secure with high bounce (around 16) sand wedges. These provide maximum margin for error out of sand (especially soft sand) because of the high "bounce' angle -

you can hit with a generous degree of latitude behind the ball without much resulting difference. However, while high bounce wedges are great from soft sand, they are a disadvantage from firmer sand bunkers as they may be inclined to "bounce".

When chipping with a sand wedge, the same rules apply as in lob wedges.

Lob Wedges

Lob wedges perform those delicate up and downs around the greens better than any other club.

They generally have 60° to 64° degrees of loft and are therefore one club more lofted than a sand wedge. Lob wedges are primarily used for chipping around the greens. The extra loft gets the ball up quickly, and the additional spin that the loft applies, stops the ball more effectively.

Lob wedges are great for popping the ball up quickly, over bunkers or for attacking the pin in tight positions 'a la Phil Mickelson'. Lob wedges are most effective from 60 yards in.

Caveat: Do not purchase a lob wedge if you're battling to chip with your sand wedge. Because it has greater loft, you're required to execute a fuller swing to cover the same distance, which greatly increases your risk.

Practicing on a consistent basis is a necessity, not just with the lob wedge, but also with all aspects of your short game.

When it comes to bounce, the same rules apply:

- * Low bounce lob wedges (around 4 degrees) tend to be best for lower handicaps and are perfect for players who like to be creative around the greens. They are also the most effective option from tight lies and firm turf conditions. The combination of less bounce and a narrower sole lowers the leading edge of the blade to promote clean contact. However, mistakes are heavily punished because the leading edge digs in on mis-hits.

- * There isn't enough bounce to help it slide through. In bunkers, low bounce lob wedges are only effective in firm or hardpan conditions - they don't have enough bounce to slide through medium or fluffy sand.

Mid bounce lob wedges (around 8 degrees) are great for mid handicaps. They are versatile and offer a good blend of finesse and forgiveness. Mid bounce lob wedges can be used in a wide variety of sand and turf conditions. The bounce is sufficient to prevent over digging and helps create a smoother gliding action under the ball for more consistent shot making. They are effective from bunkers as well as around the greens.

Recommended mid bounce lob wedges:

High bounce lob wedges (around 12 degrees) are generally preferred by higher handicaps and work best in lush and soft turf conditions and from soft, fluffy bunkers. They react well on mis-hits behind the ball and are generally more forgiving.

During winter, or on courses that don't have much grass cover, high bounce wedges may "bounce" excessively through impact resulting in skinned/thin shots.

Caveat: For lower handicaps, high bounce wedges are clumsy and difficult to "finesse".

Lastly, remember that less expensive wedges are only made from traditional stainless steel, which may feel a little harder and offer less spin.

Premium wedges are either forged or cast from soft carbon steel which gives/imparts a softer feel and a little more spin. Similarly, copper and brass options are also a little softer and offer the same benefits.

Black oxide and other non-standard finishes reduce glare (reflection), but do not offer any appreciable playability advantage. A chrome finish is the most popular finish found on today's wedges.

As with all types of tools, to develop proficient skills, practice makes perfect and the more time you spend with your wedges, the faster you will accomplish reducing your score. The answer is in the dirt!

eed to hold the club above the sand while preparing to hit any sand shot.

So 5 hour rounds are a pretty common occurrence at a public golf course. And honestly, there is no need for it. I don't care if you're a 40 handicap or a 5 handicap, you can play in 4 hours or less, as long as you follow some simple rules...

Play Ready Golf!

How often have you stood on the tee of a par 3, watching the group in front for what seems to be an eternity? Three of the guys are on the green. One is in the bunker. The guy in the bunker was the last to hit...so he's also the last to get to the bunker. The other 3 guys are standing around chatting as bunker guy gets his sand wedge...heads over to the bunker...and thinks about not screwing up his sand shot. He hits his sand shot, which flies over the green, into a bunker on the other side of the green. The other 3 guys chuckle, and continue to chat. Bunker guy rakes his bunker (nice job!), walks to the other side of the green...and hits an ok shot that ends up on the green, but he's still 'away'. Bunker guy rakes...oops...he forgot his putter in the cart...3 other guys continue to chit chat..and laugh at bunker guy...you really screwed this hole up Charlie! Bunker guy finally putts, makes a great one...saves his 4. And now the other 3, one by one, take their time reading their putts, lining up the putts, hitting their putts...missing..marking their ball...and begin the routine once again. This is absolutely insane.

This is an 'extreme' example, but I see it happening in so many different circumstances. People do it on the fairway...one by one, completely serially, people select a club, think about their shot, take some practice swings and then hit the ball...waiting for their playing partner on the complete opposite side of the fairway to hit their ball...watch it fly through the air, and land wherever it went.

You do NOT have to wait for your playing partners. While the guy is hitting his bunker shot, read your putt...heck, use a golf ball with an alignment mark, and line up your putt. While your playing partner is thinking about his shot out of the rough, you should be selecting your club for your approach shot out of the fairway...you can pick your intermediate target, get a clear image of what you are going to do. Just be READY to step right into your pre-shot routine as soon as the other guy hits.

The Ball is Lost...Forget About It

This does not bother me nearly as much as #1, but if you hook your tee shot into some deep woods, with lots of underbrush...you are not going to find it. Yes, I understand the rules give you 5 minutes to look...but the vast majority of people take more than that...and for the most part it is a fruitless effort. Look for a minute or two...if you seriously think you have a reasonable chance of finding it, sure use your 5 minutes. But, come on...if it looks like a Costa Rican jungle...you are not going to find the ball, do not waste any more time looking for it.

Gimme Putts

Unless you are playing for \$100 a hole, please do not spend 5 minutes lining up your 183 putt. Tell your playing partner it is good, and have him pick up. How many times have you watched another 2-5 minutes wasted while the group in front of you is standing in a 5 foot circle surrounding the pin?

Develop a Pre-Shot Routine

If you do not already have one, work on developing a consistent pre-shot routine. Just don't make it a 5 minute one that involves 35 waggles, and constant re-gripping of the club. Mine involves lining up behind the ball, envisioning my shot, walking up to the ball, grip, look up, check alignment, look up...hit. It probably doesn't take more than 20 seconds. And it's consistent. I don't spend minutes hemming and hawing over what to do. Not only does it help speed up play, but it will clear your mind, and help you stay focused.

Leave Your Bags in the Direction of the Next Tee

I don't see it as often as other slow down mistakes, but it definitely happens. Leave your bags to the side of the green, and in the direction of the next tee, never in front of the green. Nothing worse than watching a slow group take forever to putt out, then all walk back toward me...to get their bags and put away their clubs...then walk BACK over the green toward the next tee.

Play Level Appropriate Tees

I don't worry about this as much as some people do, but you are only doing yourself a disservice if you are a 20 handicap playing off the back tees. But, I'm not going to say that everyone that does it slows down play. If you're a high handicapper who plays quickly, by all means, torture yourself from the back tees.

Cart Riders...

Two very simple things. First: drop your cart partner off at their ball...then drive to your ball and get ready for your shot. Second: take at least 2 or 3 clubs with you to your ball.

Beginners

Last thing I will mention....I am all for people learning the game...but do it on an executive course or at the driving range. You will have a lot more fun on a shorter course, and will have more time to work on your short game, which is the quickest way to start shooting lower scores. However, if you MUST play that 135 slope course, play off the front tees, and pick up your ball if you have not reached the green in 5 shots