



A Golf Course Etiquette Manual

Introduction

This booklet is designed to provide an introduction to the game of golf. The purpose of this manual is to touch on many of the basics in golf etiquette. Learning these basics early – even before a player steps onto a course – will help maximize the enjoyment of all players, while at the same time, lead to better course conditions and safety for all.

Dress Code

To avoid embarrassment, determine in advance what dress standards – if any – are enforced at the course you will be playing. In particular, private country clubs usually have specific dress codes. If you're unsure, a collared shirt and slacks are always appropriate dress. Avoid wearing jeans (of any color), tank tops, short shorts or T-shirts. Some clubs may also have specific guidelines for cargo shorts or collarless shirts.

Another area to watch is shoes. Some private clubs may allow athletic shoes but all clubs forbid regular street shoes on the course because of the damage that can be done to the greens. Typically softspike shoes are the choice of golf courses. Some may allow golf sandals but again check with the policy at the course you are playing.

Cell Phones

Most private golf courses and some public courses have policies prohibiting the use of cell phones on the premises. Other courses may allow the use of cell phones but restrict the usage to particular areas of the club and/or course. Be sure to check the policy before taking the phone with you. If you must have your phone with you on the golf course, as a matter of courtesy always keep it on vibrate.

Courtesy

One of the reasons for golf's popularity is that the game emphasizes sportsmanship and courteous behavior. From the time you arrive at a course until you leave, you should be as polite as possible in all situations.

In the Clubhouse

For many people, a clubhouse is a place to relax with friends and get away from the hustle and bustle of the everyday world. Loud, boisterous horseplay is frowned upon and there are often areas of the clubhouse where visitors are not allowed.

As a general rule, golf clubs should not be brought into the clubhouse or golf shop and golf shoes should be worn only in the golf shop, locker room or rest room areas, unless specifically noted otherwise.

At the Golf Shop

Check in at the golf shop to determine your tee time and let the starter know that you and/or your group have arrived. Fees are usually paid either in the golf shop or at the starter's area. Check in early enough to allow yourself time to warm up and get mentally prepared to play.

On the Practice Range

The practice range is a facility with two purposes. It allows players to warm up before their game and also allows golfers to practice shots when they are not scheduled to play. The range usually has a long, rectangular area for hitting long shots and some also have areas to practice chipping and/or bunker play. Balls are usually available from the golf shop or through a machine near the range, check with the golf shop for details.

Because many people often use the range at one time, be aware of others as you practice or warm up. Do not get too close to other players while they are hitting balls and do not distract others. When you finish your allotment of balls, leave the area so others can practice.

Warm up carefully. Do some simple stretching exercises and begin hitting short irons to loosen up. After you're warm, you can then hit longer irons and woods.

Be cognizant of the practice range area. Aim towards the center of the area so that slices and hooks will stay in the range and not stray onto the golf course. Be aware of the length of the range and do not hit clubs that you know will clear the back fence and/or limit line – flying golf balls can be dangerous!

Confine the area in which you practice to a small patch of turf (if the range has natural grass) to help preserve the grass for other golfers.

On the Practice Putting Green

On the putting green, you usually practice with your own golf balls. Limit the number of balls you putt at any one time so you don't cause others to have to wait unduly. Since many people are often using the practice putting green at the same time, be careful as you putt so you don't distract others or putt across other players lines.

Yardages

Many courses have yardages marked at specific spots on the course to help you determine club selection. Some clubs use distinctive bushes, trees, posts or other objects at 150 yards. Others mark the sprinkler heads. Many have markings on the cart path and some use plates in the fairways at specific intervals (e.g., 100 yards) to help players determine yardage.

Courses now offer Global Positioning Systems (GPS) on their golf carts to get a more accurate read of exactly how far the player is from the green. Hand held laser devices may also be an option for golfers. These hand held devices will be pointed at the flagstick which will have a reflective piece attached, and the distance is then provided for the player.

Golf Carts

Most clubs have specific rules about the use of electric and/or hand carts and these rules may vary during the year because of course conditions. As a general rule, private country clubs in America do not allow hand carts. Electric carts are often required by many courses, particularly resort courses and private clubs; however, use of these carts may be restricted to players above a specific age.

Carts are often allowed on all parts of the course (except greens and tees) but occasionally a course may restrict carts to the cart path or use a 90 degree rule.

If carts are restricted to the cart path, you must be sure you take enough clubs with you when you walk to your ball to avoid walking back to the cart for a different club. A good rule of thumb is to take a club for the yardage you will be hitting plus one or two clubs above and below your original club selection. For example, if you would normally hit a five iron from the spot of your ball, take a four iron, five iron and six iron with you (or a three iron, four iron, five iron, six iron and seven iron).

If a club is using a 90 degree rule, drive your cart on the cart path to a point directly opposite your golf ball, then drive to your ball. After you're finished hitting, drive your cart back to the cart path and continue forward.

Keep all carts (hand or electric) well away from greens, tees and any excessively wet areas. Drive electric carts safely, especially in hilly areas, and always set the parking brake correctly. Be sure golf bags are securely attached to the back of the cart before you begin driving and that your cart partner is safely seated.

The Golf Course

Once you've warmed up, you are ready to play on the course. Be ready to play when the starter calls you to the tee. As a courtesy to other golfers on the tee, do all advance preparation work (e.g., putting tees and golf balls in your pocket, putting watch and coin purse in the golf bag) away from the teeing area. Allow enough time – five to 15 minutes – to do all of this so that you are relaxed when you're called to the tee.

There are two cardinal rules on the golf course:

1. **Be motionless and quiet while others are playing.** Golfers can easily be distracted. Talking, jingling of coins, standing in the line of play or sight, or walking are examples of actions that can be distracting to a golfer trying to concentrate. You will quickly come to appreciate such courtesies from other golfers – always practice them yourself.
2. **Be courteous and pleasant on the course.** No one likes to play with an obnoxious person. Maintain your composure at all times, even when you're having a bad day on the course. Do not slam, throw or otherwise abuse your clubs after a poor shot and do not use foul language. The game is to be enjoyed and no one likes a person who constantly complains about everything. As the USGA says, "Don't get mad at golf, get mad about golf!"

Other important rules:

- **Help follow other player's golf balls and locate them, if necessary.** When a person is hitting, mark the line of the golf ball, particularly if it is well off the fairway. Mark the flight of the ball with a distinctive landmark (a tree, telephone pole, etc.) so that the person can later find it. Ask if the person has seen the ball; if not, tell them the line. Later, if necessary, help them find the ball. If you have bad eyes – in particular, bad depth perception – let your fellow competitors know ahead of time so they can help spot your ball.
- **Be ready to hit when it's your turn.** Without being distracting, assess what club you will be hitting while someone else is playing their shot so that you will be ready to hit when it's your turn. One of *The Rules of Golf* is the person farthest away from the hole hits first, but it is imperative that everyone in the group be ready to play when it's their turn to do so.
- **Keep up with the group in front of you.** Study the section in this brochure entitled "Speed of Play" for other pertinent information on this subject.

Bunkers

Unless a course has no bunkers, you will inevitably find yourself in one at some time. When you walk into a bunker, carry the club with which you are going to hit. Walk in from the side of the bunker either closest to the ball or with the flattest entry point; if in doubt use the latter. Be careful not to damage the sides of the bunker when you enter or exit. Greenside bunkers should be entered from behind the ball not from the green side.

After you hit your bunker shot, use the rake to smooth the sand where you hit the ball and the footprints you left entering and exiting the bunker (if you have a caddie, he will do this for you). Minimize the amount of raking needed by walking out the same way you walked in, unless this is impractical. After hitting your shot out of the bunker, try to leave the bunker in the best condition possible for the next player.

On the Putting Green

Because putts roll along the ground, they are influenced by the condition of the turf. Be aware of where all players' balls are on the putting green so you don't step on someone's line. This is especially true near the hole.

If your ball will be near someone's line, or if you are asked to do so, mark your ball by placing a small coin or ball marker directly behind the ball and then picking up the ball. If you're asked to move the marker to one side or the other, line your mark up with a distinctive object near the green (e.g., a tree, pole or edge of a bunker) and then move the coin in the direction asked, using the putter head as a measurement. If someone else's ball is going to distract you, ask politely that it be marked and/or the coin be moved.

Ask players if they would like the flagstick attended, and perform this task, if necessary, generally the person closest to the hole (who will be the last person to putt) is the person who attends the flagstick. Remember that a player off the green (even if he is putting) has the right to have the flagstick left in, taken out or attended.

When attending the flagstick, stand in such a way that you will not be in any player's line and your shadow does not fall over the hole or line of putt. Hold the flagstick until the player putts and then pull the flagstick straight up out of the cup and move it away from the hole. Lay the flagstick down carefully (do not jab it into the ground) well away from all people who will be putting.

When waiting to putt, try to line up your putt prior to your turn. However, make sure that your actions don't interfere with or distract a fellow player who is putting.

Be aware of *speed of play* policies and course maintenance procedures outlined in other sections of this booklet. Repair your ball marks and others you find without unduly delaying play.

Speed of Play

Every attempt should be made to maintain your group's proper position on the course. As a general rule, players should maintain proper pace with the group in front of them and not slow up groups behind them. The latter, of course, is unavoidable if your group is being held up by groups in front of you. Most 18-hole courses can be played in four hours or less by a group of four if all groups are playing at the correct speed.

If you find that your group is not keeping pace and is holding up a group behind you, invite that group to play through by waiving them up with your hand. When you do this, stand aside and let the group get through you comfortably before you resume play. In particular, this action may be necessary if one or more people in your group have lost a golf ball.

As a general rule, if a hole is open in front of you, you are out of position and should speed up play, even if there is no group behind you.

Things you can do to speed up play:

- **Pick the right set of tees when you play.** Too many golfers feel they have to play the longest set of tees (I paid my money and I'm going to play this course from the tips!), even if they are not capable of playing easily and comfortably from those tees. If in doubt, pick the set of tees you would normally play and then play one set lower. A 6,200 yard golf course is plenty for the average golfer; a 6,500 yard course or longer is often too much distance.
- **Always be ready to hit when it's your turn.** Have your club selected (see the section on carts) and be ready to hit when it's appropriate.
- **Do not take an inordinate number of practice swings.** Scottish courses forbid practice swings on the tee – that's a good practice to follow anywhere. Most people do not need a practice swing unless they are playing an unusual shot.
- **Do not stand over your ball for a long period of time before making your shot.** Walter Hagen, a famous golfer in the 1920's, coined the best phrase for this philosophy: "Miss it quick".
- **Use reference points when marking the flight and/or spot of a golf ball.** Line up the flight of the ball with a specific tree, pole, building or other fixed object.

- **Hit a provisional ball when your shot may be out of bounds or lost outside of a water hazard.** When either of these occasions arises, say to your fellow competitors, "I'm going to hit a provisional" and then hit another ball (preferably one with a different marking than the original). If you find your ball in bounds, you must abandon the provisional. Under *The Rules of Golf*, you cannot hit a provisional for a ball lost in a water hazard; you must use the options specified for water hazards or lateral water hazards.
- **Abandon a search for a lost ball after the maximum amount of search time has been reached.** Under *The Rules of Golf*, you have five minutes from the time you reach the spot where you think your ball should be to find it. Once you have exceeded this time limit, abandon the ball and continue play under the rules.
- **Do not unduly delay play in an attempt to retrieve your ball from a water hazard or an out-of-play area.**
- **Leave the green immediately upon completion of the hole.** Mark the scores for the hole on the way to the next teeing area. Do not practice putting on the green if the next tee is open or a group is waiting to hit behind you.
- **Do not take practice shots (i.e. mulligans) during play.**
- **If you stop for a snack at the turn, allow following groups to play through if you're holding up play.**

Safety

Golfers are responsible for protecting themselves and for taking care of others on the course, as well. Three rules apply:

- When making a swing, whether practice or an actual stroke, be sure that no one is in a position to be hit by the club. This is particularly important in the teeing area.
- Players should not hit shots until the players in front of them are out of range.
- If a ball in motion might strike someone, the player and/or his group should shout "FORE!" as a warning. If you hear someone shouting "FORE!" cover up to avoid being struck by a flying golf ball.

Course Maintenance

Maintaining the quality of the golf course is every golfer's responsibility. A few seconds taken to repair a ball mark or fix a divot helps maintain good turf quality and makes the game more enjoyable for everyone. As a general rule, leave the golf course in better condition than you found it.

Remember to:

- **Replace divots after you make a shot.** Use sand and/or seed mixture when a course provides this to repair divots. Otherwise, replace as much of the grass as is possible and tap down lightly with your foot. Take care to make sure that divots are not taken with practice swings and limit the number of practice swings taken, especially in the teeing area.
- **Rake bunkers properly after hitting bunker shots.** Be certain, however, not to violate *The Rules of Golf* when smoothing the bunker.

- **Repair ball marks on the green.** To repair a ball mark, use a tee or tool designed for that purpose. Gently stretch the edges of the turf back over the ball mark, loosen the soil underneath so the turf can take root, and then tap the spot down with your putter. Press down any irregularities after you putt, as long as you are not unduly delaying play or affecting the subsequent play of others in your group.
- **Be certain not to do anything, even inadvertently, that will damage the surface of the green or cup.** When walking, be careful not to drag your feet. When lowering the flagstick to the green surface, do not jab the end into the green surface. When replacing the flagstick in the cup, be careful not to damage the hole. Never slam your putter on the putting surface or into the side of the hole. Always retrieve your ball from the hole with your hand, not the head of the putter.
- **Leave your golf bag off to the side of the green.**
- **Follow the club's prescribed cart policies.** Keep carts in the rough area as much as possible if no cart paths are present. Use the 90 degree rule as much as possible to minimize wear on fairways.
- **Don't drive carts close to the teeing area or green.**
- **Avoid extremely wet areas or steep slopes when driving a cart.** If you must be in these areas, use caution both for safety and course maintenance.
- **Replace any moveable obstruction (e.g., hazard stakes, benches, signs) when they have been moved.** Be sure not to violate *The Rules of Golf* when replacing moveable obstructions.

The Rules of Golf

Often during the manual, we have referred to *The Rules of Golf*. Golf is unique in that each player is responsible for knowing and administering the rules and obliged to call penalties on himself if necessary. It is important, therefore, to develop an understanding of *The Rules of Golf* and to play the game by the rules at all times.

Knowing the rules prevents embarrassing situations when a fellow player is forced to call a penalty on a player who simply did not know the appropriate rule. Learning the rules helps avoid these problems.

The rules are not merely a series of do's and don'ts. Many times, golfers who know the rules can get out of bad situations simply because they know their options under *The Rules of Golf*.

Beginning golfers should acquire a rules book and try to learn the basics of *The Rules of Golf*. Helpful books and pamphlets are also available from the Southern California Golf Association, United States Golf Association and the Professional Golf Association. An illustrated book with text written by Tom Watson is available in most bookstores. Golfers can also consult people well versed in *The Rules of Golf* – such as the SCGA, coach, club professional, or experienced player – if they have specific questions on *The Rules of Golf*.

Conclusion

Much of what has been said in this booklet can be summed up in one word: courtesy. For more than 400 years, golfers have developed a code of conduct that sets the game apart from all

other sports. Adhering to these rules will increase your enjoyment of a game that will last a lifetime.

Important Definitions

Bunker

A "*bunker*" is a *hazard* consisting of a prepared area of ground, often a hollow, from which turf or soil has been removed and replaced with sand or the like.

Grass-covered ground bordering or within a bunker, including a stacked turf face (whether grass-covered or earthen), is not part of the *bunker*. A wall or lip of the bunker not covered with grass is part of the bunker. The margin of a bunker extends vertically downwards, but not upwards.

A ball is in a bunker when it lies in or any part of it touches the bunker.

Casual Water

"*Casual water*" is any temporary accumulation of water on the *course* that is not in a *water hazard* and is visible before or after the player takes his *stance*. Snow and natural ice, other than frost, are either *casual water* or *loose impediments*, at the option of the player. Manufactured ice is an *obstruction*. Dew and frost are not *casual water*.

A ball is in *casual water* when it lies in or any part of it touches the *casual water*.

Ground Under Repair

"*Ground under repair*" is any part of the *course* so marked by order of the *Committee* or so declared by its authorized representative. All ground and any grass, bush, tree or other growing thing within the ground under repair are part of the ground under repair. *Ground under repair* includes material piled for removal and a hole made by a greenkeeper, even if not so marked. Grass cuttings and other material left on the *course* that have been abandoned and are not intended to be removed are not ground under repair unless so marked.

When the margin of ground under repair is defined by stakes, the stakes are inside the ground under repair, and the margin of the ground under repair is defined by the nearest outside points of the stakes at ground level. When both stakes and lines are used to indicate ground under repair, the stakes identify the ground under repair and the lines define the margin of the ground under repair. When the margin of ground under repair is defined by a line on the ground, the line itself is in the ground under repair. The margin of *ground under repair* extends vertically downwards but not upwards.

A ball is in ground under repair when it lies in or any part of it touches the ground under repair.

Stakes used to define the margin of or identify *ground under repair* are *obstructions*.

Note: The *Committee* may make a Local Rule prohibiting play from ground under repair or an environmentally-sensitive area defined as ground under repair.

Line of Putt

The "*line of putt*" is the line that the player wishes his ball to take after a *stroke* on the *putting green*. Except with respect to Rule 16-1e, the line of putt includes a reasonable distance on either side of the intended line. The line of putt does not extend beyond the *hole*.

Out of Bounds

"*Out of bounds*" is beyond the boundaries of the *course* or any part of the *course* so marked by the *Committee*.

When out of bounds is defined by reference to stakes or a fence or as being beyond stakes or a fence, the out of bounds line is determined by the nearest inside points at ground level of the stakes or fence posts (excluding angled supports). When both stakes and lines are used to indicate out of bounds, the stakes identify out of bounds and the lines define out of bounds. When out of bounds is defined by a line on the ground, the line itself is out of bounds. The out of bounds line extends vertically upwards and downwards.

A ball is out of bounds when all of it lies out of bounds. A player may stand out of bounds to play a ball lying within bounds.

Objects defining out of bounds such as walls, fences, stakes and railings, are not *obstructions* and are deemed to be fixed. Stakes identifying out of bounds are not *obstructions* and are deemed to be fixed.

Note 1: Stakes or lines used to define out of bounds should be white.

Note 2: A *Committee* may make a Local Rule declaring stakes identifying but not defining out of bounds to be movable *obstructions*.

Putting Green

The "*putting green*" is all ground of the hole being played that is specially prepared for putting or otherwise defined as such by the *Committee*. A ball is on the putting green when any part of it touches the putting green.

Stroke

A "*stroke*" is the forward movement of the club made with the intention of striking at and moving the ball, but if a player checks his downswing voluntarily before the clubhead reaches the ball he has not made a stroke.

Teeing Ground

The "*teeing ground*" is the starting place for the hole to be played. It is a rectangular area two club-lengths in depth, the front and the sides of which are defined by the outside limits of two tee-markers. A ball is outside the teeing ground when all of it lies outside the teeing ground.

Through the Green

"*Through the green*" is the whole area of the *course* except:

- a. The *teeing ground* and *putting green* of the hole being played; and
- b. All *hazards* on the *course*.