

Rules Modernization FAQs – March 2018 Update

Background Questions

1. What was the motivation to modernize the Rules of Golf?

The Rules of Golf are normally revised in a regular four-year cycle that allows us to adapt them in response to the ongoing stream of Rules questions from golfers and officials across the game. The current review began in 2012 because we recognized that these incremental revisions over the years have tended to make the Rules more and more complex, especially as concepts and exceptions are added in an effort to give a “fair” answer for every situation.

This fundamental review is intended to bring the Rules up to date to make them more consistent, easy to understand and apply, and fair. See also [Overview of the Rules Modernization Initiative: Goals, Changes and Process for Implementation in 2019](#).

2. How did the USGA and The R&A decide which Rules to consider as part of the initiative?

In carrying out this review, we looked at every Rule. A guiding theme for the initiative was that even far-reaching rules changes should be open for discussion, but golf’s essential principles and character must be preserved.

3. Was the primary consideration to simplify the Rules of Golf?

No. The main goal of the initiative is to achieve greater consistency and fairness and, overall, by making them easier to understand and apply.

4. When did this modernization initiative begin and who has been involved?

Since 2012, a working group of USGA and R&A Rules staff, committee members, professional tour officials and other rules experts has been examining both the substance of the Rules and how they are written. In 2017, we sought feedback from golfers and golf organizations around the world about the proposed Rule changes. The final changes have now been approved by both organizations’ Rules of Golf Committees and respective boards and will go into effect on January 1, 2019.

5. Do the changes apply to all levels of the game around the world?

Yes. We remain committed to the principle that a single set of Rules for all golfers, irrespective of ability, is one of golf’s enduring strengths.

6. Are there previous times when a full review of the Rules of Golf has led to a broad set of rules changes being made at a single time?

The regular Rules process tends to focus on discrete issues, but there have also been times when the Rules have been reviewed and revised from a broader perspective. Such fundamental reviews led to the first consolidated Rules code in 1899, a major Rules revision in 1934, the first unified R&A/USGA Rules code in 1952 and a full reorganization of the Rules in 1984. Each fundamental review had its own motivations and goals, but the common thread was that the time had come for a major review and revision of the Rules. See also [A Brief History of Revisions to the Rules of Golf: 1744 to 2016](#).

Timeline Questions

7. When will the new Rules take effect?

The new Rules of Golf will take effect on January 1, 2019.

8. Will any of the changes be available to use through an optional Local Rule before the new set of Rules takes effect?

In general, no. Unless already authorized, none of the new Rules will be permitted for use by a Local Rule before the new Rules take effect on January 1, 2019. The current Rules of Golf will continue to apply in their entirety until the new Rules take effect in 2019.

9. Is it okay for clubs or committees to begin using the new Rules of Golf in 2018?

No, the current set of Rules should be used. We will encourage all groups and individuals to learn about the new Rules towards the end of this year, but continue playing by the current Rules until the new Rules take effect on January 1, 2019.

10. Am I allowed to submit a score for handicap purposes which I made while trying out the new Rules?

No. An important characteristic of the handicap systems used around the world is that submitted scores must have been played under the same set of Rules so that there is a common basis for calculating a player's handicap that measures his or her potential ability. Scores from rounds played using any of the changes before January 1, 2019 will not be acceptable for handicap purposes.

Feedback and Evaluation Period

11. How was feedback collected and considered before the Rules were finalized?

Between March and August of 2017, the USGA and The R&A sought and received input from the golf community on the proposed changes in a variety of ways. Collectively, we received comments from over 30,000 individuals through the joint online survey, social media platforms, in-person conversations and direct correspondence with USGA and R&A staff. These comments were analyzed and considered by the respective Rules of Golf committees, and ultimately played a role in the subsequent changes to the proposed Rules.

12. What changes have been made to the final 2019 Rules since the proposed Rules were released in March 2017?

Several changes were made to the new Rules following their initial release and as a result of the review, including:

Dropping procedure: When taking relief (from an abnormal course condition or penalty area, for example), players will now drop from knee height. This will ensure consistency and simplicity in the dropping process while also preserving the randomness of the drop. (*Key change: the proposed Rules released in 2017 suggested dropping from any height*).

Measuring in taking relief: The player's relief area will be measured by using the longest club in their bag (other than a putter) to measure one club-length or two club-lengths, depending on the situation, making for a consistent process for players to establish their relief area. (*Key change: the proposed Rules released in 2017 suggested a 20-inch or 80-inch standard measurement*).

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. Players will simply count the one stroke they made to strike the ball. (*Key change: the proposed Rules released in 2017 included the existing one-stroke penalty*).

Balls Lost or Out of Bounds – Alternative to Stroke and Distance: A new Local Rule will now be available from January 2019, permitting committees to allow players 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. The addition was made to further encourage pace of play. (*Key change: this is a new addition to support pace of play.*)

Content Questions

13. What are examples of the major changes included in the new Rules?

It's important for golfers to know that the entire set of Rules have been rewritten, essentially decreasing the number of Rules from 34 to 24. We have identified approximately thirty "major" changes that many golfers would know and apply. We have created a series of educational videos, infographics and other learning tools to help golfers understand them more fully.

14. Do you expect that the new Rules will help with pace of play?

Yes. We certainly considered pace of play and hope it will be positively impacted for all golfers through some of the changes in the 2019 Rules. One of the changes includes a recommended maximum time (40 seconds) to play each stroke, noting that players should usually play more quickly than that. There is also a strong encouragement to play "ready golf" in stroke play when this can be done in a safe and responsible manner. Other changes that will also positively impact pace of play include: the reduced time to search for a ball, allowing committees to designate "penalty areas" (currently called water hazards) for areas that don't contain water and to mark all penalty areas as red (so that lateral relief is always allowed) if they choose to do so, the simplified dropping procedure, and the option to leave the flagstick in the hole when putting.

15. The new Rules still seem long – could you have made them shorter and simpler?

The majority of players are expected to use the Player's Edition of the Rules of Golf as their main Rules resource both on and off the golf course. This will be a streamlined version that should be easier to use and apply, focusing only on the Rules most relevant to "you", the individual player.

The Rules of Golf will continue to be an important tool as it will contain the Rules of Golf in their full form and this is expected to be the version that will mainly be used by Committees and Referees. The Rules of Golf will therefore continue to cover all of the many types of situations that can arise in what is a game with inherent complexities, given it is an outdoor game played on non-standardized playing fields throughout the world.

With that in mind, our review of The Rules of Golf did not focus on the length of the book, but rather looked to present the Rules so that they are complete while also using a simpler writing style. In doing this, many "hidden Rules" currently contained in the Decisions book have been included directly in the Rule book for ease of access and understanding.

Rules Presentation Questions

16. How has the presentation of the new Rules changed from the current Rules?

The new Rules have been written using a modern, plain style that uses common words, shorter sentences, bulleted lists and explanatory headings. Each new Rule will include a "purpose statement" to help explain key concepts and the new Rules will also use visual tools, such as illustrations.

In addition, the new Rules have been written using a version of International English that is used by many international organizations including the United Nations and NATO. This will allow a common language to be used across all English Rules of Golf publications going forward.

17. Will technology be used to help readers access the new Rules?

We will continue to embrace technology in presenting the new Rules on various digital platforms. Even greater use of links, videos and search capabilities will give fast and efficient access to Rules answers and other explanatory material, on and off the course. We plan to take advantage of technological advances when providing digital resources for the implementation of the new Rules.

18. What are the primary Rules publications available for reference?

There will be three primary Rules publications available this September for players and administrators, available in both print and digital form.

The Player's Edition of the Rules of Golf: An abridged, user-friendly set of the Rules with shorter sentences, commonly used phrases, and illustrations. Written in "second person," The Player's Edition is intended to be the primary publication for players. Importantly, this will be an actual Rule book, not merely a summary or a "Quick Guide", and so it will give the same answer that is found in the full edition of the Rules of Golf. Less frequently occurring situations will not be included, but the Player's Edition will advise the player where to find those answers in the full Rule book.

The Rules of Golf: The full edition of the Rules is written in the third person and will include illustrations in the final printed and digital versions. The Rules of Golf is intended to be the primary publication for officials.

The Official Guide to the Rules of Golf: This "guidebook" replaces the Decisions book, and will contain information to support committees and officials. It includes interpretations on the Rules, Committee procedures (available model local rules and information on establishing the terms of the competition), and the Modified Rules of Golf for Players with Disabilities. It is a "long-form" resource document intended as a supplementary publication. It will be available as a pdf around September 2018 and will be available in print before the end of 2018.

19. When will the three Rules publications be available for reference?

The Player's Edition to the Rules of Golf: Print and digital publications will be available beginning mid-September 2018.

The Rules of Golf: A pdf version is available now and the print and digital publications will be available beginning mid-September 2018.

The Official Guide to the Rules of Golf: Pdf and digital versions will be available from mid-September 2018 and the print publication will be available beginning November 2018.

Translated versions of the Rules publications: For details on when foreign language versions will be available, please contact the relevant national golf union. The Rules of Golf is currently translated into more than 30 languages.

20. Where do I find the rules and procedures that guide Committees in charge of a competition or a course?

As part of the reorganization of the new Rules, information that is relevant only to Committees who are in charge of a competition or a golf course (especially Rule 33 of the current Rules) has been removed from the Rules of Golf and will instead be included in a separate section of the Official Guide entitled "Committee Procedures." That section will cover all matters related to running a competition and adopting Local Rules.

21. Is there a new Decisions book for 2018?

No. The current edition of the *Decisions on the Rules of Golf*, 2016-2017 is in effect until the new Rules of Golf take effect in 2019.

Other Related Questions

22. Is there anything that Committees need to be aware of now to start preparing for the 2019 changes?

Committees should be aware that there are a number of changes that will impact their Local Rules. The Committee Procedures section of the Official Guide to the Rules of Golf will detail these changes.

We recommend that Committees do not reprint scorecards or finalize their Terms of Competition (new term for Conditions of Competition) until the Committee Procedures for 2019 are available as that publication will include new recommended wording for Local Rules, and we wish to avoid confusion between the existing and 2019 Rules.

23. Does this initiative encompass the equipment Rules for clubs and balls?

Modernizing the Rules is about the playing Rules, and it does not address the Rules of equipment standards. Accordingly, the absence of any changes or discussion on those topics should not be viewed as indicating that any decisions have been reached about whether to make any future changes to the Equipment Rules; these rules are the subject of a separate, ongoing review.

24. Will the new Rules impact the clubs or balls that I currently use?

No. While the playing Rules require that the equipment a player uses must conform to the Equipment Rules, this review will have no effect on the clubs and balls you currently use.

25. How will the new Rules impact course ratings and handicaps?

The USGA Course Rating System is primarily an evaluation of the difficulty of a course based on yardage, effective playing length corrections, obstacles and other factors to the extent they affect expected scores, and, therefore, will not be drastically impacted by these Rules changes. With that said, we will communicate any material changes to these systems later in the year before the new Rules take effect.

26. Are the Modifications to the Rules of Golf for Players with Disabilities also being reviewed as part of this initiative?

Yes. A parallel review of the Modifications is ongoing. The Modifications will be updated to reflect the revised style of the new Rules of Golf for 2019 (common language, revised terms, organization, etc.), and other changes are also being considered. This review will be completed on the same timeline, with the revisions taking effect on January 1, 2019.

Education Questions

27. When will you begin educating golfers on the revised Rules?

The R&A will commence its Rules education programme from September 2018. Due to the demand for seminars, The R&A looks to its affiliated National Governing Bodies (NGBs) to assist in delivering its Level 1 and Level 2 Rules Seminars. Anyone interested in joining a Seminar should contact their NGB in the first instance. In addition to the Rules Seminars, information on the new Rules will be available online at www.randa.org and www.rules.golf.

28. What resources will The R&A make available to learn the Rules?

Working with our affiliated national associations around the world, we will have many educational opportunities and resources available for golfers, administrators and referees at all levels to learn and better understand the new Rules of Golf for 2019.

From September 2018, the following will be available:

- The Player's Guide publication
- The Rules of Golf publication
- A variety of digital products that provide all golfers with the opportunity to learn at their own pace and schedule, and
- Practical seminars run by national associations in conjunction with The R&A, as part of The R&A's tiered education process.