

Top Ten Cool New Rules of Golf for 2019

- 1) **Flagstick Can Stay In:** You can now have the flagstick in or out when you are putting – your choice. And you can now repair all types of damage on a putting green (divot marks, spike marks, animal damage).
- 2) **Knee High Drop:** When you drop a ball while taking relief – you now must do so from knee height.
- 3) **Play Ready Golf** - don't have to worry about whose turn it is to hit during stroke play. Now it is just fine to hit when you get to your ball as long as you can do so safely. (*Note – it still matters in Match Play though*).
- 4) **Go Ahead and Pick Up Sticks:** You can now remove stuff like rocks and twigs (known as loose impediments) from Penalty Areas and Bunkers – so clean away but just don't move your ball when you are doing so. If you do move your ball – move it back to the spot it was and take a one-stroke penalty.
- 5) **OK to Check Your Ball:** You can lift your ball to identify it or check it for damage without getting permission – but be sure to mark it before you pick it up and not clean it unless you are on the putting green.
- 6) **Oh No – The Ball Hit Me (That's OK):** If your ball accidentally hits you, someone else, a ball or equipment during a shot – it's OK and there is no penalty and you play it where it ends up.
 - **Note:** However, there is a 2-stroke penalty on the green if you hit another ball when putting – and both balls were on the green when you started.
- 7) **The Dreaded Double Hit:** A double hit (where your club hits the ball twice during one swing of the club) is still not a very good shot – but at least now there is no penalty, and it counts as only one shot!
- 8) **Wind Moves Your Ball:** If a natural force like wind or water moves your ball - that's OK. There is no penalty and you play the ball from its new spot.
 - **Note:** However, if you are on the putting green and have already picked up your ball and replaced it – THEN if the wind moves your ball there is no penalty BUT you move it back to where it was.
 - **Special Note:** Generally (*but not always*) – if YOU move your ball then you should move it back.
- 9) **Hazards Now Are Penalty Areas:** (Water) Hazards are now called Penalty Areas because they now include rocky areas and sandy areas – not just areas of water. These are marked by red and yellow stakes – you get one more relief option when it is marked with red stakes.
- 10) **I Need Some Relief:** Taking a drop from a Penalty Area or when you have Declared Your Ball Unplayable is now as easy as **A – B – C:**
 - A – **All the Way Back Relief** (“stroke and distance”)
 - B – **Back-on-The-Line Relief**
 - C – **Two Club Lengths Relief** (red stake penalty areas only + for unplayable balls)

Taking Relief from a Penalty Area and Declaring Your Ball Unplayable

There are three basic scenarios when you are able to take your ball out of play, move it and drop or place it back into play. These are **Free Relief** (no penalty), **Penalty Relief** for a ball in a **Penalty Area**, **Lost or Out of Bounds** (one stroke penalty) and when you **Declare Your Ball Unplayable** (you can do this anywhere except in Penalty Areas – typically one stroke penalty).

A **Reference Point** is used to drop your ball when taking relief or when you declare it unplayable. This is the point from which you measure the one or two club-lengths for a **Relief Area**. It may be the point from which you played your last shot. It may be a point behind where the ball last crossed into a penalty area or lies in an unplayable position.

Note you always have the option to play the ball where it lies (i.e. hit it from the Penalty Area) but how you take the stroke may have certain restrictions when hitting from that spot so know the rules.

When taking relief from a **Penalty Area** or when you declare your **Ball Unplayable** – your options are as easy as **A-B-C**. You most often will add a one-stroke penalty when using one of these options.

A – **All the Way Back Relief** (aka stroke and distance): go back and drop the ball from within one-club length of your previous spot and hit from there (note you can drop or re-tee anywhere if on a teeing area).

B – **Back-on-The-Line Relief**: go back as far as you want on a straight line formed by the flag and the Reference Point (see definition above). *Note that if you declare your ball unplayable in a bunker – you must say on a line that keeps your ball in the bunker for only a one-stroke penalty – but see new option below.*

C – **Two Club Lengths Relief**: take relief by dropping the ball within two club lengths from the Reference Point (see definition above). Note that this is for **red staked** Penalty Areas only but not yellow staked area (*and again – if the unplayable ball is in a bunker it must remain in a bunker with this relief option*).

New This Year – Take An Unplayable Ball OUT of the Bunker: You can now choose to take Back-on-the-Line relief by following the line between the flag and your ball and going back as far as you'd like to drop OUTSIDE the bunker – but with this choice you will incur a two-stroke penalty not one.

Taking Free Relief from Abnormal Course Conditions (including Ground Under Repair and Immovable Obstructions which includes Cart Paths)

Free relief is allowed when an abnormal course condition interferes with your stance, swing or ball position. There is no penalty for taking free relief but you must follow these steps:

- 1) Find your **Nearest Point of Complete Relief** – this is the point closest to where your ball lies in the abnormal condition – where your new ball location, your stance and your swing are all clear. Suggest you mark this nearest point of complete relief point with a tee. (It's also the **Reference Point**.)
 - Note that *nearest* point of relief may not always be the *niciest* point of relief
- 2) Drop the ball within one club length of that nearest point of relief – no nearer the hole.
- 3) Remember you drop your ball from knee height – and the ball needs to hit the ground before it hits anything else or you need to re-drop.
- 4) Your ball must come to rest within that one-club Relief Area – or you need to re-drop.