

LEARNING MADE EASY



2nd Edition

Golf Rules & Etiquette

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Grasp the basics of
good golf etiquette

—
Understand the unwritten
rules of the game

—
Sharpen your strategy
with key rules

John Steinbreder
with Kevin Cook

Golf Rules & Etiquette

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Golf Rules & Etiquette

2nd Edition

**by John Steinbreder
with Kevin Cook**

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand

Golf Rules & Etiquette For Dummies®, 2nd Edition

Published by: **John Wiley & Sons, Inc.**, 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774, www.wiley.com

Copyright © 2026 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. All rights reserved, including rights for text and data mining and training of artificial technologies or similar technologies.

Media and software compilation copyright © 2026 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. All rights reserved, including rights for text and data mining and training of artificial technologies or similar technologies.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning or otherwise, except as permitted under Sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without the prior written permission of the Publisher or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc., 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400, fax (978) 750-4470, or on the web at www.copyright.com. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

The manufacturer's authorized representative according to the EU General Product Safety Regulation is Wiley-VCH GmbH, Boschstr. 12, 69469 Weinheim, Germany, e-mail: Product_Safety@wiley.com.

Trademarks: Wiley, For Dummies, the Dummies Man logo, Dummies.com, Making Everything Easier, and related trade dress are trademarks or registered trademarks of John Wiley & Sons, Inc. and may not be used without written permission. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

LIMIT OF LIABILITY/DISCLAIMER OF WARRANTY: THE PUBLISHER AND THE AUTHOR MAKE NO REPRESENTATIONS OR WARRANTIES WITH RESPECT TO THE ACCURACY OR COMPLETENESS OF THE CONTENTS OF THIS WORK AND SPECIFICALLY DISCLAIM ALL WARRANTIES, INCLUDING WITHOUT LIMITATION WARRANTIES OF FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE. NO WARRANTY MAY BE CREATED OR EXTENDED BY SALES OR PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS. THE ADVICE AND STRATEGIES CONTAINED HEREIN MAY NOT BE SUITABLE FOR EVERY SITUATION. THIS WORK IS SOLD WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THE PUBLISHER IS NOT ENGAGED IN RENDERING LEGAL, ACCOUNTING, OR OTHER PROFESSIONAL SERVICES. IF PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANCE IS REQUIRED, THE SERVICES OF A COMPETENT PROFESSIONAL PERSON SHOULD BE SOUGHT. NEITHER THE PUBLISHER NOR THE AUTHOR SHALL BE LIABLE FOR DAMAGES ARISING HEREFROM. THE FACT THAT AN ORGANIZATION OR WEBSITE IS REFERRED TO IN THIS WORK AS A CITATION AND/OR A POTENTIAL SOURCE OF FURTHER INFORMATION DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE AUTHOR OR THE PUBLISHER ENDORSES THE INFORMATION THE ORGANIZATION OR WEBSITE MAY PROVIDE OR RECOMMENDATIONS IT MAY MAKE. FURTHER, READERS SHOULD BE AWARE THAT INTERNET WEBSITES LISTED IN THIS WORK MAY HAVE CHANGED OR DISAPPEARED BETWEEN WHEN THIS WORK WAS WRITTEN AND WHEN IT IS READ.

For general information on our other products and services, please contact our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at 877-762-2974, outside the U.S. at 317-572-3993, or fax 317-572-4002. For technical support, please visit <https://hub.wiley.com/community/support/dummies>.

Wiley publishes in a variety of print and electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some material included with standard print versions of this book may not be included in e-books or in print-on-demand. If this book refers to media that is not included in the version you purchased, you may download this material at <http://booksupport.wiley.com>. For more information about Wiley products, visit www.wiley.com.

Library of Congress Control Number is available from the publisher.

ISBN 978-1-394-41750-6 (pbk); ISBN 978-1-394-41751-3 (ebk); ISBN 978-1-394-41752-0 (ebk)

Contents at a Glance

Introduction	1
Part 1: You've Got to Play by the Rules	5
CHAPTER 1: Who Made the Rules?	7
CHAPTER 2: Why Golfers Are So Devoted to Golf.	29
CHAPTER 3: The Rules (And Why They Matter So Much)	39
Part 2: The Unwritten Rules: How to Handle Yourself on (and off) the Course.	59
CHAPTER 4: Universal Truths and Other Rules to Live By.	61
CHAPTER 5: This Isn't <i>Caddyshack</i> : Playing on Public and Private Courses	83
CHAPTER 6: Driving Ranges, Simulators, Topgolf, and Other Ways to Practice.	89
CHAPTER 7: Taking Care of Business	99
Part 3: Even More Rules . . . For Players and Spectators.	113
CHAPTER 8: The Do's and Don'ts of Golf Outings.	115
CHAPTER 9: Keeping Your Cool on the Course: Fan Etiquette.	125
Part 4: The Part of Tens	135
CHAPTER 10: Ten Ruinous Penalties.	137
CHAPTER 11: Ten Fun Games and Bets	143
CHAPTER 12: Ten Things You Can Learn from the Movies	151
Part 5: Appendixes.	157
APPENDIX A: Glossary	159
APPENDIX B: Resources	165
Index	179

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	1
About This Book	1
Foolish Assumptions.....	2
Icons Used in This Book.....	3
Beyond the Book.....	3
PART 1: YOU'VE GOT TO PLAY BY THE RULES	5
CHAPTER 1: Who Made the Rules?	7
Taking a Brief Glance at the Rules of Golf.....	8
Figuring Out the Hows and Whys Behind the Rules	10
Recognizing Who Makes and Enforces the Rules.....	12
The R&A.....	13
The USGA	14
Understanding How Important It Is to Know and Follow the Rules	16
Taking a Look at the Rules' Ins and Outs.....	19
Recent changes in the rules.....	19
Golf's five best rules	20
Three weird rules decisions.....	22
Golf's most controversial rules	23
CHAPTER 2: Why Golfers Are So Devoted to Golf	29
For the Love of the Game	30
Why Golf Is Different from Other Sports.....	31
Respecting (and Loving) the Rules	33
A Case for Common Sense	35
When TV Viewers Could Call Penalties.....	36
CHAPTER 3: The Rules (And Why They Matter So Much)	39
Fifteen of the Most Important Rules in Golf	40
Rule 1.1: The game	41
Rule 3.2: The match.....	41
Rule 3.3: Stroke play	41
Rule 4.1: No more than 14 clubs.....	42
Rule 4.2: The ball	42
Rules 5.2 and 5.5: Practice	43

Rule 10.2: Advice	44
Rule 9: Ball played as it lies	45
Rule 13: The putting green	46
Rule 13.2: The flagstick	48
Rule 15: Loose impediments	48
Rule 15.2: Obstructions, movable and immovable	50
Rule 17: Penalty areas	50
Rule 18: Ball lost or out of bounds; provisional ball	51
Rule 19: Unplayable Ball	54
How the Rules Have Been Interpreted	54
Once more, with anger	55
Rolling the rock	56
Say again?	56
“What a stupid I am”	56

PART 2: THE UNWRITTEN RULES: HOW TO HANDLE YOURSELF ON (AND OFF) THE COURSE 59

CHAPTER 4: Universal Truths and Other Rules to Live By 61

Golf Etiquette 101: The Basics	62
Playing in Tournaments	68
Understanding the Handicap System	73
Playing with Caddies	76
Tipping Gracefully	82

CHAPTER 5: This Isn't *Caddyshack*: Playing on Public and Private Courses 83

Knowing the Muni Course Basics	83
Playing at a Fancy “Country-Club-for-a-Day”	85
Teeing It Up at a Private Club	86

CHAPTER 6: Driving Ranges, Simulators, Topgolf, and Other Ways to Practice 89

At Home on the Range	90
Watch where you're aiming	90
Leave the range balls on the range	91
Pay for your range balls	91
Hit your balls between the ropes	92
Keep your tunes to yourself	92
Stay off the range when others are hitting	94

Putting Greens	94
Treat the putting green as you would any green on the course	95
Don't use more than two balls when you're putting	95
Pay attention to which hole you're putting to	95
Don't assume that chipping around the putting green is allowed	95
Use practice greens to introduce your kids to the game.	96
Other Venues	96
Simulators	96
Eat, drink, and play	97
CHAPTER 7: Taking Care of Business	99
Playing Golf with Colleagues or Clients	100
Make sure they enjoy the game before inviting them	100
Inform guests of dress codes and other customs	100
Compliment their shots	101
Help them look for lost balls	101
Don't talk business every minute	101
Don't give too much advice	102
Walk if you can	104
Look the other way if a guest breaks a rule or two	104
Playing Golf with Your Boss	106
Understanding the Do's and Don'ts of Some Key Issues in the Game of Golf	108
Winning	108
Betting	108
Telling jokes	109
Drinking	109
Phones, videos and selfies	110
PART 3: EVEN MORE RULES . . . FOR PLAYERS AND SPECTATORS	113
CHAPTER 8: The Do's and Don'ts of Golf Outings	115
Business-Related Golf Outings	115
Charity Outings	119
Pro-Am Events	120
CHAPTER 9: Keeping Your Cool on the Course: Fan Etiquette	125
Attending Golf Tournaments	125
Interacting with Players	131

PART 4: THE PART OF TENS	135
CHAPTER 10: Ten Ruinous Penalties	137
Bad Hands	138
Bad Throw	138
Bad Drop	139
Bad Advice	139
Bad Agreement	139
Bad Good Deed	140
Bad Mood	140
Bad Practice	140
Bad Swing	141
Bad PDA	141
CHAPTER 11: Ten Fun Games and Bets	143
Nassau	145
Skins	146
Wolf	147
Points	147
Dollar a Yard	148
Pink Lady	148
Junk	148
Bingo Bango Bongo	149
Hog Press	149
The Big Hawaiian	149
CHAPTER 12: Ten Things You Can Learn from the Movies	151
When You Hit into the Water, Drop a New Ball Where the First One Entered the Hazard	152
Don't Fly a Helicopter If Golfers Are Hitting	152
Watch Where You Hit Your Ball	152
Keep Your Eye on the Ball — and Your Caddie	153
Know Where to Drop	153
Don't Ask Anyone but Your Caddy for Advice	154
Keep It Moving	154
Be Quiet When Others Are Hitting	155
Always Pay Up	155
Honor the Game	155

PART 5: APPENDIXES	157
APPENDIX A: Glossary	159
APPENDIX B: Resources	165
Websites	165
Rules	165
News	166
Travel	166
Courses	166
Golf gear	167
Podcasts	167
Golf Associations	168
North America	168
Australia	170
Belgium	170
Chile	170
China	171
Europe	171
Finland	171
France	171
Germany	171
Hong Kong	172
Iceland	172
Ireland	172
India	172
Japan	173
Malaysia	173
Morocco	173
Netherlands	173
New Zealand	174
Norway	174
Peru	174
Philippines	174
Scotland	174
Singapore	175
South Africa	175
South Korea	175
Spain	175
Sweden	176

Switzerland	176
Thailand	176
United Arab Emirates	176
United Kingdom	176
Saudi Arabia	177
Venezuela	177
Vietnam	177
Wales	177
Zimbabwe	178

INDEX	179
------------------------	------------

THIS BOOK REPRESENTS A SUMMARY OF *THE RULES OF GOLF* AS INTERPRETED BY THE AUTHOR. IT DOES NOT CARRY THE OFFICIAL APPROVAL OF THE UNITED STATES GOLF ASSOCIATION (USGA), WHICH DOES NOT THEREFORE WARRANT THE ACCURACY OF SUCH INTERPRETATIONS. READERS SHOULD REFER TO THE FULL TEXT OF THE RULES AS PUBLISHED IN THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION, *THE RULES OF GOLF*, WHICH IS PUBLISHED BY THE USGA AND THE ROYAL AND ANCIENT GOLF CLUB OF ST. ANDREWS, SCOTLAND (R&A). THE USGA AND R&A REVIEW AND MAKE REVISIONS TO THE RULES OF GOLF EVERY FOUR YEARS. THE RULES OF GOLF WERE MODERNIZED IN 2019, WITH THE NEXT REVISIONS TAKING PLACE IN 2023. READERS CAN OBTAIN COPIES OF THE RULES OF GOLF BY CALLING 908-326-1850 OR VISITING USGA.ORG.

Introduction

Welcome to *Golf Rules & Etiquette For Dummies*, 2nd Edition, which makes sense of those two very important parts of the game. No, I don't show you how to swing a 6-iron or hit a flop wedge. Nor do I list my favorite golf courses and give you tips on how to watch tournaments on television. That's what Gary McCord does in the bestselling *Golf For Dummies*, 5th Edition, and I have no reason to duplicate his good work. Instead, I'm here to tell you about those all-important rules that govern the wonderful game of golf and describe the basic etiquette for playing — and watching — the sport.

About This Book

Dozens of books have been written about the Rules of Golf, including the bible on the subject, appropriately titled *The Rules of Golf* and published by the United States Golf Association (USGA), one of the governing bodies of the game. Other books, like *Golf For Dummies*, touch on issues of etiquette as well. But as far as I know, this is the only book that covers both subjects with equal emphasis and authority — and does so with a certain dose of knowledge, humor, and fun.

Golf Rules & Etiquette For Dummies, 2nd Edition describes how and when the rules of golf were written and why they are followed so closely. Plus, I cover most of the *unwritten* rules as they relate to course behavior and etiquette, whether you're playing a public course, a high-end daily-fee layout, or you're hobnobbing with the rich and famous at some posh country club. When you read this book, you'll find out what you need to know about business golf (whether with your boss, clients, or coworkers) or tournaments and charity outings. You'll find tips on tipping as well as advice on betting, drinking, and appropriate golf attire. Whether you've been playing for years or are just figuring out which end

of the putter to hold, this book has useful information for you. (And it wouldn't be a bad gift for your friends at the office, either.)

Also, staying true to the design of the *For Dummies* series, I've organized this book in a very simple fashion, beginning with explanations and descriptions of the rules and then moving into the etiquette of the game. The book is divided into parts, which contain chapters that give you the information you're looking for.

But you don't have to read this book from cover to cover. Pick the chapters that interest you most, and take it from there. If you're a beginner, the Glossary may be an immediate help to you so that you have a better idea of how to talk golf before you start reading more deeply. Parts 2 and 3, on unwritten rules and etiquette, merit close attention for beginners as well. (Experience tells me that no matter how long you've been playing the game, looking over this material won't do you any harm. After all, we can all use a refresher course on occasion.) Chapter 3, which explains the rules themselves, will likely appeal to anyone heading out to the course, whether you're just playing on Sunday mornings with your friends or competing in a tournament. Finally, if you use a lot of golf in your business, a number of chapters, and especially Chapter 7, will be helpful for golf outings with your bosses and clients.

Foolish Assumptions

When it comes to you, the reader, I make very few assumptions other than that you have some level of interest in the game of golf. This book is for golfers of all backgrounds and abilities, from the 9-year-old girl taking her first lesson to the 84-year-old duffer who tees it up at his local course every weekend. Whether you're a high-rolling country clubber or a regular at your neighborhood muni track, you'll find plenty of useful information in these pages. High-school players will garner better knowledge of the game, and businesspeople who find that golf is part of their work lives will be able to make the transition from the boardroom to the putting green with ease. Even competitive amateur players and professionals may pick up some

helpful tips in these pages, because the rules and etiquette of the game of golf can get complicated — and even the most experienced players don't know it all.

Icons Used in This Book

Icons are those attention-grabbing little pictures in the margins of this book that are intended to, well, grab your attention. Here are the icons I use in this book and an explanation of what each one means:



TIP

This icon steers you to important tips that will help you follow the rules of the game and conduct yourself with proper etiquette.



HAZARD

As the robot in an old TV series used to say, “Danger! Danger!” Be careful and pay heed when you see this icon nearby.



REMEMBER

This information bears repeating. Bears repeating.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

You don't have to be a rocket scientist to understand the rules and etiquette of golf. But information like this sometimes makes it seem that way.



ANECDOTE

This icon lets you know when I'm telling one of my best golf stories. Please listen up!

Beyond the Book

You can find additional advice for golfers and golf fans, plus tips on handling common penalties and surviving (and even enjoying) a business outing on the golf course. Just go to www.dummies.com or your browser and type **Golf Rules & Etiquette For Dummies Cheat Sheet** in the Search box.

1

**You've Got to
Play by the
Rules**

IN THIS PART . . .

You'll find all the information you need on the Rules of Golf — from where the game and its rules originated to the latest updates for the ancient game.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » **Rules 101: Discovering how the rules began**
- » **Finding out the who, what, when, where, and why behind the rules**
- » **Figuring out the roles played by the two major golf organizations, the USGA and the R&A**

Chapter **1**

Who Made the Rules?

We didn't make the rules, and our grandfathers didn't either. A bunch of Scotsmen in the game's ancestral home put together the first set of rules in the 1700s, when America was still a colony and "Tiger Woods" would be understood as a scary area in India or Russia. Since then, millions of people have swatted balls around grassy fields, enjoying (usually) the game called golf.

Most golfers pay close attention to the rules that govern the game. In this chapter, I help you understand where those rules came from, who made them up, and why they are so important. I also show you how they have broken many a player's heart over the years — not because I enjoy the suffering of others, but because the Rules of Golf will do that sometimes.