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The Rules of Golf



In This Presentation

Free Relief Procedures

- Abnormal Course Conditions & Embedded Ball (Rule 16)
- Loose Impediments and Movable Obstructions (Rule 15)

Penalty Relief Procedures

- Penalty Areas (Rule 17)
- Unplayable Ball (Rule 19)
- Stroke & Distance, Ball Lost/Out of Bounds, Provisional (Rule 18)



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Free Relief by Moving the Ball Away From Interference

(Rule 16)



Recognizing Abnormal Course Conditions

Abnormal course conditions are **any** of these things:

- Animal holes,
- Ground under repair,
- Immovable obstruction, or
- Temporary water





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Abnormal Course Condition Relief

Relief is allowed when interference exists:

- The ball **touches** or is **in** or **on**,
- Physical interference with **intended stance** or **intended swing**,
- On **line of play** for *putting green* only.



Ball lies **on** an immovable obstruction



Player's **stance** has interference from an immovable obstruction



Temporary water on the putting green may intervene on **line of play**



Abnormal Course Condition Relief

Three exceptions when relief would not be allowed:

- Ball is in a *penalty area*,
- *Abnormal course condition is out of bounds*,
- Clearly unreasonable to play the ball:
 - Because of something other than an *abnormal course condition*
 - Because you choose a club, type of *stance*, swing, or direction of play that is clearly unreasonable.



Ball in penalty area is not entitled to relief



Unreasonable stroke not entitled to relief

Nearest Point of Complete Relief

It is the estimated point where the ball would lie that is:

- Nearest to the ball's original spot, **but** not nearer the *hole* than that spot,
- In the required *area of the course*, and
- Where there is **no interference** (under the Rule being used) from the condition from which relief is being taken



Nearest Point of Complete Relief

Estimating this reference point requires the player to identify the choice of:

- club,
- *stance*,
- swing, and
- *line of play*

the player would have used for the *stroke* if the condition were not there.





Nearest Point of Complete Relief

The *nearest point of complete relief* relates

- solely to the particular condition from which relief is being taken, and
- may be in a location where there is interference from something else.

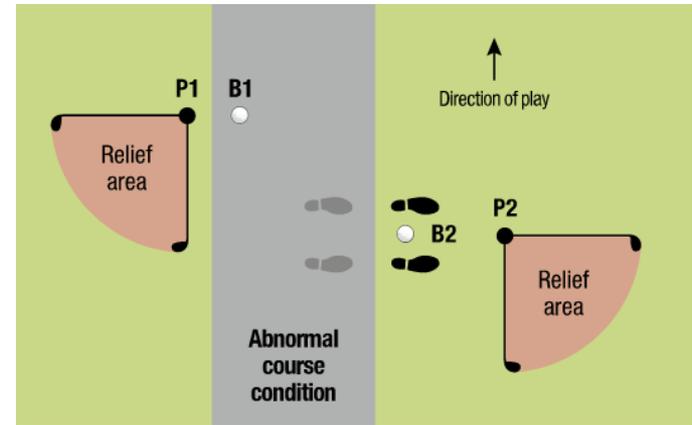
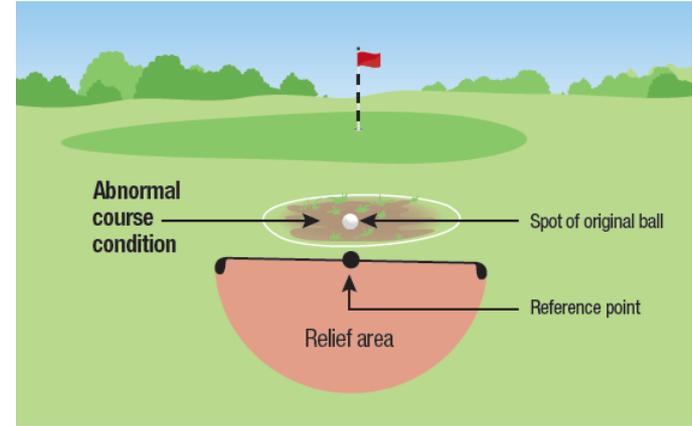




Abnormal Course Condition Relief

When taking relief from an abnormal course condition in the *general area*, you must follow these steps:

1. Identify a reference point
 - Nearest point of complete relief
2. Measure **one club-length** from the reference point (which must be in the general area)
3. Drop in relief area





Abnormal Course Condition Relief

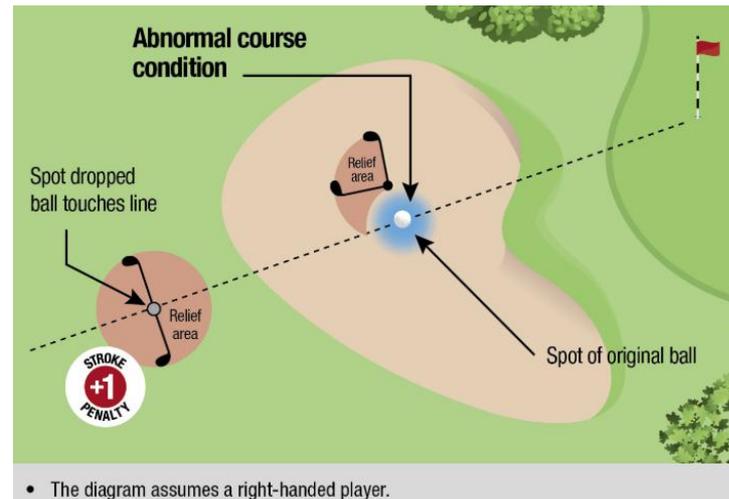
When taking relief from an abnormal course condition in a *bunker*, the player has two options:

1. Free Relief

- The nearest point of complete relief and the relief area must be in the bunker.

2. Penalty Relief

- For **one penalty stroke**, the play may drop a ball outside the bunker using the back-on-the-line relief.





Definition: Embedded

When a player's ball is in its own pitch-mark

- made as a result of the player's previous *stroke* and
- where part of the ball is below the level of the ground.

A ball does not necessarily have to touch soil to be *embedded* (for example, grass and loose impediments may be between the ball and the soil).





Embedded Ball Relief

- The ball must be *embedded* in the **General Area**.
- **But** if the ball is *embedded* on the *putting green*, the player may:
 - *mark* the spot of the ball, and
 - *lift* and clean the ball,
 - repair the damage caused by the ball's impact, and
 - *replace* the ball on its original spot.

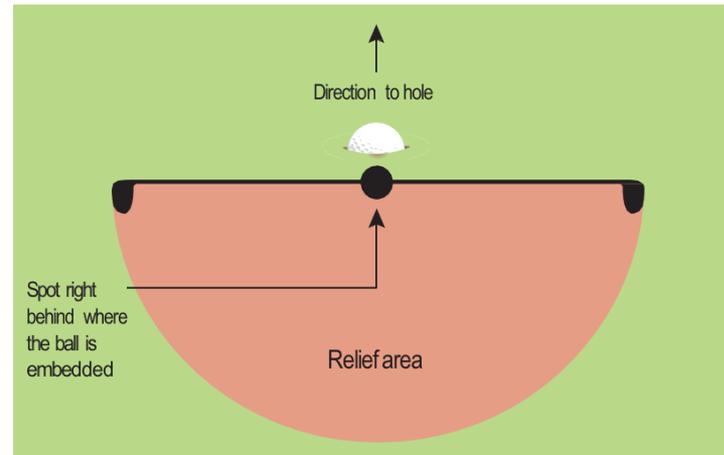




Embedded Ball Relief

When a player's ball is *embedded* in the *general area* and relief is allowed, the player may take free relief by:

- *dropping* the original ball or another ball
- in this *relief area*:



- **Reference Point**: The spot in the *general area* right behind where the ball is *embedded*.
- **Size of Relief Area Measured from Reference Point**: *One club-length*, but with these limits:
- **Limits on Location of Relief Area**:
 - » Must be in the *general area*, and
 - » Must not be *nearer the hole* than the reference point.

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Free Relief by Moving the Interfering Object

(Rule 15)



Definition: Loose Impediments

Any unattached **natural** object such as:

- Stones, loose grass, leaves, branches, and sticks,
- Dead *animals* and *animal* waste,
- Worms, insects, and similar *animals* that can be removed easily (including the mounds and webs they build, such as worm casts and ant hills),
- Clumps of compacted soil (including aeration plugs)





Definition: Loose Impediments

Special cases:

- **Sand and Loose Soil** are not *loose impediments*.
- **Dew, Frost, and Water** are not *loose impediments*.
- **Snow and Natural Ice** (other than frost) are either
 - *loose impediments* or,
 - when on the ground, *temporary water*, at the player's option.
- **Spider Webs** are *loose impediments* even though they are attached to another object.
- **Live Insect on Ball** is a *loose impediment*.





Removing Loose Impediments

Without penalty, a player may:

- Remove a *loose impediment*
- anywhere on or off the *course*, and
- may do so in any way such as by:
 - using a hand or foot,
 - using a club or other *equipment*,
 - getting help from others, or
 - breaking off part of a *loose impediment*





Removing Loose Impediments

If a player's removal of a *loose impediment* **causes** their **ball to move**:

- The ball must be *replaced*
 - on its original spot
 - (which if not known must be estimated)
- If the *moved* ball has been at rest anywhere, except
 - on the putting green, or
 - in the teeing area,



The player gets **one penalty stroke** under Rule 9.4 (player causing ball to move).

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Definition: Movable Obstruction

Any **artificial** object that can be moved:

1. With reasonable effort, and
2. Without damaging the *obstruction* or the *course*.



Except if the object is an:

- *integral object*,
- *boundry object*, or
- *immovable obstruction*





Removing Movable Obstructions

Without penalty, a player may:

- remove a *movable obstruction*
- anywhere on or off the *course*, and
- may do so in any way.



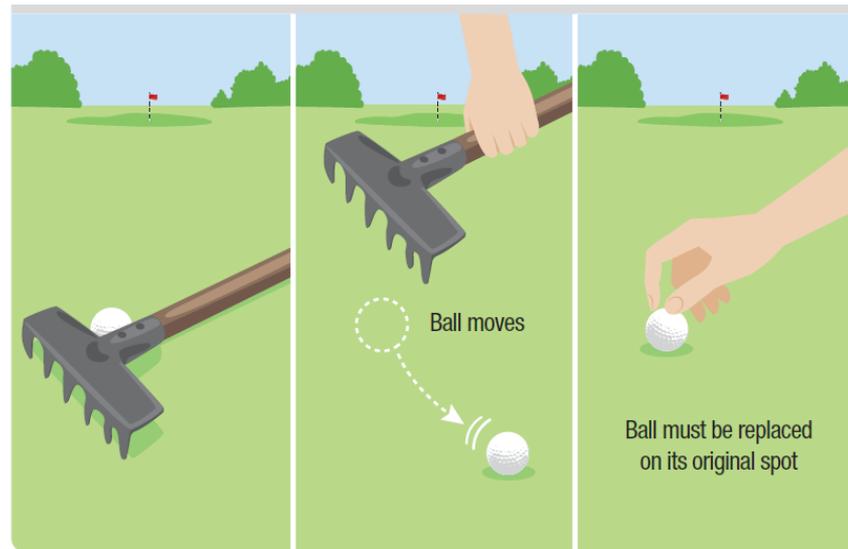


Relief from Movable Obstructions

Removal of Movable Obstruction:

If a player's ball *moves* while they are removing a *movable obstruction*:

- There is no penalty, and
- The ball must be replaced on its original spot (which if not known must be estimated).





Relief from Movable Obstructions

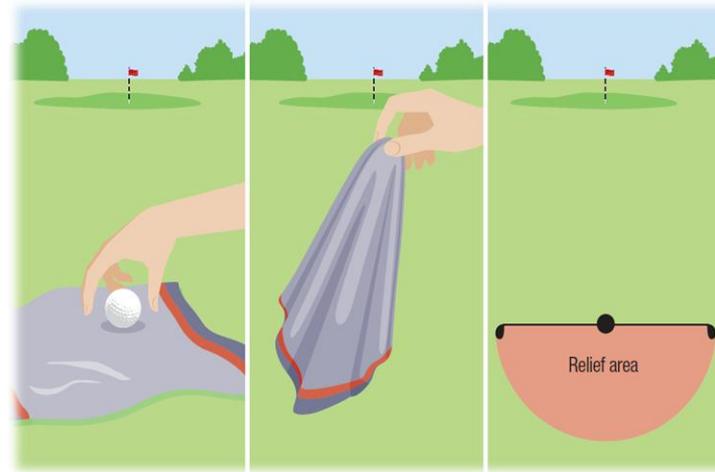
Relief When Ball Is in or on Movable Obstruction

Anywhere on Course Except on Putting Green:

The player may take free relief by

- lifting the ball,
- removing the *movable obstruction*, and
- **dropping** the original ball or another ball

in this relief area...



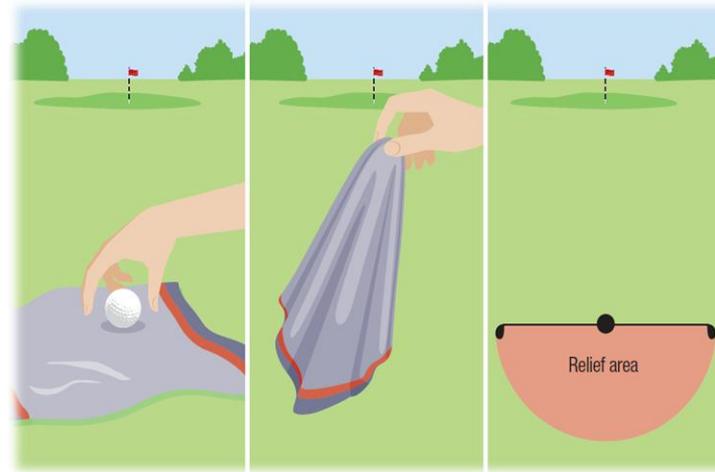


Relief from Movable Obstructions

Relief When Ball Is in or on Movable Obstruction Anywhere on Course Except on Putting Green:

in this relief area...

- **Reference Point:** The estimated point right under where the ball was at rest in or on the *movable obstruction*.
- **Size of Relief Area:** One *club-length*, but with these limits:
- **Limits on Location of Relief Area:**
 - Must be in the same *area of the course* as the reference point, and
 - Must not be nearer the *hole* than the reference point.





Relief from Movable Obstructions

Relief When Ball Is in or on Movable Obstruction on **Putting Green**:

The player may take free relief by

- lifting the ball,
- removing the *movable obstruction*, and
- **placing** the original ball or another ball on the estimated spot right under where the ball was at rest in or on the *movable obstruction*.



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Penalty Areas

(Rule 17)



Definition of Penalty Area

A *penalty area* is:

- Any body of water on the *course* (whether or not marked by the *Committee*), including a
 - sea,
 - lake,
 - pond,
 - river,
 - ditch,
 - surface drainage ditch or
 - other open watercourse (even if not containing water), and
- Any other part of the course the *Committee* defines as a *penalty area*.





Penalty Areas

Player May **Play Ball as It Lies** in Penalty Area or **Take Penalty Relief**

The player may:

- Play the ball as it lies
 - without penalty,
 - under the same Rules that apply to a ball in the *general area*...

i.e., there are no special Rules limiting how a ball may be played in a *penalty area*



Penalty Areas



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- Play from Penalty Areas
 - Okay to move loose impediments
 - Okay to make practice swings
 - Okay to ground your club
 - Okay to touch water





Penalty Areas

There are two different types of *penalty areas*, distinguished by the color used to mark them:

Yellow *penalty areas*

- (marked with yellow lines or yellow stakes)
- give the player two relief options (Rules 17.1d(1) and (2)).



Red *penalty areas*

- (marked with red lines or red stakes)
- give the player an extra lateral relief option (Rule 17.1d(3)), in addition to the two relief options available for yellow *penalty areas*.





Penalty Areas

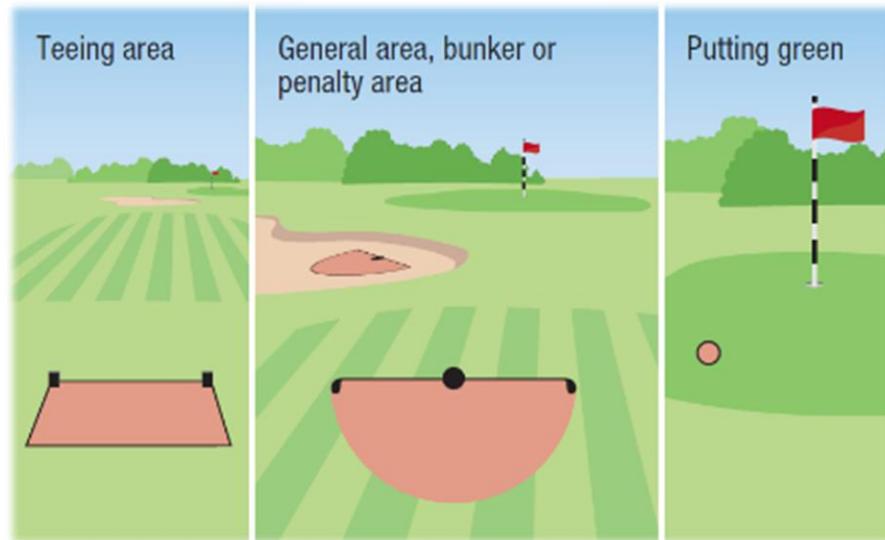
Relief for Ball in Penalty Area

(1) Stroke-and-Distance Relief

Red or **Yellow**

The player may play

- the original ball or another ball
- from where the previous *stroke* was made (see Rule 14.6).



Anywhere inside the
teeing area

Within one club-length of the spot
where the previous stroke was made

On the spot where
the previous stroke
was made



Penalty Areas

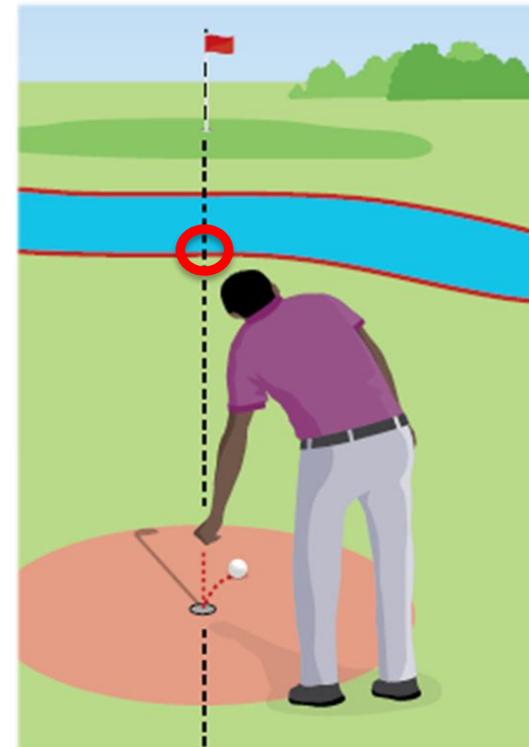
Relief for Ball in Penalty Area

(2) Back-On-the-Line Relief **Red** or **Yellow**

The player may

- *drop* the original ball or another ball (see Rule 14.3)
- outside the *penalty area*,
- keeping the estimated point where the original ball last crossed the edge of the penalty area,
- between the *hole* and the spot where the ball is *dropped*

(with no limit as to how far back the ball may be *dropped*).





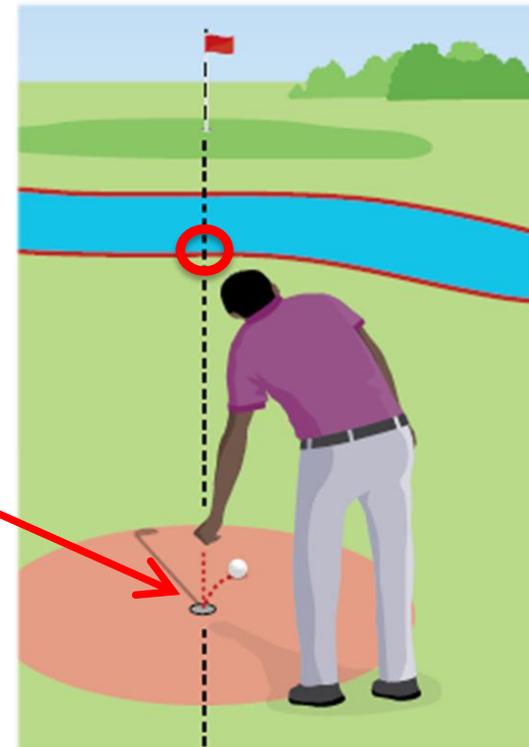
Penalty Areas

Relief for Ball in Penalty Area

(2) Back-On-the-Line Relief **Red** or **Yellow**

The spot on the line where the ball first touches the ground when *dropped*

- creates a **relief area**
- that is **one club-length** in any direction from that point (with limits).





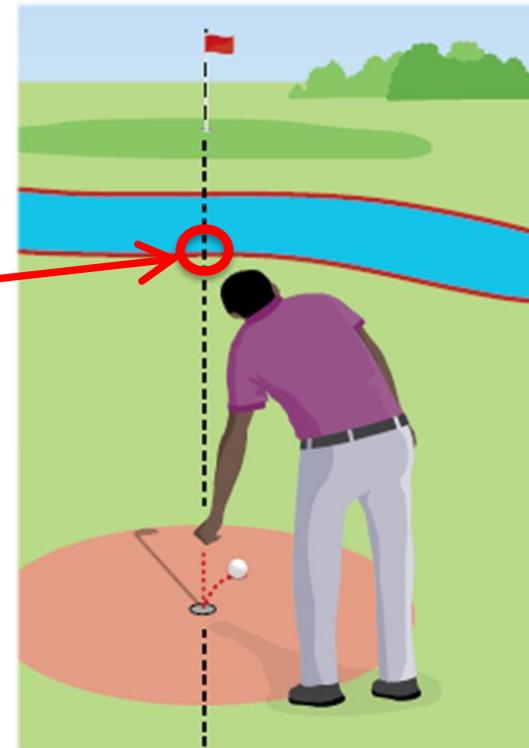
Penalty Areas

Relief for Ball in Penalty Area

(2) Back-On-the-Line Relief **Red** or **Yellow**

But with these limits:

- Must not be nearer the *hole* than the estimated point where the original ball last crossed the edge of the *penalty area*, and
- May be in any *area of the course* except the same *penalty area*, but
- Must be in the same *area of the course* that the ball first touched when *dropped*.





Penalty Areas

Relief for Ball in Penalty Area

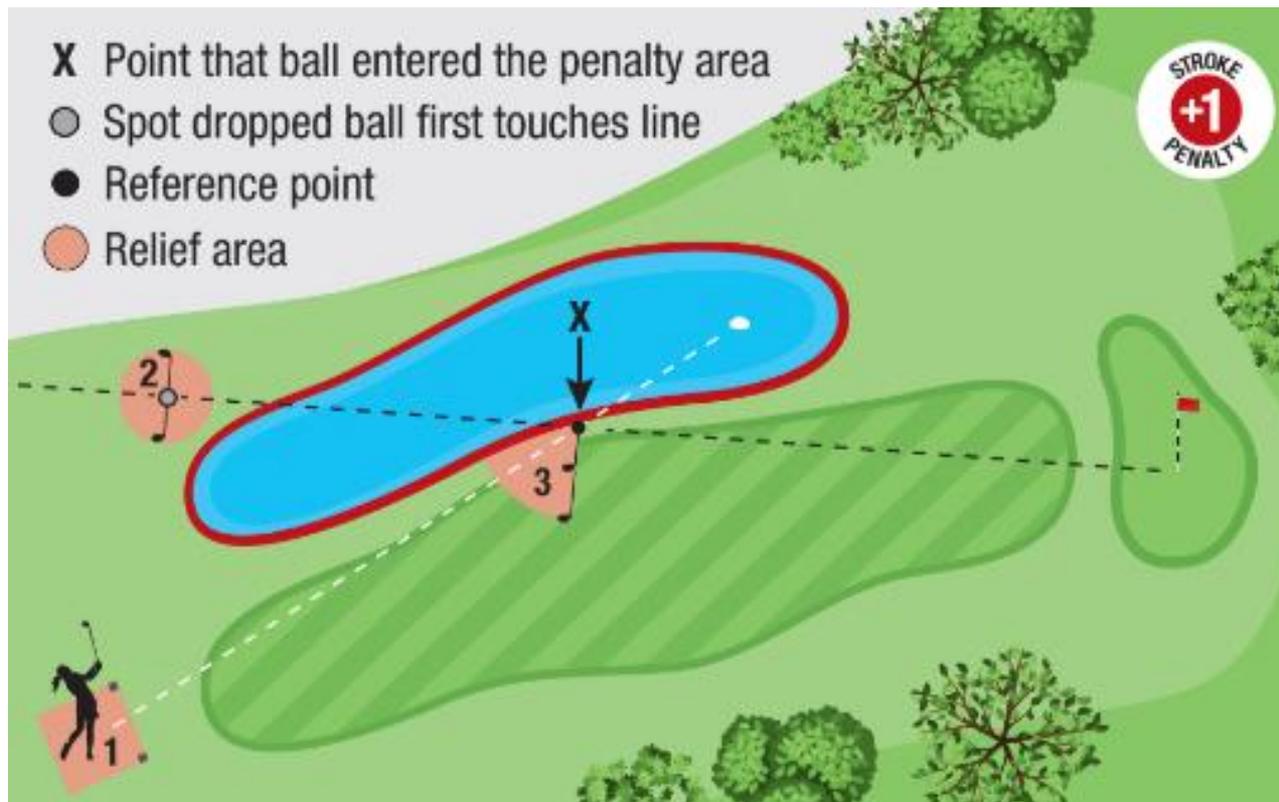
(3) Lateral Relief (Only for **Red** Penalty Area).

- Reference Point: The estimated point where the original ball last crossed the edge of the red *penalty area*.
- Size of Relief Area Measured from Reference Point:
Two club-lengths





Penalty Areas



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Unplayable Ball

(Rule 19)



Unplayable Ball

- Player is the **only** person who may decide to treat their ball as unplayable.
- Unplayable ball relief is allowed anywhere on the course, except in a *penalty area*.

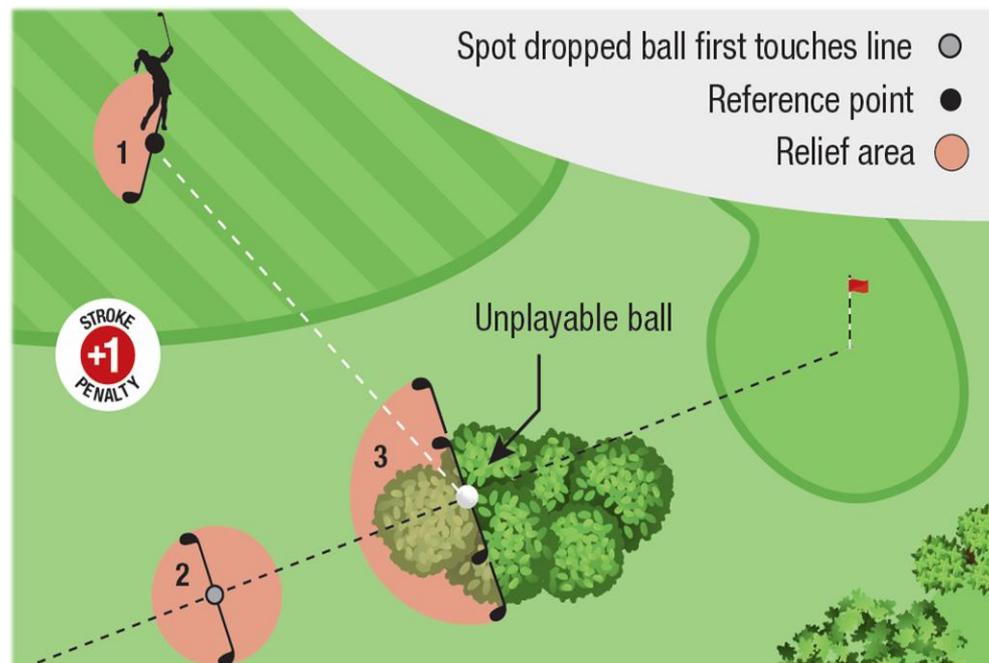




Unplayable Ball

Relief for Ball Unplayable in General Area

- (1) Stroke-and-Distance Relief
- (2) Back-On-the-Line Relief
- (3) Lateral Relief





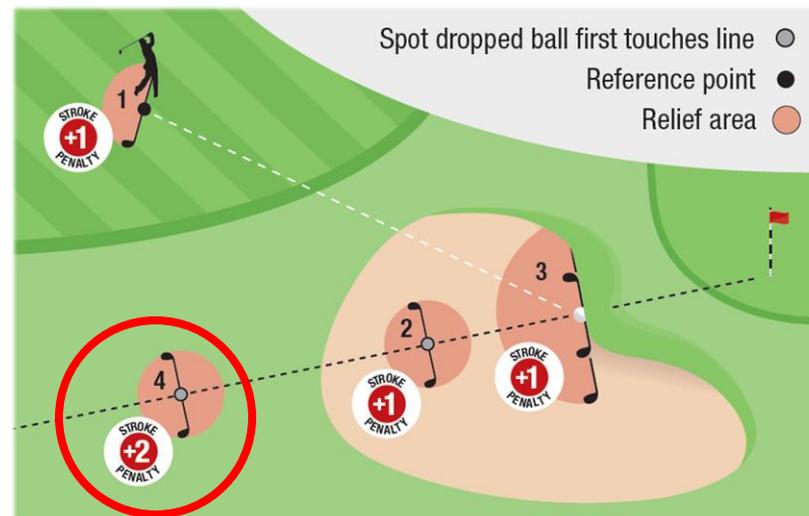
Unplayable Ball – Additional Option

Relief for Ball Unplayable in Bunker

Extra Relief Option (Two Penalty Stroke)

As an **extra relief option** when a player's ball is in a *bunker*,

- for a **total of two penalty strokes**,
- the player may take **back-on-the-line** relief outside the *bunker*.



A player decides that their ball in a bunker is unplayable. The player has **four options**:

- (1) For one penalty stroke, the player may take stroke-and-distance relief.
- (2) For one penalty stroke, the player may take back-on-the-line relief in the bunker.
- (3) For one penalty stroke, the player may take lateral relief in the bunker.
- (4) For a total of two penalty strokes, the player may take back-on-the-line relief outside the bunker.

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Stroke-and-Distance Relief; Ball Lost or Out of Bounds; Provisional Ball

(Rule 18)



When is a Ball Lost

A ball is lost

- if **not found in three minutes**
- after the player or their *caddie* begins to search for it.

The search time begins when:

- the player,
- the player's caddie,
- the player's partner,
- or partner's caddie

begin to look for the ball.





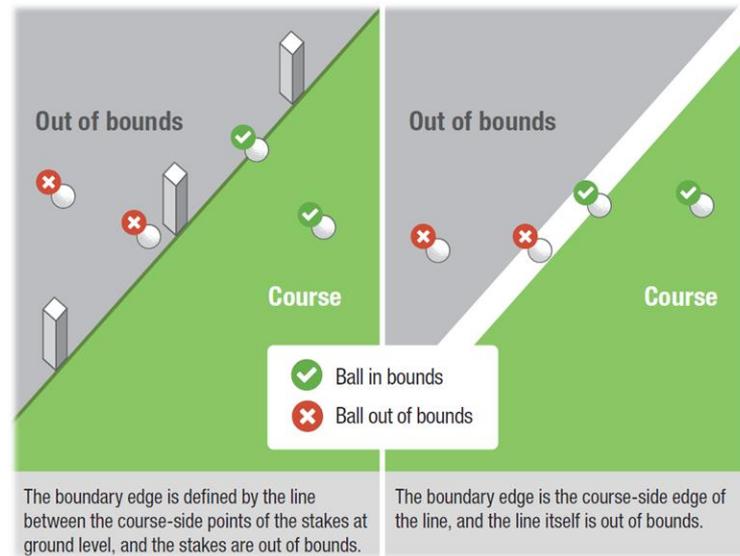
When is a Ball Out of Bounds

A ball is out of bounds

- only when **all of it**
- is **outside** the boundary edge of the *course*.

A ball is **in bounds** when:

- lies on or touches
the ground or anything else inside the boundary edge
- is above
the boundary edge or any other part of the *course*.

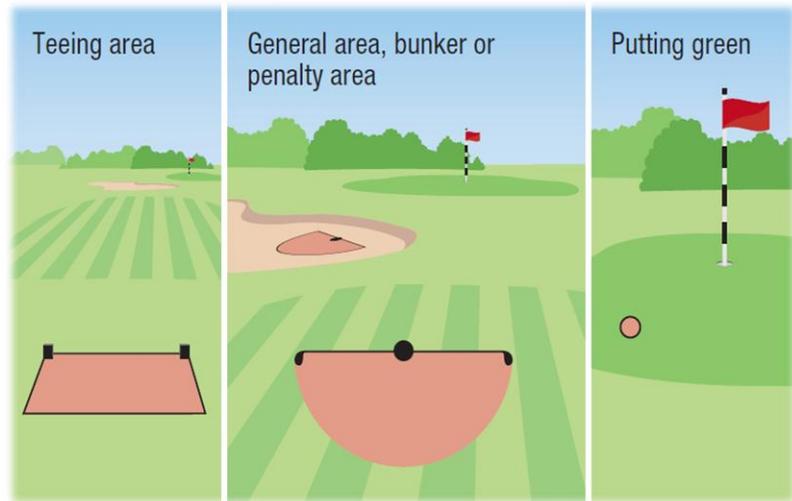




What to Do When Ball is Lost or Out of Bounds

If a ball is *lost* or *out of bounds*,

- The player must take *stroke-and-distance* relief
- By adding **one penalty stroke** and
- Playing the original ball or another ball
- From where the previous *stroke* was made.

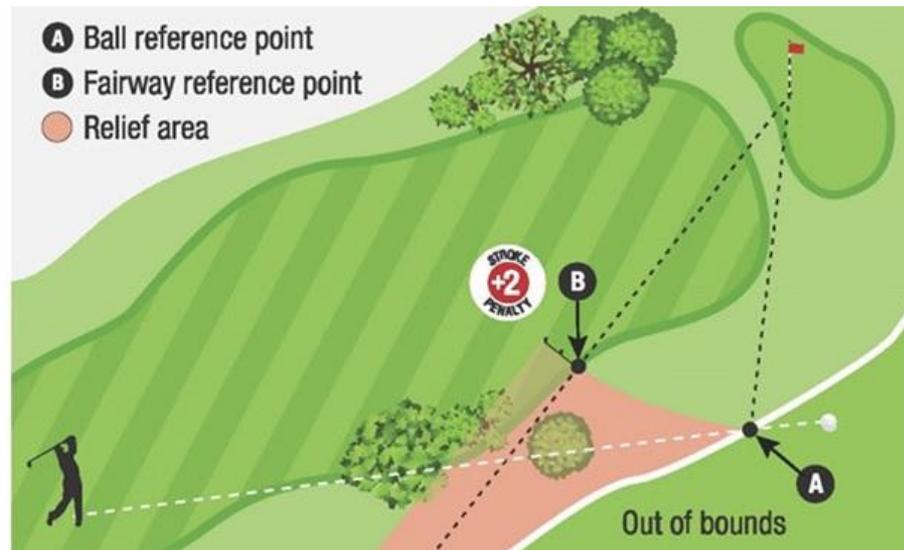
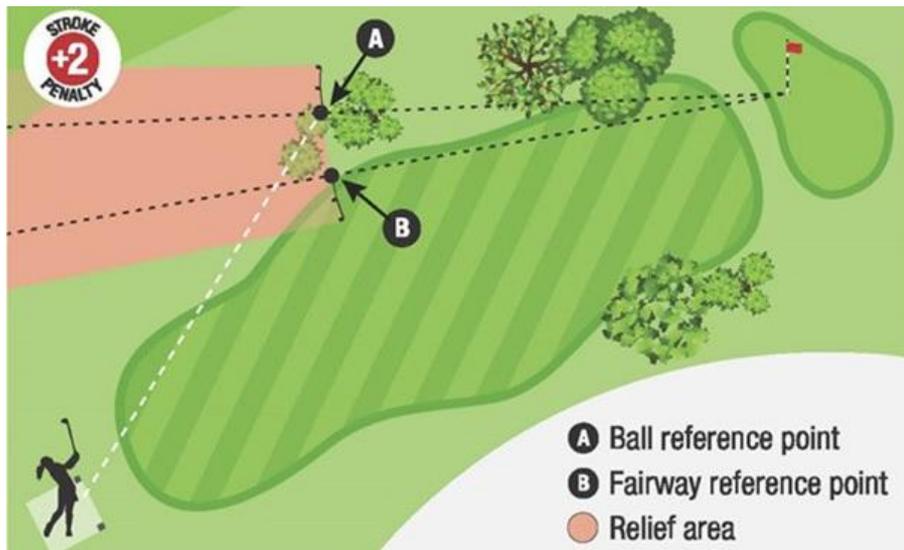




Alternative to Stroke-and-Distance

By Model Local Rule Only: MLR E-5

- Provides quicker option to help pace of play, rather than returning to previous spot where stroke made.
- **Two penalty strokes** to use this option.



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What is a Provisional Ball?

Another ball played in case the ball just played by the player may be:

- *out of bounds,*
- lost outside a *penalty area*

You can play a provisional in any of these situations:

- When your original ball went toward a boundary and might be out of bounds.
- When your original ball went somewhere on the *course* outside a penalty area where you don't think you'll find it.
- When your original ball might have gone into a penalty area, but it also might be somewhere you cannot find it outside a *penalty area*.





Announcing Play of Provisional Ball

Before the *stroke* is made, the player **must announce** to someone that they are going to play a *provisional ball*.

It is **not enough** for the player only to say they:

- Are playing another ball, or
- Are playing again.

- The player must use the word **“provisional”** or
- otherwise clearly indicate that they are playing the ball provisionally under Rule 18.3.

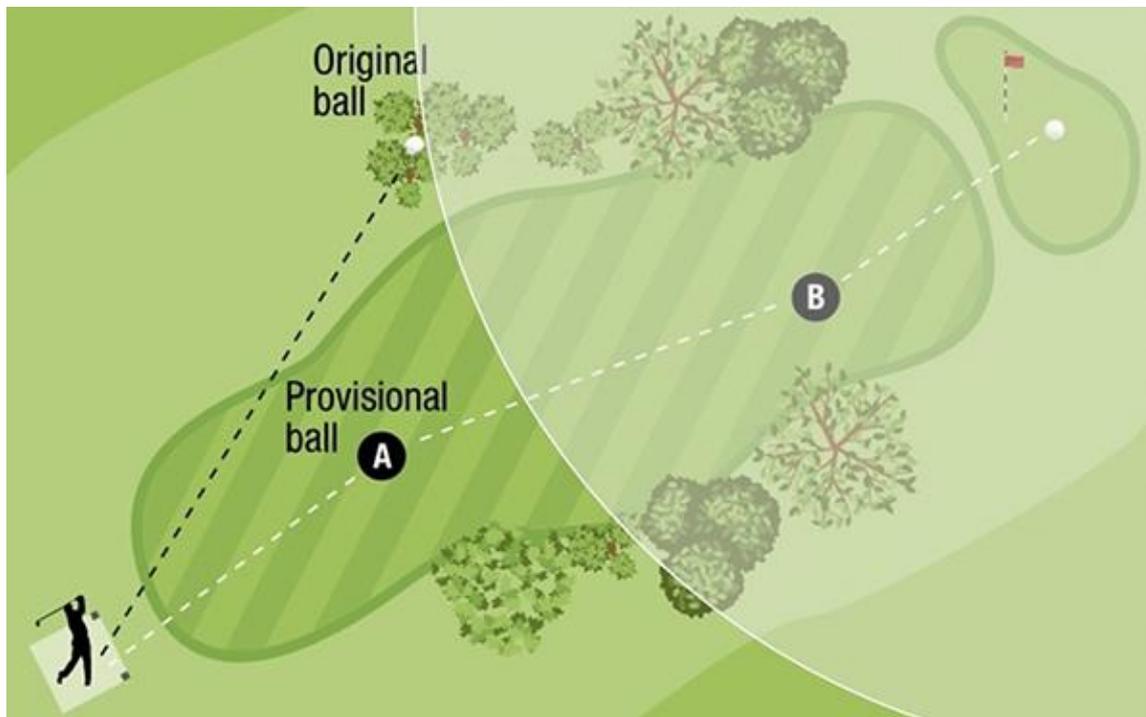




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Playing the Provisional Ball

The player is allowed to play a provisional ball all the way up to the estimated spot the player's original ball is likely to be.



When Provisional Ball Must be Abandoned



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Examples where *provisional ball* **must be** abandoned:

1. If the player finds the original ball on the *course* within the three-minute search time.
 - The player cannot play provisional ball
 - Player may play original ball or proceed under the Rules
2. The player finds their ball in, or it is known or virtually certain that the ball is in a *penalty area*.
 - The player cannot play provisional ball
 - Player may play original ball or proceed under Penalty Area Rule

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Additional Rules Resources

- **VSGA Website**
 - Recordings and slide decks for all webinars.
 - www.vsga.org/rules
- **USGA Rules Section**
 - Helpful videos, additional resources, and free Rules 101 online course
 - www.usga.org



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Thank you!