



Rules Modernisation - Frequently Asked Questions

Background questions

1. What was the motivation to modernise 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 five years ago because we recognised 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 meet the changing needs of the global game. See also *Overview of the Rules Modernisation Initiative: Goals, Proposed 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, not just the larger issues or particular topics. 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 help golfers everywhere by revising many Rule procedures and outcomes for better consistency, simplicity and fairness and, overall, by bringing the Rules up to date to meet the changing needs of the global game. Although simplicity is important, it is only one of several considerations that need to be balanced in providing the best set of Rules for the game.

4. When did this modernisation 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. The proposed changes have been approved by both organisations' Rules of Golf Committees and respective boards. As work progressed, we spoke with many different golf organisations and golfers around the world to alert them and to get their preliminary reactions.

For the next six months, we are seeking feedback from golfers and golf organisations around the world about the proposed Rule changes and revised ways of presenting the Rules. This feedback and evaluation period runs until the end of August 2017.



Rules Modernisation - Frequently Asked Questions

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

Yes. Since 1952, the USGA and The R&A have worked together to issue one set of Rules that apply everywhere golf is played around the world. 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 and ties everyone to the same game, principles and traditions. One of the guiding themes for this entire initiative was that revisions should be assessed with all golfers in mind, so that the Rules are easier to understand and apply not only for professionals and elite amateurs, but also for club and recreational golfers at all levels of play around the world.

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 reorganisation 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 Present*.

Timeline questions

7. When will the proposed new Rules take effect?

The new Rules of Golf will take effect on 1 January 2019. By previewing the proposed changes and creating a period of feedback and evaluation, we hope to create an open forum that allows all who are interested to give us their perspective on the proposed new Rules. We will then finalise work on the new Rules code in 2018 and allow for a substantial period for education so that golfers and golf officials will have considerable time to learn the new Rules before they take effect. There will also be significant additional work to complete before 1 January 2019, such as finishing and producing many publications and supporting digital products.

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

It is not anticipated that any of the proposed changes will be authorised for use by a Local Rule before the new Rules take effect in 2019. Many of the changes are interlinked and it is not practical to implement them outside the full code. The current Rules of Golf will continue to apply in their entirety until the new Rules take effect in 2019.



Rules Modernisation - Frequently Asked Questions

Feedback and Evaluation

9. Are the proposed new Rules final, or will changes be made based on feedback?

The proposed new Rules are only in draft form. There are a number of issues that we are continuing to discuss (see *Certain Topics or Proposals Not Addressed in the Proposed New Rules of Golf for 2019*). We are also committed to listening to the perspectives of golfers and others in the golfing community from around the world as part of the feedback and evaluation period. Those comments will be taken into account as we develop the final version of the Rules that will take effect on 1 January 2019.

10. What type of input is being sought by the USGA and the R&A?

The feedback and evaluation period will allow all who are interested to provide their thoughts on the proposed changes. We encourage you to review the materials, to try the proposed new Rules out on the course over the next few months, and to let us know what you think. What do you like and not like? What do you think will work and what won't work, and why? We are also seeking input on how the Rules are written, organised and delivered (see *A Revised Approach to Writing and Presenting the New Rules of Golf for 2019*).

11. How do I submit feedback to the R&A?

Anyone interested in offering feedback or a suggestion on the proposed new Rules can submit their views through the [Feedback survey](#). In addition, you can share your thoughts through social media using #GolfRules2019

In addition to the input we receive in those ways, we also will continue to meet with interested golf organisations and groups of golfers around the world to get their views. This will be an informal process in which we listen to and consider input that we receive in many different ways, as we continue to assess and then finalise these revisions.

12. Is it okay for clubs or committees to conduct unofficial events now using the proposed new Rules of Golf for 2019 to test how those proposed changes might work? If so, are there resources available for players to use during such an unofficial test event?

Yes. These proposed new Rules are not final and will not take effect until 2019, and the current Rules of Golf should continue to be followed by clubs, committees and golfers for all official competitions and regular play. But we encourage clubs, committees and groups of players to try out the proposed new Rules in an unofficial event and to let us know what they think. To help in organising this, we have developed a sample "Test New Rules" sheet. This document can be provided to all participants, who are then encouraged to complete the [feedback survey](#).



Rules Modernisation - Frequently Asked Questions

13. Am I allowed to post a score for handicap purposes which I made while trying out the proposed new Rules?

No. An important characteristic of the handicap systems used around the world is that posted 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. While we encourage golfers to try out the proposed new Rules in unofficial events, scores from rounds played using any of the proposed changes will not be acceptable for handicap purposes. Please take this under consideration when trying out the proposed new Rules.

Content questions

14. What are examples of the major proposed rules changes?

There are approximately thirty “major” changes as part of the proposed new Rules, all of which can be viewed in the *Summary Chart: The Major Proposed Changes in the New Rules of Golf for 2019*. Further detail on the proposed changes is also available in additional summary charts that can be accessed from the [Resource Library](#).

15. Are there additional changes you are still considering?

Yes. The entire new Rules code remains a draft and continues to be discussed, and the comments received during the feedback and evaluation period will be taken into account to help us as we resolve issues and finalise the new Rules in 2018 for implementation on 1 January 2019 (see *Certain Topics or Proposals Not Addressed in the Proposed New Rules of Golf for 2019*).

One important area of ongoing discussion is whether to provide an alternative to stroke and distance relief for a ball that is lost or out of bounds. We recognise that the need to return to the spot of the previous stroke to play again under penalty of stroke and distance presents significant issues for many in the play of the game; at the same time, we also recognise the need to preserve the fundamental concept of playing from tee to green in a progression. You can learn more about this topic by reading the linked paper *Consideration of Alternatives to the Stroke-and-Distance Relief Procedure for Balls that are Lost or Out of Bounds*, including a discussion of a number of alternatives that are being considered and the reasons why, to date, we have not included any alternative relief option in the proposed changes.

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

Yes. We know that the Rules of Golf are only part of the solution, but a number of the proposed new Rules will affirmatively promote pace of play and encourage players to play promptly. Some of these proposals include a recommended maximum time (40 seconds) to play each stroke, noting that players



Rules Modernisation - Frequently Asked Questions

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 simplified dropping procedure, 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, and the option to leave the flagstick in the hole when putting.

17. Are there any rules changes that you have considered but not proposed?

Yes. In this initiative, we reviewed every one of the game’s 34 Rules. We are proposing a large number of changes, many of which arise out of suggestions that have been voiced by people in the golf community over the years. However, it is also necessarily the case that there are a significant number of suggestions for change that we have noted, but decided not to include in the proposed new Rules. For more information on this, see the linked paper *Certain Topics or Proposals Not Addressed in the Proposed New Rules of Golf for 2019*.

18. The draft of the new Rules still seems long – could you have made them shorter and simpler?

While the proposed new Rules of Golf for 2019 will be easier to understand and apply, they also reflect the inherent complexities of an outdoor game that is played on non-standardised playing fields throughout the world, with people, animals, vehicles and a great many other objects regularly in the way. The Rules necessarily cover many different types of situations.

Our review 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. Additionally, a major change in how the Rules are presented is the introduction of the “Player’s Edition”, which is a much shorter version of the Rules that focuses only on the Rules most relevant to “you”, the individual player.

Rules presentation questions

19. How will the Rules be presented differently in the future?

The new Rules have been written using a modern, plain style that uses more 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 and charts.



Rules Modernisation - Frequently Asked Questions

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

We will continue to explore and embrace technology in presenting the new Rules on various digital platforms, compatible with various electronic devices. 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 hope to take advantage of technological advances when providing digital resources for the implementation of the new Rules.

21. What is the Player's Edition of the Rules?

The Player's Edition will be the primary publication circulated to golfers worldwide. It is written in the second person (meaning "you" is used rather than "the player") and is a much shorter version of the Rules that will make it easier for you to find answers when situations arise out on the course. The Player's Edition will be an actual Rule book, not merely a summary or a "Quick Guide". It will look like the full Rules and, although the text of the Player's Edition will be condensed, it will give you the same answer that is found in the full Rules. Less frequently occurring situations will not be included, but the Player's Edition will tell you where to find those answers in the full Rule book.

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

As part of the reorganisation 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 published in a separate document, called the "Committee Procedures". That document will cover all matters about running a competition (such as giving out score cards) and about adopting Local Rules and their recommended wording. The "Committee Procedures" document is currently in draft form, and we hope to share the draft at a later stage of the process.

23. Will there be a Decisions book in the future?

We will continue to provide extensive guidance on the interpretation of the Rules, but the traditional "question and answer" Decisions book will be replaced with a "Handbook". The Handbook will give organised explanatory guidance on each Rule where needed rather than using "Decisions" as the sole method of providing interpretations of the Rules. The Handbook is currently in early draft form, and we hope to share the draft at a later stage of the process.



Rules Modernisation - Frequently Asked Questions

24. Will there be a new Decisions book for 2018?

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

Other related questions

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

The Rules Modernisation Initiative is about the playing Rules, and it does not address the specifications or performance of clubs and balls. Accordingly, the absence of any proposals 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 vitally important for the future of the sport, but are the subject of a separate, ongoing review.

26. Will the proposed new Rules impact the equipment 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 equipment you currently use.

27. How will the proposed 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, and obstacles factors to the extent they affect expected scores.

Because the proposed new Rules of Golf for 2019 are not yet in effect, they will not affect the USGA Course Rating System or the handicap systems in use around the world today. However, the USGA and R&A are working together with other national associations around the world to develop a new World Handicap System. We anticipate having an announcement about this later this year.

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

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



Rules Modernisation - Frequently Asked Questions

Education questions

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

We anticipate starting education for golfers on the new Rules of Golf for 2019 during the second half of 2018.

30. 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. Some of these include:

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