

RULES AND ETIQUETTE

Golf is a strange sport in that it has two sets of rules – the written and unwritten versions. The written version, called the Rules of Golf, was first published back in 1899, and covers the actual Rules pertaining to the game of golf.

The unwritten Rules, although recognised in the official Rules, is known as ‘golf etiquette’ and concerns itself with how you behave on the golf course, while you are playing by the Rules.

HERE ARE A FEW BASIC PRINCIPLES OF GOLF ETIQUETTE:

RESPECT: The most important of the etiquette rules relates to respect for other golfers. You need to keep your voice down – better yet, shut up completely – during someone’s swing. Don’t even fidget or rattle your clubs when someone is about to play a shot, while a ringing cellphone on the course is a big no-no.

WHERE TO STAND: The general rule is never to stand in front of another player who is playing a shot. That should be easy enough to remember after the first time you catch a misdirected golf ball between the eyes. The best place to stand is perpendicular to the person and facing him.

ORDER: The person furthest from the hole plays first. Of course, if you are under time pressure, then players in your group may agree to play ‘ready golf’, which means that you play when you are ready, as long as no one else is playing at the same time.

SPEED UP: Even if you aren’t holding up the group behind you, your job is to keep up with the group playing the hole ahead of you. If the gap extends to a full hole, you are playing too slowly and are likely holding up the field. If you are playing slowly and looking for golf balls often, consider letting the group behind you play through while you continue your search.

REPAIR DIVOTS AND PITCHMARKS: Fill your divot with sand if you cause some of the course’s real estate to come loose – it helps the grass grow back much quicker. And don’t forget to fix your pitchmarks on the green – the correct technique is to push the grass on the edge of the hole back into the middle.

RAKE BUNKERS: Always rake the bunker after you have played from it. It needs to be as smooth as you would have liked to find it. Bunkers are tough enough without having to play from some inconsiderate golfer’s footprint.

TEND THE PIN: You need to take the pin out of the hole when you are putting on the green – or have someone attend it if you are far away and need a sighter.

GREEN ETIQUETTE: Don’t throw the pin about like a javelin, lean on your putter on the green surface or walk across the line of your playing partner’s putt (the line he intends to hit the putt on).

KEEP IT TIDY: A funny chirp here or there is good humour, in fact we encourage it, but making a scene, rolling around the course laughing or deliberately putting another player off is not acceptable. This isn’t football, you know.



EQUIPMENT

You've got a number of choices when it comes to buying clubs, but a lot depends on your budget, how seriously you intend on playing the game and how talented you are at hitting a little white ball around a golf course. Top-of-the-range clubs can be very expensive, and while your better players will happily cough up their hard-earned cash for any extra advantage that these weapons may bring, any beginner would be well advised to ease their way into the game with a comprehensive set of easy-to-hit clubs.

BOX SETS

These are packaged sets where all the clubs in the bag are from the same manufacturer. A lot of these sets would be produced by the smaller brand names in the golfing business, but still provide great value for money. As an introductory set of golf clubs, a box set is ideal, although you might consider keeping some cash aside for a new putter as this is arguably the most important club in your bag and you might prefer a different design to what they offer.

SECOND-HAND SETS

If you know what you are looking for, a second-hand set can turn out to be a real bargain and your local pro is a great guy to turn to for advice when it comes to purchasing someone else's old clubs. Chances are your pro will have some trade-in sets for a good price, so maybe check with him before blowing the budget on a brand new set.

LAST SUMMER'S WINNERS

These days, many club manufacturers produce a new range of clubs every year or so, and when they do this the older sets – the top-of-the-range clubs last summer – need to make way to create some space on the shelves. Cue massive discounts for clubs that still make use of pretty much all the modern technology that the latest models enjoy.