

15 Common Golf Etiquette Rules

1. Get to the golf course early

Unlike tennis, where there's nothing you can do on the court before your appointed court time, golf doesn't begin at your tee time, it begins in the parking lot. This means you need to arrive early, at least a half hour or more, depending on how much you want to practice, or perhaps grab a snack or a beverage. It begins with dropping off your clubs at bag drop or taking them from your trunk to the course, putting on your golf shoes, and checking into the shop. If you plan on hitting range balls, you need to factor that in as well. And you should be at the first tee at least 10 minutes before your tee time to check in with the starter. If you wait until the last minute to show up, you're not only stressing yourself out, but the rest of the players in your group as well.

2. Where to stand on the tee

So you've made it to the first tee on the golf course. Where should you stand? The better question might be where shouldn't you stand. Individual golfers have their own quirks and pet peeves, but generally you don't want to be anywhere in front of the player teeing off or in the player's line of vision. So directly across from the player (the same line as the ball) is probably not a good idea, and many players don't like it when someone is directly behind them. The one exception to the latter might be when the golfer is teeing off into the sun, so you can help the player locate the ball after it's hit. Also important: try not to move while the player is swinging, and no talking. And it doesn't bother every golfer, but sitting in your golf cart while the others are hitting tee shots can be considered rude, too, so it's always best to watch the other players shots and even encourage them.

3. 'Ready Golf' rules (but birdies and eagles should go first)

In casual golf, Ready Golf has certainly become the custom, meaning that playing out of order is fine as long as you are not impeding another player. (Tradition has always been that the player farthest away from the hole go first, but that can often slow down play.) If you're ready to hit, go for it. The one exception is on the tee when one of the players in your group has made birdie or eagle on the previous hole. In this case, it's always preferable, even if that player isn't ready, to say "birdie goes first," at least making the offer.

4. Don't hit more than one ball

This will drive serious golfers nuts. Don't use the course as a driving range. So you hit a bad shot. As long as it's findable or not out of bounds, don't hit another one. It slows everybody down, and there's nothing worse than having to look for two balls from one player when it's totally unnecessary.

5. Replace or fill your divot, repair ball marks

If you make a divot (creating a crater in the ground with your club), either replace it or fill it with provided sand. Different courses have different rules depending on the type of turf (replace or fill). Also, if you make a pitch mark on the green with your approach shot, be sure to repair it with a tee or ball mark repair tool.

6. How and when to mark your ball on the green

You don't always have to mark your ball on the green, but you should if it interferes with another player's putting line, whether that's on the way to the hole or even behind it (your ball can be a distraction, and it's a penalty if another player's ball contacts yours). The best way to mark is with a coin or round dedicated ball marker, by placing it directly behind your ball, then lift your ball. When you putt, try to replace your ball in the exact same location and then remove the mark. Also, be aware of where you stand on the green when another player is putting. Stay out of the player's direct line of site if you can.

7. Tending the flagstick

Now that the Rules of Golf allow you to leave the flagstick in the cup, you don't always need to pull it while putting. It's become a preference one way or another for most players. Still, if you do pull it, lay it down on the green where it doesn't interfere with play. Also golf etiquette generally calls for the first player to putt out to grab the flagstick and return it to the cup when everyone finishes on the green.

8. Don't step on putting lines

While many golf shoes these days are spikeless (this isn't as big a deal as it used to be with metal spikes), it's still good etiquette to avoid walking on your fellow competitors' putting lines (the path that a player's ball will use to travel to the cup). The reason is because you could cause indentations or marks that could alter the path of their putts. It's also a good practice not to walk on the through-lines, which are the possible path a player might have back to the cup is a putt runs past the hole.

9. Keep up the pace – limit practice swings

Keeping things moving is a common theme to good golf etiquette, so here are some more guidelines: Don't take excessive practice swings. One or two should be plenty. And be ready to hit or putt when it's your turn. Try to gather as much information as you can while other players are hitting their shots, i.e., yardages, how a putt breaks, wind, etc.

10. Record your scores on the next tee box

Never do this by the green you just played. You should clear the area as soon as possible so the group behind you can hit their approach shots. And there will be plenty of time on the next tee to record scores while your fellow competitors are hitting their tee shots.

11. Don't hit into the group in front of you

Nobody likes seeing someone waiting for the group on the green to clear from 275 yards out when that golfer only hit a 200-yard drive. But by the same token, if you think you can reach the green or get near it with a good shot, you should wait, both in terms of safety and disturbing the group on the green. The same is especially true when teeing off. Make sure the group in front of you has moved out of your range. Everyone who has played golf for a while has experienced someone hitting into them. It's both scary and rude.

12. It's OK to pick up on a hole

Unless you're playing in a tournament where every stroke is counted, if a hole gets out of hand, you don't have to finish it. Making a 12 on a hole will not [affect your handicap](#) any more than making a 7 or 8, so to keep everything moving, it's OK and preferable to put your ball in your pocket and move on.

13. Golf cart etiquette

Where to drive your golf cart for a beginner isn't a given. Most courses have rules about how close to the green (usually no closer than 50 yards) you can drive a cart, and you should rarely leave the path for par 3 holes. When carts are allowed in the fairways, many have a 90-degree rule, meaning you should stay on the cart path until you're even with your ball or your playing companion's ball, then drive over. The idea is to limit potential damage to the course. Also, be cognizant about locking the break while someone else is taking a stroke. An ill-timed noise from the cart can cause another player to flinch.

14. Music do's and don'ts on the course

A more recent phenomena in golf are the portable speakers people like to take out on the course as they play. A good rule of thumb is that music shouldn't be played at a volume that would bother other players on the course, and you should always ask the rest of your group if they are OK with it.

15. Cell phone golf etiquette

Unless you're at Augusta National Golf Club or the like, having cell phones on the course is generally permitted. But please silence your ringer. And limit your phone calls on the course. But cell phones are often used with golf apps that help you navigate the course or keep score, so they are part of the game now.