

Golf Terminology

A Beginner's Guide to the Golf Terms you need to know out on the Course.

Courtesy of Northern California Golf Association | ncga.org

Hole Scoring

Par

The allocated number of strokes (shots) given to each hole and to the full round. Holes on the golf course consist of a mixture of Par 3's, Par 4's and Par 5's. This indicates the number of shots it should take to complete the hole.

Birdie

Scoring one under par on a hole.

Eagle

Scoring two under par on a hole.

Albatross (aka Double-Eagle)

Scoring three under par on a hole.

Bogey

Scoring one over par on a hole.

Hole-In-One (aka ace)

When the player gets their ball in the hole from the tee shot.

Golf Course Areas

Tee Box (and markers)

The starting point for a hole. Tee markers are used on the tee boxes to indicate the area of a tee box that you need to hit your golf ball from to start the hole. You cannot tee your golf ball in front of the tee markers without incurring a penalty, so be sure to always note where the tee markers are placed on a tee box before you hit your shot. Tee markers come in all different shapes, sizes, and colors. They may just be a painted chunk of wood or an elaborate shaped piece of metal.

Fairway

The mown areas between the tee box and the green between your tee shot and putting areas.

Skirt/Cut (aka Fringe)

The thinner grassy area between the fairway and rough to the putting green. It is advised to keep rolling golf carts off this area.

Green

The putting surface of a hole. No golf bags or carts should be placed on this surface. It is the most "fragile" of the grasses and needs special care when walking/playing on it to keep it in smooth, tip-top shape.

Rough

The taller, sometimes thicker grass that lines and surrounds the fairways and greens.

Penalty Area

Any sea, lake, pond, river, ditch, surface drainage ditch or other marked area on the course (doesn't have to contain water) – defined by yellow or red stakes or lines.

Bunker (aka Sand Trap)

Shallow pits filled with sand and generally incorporating a raised lip or barrier, from which the ball is more difficult to play than from grass. You are not allowed to "test the surface" prior to your shot attempt, this includes grounding your club head or raking the surface.

Out of Bounds (OB)

When your ball goes over a boundary of the course. These are often defined by white stakes or lines.

Shot Directions*

Duff

When you attempt to hit the ball and miss. Also known as an air shot.

Push/Fade/Slice → *for right hand golfers

Push: Ball flight starts right of target

Fade: Ball flight curves slightly from left to the right

Slice: Ball flight curves substantially from left to right

Pull/Draw/Hook ← *for right hand golfers

Pull: Ball flight starts left of target

Draw: Ball flight curves slightly from right to left

Hook: Ball flight curves substantially from right to left

Golf Clubs & Equipment

Driver

Typically, the largest, un-numbered club that goes the furthest. It is also referred to as a 1 wood.

Fairway Woods

Typically numbered 3, 5, or 7, where the lower the number, the less loft the club face has, meaning it goes further than higher number woods.

Irons

Typically numbered 2 to 9, where the lower the number, the less loft the club face has, meaning it goes further than higher number irons.

Wedges

Non-numbered clubs, like pitching wedge (PW), sand wedge (SW), or approach wedge (AW), or even lob wedge (LW) used when approaching the green (~100 yards out or less) or in green-side sand bunkers. Wedges also commonly come in 48-, 52-, 56-, 60- and 64-degree lofts, where the larger degrees launch the ball higher and shorter than the lower degree wedges.

Putter

Used on the green to roll the ball into the cup.

Tees

Wooden or plastic in varying lengths, tees are used to prop up the ball for tee shots where a driver (1-wood) is being used. They can only be used to "tee-off" in the teeing areas at the start of each hole. Tees are not required though; some golfers prefer to not use a tee on shorter par threes where they are using an iron or a wedge.

Glove

Typically worn on the non-dominant, top hand (left hands for right-handed golfers) to protect and help grip the club.

Golf Shoes

Golf shoes are not required but help you to "grip" the ground while swinging a club, soft-spikes or a special tread are available (based on preference). A good pair of comfortable, tennis shoes with prominent tread also works.

Golf Bag

To hold your clubs, balls, etc.

Golf Towel

Helpful to clean your club faces between shots, especially in inclement weather!

Attire

Golf dress-code varies greatly depending on where you are practicing or playing, but most courses require pants/shorts of non-jean material and collared shirts. If you have questions, visit the course's website or call the golf shop ahead of time to be sure your attire complies with their dress policies.

Other Miscellaneous Terms

Tee Time

Think of tee times as an appointment time for you to tee off to start your round of golf. You typically contact the golf shop staff and set up a time that works for you to begin your round. Some golf courses offer online sign ups that will show you a tee sheet with a list of times available and then you pick the time you want and tell the system how many golfers will be in your group. Tee times may run at different intervals depending on the golf course. For example, the times might be 7:00, 7:10, 7:20, etc. or they may be 7:00, 7:08, 7:16, etc. They usually start just after sunrise and end late in the day to give you enough time to finish your round of golf before the sun sets.

Flagstick/Cup

Flagsticks mark the hole location on the putting green. When you are getting ready to hit your ball on the putting green you need to know where the hole is located on the green surface to know where to aim. Flagsticks will typically have a colored flag, matching the golf course colors, or red, white, or blue. These flags are determined by the golf course.

Ball Marker

A ball marker is used anytime you are going to pick your ball up in your hand and then replace it in the exact spot you just picked it up from. Ball markers are typically round, for example a coin or a poker chip. This action is very common on the putting green, you mark your ball and pick it up then replace it when it is your turn to putt.

Ball Divot Repair Tool

This is a handy little tool to repair the small round dent that your golf ball makes when it hits the putting green surface. Etiquette is to fix your ball mark and one more (sometimes golfers don't fix their marks).

Mulligan

A mulligan is just a second shot when the first shot isn't well played. There are nuances to when it can be used, typically not allowable in competitive golf, but definitely allowed in casual golf or even in can be "purchased" in charity golf events.

Etiquette

Fore

If you think your ball is about to hit someone you shout "Fore". Shouting "Fore left" or "Fore right" is a way of saying "watch out!" giving the person from which direction to duck and cover from.

Divot

Piece of turf/grass that gets removed when hitting a golf ball off the ground. Players should fix their divots by either placing the removed turf back into the divot or filling the divot with sand/seed from the bottles on the golf cart.

Ready Golf

Different from "honors golf", where if it is safe to do so, whoever is ready to hit can go first (usually the person furthest from the hole).

Honors Golf

This gives the person who had the lowest score on the previous hole the right to tee off first on the next hole.

Putting Line

Due to the sensitive nature of the putting green surface, it's advisable to refrain from walking in or across the line of your golf partner's upcoming shot. Walking around or "hopping" over the line is best so you don't disrupt the grass which can affect the way the ball rolls.

Quiet Consideration

Golf is a game of concentration, so it's considered polite to be as quiet as possible when someone is in the process of hitting their ball.

Handicapping

For more information on Handicapping, visit our [Handicap 101](#) page.

Handicap Index® (GHIN Number)

A numerical calculation of a golfer's demonstrated ability from negative digits, to zero (par) up to 54. Often referred to as a player's GHIN number. To put it simply, handicaps are equalizers.

Stands for Golf Handicap Information Network (GHIN) number, and is your unique identification enabling you to post your scores to establish/manage your Handicap Index, overseen by The United States Golf Association ([USGA](#)), in the United States in accordance with the [World Handicap System](#).

Net Score

When you play a round of golf, the total number of strokes you take is your 'gross score'. The 'net score' is determined by subtracting the course handicap from the gross score. Following the above example: you play a round and your gross score is 95, subtract your course handicap 23, your net score is 72. That is a net par!

Competition Formats

Stroke Play (aka Medal Play)

Each shot is counted and added up at the end of the round. If it's a handicap competition the golfer plays using their playing handicap.

Match Play

Head-to-head golf. Each hole is treated as a separate competition and players can either win, halve or lose a hole. The winner is determined by the number of holes won.

Stableford

A point-scoring system depending on the shots taken on each hole. This is a very popular format because one or two bad holes do not rule out a good overall score.

Scramble

Scramble is a popular team format in golf. Each player in a group tees off. The best of these shots is then chosen to be used for the next shot. Each member of the team hits their shot from that spot. This continues until you finish the hole.