



A Quick Guide to the Rules of Golf

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This guide is not a replacement for the Rules of Golf but provides a simple explanation of some common Rules situations that you may come across during your rounds of golf. Whenever any doubt arises you should consult the full Rules of Golf and for more information on any points covered, refer to the relevant Rule.

General Points

Conduct Expected of All Players (Rule 1.2a)

All players are expected to play in the spirit of the game by:

- Acting with integrity – for example, by following the Rules, applying all penalties and being honest in all aspects of play.
- Players are responsible for applying rules to themselves and calling penalties on themselves if and when due (Rule 1.3b).
- Penalties also apply when the player sees another person about to take an action concerning the player's ball or equipment that s/he knows would breach the Rules if taken by the player or caddie and does not take reasonable steps to stop it happening (Rule 1.3c).
- Showing consideration to others – for example, by playing at a prompt pace, looking out for the safety of others, and not distracting the play of another player.

- Taking good care of the course – for example, by replacing divots, smoothing bunkers, repairing ball-marks, and not causing unnecessary damage to the course.

There is no penalty under the Rules for failing to act in this way, **except** that the Committee may disqualify a player for acting contrary to the spirit of the game if it finds that you have committed serious misconduct.

Penalties other than disqualification may be imposed for player misconduct only if those penalties are adopted as part of a Code of Conduct under Rule 1.2b.

Before starting your round, you are advised to:

- read the Local Rules on the score card and the notice board put an identification mark on your ball; many golfers play the same brand of ball and if you can't identify your ball, it is considered lost (Rules 6.3a and 7.2)
- count your clubs; you are allowed a maximum of 14 clubs (Rule 4.1b).

During the round:

- don't ask for advice from anyone except your caddie, your partner (i.e. a player on your side) or your partner's caddie; don't give advice to any player except your partner; you may ask for or provide information on the Rules, distances and the position of hazards, the flagstick, etc. (Rule 10.2)
- don't play any practice shots during play of a hole (Rule 5.2)
- play at a reasonable pace and allow faster groups through

- you may play out of turn, playing ‘Ready Golf’ if, and when, it is safe to do so (Rule 6.4b Exception) At the end of your round:
- in match play, ensure the result of the match is posted
- in stroke play, ensure that your score card is completed properly and signed by you and your marker, and return it to the Committee as soon as possible (Rule 3.3b(2)).
- Provided you have not already played your ball you may correct a possible breach of a rule, without penalty.

The Rules of Play

Tee Shot (Rule 6)

You may change your ball before playing your tee shot, but it is good practice to advise a player in your group if you are changing your ball. Play your tee shot from between, and not in front of, the tee-markers. You may play your tee shot from up to two club-lengths behind the front line of the tee-markers.

If you play your tee shot from outside this area:

- in match play there is no penalty, but your opponent may require you to replay your stroke provided he does so immediately; in stroke play you incur the General Penalty (two penalty strokes), the stroke itself does not count and you must play a ball from within the correct area.

Playing the Ball (Rules 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11)

If you think a ball is yours but cannot see your identification mark, you may mark the position of the ball and lift it to identify it. When lifted under this Rule, your ball must be marked (do not use a loose impediment to mark the ball, if you do you incur a 1-stroke penalty) and

may not be cleaned except to the extent necessary to identify it (Rule 7.3).

Play the ball as it lies. Don't improve your lie, the area of your intended stance or swing, or your line of play (Rule 8.1) by:

- moving, bending or breaking anything fixed or growing, except in fairly taking your stance or making your swing, or
- pressing anything down (Rule 8.1a), including your club behind or in front of your ball; you may however lightly rest your club behind or in front of your ball (Interpretation 8.1b/1)
- if your ball is in a divot hole, there is no free relief, the ball must be played as it lies or declared unplayable (Rule 19)

If your ball is in a bunker, don't;

- touch the ground in front of or behind your ball with your club before your downswing, or touch the sand with your hand to test the condition of the bunker
- you may move loose impediments or movable obstructions (Rule 12.2b(1)).

If you play a wrong ball (i.e. stray ball or ball being used by another player):

- in match play you lose the hole
- in stroke play you incur the general penalty (two penalty strokes), the strokes made with the wrong ball do not count and you must correct the mistake by playing the correct ball (Rule 6.3c).

If you play from the wrong place (Rule 14.7a), If it is not a serious breach you incur the General Penalty of 2-strokes and may continue playing the ball you played from the wrong place. If however it is a

serious breach i.e. you have gained a considerable advantage from playing from the wrong place, then you incur the General Penalty but **MUST** correct your mistake by playing another ball from the correct place; failure to correct your error will lead to your disqualification **On the Putting Green (Rules 13)** On the putting green, you may:

- mark, lift and clean your ball (always replace it on the same spot), and
- repair all damage except that caused naturally or by routine maintenance to the putting green e.g. aeration holes (Rule 13.2c).
- leave the Flagstick in the hole (Rule 13.2a), your decision to have the Flagstick left in the hole must be made before you make your stroke, or
- you may also have the flagstick removed or attended when the ball lies on or off the putting green; your decision to have the Flagstick removed or attended must be made before you make your stroke, (Rule 13.2).

Ball at Rest Moved (Rule 9)

Generally, when your ball is in play, if you accidentally cause it to move, touch it or lift it when not permitted, add a penalty stroke and replace your ball.

If someone other than you, your caddie, your partner or your partner's caddie moves your ball at rest, or it is moved by another ball, replace your ball without penalty.

If a ball at rest is moved by natural forces or it moves of its own accord, play the ball as it lies without penalty, except when you have already marked, lifted and replaced your ball when you must then replace your ball on its original spot.

Ball in Motion Accidentally Hits Outside Influence or is Deliberately Deflected or Stopped (Rule 11)

If your ball in motion accidentally hits a person or outside influence there is no penalty, unless it is played from on the putting green and, in Stroke Play, it hits another ball, you then receive the general penalty of 2 penalty-strokes, (Rule 11.1a Exception) 1 You play the ball as it lies. If your ball was played off the green and comes to rest on a person or moving outside influence you do not play the ball as it lies but instead must take relief under Rule 14.3, dropping a ball in the appropriate relief area.

If your ball was played from the putting green and accidentally hits a person, animal or movable obstruction, your stroke does not count, and you must replace your ball on the original, or estimated, spot, unless it hits a ball at rest or a ball-marker when the stroke counts and you play the ball as it lies. (Rule 11.1b).

Lifting, Dropping and Placing the Ball (Rule 14)

Prior to lifting your ball that has to be replaced (e.g. when you lift your ball to identify it or on the putting green to clean it), the position of the ball must be marked (Rule 14.3). When your ball is being lifted in order to drop or place it in another position (e.g. dropping within two club-lengths under the unplayable ball Rule), it is not mandatory to mark its position although it is recommended that you do so. When dropping, hold your ball at knee-height and drop it.

Common situations where a dropped ball must be re-dropped include when it:

- rolls to a position where there is interference from the same condition from which free relief is being taken (e.g. an immovable obstruction)

- comes to rest outside the relief area from where it was dropped, or
- comes to rest nearer the hole than its original position, the nearest point of complete relief or where the ball last crossed the margin of a penalty area.

If a ball dropped for a second time rolls into any of these positions, you place it where it first struck the course when re-dropped (Rule 14.3c(2)); this can mean, however, that if a ball cannot come to rest within a relief area e.g. because it is on a severe slope, the point that the ball can come to rest on may be outside the relief area, as long as the point is not nearer the hole etc.

Ball Assisting or Interfering with Play (Rule 15.3b)

You may:

- lift your ball or have any other ball lifted if you think the ball might assist another player, or
- have any ball lifted if it might interfere with your play. You must not agree to leave a ball in position in order to assist another player.

A ball that is lifted because it is assisting or interfering with play must not be cleaned, except when it is lifted from the putting green.

Loose Impediments (Rule 15.1)

You may move a loose impediment (i.e. natural loose objects such as stones, detached leaves and twigs) if you remove a loose impediment and this causes your ball to move, the ball must be replaced and (unless your ball was on the putting green) you incur a one-stroke penalty.

If your ball lies on a loose impediment which, if moved, would move your ball, and you have to mark, lift and replace your ball (e.g. for identification), you must not remove the loose impediment before replacing your ball in its original position.

Movable Obstructions (Rule 15.2)

Movable obstructions (i.e. artificial movable objects such as rakes, bottles, etc.) located anywhere may be moved without penalty. If your ball moves as a result, it must be replaced without penalty.

If your ball is in or on a movable obstruction, the ball may be lifted, the obstruction removed, and the ball dropped, without penalty, on the spot directly under where the ball lay on the obstruction, except that on the putting green, the ball is placed on that spot.

Immovable Obstructions and Abnormal Ground Conditions (Rules 16)

An immovable obstruction is an artificial object on the course that cannot be moved (e.g. a building) or cannot readily be moved (e.g. a firmly embedded direction post or stone). Objects defining out of bounds are not treated as obstructions.

An abnormal course condition is temporary water, not in a penalty area, ground under repair or a hole made by an animal or an immovable obstruction.

Except when your ball is in a penalty area, relief without penalty is available from immovable obstructions and abnormal ground conditions when the condition physically interferes with the lie of the ball, your stance or your swing. You may lift the ball and drop it within one club-length of the nearest point of complete relief (see Definition of ‘Nearest point of complete relief’), but not nearer the hole than the nearest point of complete relief (see diagram below). If the ball is on the putting green, you place it at the nearest point of complete relief, which may be off the putting green.

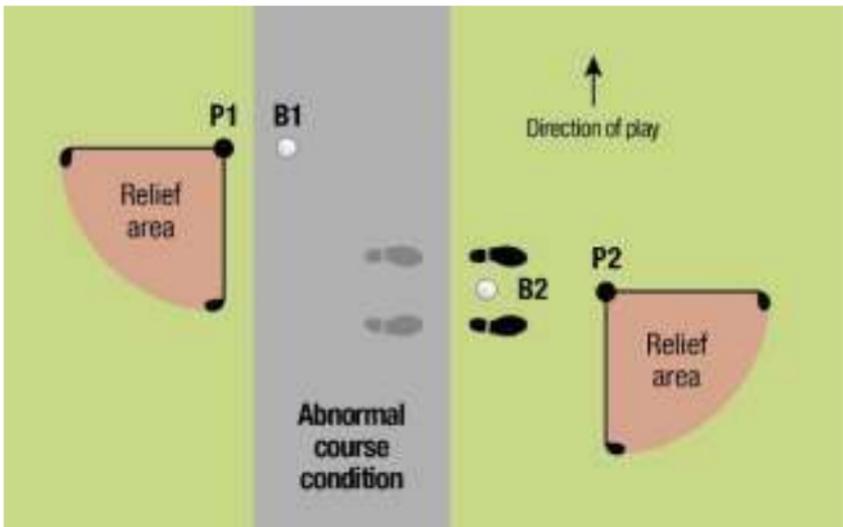
There is no relief for intervention on your line of play unless both your ball and the condition are on the putting green.

There is no relief if it is clearly impossible for you to make a stroke at your ball because of where your ball lies, or another condition or

obstruction would interfere with your stroke e.g. your ball may be in a bush.

As an additional option when your ball is in a bunker, you may take relief from the condition by dropping the ball outside on back-of-line relief the bunker under penalty of one stroke (Rule 16.1c(2))

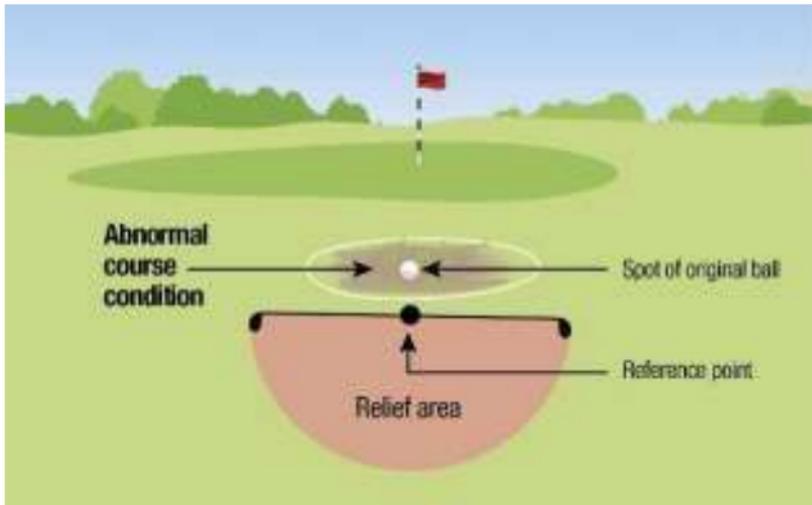
When relief is Allowed for Abnormal Course Condition



The diagram assumes you are right-handed. Free relief is allowed for interference by an abnormal course condition (ACC), including an immovable obstruction, when the ball touches or lies in or on the condition (B1), or the condition interferes with the area of intended stance (B2) or swing. The nearest point of complete relief for B1 is P1 and is very close to the condition. For B2, the nearest point of complete relief is P2,

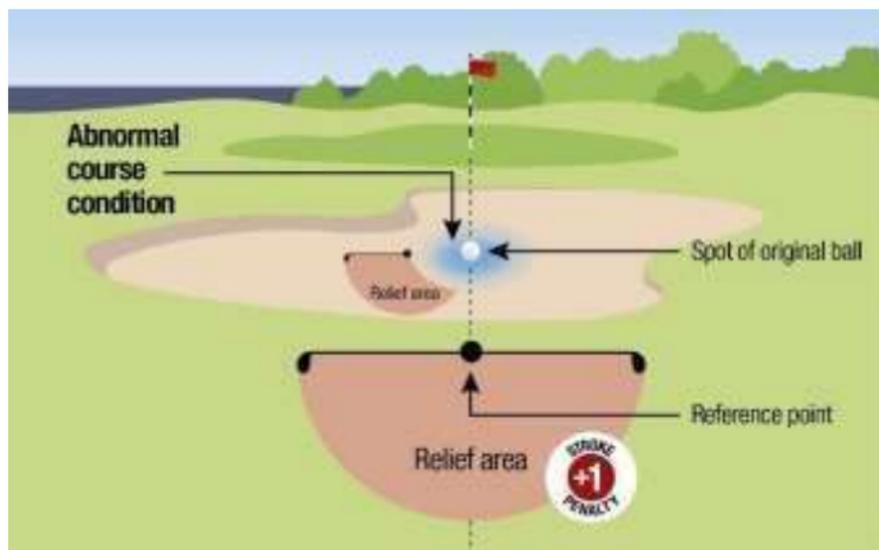
and is farther from the condition as the stance has to be clear of the Abnormal Course Condition.

Free Relief from Abnormal Course condition in General Area



Free relief is allowed when your ball is in the general area and there is interference by an abnormal course condition. The nearest point of complete relief should be identified, and a ball must be dropped in and come to rest in the relief area. The relief area is one club-length from the reference point, is not nearer to the hole than the reference point and must be in the general area. When taking relief, you must take complete relief from all interference by the abnormal course condition.

Relief from Abnormal Course Condition in a Bunker



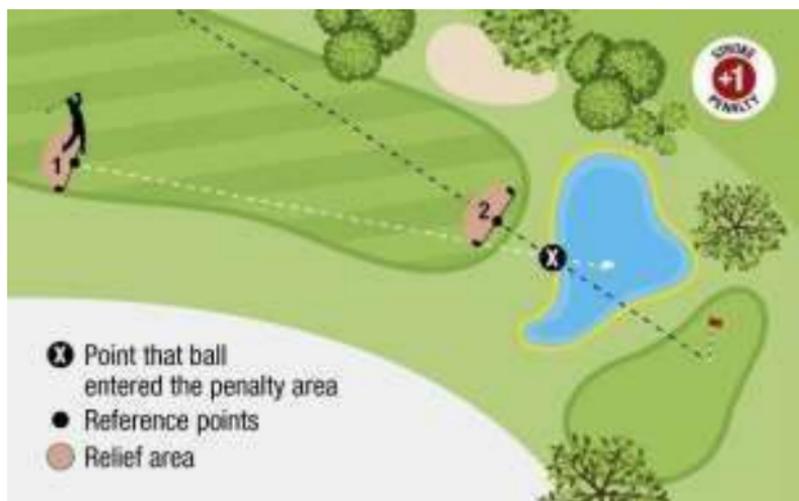
The diagram assumes you are a right-handed player. When there is interference from an abnormal course condition in a bunker, free relief may be taken in the bunker under Rule 16.1b or relief may be taken outside the bunker for one penalty stroke. Relief outside the bunker is based on a reference line going straight back from the hole through the spot of the original ball in the bunker. The reference point is a point on the course outside the bunker chosen by you that is on the reference line and is farther from the hole than the original spot (with no limit on how far back on the line). The relief area is one club-length from the reference point, is not nearer to the hole than the reference point but may be in any area of the course. In choosing this reference point, you should indicate the point by using an object (such as a tee).

Penalty Areas (Rule 17)

If your ball is in a penalty area (yellow or red stakes and/or lines) you may play it as it lies or, under penalty of one stroke:

- play a ball from where your last shot was played, or
- drop a ball any distance behind the penalty area keeping a straight line between the hole, the point where the ball last crossed the margin of the penalty area and the spot on which the ball is dropped.

Relief for Ball in Yellow Penalty Area

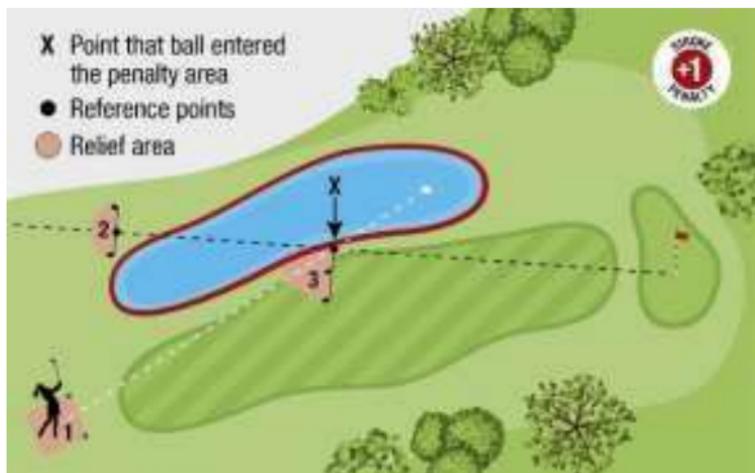


When it is known or virtually certain that a ball is in a yellow penalty area and you wish to take relief, you have two options, each for one penalty stroke:

- (1) You may take stroke-and-distance relief by playing the original ball or another ball from a relief area based on where the previous stroke was made (see Rule 14.6 and Diagram above).
- (2) You may take back-on-the-line relief by dropping the original ball or another ball in a relief area based on a reference line going straight back from the hole through point X. The reference point is a point on the course chosen by you that is on the reference line through point X (the point where the ball last crossed the edge of the yellow penalty area). There is no limit on how far back on the line the reference point may be.

The relief area is one club-length from the reference point, is not nearer to the hole than the reference point and may be in any area of the course, except the same penalty area. In choosing this reference point, you should indicate the point by using an object (such as a tee).

Relief for Ball in Red Penalty Area



When it is known or virtually certain that a ball is in a red penalty area and you wish to take relief, you have three options, each for one penalty stroke:

- (1) You may take stroke-and-distance relief (see point (1) in the Diagram).
- (2) You may take back-on-the-line relief (see point (2) in the Diagram above).
- (3) You may take lateral relief (red penalty area only). The reference point for taking lateral relief is point X, which is the estimated point where the original ball last crossed the edge of the red penalty area. The relief area is two club-lengths from the reference point, is not nearer to the hole than the reference point and may be in any area of the course, except the same penalty area.

Ball Lost or Out of Bounds; Provisional Ball (Rule 18)

Check the Local Rules on the score card to identify the boundaries of the course. These are normally defined by fences, walls, white stakes or white lines.

If, after playing a shot, you think your ball may be lost outside a penalty area or out of bounds you should play a provisional ball from the spot where the last shot was played, under penalty of one stroke, i.e. stroke and distance. You must announce, and use the word 'provisional', that it is a provisional ball.

You are allowed 3 minutes to search for a ball. If it is not found within 3 minutes, it is lost, (Rule 18.2), and you continue play with your provisional ball.

If you have gone forward and started a search for your ball but it has not been found and you are still within your 3 minute search time, so your ball is not yet deemed lost, and you will still have time to go back and

play a ball from where you played your previous stroke from, you may still play a provisional ball.

If your original ball is then found still within time, you are allowed time to walk to the ball and identify it.

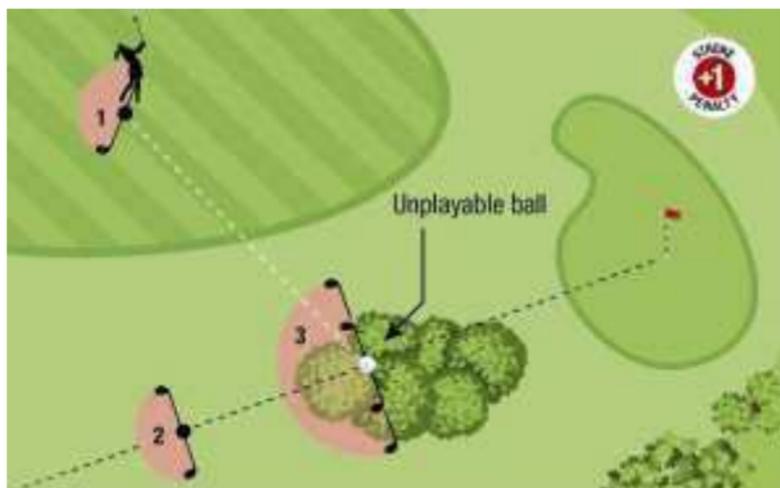
If you have to temporarily stop your search while another player plays their shot, this stoppage time is not deducted from your 3-minute allowance for a search.

NOTE: Check the Golf Club's Local Rules in case it has adopted a Local Rule to allow an alternative to Stroke-and-Distance, in which case do not play a provisional ball if you wish to take relief under that local rule; by playing a provisional ball you lose the relief offered by the alternative to Stroke-and-distance and if you do not find your original ball you must continue play with your provisional ball.

If the original ball is lost (other than in a penalty area) or out of bounds, you must continue with the provisional ball, under penalty of one stroke. If the original ball is found in bounds within 3 minutes, you must continue play of the hole with it, and must stop playing the provisional ball.

Ball Unplayable (Rule 19)

RELIEF OPTIONS FOR BALL UNPLAYABLE IN GENERAL AREA



A player decides that his or her ball in a bush is unplayable. You have three options, in each case adding one penalty stroke:

(1) You may take stroke-and-distance relief by playing the original ball or another ball from a relief area based on where the previous stroke was made (see Rule 14.6 and Diagram above).

(2) You may take back-on-the-line relief by dropping the original ball or another ball in a relief area based on a reference line going straight back from the hole through the spot of the original ball. The reference point is a point on the course chosen by you that is on the reference line and is farther from the hole than the spot of the original ball. There is no limit on how far back on the line the reference point may be. The relief area is

one club-length from the reference point, is not nearer to the hole than the reference point and may be in any area of the course. In choosing this reference point, you should indicate the point by using an object (such as a tee).

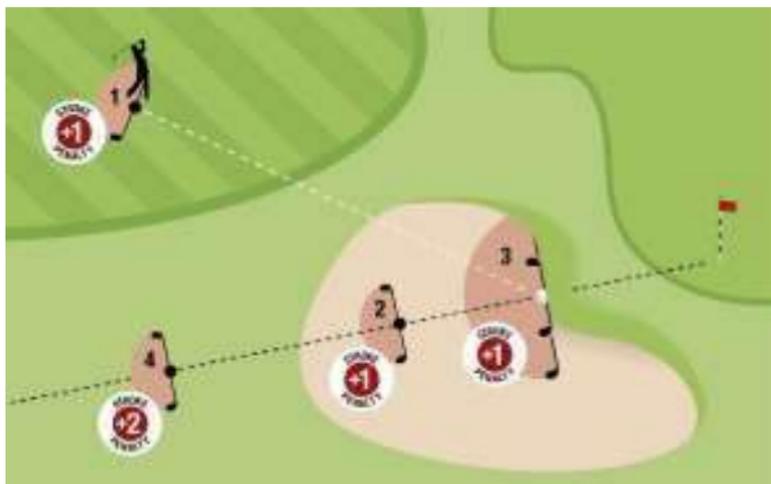
(3) You may take lateral relief. The reference point is the spot of the original ball. The relief area is two club-lengths from the reference point, is not nearer to the hole than the reference point and may be in any area of the course.

If your ball is in a penalty area and you do not wish to play it as it lies, you must proceed under the Penalty Area Rule – the unplayable ball Rule does not apply. Elsewhere on the course, if you believe your ball is unplayable, you may, under penalty of one stroke:

- play a ball from where your last shot was played, or
- drop a ball any distance behind the point where the ball lay keeping a straight line between the hole, the point where the ball lay and
- the spot on which the ball is dropped, or
- drop a ball within two club-lengths of where the ball lay not nearer the hole.

If your ball is in a bunker you may proceed as above, except that if you are dropping back on a line or within two club-lengths, you must drop a ball in the bunker.

RELIEF OPTIONS FOR BALL UNPLAYABLE IN BUNKER



A player decides that his or her ball in a bunker is unplayable. You have four options:

1. For one penalty stroke, you 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, you may take lateral relief in the bunker.
4. For a total of two penalty strokes, you may take back-on-the-line relief outside the bunker based on a reference line going straight back from the hole through the spot of the original ball.

Acknowledgements

- R&A, www.randa.org, for illustrative diagrams