# Additional Clarifications of the 2023 Rules of Golf

Updated October 2, 2026

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**No New Clarifications For October 2026**

## RULES

### Rule 5:

#### Rule 5.2:

**5.2b/3 – Application of Penalty for Practising on Course Before Round in Stroke Play**

Rule 5.2b explains when a player is not allowed to practise on the course before a round in *stroke play*. The penalty statement in Rule 5.2b is not limited to making a *stroke* as the term "practising on the course" also includes testing the surface of the *putting green* by rolling a ball or rubbing the surface.

If a player rubs the surface of a single *green*, they have only breached Rule 5.2 once no matter how many times they rub the surface of the same *green*. (Added December 2022)

### Rule 8

#### Rule 8.1:

**8.1a/10 – Player Allowed to Put Movable Part of Immovable Obstruction Back in Intended Position**

Rule 8.1a(2) prohibits placing a *movable obstruction* into position to *improve* the *conditions affecting the stroke*. However, this restriction does not apply to returning a movable part of an *immovable obstruction* to its intended position.

For example:

- If a sprinkler head is popped up, the player may push it down before playing the ball as the sprinkler head is not in its intended position.
- If a drain cover has been removed or dislodged, the player may return it to its intended position.

In both cases, there is no penalty under Rule 8 even if this *improves* the *conditions affecting the stroke*. (Added July 2023)

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## Rule 10:

### Rule 10.2:

#### 10.2b/1 – Use of Self-Standing Putter for Alignment Help is Not Allowed

Provided a self-standing putter conforms to the *Equipment Rules*, it may be used to make a *stroke* (Rule 4.1a(1)). But the player (or their *caddie*) is not allowed to set such a putter down to get help in any way that would breach Rule 10.2b.

For example, the player must not set the putter down in a standing position right behind or right next to the spot where the ball lies on the *putting green* to show the *line of play* or to help the player in taking their *stance* for the *stroke* in breach of Rule 10.2b(3). (Reinstated January 2025)

#### 10.2b(3)/1 – Setting Clubhead on Ground Behind Ball to Help the Player Take a Stance is Allowed

Rule 10.2b(3) does not allow a player to set down an object (such as an alignment rod or a golf club) to help the player take a *stance.*

However, this prohibition does not prevent a player from positioning their clubhead behind the ball, such as when a player stands behind the ball and places the clubhead perpendicular to the *line of play* and then, while still holding the club, walks around from behind the ball to take their *stance.* (Reinstated January 2025)

#### 10.2b(3)/2 – Delay of Implementation for Certain Uses of Self-Standing Putters

(Withdrawn January 2025)

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## Rule 11:

### Rule 11.1:

#### 11.1b(2)/1 – Ball Played from Putting Green Hits Another Ball in Motion on the Putting Green

A ball is a *movable obstruction*, including when it is in motion on the *putting green*.

If it is *known or virtually certain* that a player's ball in motion played from the *putting green* accidentally hits another ball in motion on the *putting green*, the player must replay the *stroke* by playing the original ball or another ball from the spot where that *stroke* was made (see Rule 14.6). (Added January 2024)

## Rule 14:

### Rule 14.3:

#### 14.3b(4)/1 – General Penalty Applies Under Rule 14.7a

In relation to the final bullet in Rule 14.3b(4), if a player gets the *general penalty* for making a *stroke* without correcting their mistake, the *general penalty* applies under Rule 14.7a for having played from a *wrong place*.

For example, when taking back-on-the-line relief, a player *drops* their ball almost one *club-length* to the side of the line. The ball is in a *wrong place* irrespective of where it comes to rest, even if it comes to rest on the line. The ball must be *dropped* again to avoid penalty under Rule 14.7a.

In *stroke play*, if the player makes a *stroke* from the *wrong place*, the player would need to correct this mistake if playing from a *wrong place* was a *serious breach*. (Added April 2023)

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## COMMITTEE PROCEDURES

**Section 5A(5) - When Scorecard Has Been Returned**

The following guidance has been added to the Committee Procedures based on several organizations adopting various policies that use a duration of time to further define when a scorecard is returned.

These policies are not a change to the Rules of Golf, but clarify that the Committee or competition organizer has the option of adopting a time-based policy when specifying when the scorecard has been returned, that means that once this has occurred, the player may no longer make any changes to their scorecard (see Rule 3.3b(2)).

This new guidance has been added to Section 5A(5)a, which is the section that provides ways a Committee may specify when a scorecard is considered returned in stroke play and offers several options of how this can be done.

a. Specify When Scorecard is Considered Returned

- During 2024 the governing bodies confirmed that the Rules of Golf allow for a policy that uses a duration of time (such as 15 minutes) to define when a scorecard is returned.
  - Such policies allow a player to return to the defined scoring area and correct a scorecard mistake within that duration of time, but do not change the requirement for the player to promptly proceed to the scoring area after they finish their round.
  - When using such a policy, the Committee should determine both how much time is allowed as well as when it begins, such as when:
    - the player left the defined scoring area
    - the group completed their last hole of the round, or
    - the player's scorecard was entered into an electronic scoring system.

    (Added January 2025)

## Model Local Rule A-4:

### A-4 – Internal Out of Bounds

Purpose. For course design or safety reasons, a Committee can choose to specify that a particular part of the course is out of bounds during the play of a particular hole (see Model Local Rule A-4.1). The Committee may also specify that such a boundary only applies to any stroke made from the teeing area of a particular hole (see Model Local Rule A-4.2).

This is done to stop players who are playing that hole from playing to and from another part of the course. For example, on a dog-leg hole, an internal out of bounds may be used to prevent a player from cutting the dog-leg by playing a ball to the fairway of another hole.

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But a Local Rule stating that a ball is out of bounds if it crosses a boundary, even if it re-crosses the boundary and comes to rest on the same part of the course, is not authorized because a ball is only out of bounds when it comes to rest out of bounds.

**Model Local Rule A-4.1**

"During play of [specify hole number], the [specify location or side] of the hole, defined by [insert description of method of defining *out of bounds*, for example, white stakes], is *out of bounds*.

These [insert objects used to define *out of bounds*, for example, stakes] are *boundary objects* during the play of [specify hole number]. For all other holes, they are [*immovable* | *movable*] *obstructions*.

**Model Local Rule A-4.2**

"During play of [specify hole number], the [specify location or side] of the hole, defined by [insert description of method of defining *out of bounds*, for example, white stakes], is *out of bounds* for any *stroke* that must be made from the *teeing area*.

These [insert objects used to define *out of bounds*, for example, stakes] are *boundary objects* during the play of [specify hole number] for any *stroke* that must be made from the *teeing area*. At all other times, they are [*immovable* | *movable*] *obstructions*.
(Updated January 2026)

## Model Local Rule E-13:

### E-13 – Player May Remove Animals Not Defined As Loose Impediments From Near Ball

Purpose. When an animal is touching or is near a player's ball, the player may encourage it to move, and if the animal causes the ball to move when it is being encouraged by the player, Rule 9.6 applies.

If the animal does not move, the player can choose between removing the animal and risking penalty if they cause the ball to move (Rule 9.4b), taking penalty relief (Rules 17.1 or 19.1) or playing the ball as it lies while the animal is still touching or is near the ball.

This Local Rule allows the player to remove animals that are not defined as loose impediments without penalty under Rule 9.4.

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**Model Local Rule E-13**

"A player may remove an *animal,* other than those defined as a *loose impediment,* that is touching or near their ball without penalty and may do so in any way.

If the player's ball *moves* while they are removing the *animal*:

- There is no penalty, and

- The ball must be *replaced* on its original spot (which if not known must be estimated) (see Rule 14.2).

**Penalty for Playing Ball from a *Wrong Place* in Breach of Local Rule: *General Penalty* Under Rule 14.7.**" (Added July 2023)

## Model Local Rule E-14:

### E-14 – Player Has Not Played from Wrong Place When Unaware Ball Might Have Moved

Purpose. When the actions of a player (or the actions of the player's caddie) cause their ball to move, the player is required to replace it before playing. This is true even when the player is unsure if they caused it to move, and even when they are unaware that it might have moved, as the player's lack of knowledge of their own breach does not exempt them from the replacement requirements under Rule 9.4a (see Clarification 9.2a/2).

But in the narrow circumstance where a player is completely unaware their ball might have moved before making a stroke, a Committee can choose to adopt this Local Rule to address situations where the player's lack of awareness provides no reason to even consider replacing the ball. When adopted, this Local Rule changes that outcome by providing that a player who fails to replace their ball in these circumstances will not be treated as having played from a wrong place and will get only one penalty stroke for causing their ball to move under Rule 9.4b (unless an exception to Rule 9.4b applies).

This Local Rule does not change the outcome in situations where, before making the stroke, the player was aware the ball moved or might have moved, and it subsequently becomes known that the ball did move. This includes situations where the player believed they had correctly resolved any doubt they had about the movement of their ball before making their next stroke.

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**Model Local Rule E-14**

"If a player causes their ball at rest to *move* and they fail to replace it before making their next *stroke* when they were neither aware that the ball had *moved* nor that it might have *moved*, the player gets **one penalty stroke** under Rule 9.4b (unless any of the exceptions under that Rule apply) but has not played from a *wrong place* if it subsequently becomes known that they caused the ball to *move*.

But when a player is aware their ball at rest might have *moved* and fails to replace it before making their next *stroke*, the player gets the ***general penalty*** for playing from a *wrong place* under Rule 14.7a if it subsequently becomes known that they caused the ball to *move*. The *general penalty* applies even if the ball was not replaced because the player incorrectly determined that it did not *move* or that they were not the cause." (Added January 2026)

## Model Local Rule F-2:

### F-2 – Limited or Extended Relief for Embedded Ball

Purpose. Rule 16.3 normally allows relief whenever a ball is embedded anywhere in the general area (other than in sand in areas that are not cut to fairway height or less). But a Committee may choose to limit this relief by:

- Allowing relief only when a ball is embedded in a part of the general area cut to fairway height or less.
- Not allowing free relief for a ball embedded in the wall or lip of a bunker (such as a stacked turf or soil face).

In addition, in competitions where there is live television coverage, where a ruling made in real time may later be questioned based on when video evidence of that player's stroke is shown on the broadcast, a Committee may use MLR F-2.3.

**Model Local Rule F-2.1**

"Rule 16.3 is modified in this way:

Free relief is allowed only when a ball is *embedded* in part of the *general area* that is cut to fairway height or less.

[Stacked turf faces above *bunkers* are not cut to fairway height or less for the purpose of this Rule.]

**Penalty for Playing Ball from a Wrong Place in Breach of Local Rule: *General Penalty* Under Rule 14.7a.**"

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**Model Local Rule F-2.2**
"Rule 16.3 is modified in this way:

Free relief is not allowed when a ball is *embedded* in [stacked turf faces] [soil faces] above *bunkers*."

**Model Local Rule F-2.3**

This Model Local Rule is recommended only for use in competitions where there is live television coverage, where a ruling made in real time may later be questioned based on when video evidence of that player's stroke is shown on the broadcast.

A Committee is not authorized to extend the permissions of this Model Local Rule outside of parts of the general area that are cut to fairway height or less.

"Rule 16.3 is modified in this way:

In addition to when relief is allowed under Rule 16.3a, if a *referee* determines that it is *known or virtually certain* that part of a player's ball is below the level of the ground in a pitch-mark in the *general area* that is cut to fairway height or less that has not been repaired in some way and was made as a result of any player's *stroke*, the player may take free relief using the procedures in Rule 16.3b.

A pitch-mark has been repaired in some way when it has been pressed down or undergone any form of repair by anyone whether deliberate or incidental, and regardless of the quality or completeness of the repair.

Examples of repaired in some way include when a pitch-mark has been pressed down with a club or foot, anyone has attempted to repair it with a *tee* or some other device, or when the pitch-mark is in an area over which a mower has passed or has been otherwise prepared by maintenance staff. A pitch-mark that has been repaired in some way can and will often result in a visible indentation from which there is no relief under this Local Rule.

**Penalty for Playing Ball from a Wrong Place in Breach of Local Rule: *General Penalty* Under Rule 14.7a.**" (Updated January 2026)

## Model Local Rule F-5:

**F-5 – Immovable Obstructions Close to Putting Green**
Purpose. When a ball lies anywhere other than on the putting green, an immovable obstruction on the player's line of play is not, of itself, interference under Rule 16.1. Free relief is normally not allowed.

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But if the aprons or fringes of putting greens are cut short enough that putting from off the green is likely to be a common choice of stroke, immovable obstructions that are close to the putting green may interfere with such strokes.

In that case, the Committee can choose to give an extra relief option under Rule 16.1 when a player's ball lies in the general area and an immovable obstruction close to the putting green is on the player's line of play.

The Committee may limit such relief to certain situations, such as only for particular holes or obstructions, or only when the ball and the obstruction are in part of the general area cut to fairway height or less.

The Committee can modify this Local Rule to also provide such relief from ground under repair and can limit relief to only specific areas or specific types of ground under repair.

**Model Local Rule F-5.1**

"Relief from interference by an *immovable obstruction* may be taken under Rule 16.1.

The player has an extra option to take relief when such *immovable obstructions* are on or close to the *putting green* and on the *line of play*:

Ball in General Area: The player may take relief under Rule 16.1b if an *immovable obstruction* is:

- On the *line of play*, and is:
  - On or within two *club-lengths* of the *putting green*, and
  - Within two *club-lengths* of the ball.

**But** complete relief must be taken, which includes both physical and *line of play* interference.

**Exception - No Relief If Line of Play Clearly Unreasonable.** There is no relief under this Local Rule if the player chooses a *line of play* that is clearly unreasonable.

**Penalty for Playing Ball from a Wrong Place in Breach of Local Rule: General Penalty Under Rule 14.7a.**"

**Model Local Rule F-5.2**

Model Local Rule F-5.1 applies but with the following addition to the second paragraph:

"This Local Rule only applies when both the ball and the *obstruction* are in part of the *general area* cut to fairway height or less."
(Updated January 2026)

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## Model Local Rule G-6:

### G-6 – Prohibiting Use of Motorized Transportation

Purpose. A Committee can choose to prohibit players from using any type of motorized transportation such as a golf cart during a round. This is appropriate when the Committee views walking as an integral part of playing in the competition or when it believes that the use of motorized transportation would be unsafe or might damage the course.

In adopting this Local Rule, the Committee can allow motorized transportation in limited ways, such as to take players from one hole to another when those holes are far apart or allowing members of the Committee to give a player a ride when they will play, or has played, again under penalty of stroke and distance.

If a player accepts a ride without the permission of the Committee, the Committee can waive the penalty if it would have authorized the player to ride in that situation had the request been made.

For example, if a player who had lost a ball and needed to return to the teeing area accepted a ride from a volunteer when there was no Committee member available, the Committee could waive the penalty if members of the Committee would have given the player the ride if asked.

A Committee can also later approve a ride that was accepted by a player under the mistaken belief that it was allowed, such as when it was reasonable for the player to believe that the person who offered the ride was authorized to do so as part of the competition.

But, when motorized transportation is not allowed by Local Rule, it is a principle of the Local Rule that players should walk the entire course, so authorization should not otherwise be given if a player has been given a ride forwards when they have not already walked that distance. For example, if a player stops to buy a refreshment after playing their tee shot, and then asks a volunteer for a ride forward to their ball, this is not a situation where it is reasonable for a ride to be later approved by the Committee and the penalty under the Local Rule should be applied.

**Model Local Rule G-6**

"During a *round*, a player or *caddie* must not ride on any form of motorized transportation **except** as authorized or later approved by the *Committee*.
[A player who will play, or has played, under penalty of *stroke and distance* is always authorized to ride on motorized transportation.]

[Players and caddies may ride on the shuttle between holes [identify hole] and [identify hole].]

**Penalty for Breach of Local Rule**: The player gets the ***general penalty*** for each hole during which there is a breach of this Local Rule. If the breach occurs between the play of two holes, it applies to the next hole." (Updated January 2026)

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## Model Local Rule G-9:

Note: The following Model Local Rule replaces previously published and digital versions of MLR G-9 starting on January 1, 2026.

### G-9 – Broken or Significantly Damaged Club Replaced with Similar Club

Purpose. Rule 4.1a(2) allows a player to repair or replace a club that is damaged during the round, except in cases of abuse. But a Committee may adopt a Local Rule to restrict replacement to cases where the club is broken or significantly damaged.

**Model Local Rule G-9**

"Rule 4.1a(2) applies but is modified in these ways:

1. A club damaged by the player or their caddie during the round or while play is stopped under Rule 5.7a may only be replaced if the damage was not caused by abuse and if the club is broken or the damage is significant.

   For the purposes of this Local Rule, examples of when a club is "broken or the damage is significant" include:

   **Shaft**:

   - The shaft is in pieces, or it is bent, dented, kinked or splintered.

   **Clubhead (except Club Face)**:

   - The clubhead is visibly cracked or substantially deformed (but not when it is only scratched, chipped or has a minor dent),
   - The clubhead is loose or no longer attached to the shaft, or
   - A part inside the clubhead is loose (such as when there is an audible rattle).

   **Club Face:**

   - The club face is visibly cracked or deformed (including when it has a chip or minor dent but not when it is only scratched).

   **Grip**:

   - The grip or part of it is loose.

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2. When replacing a club under this local rule:

   - The replacement club must fill the gap created when the player took the broken or damaged club out of play to ensure the progression of the set is maintained.
   - Rule 4.1b(4) is modified to allow a replacement club to be built from parts being carried by or for the player or any other player who is playing on the *course*. But the other restrictions of Rule 4.1b(4) continue to apply. For example, the player must not add or borrow any club being carried by or for any other player who is playing on the *course*.

**Penalty for Breach of Local Rule – See Rule 4.1b.**" (Updated January 2026)

## Model Local Rule M-4:

Note: The following Model Local Rule replaces the previous version of MLR M-4 starting on July 1, 2026.

### M-4 – Limited Relief for Ball in or Near Bunker for Players Using Wheeled Mobility Devices

Purpose. The design and shape of bunkers often create situations where it is either not possible, or it would require unreasonable effort for a player using a wheeled mobility device to position themselves to make a stroke on their intended line of play due to the size and limited manoeuvrability of wheeled mobility devices.

Examples of such situations include when the wall, lip or slope immediately around the bunker prevents a player from taking their stance or the severity of the slope of sand in the bunker requires the player to make unreasonable efforts to take their stance, even though playing the ball as it lies would generally be possible for other players.

When such a situation exists, this Local Rule allows the player the option of taking free relief while trying to maintain playing from the same area of the course as where the ball originally came to rest.

This Local Rule requires the player to make an honest assessment as to when it would require unreasonable effort for them to take a stance to play the ball as it lies. There will be times when the player is not allowed to take free relief because they are able to take their stance with reasonable effort even though taking free relief elsewhere is more desirable. There will also be times when the player is not allowed to take free relief because playing the ball as it lies from that lie and using that intended stance would be clearly unreasonable for other players in the field.

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## Model Local Rule M-4

"When a player's ball comes to rest in or near a *bunker*, a player using a wheeled mobility device may take free relief when the bunker (or the wall, lip or slope immediately around the bunker) prevents the player from taking a *stance* to play the ball as it lies and on their intended *line of play* because it is either:

- Not possible (such as when the wall, lip or slope of the *bunker* prevents the positioning of the player's wheeled mobility device), or
- It would require unreasonable effort (such as when the player is unable to drive their wheeled mobility device up a sandy slope to take a *stance*).

The player may take free relief by *dropping* the original ball or another ball in and playing it from this *relief area* using the procedures below in (1) or (2) depending on where the ball came to rest:

**(1) Ball in *bunker*:**

- Reference Point: The nearest point to the ball's original spot where the ball could be positioned in the *bunker* so that the player would be able to take a *stance* for their intended line of play without unreasonable effort, which may be nearer the *hole*. **But** if there is no such point inside the *bunker*, they may take free relief using the procedure in (2) below for a ball outside the *bunker*.
- Size of Relief Area Measured from Reference Point: One *club-length* in any direction, **but** with these limits:
- Limits on Location of Relief Area:
  - Must be in the same *bunker*, and
  - Must be where the *bunker* (and the wall, lip or slope of the bunker) no longer prevents the player from taking a *stance* for their intended *line of play*.

**(2) Ball outside *bunker*:**

- Reference Point: The nearest point to the ball's original spot, not nearer the *hole*, where the ball could be positioned outside the *bunker* so that the *bunker* (and the wall, lip or slope of the bunker) would no longer prevent the player from taking a *stance* for their intended *line of play*.
- Size of Relief Area Measured from Reference Point: One *club-length*, **but** with these limits:
- Limits on Location of Relief Area:
  - Must be in the same *area of the course* as the reference point, and
  - Must not be nearer the *hole* than the reference point.
  - Must be where that *bunker* (and the wall, lip or slope of the bunker) no longer prevents the player from taking a *stance* for their intended *line of play*.

**Exception – No Relief Even Though Stance Not Possible or Unreasonable Effort Required**. Relief is not available under this Local Rule when:

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- Playing the ball as it lies is clearly unreasonable because of something other than the player being unable to take a *stance* or taking a stance requiring unreasonable effort (such as when the ball is buried in a steep sandy faced *bunker*).
- The player creates a situation where free relief would be available, but does so only because:
  - They choose a clearly unreasonable direction of play (such as playing a ball directly *out of bounds* or into a *penalty area* when taking a stance would take unreasonable effort), or
  - They choose a clearly unreasonable club or type of swing.

**Penalty for Playing Ball from a *Wrong Place* in Breach of Local Rule: *General Penalty* Under Rule 14.7a.**" (Updated July 2026)

To view a document detailing the application of Model Local Rule M-4, including example situations where the exception would apply click here. (Last Updated July 2026).