

COURSE MANAGEMENT, MARKING THE COURSE, & COURSE SET-UP PROCEDURES – Golf Australia Recommendations (version 25 March 2019)

Many aspects of this document have been reproduced from The R&A's "Guidance on Running a Competition". The information is provided to assist Committees in setting up their own courses.

PART I – Course Management

a) Match Play Index

The Committee must publish a table indicating the order of holes at which handicap strokes are to be given or received (Committee Procedures Section 5I (4)). This order should be printed on the club's scorecard.

The following is provided by Golf Australia as an option for clubs. This method provides for a fairly-even distribution throughout the round. It also disregards hole difficulties (acknowledging that a 30-handicapped player receives 5 strokes from a 25-handicapped player, which is also what a 5-handicapped player receives from a scratch-handicapped player, but that there can be clear differences in the holes a 5-handicapped player and scratch-handicapped player will find the most challenging). It is fair to players on all handicap levels, and it has proved satisfactory in use. It avoids allocating low-numbered strokes to the last two holes so players receiving few strokes will have the opportunity to use these before a match is decided. It also avoids allocating low-numbered strokes to the first three holes in case a match goes to extra holes.

(Note: When using the match play index in match play competitions, the index should be adapted when a match commences at any other hole on the course other than the 1st. Hole 1 in the recommendation should apply to the first hole to be played, Hole 2 to the second hole to be played, etc.)

Hole	Index	Hole	Index
1	18	10	5
2	8	11	11
3	12	12	2
4	3	13	15
5	14	14	7
6	6	15	13
7	10	16	4
8	1	17	17
9	16	18	9

b) Stroke Play Index

Under the (Committee Procedures Section 5I (4)), the Committee must publish a table indicating the order of holes at which handicap strokes are to be received in Stableford and Par (and potentially Maximum Score) events. This order should be printed on the club's scorecard. The Stroke Play Index can also be used as the Match Play Index however GA recommends use of the generic GA Match Play Index.

There are various ways to formulate a Stroke Play Index.

Standard Statistical Method for Determination of Stroke Index

One of the standard statistical methods for determining a Stroke Play Index is to analyse all players' results in an eclectic competition which has been conducted over a reasonable period of time. Another method is to analyse the hole-by-hole scores from an elite competition.

Comprehensive Statistical Method for Determination of Stroke Index

For Committees who have available to them someone who is willing and able to perform detailed statistical projects, it is recommended that a more granular analysis be conducted. With such an analysis for example, players are split into handicap groups, and the 'average over par' score calculated for each hole within each group.

Examples of considerations that support the pursuit of such an approach are as follows:

- Will a 15-handicapped player and a 1-handicapped player both agree on what is the hardest hole on a course? Not necessarily as they have quite different skill levels and will play the game in different ways. And does it matter what hole the 15-handicapped player will find the most difficult? Not at all because whether a specific hole is the hardest on the course or the sixth hardest, the 15-handicapped player will still receive a handicap stroke – for them it is simply an interesting point of discussion. But it is critical for the 1-handicapped player because for them it is the difference between receiving a handicap stroke on a hole and not.
- Is there likely to be a notable difference from low to high handicapped players as to the degree of difficulty that will be ascribed to a hole? There certainly can be, and it is a particularly common occurrence with par 5s. Par-5 holes are relatively easy for low-handicapped players, but can become harder as the handicap of a player increases. This is because a higher-handicapped player must hit **three** relatively good shots on a par-5 hole to get to a position that is near the green. Given the inconsistencies of higher-handicapped players, this can be a challenging proposition (particularly on a course that features many obstacles). On the other hand, when a low-handicapped player stands on the tee of a par 5, their standard thought is “good birdie chance”.

One method for performing a granular analysis is to start by summarising the output for players in each group of 6 handicaps (1-6, 7-12, 13-18, 19-24 etc). For example, scores returned from players on handicaps 1-6 are summarised below:

Hole	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Par	3	4	4	3	4	4	4	5	5	4	3	4	4	4	3	5	4	5
Av Score	2.8	4.1	3.9	3	5.1	4.0	4.8	5.2	5.0	4.7	3.3	4.4	5.4	4.7	3.5	5.4	4.6	6.3
Difference	-0.2	0.1	-0.1	0	1.1	0	0.8	0.2	0	0.7	0.3	0.4	1.4	0.7	0.5	0.4	0.6	1.3
Ranking	18	13	17	=14	3	=14	4	12	=14	=5	11	=9	1	=5	8	=9	7	2

The next step is to highlight the SIX holes with the highest difficulty (i.e. the six hardest holes for this handicap group). These holes then become ranked 1-6 on the Stroke Index. i.e. Hole 13 = Index 1, Hole 18 = Index 2 and so on.

Using the same procedure for the output of players on handicaps 7-12, identify the SIX hardest holes for this group. These six holes then become ranked 7-12 on the Stroke Index. E.g. if Hole No 5 had the highest difficulty it would be ranked Index 7, and so on.

The same procedure is carried out for all other handicap groups (13-18, 19-24 etc).

It is most likely that some holes will overlap from one handicap group to another, in which case the Committee should use its discretion and allocate an appropriate Index to these holes, based on local considerations/knowledge.

For allocation of Stroke Indexes for players on handicaps above 18, please see the later paragraph on this subject. Note in particular comments relating to the allocation of second strokes on par-3 holes.

Even Distribution of Handicap Strokes

Ideally, the Indexes should be spread evenly between the front and the back nine.

Indexing Holes for Players on Handicaps Above 18

Committees must determine how they wish to Index holes for players on handicaps above 18.

A common practice for allocating handicap strokes to players on handicaps of 19-36 is for the distribution to replicate the order used for players on handicaps of 1-18. For example, the Index in such cases would read 1/19, 2/20, 3/21, 4/22, 5/23, etc. However, whilst holes with Index 1 and Index 2 may be the most difficult holes for 1 and 2-handicapped players, they may not be the most difficult holes for a 20-handicapped player. Therefore, a ‘split Index’ may be more appropriate

For example, a Committee may consider a given hole to be the most difficult hole on the course for a low-handicapped player and yet the seventh hardest hole for a higher-handicapped player. This hole would be recorded on the Index table as 1/25.

Consideration of par 3s is the typical reason for a Committee to decide to use a ‘split Index’. Many officials will consider that a difficult par 3 will be worthy of a low-handicapped player receiving a handicap stroke. However, they will also consider that the hole will be relatively easy for a higher-handicapped player to make a bogey on. As a result, they will take the view that allocation of two handicap strokes to a 20-something handicapped player on a par 3 will be too generous (consequently, and where a course has four par 3s, some officials will allocate numbers 33-36 in the Index to these holes).

Indexing Holes for Players on Plus Handicaps

Committees should also be mindful of Plus Handicapped players. For clarification, many times the easiest hole on the course may be a par 3, and therefore, a Plus-handicapped player would require a hole-in-one to have a ‘win’ on the hole in Par or to have 3 points on the hole in Stableford. It may be more appropriate for Committees to consider par 5 holes for these players. In Plus Handicap situations, Committees may have a note somewhere on the card in a prominent position saying: “Plus-handicapped players will give strokes in the following order – e.g. 6th, 13th, 2nd, 17th, etc.

In General

When using data for the purpose of determining a Stroke Index, Golf Australia also recommends the following:

- Only scores returned in singles competitions be used.

- Scores returned from competitions played with preferred lies should not be considered (unless the preferred lies local rule is a regular feature at that course).
- Scores to be used for data analysis should be taken from different times of the year. This will account for any distortionary effects that may result from varying seasonal conditions such as run, shifts in prevailing wind (which will dramatically change in some regions), etc. It would not be necessary to review scores every week for a 12-month period – Committees may look at scores on the first and third Saturdays of each month (for example).

Finally, it is recommended that the Stroke Play Index be periodically reviewed to ensure any changes in membership, or to the course, are catered for.

c) Standard Length of Holes

Allocation of the Par figure for each hole is the responsibility of the Club. For guidance, the recommended Par evaluations are as follows, however other factors such as dog-legs and topography need to be considered.

	Women	Men
Par 3	up to 180 metres	up to 230 metres
Par 4	181-365 metres	231-435 metres
Par 5	366 metres and over	436 metres and over

d) Tee Markers [the following is guidance from The R&A and United States Golf Association]:

The tee markers used to designate each set of tees should be consistent in name, colour and/or design on all holes and distinguishable from other tee markers.

The choice of colour, design or other method for identifying a particular set of tee markers is up to the Committee in charge of the course and should avoid typical gender associations (such as red for women, or blue for men). Avoiding such colours is likely to make it easier for use of any tee option to be readily accepted by players of both genders.

All references to the name, colour and/or design of the various tees should be consistent.

e) Distance Markers

Whilst it is desirable for clubs to note distances on fairway sprinkler heads, they may also wish to use marker posts (or ornamental shrubs, etc) set to the sides of fairways. Another option is a series of coloured disks set flush in the centres of fairways (eg white at 50 metres; red 100 metres; blue 150 metres; yellow 200 metres).

Wherever distances are noted they should be in metres to the centres of greens. The club's scorecard should give advice as to the significance of any distance markers, or markings.

f) Bunker Rakes

There isn't a perfect answer for the position of bunker rakes, however for club handicap golf it is felt by GA that the best solution is for rakes to be left in flat areas in bunkers, near access points, pointing in the direction of play. This is likely to be the most manageable solution for course maintenance staff.

For elite events, GA recommends that rakes be positioned outside bunkers in areas that are least likely to impact play, and facing in the direction of play. In practice, players who leave rakes in bunkers frequently leave them against bunker edges which tends to stop a ball rolling into the flat part of the bunker, resulting in a much more difficult shot than would otherwise have been the case.

If rakes are left in the middle of the bunker the only way to position them is to throw them into the bunker and this causes damage to the surface. Also, if a rake is in the middle of a large bunker it is either not used or the player is obliged to rake a large area of the bunker resulting in unnecessary delay.

However, each individual committee will face its own set of circumstances and is always entitled to adopt or maintain a policy which is contrary to the GA guidance.

g) Course Records

The term "course record" is not defined in the Rules of Golf. However, it is generally accepted that a record score should be recognised as the official "course record" only if made in an individual stroke play competition (excluding par or Stableford competitions) with the holes and tee-markers in their proper medal or championship positions.

It is recommended that a record score should not be recognised as the official "course record" if a Local Rule permitting preferred lies is in operation – unless it is common for preferred lies to be in operation at that course.

PART II – Marking the Course

Committee Procedures IA of the Rules of Golf states:

The Committee must define accurately:

- i) the course and out of bounds,*
- ii) the margins of red penalty areas and yellow penalty areas,*
- iii) ground under repair, and*
- iv) obstructions and integral objects on the course.*

Items that need to be clearly marked are:

a) Out of Bounds

- The international standard is that stakes defining out of bounds are painted white. (Note: This is the recommendation of The R&A and the USGA.)
- The distance between boundary stakes may vary, but it is crucial that it be possible to sight one stake from the next. Stakes should not be obscured by bushes, trees or the like.
- As a precaution, in major events it is recommended that a white circle is painted around the base of each stake so that if a stake is removed without authority, the Committee will know exactly where it was located.
- For major events it is recommended that out of bounds be defined by a line on the ground which in keeping with the international standard promoted by The R&A and the USGA should be white. (When both stakes and lines are used to indicate out of bounds, the stakes identify out of bounds and the lines define out of bounds. When out of bounds is defined by a line on the ground, the line itself is out of bounds.)
- If out of bounds is defined by a wall, the Committee must clarify in the Local Rules whether the inside face of the wall defines the boundary or, alternatively, whether a ball is only out of bounds if it is beyond the wall.
- In some instances, the boundary line will be defined by a trench, with a ball being out of bounds if it is in or beyond the trench. If stakes are used to draw players' attention to a boundary trench, rather than define the boundary itself, they should be painted white with black tops. As such stakes do not define the boundary they will be movable obstructions. This point should be clarified in the Local Rules.
- At times there may be a public road defined as out of bounds which divides a course. Model Local Rule A-3 advises that if a ball crosses the road and comes to rest on a part of the course on the other side of the road, that the ball is in bounds unless a Local Rule provides otherwise. However, because it is unfair that a ball on the road is out of bounds and a ball beyond it is in bounds, it is suggested that a Local Rule be adopted that declares a ball that crosses the road to also be out of bounds.

b) Penalty Areas

- Most penalty areas should be marked red to give players the additional option of lateral relief (see Rule 17.1d(3)). However, where part of the challenge of the hole is to carry over a penalty area such as a stream that crosses the front of the putting green and there is a good chance that a ball that carries over the stream could fall back into it, the Committee may decide to mark the penalty area as yellow. This ensures that a ball that lands on the far side of the penalty area before rolling back into the penalty area cannot be dropped on the far side under the lateral relief option.
- When a penalty area is marked yellow, the Committee should ensure that a player will always be able to drop back-on-the-line under Rule 17.1d(2) or consider adding a dropping zone for the penalty area so that a player would have an option other than stroke and distance.
- A Committee does not have to mark any penalty areas yellow. For simplicity, a Committee may decide to mark all penalty areas red so there is no confusion for players as to what relief options are available.
- Stakes and lines used to define the margins of a red penalty area must be red, and for a yellow penalty area must be yellow.
- Lines or stakes defining margins of a penalty area should be placed as nearly as possible along the natural limits of the penalty area. Sloping banks should be included within the margins of the penalty area.
- When only stakes are used for definition, the stakes are inside the penalty area, and the margin of the penalty area is defined by the nearest outside points of the stakes at ground level (the margin is the direct line from stake to stake). It should be ensured that no area lies outside the line that should be within the penalty area (but see Interpretation 17.1a/1).
- When both stakes and lines are used to define the margin of the penalty area, the stakes identify the penalty area and the lines define the margin. When the penalty area is defined by a line on the ground, the line itself is in the penalty area.
- If a body of water is part red penalty area and part yellow penalty area, a red and a yellow stake should be placed side by side at the point the change in status takes place.
- Ideally, stakes marking penalty areas should be treated by committees as movable obstructions, however it is appreciated that some committees will encounter challenges around this caused by players failing to replace stakes after removing them to play a stroke. An option for clubs to consider is to create permanent sleeves for penalty area stakes that allow for the stakes to be easily removed and then replaced.

c) Ground Under Repair

- Committees are encouraged to conduct a tour of the entire course to identify areas that may need to be marked. Only then should areas be marked. Otherwise the Committee may mark areas of GUR at the first few holes and subsequently find that the course has many other similar areas.

- The international standard is that GUR is defined by white lines. However if the terrain is such that putting down a line is impossible or impracticable, small stakes (preferably painted light blue) may be used. Stakes that are white, yellow, or red should not be used for this purpose. (Note: The guidance contained within this bullet point aligns with the international standard and the recommendations of The R&A and the USGA.)
- In general, bare areas in the rough should not be marked as GUR.

d) Obstructions

- Although it is not normally necessary to define obstructions, there may be situations where the extent of the obstruction is unclear.
- For example, an artificially-surfaced path may become a natural path (i.e. integral object), but it is difficult to establish exactly where the transition takes place. In these instances, the margins of the obstruction should be defined by stakes or lines. If margins are defined in this manner, the following Local Rule will need to be introduced: *“Immovable Obstructions – White lined areas adjoining any areas defined as immovable obstructions are considered to be a part of the obstruction.”*

e) No Play Zones

- Any area of the course may be deemed a No Play Zone. A No Play Zone must be defined as either a penalty area or an Abnormal Course Condition.
- These should be marked with the appropriate colour of stake for the area defined, but with a green top. For example, if the No Play Zone is a yellow penalty area, stakes defining the area should be yellow with green tops.

f) Dropping Zones / Dropping Stakes

- Should be outlined with paint and an appropriate sign should be placed, or the words “Dropping Zone” (or “DZ”) painted, in the area.
- The area created should be large enough to allow for a reasonable lie after divots are taken.
- They may be any shape and the Committee may wish to relate the colour of the paint line to the condition from which relief is being taken, ie red if the dropping zone relates to a red penalty area.
- The Note to the Specimen Local Rule for Dropping Zones (in Model Local Rule E-1 of the Committee Procedures) lists the procedure for Dropping in a Dropping Zone.
- DROPPING STAKES: In many cases, dropping zones have the potential to get heavily used resulting in inconsistent and sometimes poor turf quality. They also have to be routinely maintained with lines repainted to maintain visibility and definition to players. In situations where the need for a dropping zone ceases, it can take some time for the lines denoting the zone to fade (as the grass grows and is mown) thus causing confusion to players as to whether the relief option remains. As a result of the above, The R&A suggests that clubs may wish to consider using dropping stakes. A dropping stake should be approximately one metre high, made of metal or wood, with the words “Dropping Stake” written/painted on at least two sides. While it is not mandatory for the stakes be a specific colour, it is suggested they be orange (preferably fluorescent or bright orange so they can be easily located by a player, and to distinguish them from other stakes on the course). The dropping stakes themselves can be defined as either movable or immovable obstructions. If the stakes are treated by the club as movable obstructions, it is recommended that a small paint mark be made to indicate the exact position to which the stake is to be returned in the event it is lifted.

PART III – Course Set-up

Committees are reminded that each course has its own characteristics and has been designed by the architect to have certain features. In preparing a course for a competition, it is important to take account of the strategy that the architects had in mind, and also the type of course and its individual requirements.

It should be the aim of the Course Staff and the Committee to have the condition of the course (including pace of greens) virtually identical from the first practice day to the last day of a multi-day event.

The person(s) appointed by the Committee to set up the course each day must establish the teeing areas at each hole, determine hole locations, ensure bunkers have been raked, and that putting greens, fairways, and tees have been cut, and check lines and stakes defining out of bounds, penalty areas, etc.

a) Teeing Areas

- Teeing areas should be level and firm and the line of sight to the fairway should not be obscured by overhanging branches or the like.
- For competitions that extend over several days, the tee positions should generally not vary to such an extent as would significantly alter the overall course length. (However, if a strong wind or the like jeopardised the proper playing of the hole, a Committee would be justified in altering the tee markers.)
- A sign stating the hole number, length and par should be clearly visible at each tee to avoid a group or match playing from a wrong teeing area.
- Tee markers should be placed approximately six to seven metres apart and the front line of the teeing area should be set up at right angles to the centre of the drive zone.

- The Rules of Golf state that the teeing area is an area of two club lengths in depth, and therefore tee-markers should always be at least two club-lengths forward from the back edge of the tee.
- Ensure trees, advertising boards, etc do not create interference at any point within the teeing area.

b) Hole Positions

- The hole should be positioned at least four paces from any edge of the green. If a bunker is close to the edge, or if the ground slopes away from the edge, the distance should be greater.
- An area of two or three feet around the hole should be as level as possible. Effort should be made to ensure holes are not positioned within three metres of a very severe slope or ridge or of a recently cut hole.
- Consider the condition of nearby turf, especially taking care to avoid old hole plugs.
- Ensure there is a balanced selection of holes for the entire course with respect to left, right, central, front, and back positions.
- For a competition played over several days, the course's degree of difficulty should be maintained at a consistent level.

We hope this document assists in the management of your golf course and of play at your golf club. Please feel free to contact us if you have any queries or if you would like further information.

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