

Golf

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Golf is a [sport](#) in which a player, using several types of [clubs](#), hits a [ball](#) into each hole on the golf course in the lowest possible number of strokes. Golf is one of the few [ball games](#) that does not use a standardised playing area; rather, the game is played on golf "courses," each one of which has a unique design and typically consists of either 9 or 18 separate holes. Golf is defined in the *[Rules of Golf](#)* as "*playing a ball with a club from the teeing ground into the hole by a stroke or successive strokes in accordance with the Rules.*"

[The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews](#)

The first game of golf for which records survive was played at [Bruntsfield Links](#), in [Edinburgh](#), [Scotland](#), in A.D. 1456, recorded in the [archives](#) of the Edinburgh Burgess Golfing Society, now [The Royal Burgess Golfing Society](#). Golf has become a worldwide sport, with golf courses in the majority of countries.

Golf competition may be played as stroke play, in which the individual with the lowest number of strokes is declared the winner, or as match play with the winner determined by whichever individual or team posts the lower score on the most individual holes during a complete round. In addition, team events such as [fourball](#) have been introduced, and these can be played using either the stroke or matchplay format. Alternative ways to play golf have also been introduced, such as [miniature golf](#) and [disc golf](#).

Golf has increasingly turned into a spectator sport, with several different levels of professional and amateur tours in many regions of the world. People such as [Tiger Woods](#), [Jack Nicklaus](#) and [Annika Sorenstam](#) have become well recognised sportspeople across the world. Sponsorship has also become a huge part of the sport and players often earn more from their sponsorship contracts than they do from the sport itself.

Contents

- [1 Etymology](#)
- [2 History](#)
- [3 World popularity](#)
- [4 Golf course](#)
- [5 Play of the game](#)
 - [5.1 Par](#)
 - [5.2 Penalties](#)
 - [5.3 Scoring](#)
 - [5.4 Team play](#)
- [6 Handicap systems](#)
- [7 Rules and other regulations](#)
- [8 Winter Rules](#)
- [9 Hitting a golf ball](#)
 - [9.1 Swinging the golf club](#)
 - [9.2 Types of Shots](#)
- [10 Equipment](#)
- [11 Professional golf](#)
 - [11.1 Golf tours](#)
 - [11.2 Men's major championships](#)
 - [11.3 Women's major championships](#)
 - [11.4 Senior major championships](#)
- [12 Environmental impact](#)
- [13 Golf movies](#)
- [14 Golf magazines](#)
- [15 See also](#)
- [16 References](#)
- [17 External links](#)

Etymology

The word *golf* was first mentioned in writing in 1457 on a [Scottish statute](#) on forbidden games as *gowf*,^[1] possibly derived from the [Scots](#) word *goulf* (variously spelled) meaning "to strike or cuff". This word may, in turn, be derived from the Dutch word *kolf*, meaning "bat," or "club," and the Dutch sport of the same name. It is often claimed that the word originated as an [acronym](#) for "gentlemen only, ladies forbidden", but this is an [urban legend](#).^[2]

History

Main article: [History of golf](#)

Golf is a very old game of which the exact origins are unclear. The origin of golf is open to debate as to being [Chinese](#), [Dutch](#) or [Scottish](#). However, the most accepted golf history theory is that this sport originated from Scotland in the 1100s.^[3]

A game somewhat similar to golf was first mentioned in *Dōngxuān Records* ([Chinese](#): 東軒錄), a Chinese book of 11th Century. It was also mentioned on [February 26, 1297](#) in [the Netherlands](#) in a city called [Loenen aan de Vecht](#). Here the Dutch played a game with a stick and leather ball. Whoever hit the ball into a target several hundreds of meters away the most number of times, won.

However, modern golf is considered to be a [Scottish invention](#),^{[4][5]} as the game was mentioned in two 15th century laws prohibiting the playing of the game of *gowf*. Some scholars have suggested that this refers to another game which is more akin to modern [shinty](#), [hurling](#) or [field hockey](#) than golf. A game of putting a small ball in a hole in the ground using clubs was played in 17th century [Netherlands](#). The word *golf* derives from the [Dutch](#) *kolf* meaning *stick*, *club* or *bat*^[6] (see: [Kolven](#)). Flourishing trade over the North Sea during the Middle Ages and early Modern Period led to much language interaction between [Scots](#), Dutch, Flemish and other languages. There are reports of even earlier accounts of golf from continental Europe.^[7]

The oldest playing golf course in the world is The Musselburgh Old Links Golf Course [\[1\]](#). Evidence has shown that golf was played here in 1672 although [Mary, Queen of Scots](#) reputedly played there in 1567.

Golf courses have not always had eighteen holes. The [St Andrews Links](#) occupy a narrow strip of land along the sea. As early as the 15th century, golfers at [St Andrews](#), in [Fife](#), established a customary route through the undulating terrain, playing to holes whose locations were dictated by topography. The course that emerged featured eleven holes, laid out end to end from the clubhouse to the far end of the property. One played the holes out, turned around, and played the holes in, for a total of 22 holes. In 1764,

several of the holes were deemed too short, and were therefore combined. The number was thereby reduced from 11 to nine, so that a complete round of the links comprised 18 holes.^[8]

The major changes in equipment since the 19th century have been better mowers, especially for the greens, better golf ball designs, using rubber and man-made materials since about 1900, and the introduction of the metal shaft beginning in the 1930s. Also in the 1930s the wooden golf tee was invented. In the 1970s the use of steel and then titanium to replace wood heads began, and shafts made of "graphite" (known more commonly elsewhere as [carbon fiber](#)) were introduced in the 1980s. Though wooden tees are still most popular, various designs of plastic tees have been developed in recent years, and the synthetic materials composing the modern ball continue to be developed.^[9]

Golf balls are famous for "dimples". These small dips in the surface of the golf ball decrease aerodynamic drag which allows the ball to fly further.^[9] Golf is also famous for the use of [flags](#). These show the position of the hole to players when they make their first drive and are too far away from the hole to aim accurately. When all players in a group are within putting distance, the [flag](#) is removed by a "caddy" or a fellow player to allow for easier access to the hole.

World popularity

In 2005 *Golf Digest* calculated that there were nearly 32,000 golf courses in the world, approximately half of them in the [United States](#).^[10] The countries with most golf courses in relation to population, starting with the best endowed were: [Scotland](#), [New Zealand](#), [Australia](#), [Republic of Ireland](#), [Northern Ireland](#), [Canada](#), [Wales](#), [United States](#), [Sweden](#), and [England](#) (countries with fewer than 500,000 people were excluded). Apart from Sweden, all of these countries have [English](#) as the majority language, but the number of courses in new territories is increasing rapidly. For example the first golf course in the [People's Republic of China](#) opened in the mid-1980s, but by 2005 there were 200 courses in that country.

The professional sport was initially dominated by Scottish then English golfers, but since [World War I](#), America has produced the greatest quantity of leading professionals. Other [Commonwealth](#) countries such as [Australia](#) and [South Africa](#) are also traditional powers in the sport. Since around the 1970s, [Japan](#), [Scandinavian](#) and other [Western European](#) countries have produced leading players on a regular basis. The number of countries with high-class professionals continues to increase steadily, especially in [East Asia](#). [South Korea](#) is notably strong in women's golf.

The last decade or so has seen a marked increase in specialised golf vacations or holidays worldwide. This demand for travel which is centered

around golf has led to the development of [luxury resorts](#) which cater to golfers and feature integrated golf courses.

Golf course

Main article: [Golf course](#)



The famous 17th hole of the [TPC at Sawgrass](#) Stadium Course.

Golf is played in an area of land designated a [golf course](#). A course consists of a series of holes, each consisting of a teeing area, fairway, rough and other hazards, and the green with the pin and cup. A typical golf course consists of eighteen holes, but many have only nine.

Play of the game

Every game of golf is based on playing a number of holes in a given order. A *round* typically consists of 18 holes that are played in the order determined by the course layout. On a nine-hole course, a standard round consists of two successive nine-hole rounds. A hole of golf consists of hitting a ball from a tee on the [teeing box](#) (a marked area designated for the first shot of a hole, a tee shot), and once the ball comes to rest, striking it again. This process is repeated until the ball is in the cup. Once the ball is on the *green* (an area of finely cut grass) the ball is usually *putted* (hit along the ground) into the hole. The goal of resting the ball in the hole in as few strokes as possible may be impeded by hazards, such as bunkers and [water hazards](#).

Players walk (or drive in motorized carts) over the course, either singly or in groups of two, three, or four, sometimes accompanied by [caddies](#) who carry and manage the players' equipment and give them advice. In most typical forms of gameplay, each player plays his or her ball from the tee until it is holed.

Each player often acts as *marker* for one other player in the group, that is, he or she records the score on a *score card*. In stroke play (see below), the score consists of the number of strokes played plus any *penalty strokes* incurred. Penalty strokes are not actually strokes but penalty points that are added to the score for violations of rules or utilizing relief procedures.

Par

A hole is classified by its [par](#), the number of strokes a skilled golfer should require to complete play to the hole. For example, a skilled golfer expects to reach the green on a par-four hole in two strokes, one from the tee (the "drive") and another, second, stroke to the green (the "approach") and then roll the ball into the hole with two putts. Traditionally, a golf hole is either a par-three, -four or -five; some par-six holes exist, but are not usually found on traditional golf courses.^[11]

Primarily, but not exclusively, the par of a hole is determined by the tee-to-green distance. A typical length for a par-three hole ranges between 91 and 224 metres (100–250 yd), for a par-four hole, between 225 and 434 metres (251–475 yd). Typically, par-five holes are at between 435 and 630 metres (476–690 yd), and nontraditional par-six holes are any longer distance. These distances are not absolute rules; for example, it is possible that a 450 metre (492 yd) hole could be classed as a par-four hole, since the par for a hole is determined by its 'effective playing length'. If the tee-to-green distance on a hole is predominantly downhill, it will play shorter than its physical length and may be given a lower par rating. Par ratings are also affected by factors affecting difficulty; the placement of hazards or the shape of the hole for example can sometimes affect the play of a hole such that it requires an extra stroke to avoid playing into the hazard or out-of-bounds.^[12]

Eighteen hole courses may have four par-three, ten par-four, and four par-five holes, though other combinations exist and are not less worthy than courses of par 72. Many major championships are contested on courses playing to a par of 70 or 71. In some countries, courses are classified, in addition to the course's par, with a course classification describing the play difficulty of a course and may be used to calculate a golfer's playing handicap for that given course (c.f. [golf handicap](#)).^[13]

Penalties

Main article: [Penalty \(golf\)](#)

Penalty strokes are incurred in certain situations. Most often a penalty stroke is assessed because a player has hit into a situation from which they cannot or choose not to play the ball as it lies (e.g. in a water hazard), or because they have lost their ball (out of bounds (OB)) and must play a substitute. Penalty strokes are counted towards a player's score as if they were an extra swing at the ball.

Scoring

In every form of play, the goal is to play as few strokes per round as possible. Scores for each hole can be described as follows:

Term on a scoreboard	Specific term	Definition
-4	Condor or Vulture (or triple-eagle)	four strokes under par
-3	Albatross (or double-eagle)	three strokes under par
-2	Eagle	two strokes under par
-1	Birdie	one stroke under par
0	Par	strokes equal to par
+1	Bogey	one stroke more than par
+2	Double bogey	two strokes over par
+3	Triple bogey	three strokes over par

The two basic forms of playing golf are [match play](#) and [stroke play](#).

- In match play, two players (or two teams) play each hole as a separate contest against each other. The party with the lower score wins that hole, or if the scores of both players or teams are equal the hole is "halved" (drawn). The game is won by the party that wins more holes than the other. In the case that one team or player has taken a lead that cannot be overcome in the number of holes remaining to be played, the match is deemed to be won by the party in the lead, and the remainder of the holes are not played. For example, if one party already has a lead of six holes, and only five holes remain to be played on the course, the match is over. At any given point, if the lead is equal to the number of holes remaining, the match is said to be "dormie", and is continued until the leader increases the lead by one hole, thereby winning the match, or until the match ends in a tie. When the game is tied after the predetermined number of holes have been played, it may be continued until one side takes a one-hole lead.
- In stroke play, every player (or team) counts the number of shots taken for the whole round or tournament to produce the total score, and the player with the lowest score wins.

There are variations of these basic principles, some of which are explicitly described in the "Rules of Golf" and are therefore regarded "official." "Official" forms of play are, among others, *foursome* and *four-ball* games.

Team play

A [*foursome*](#) (defined in Rule 29) is played between two teams of two players each, in which each team has only one ball and players alternate playing it. For example, if players A and B form a team, A tees off on the first hole, B will play the second shot, A the third, and so on until the hole is finished. On the second hole, B will tee off (regardless who played the last putt on the first hole), then A plays the second shot, and so on. Foursomes can be played as match play or stroke play.

A [*four-ball*](#) (Rules 30 and 31) is also played between two teams of two players each, but every player plays his own ball and for each team, the lower score on each hole is counted. Four-balls can be played as match play or stroke play.

There are also popular unofficial variations on team play:

- In a *scramble*, each player in a team tees off on each hole, and the players decide which shot was best. Every player then plays his second shot from within a clublength of where the best ball has come to rest, and the procedure is repeated until the hole is finished. In *best ball*, each player plays the hole as normal, but the lowest score of all the players on the team counts as the team's score.
- In a *greensome*, also called *modified alternate shot*, both players tee off, and then pick the best shot as in a scramble. The player who did not shoot the best first shot plays the second shot. The play then alternates as in a foursome.
- A variant of *greensome* is sometimes played where the opposing team chooses which of their opponent's tee shots the opponents should use. The player who did not shoot the chosen first shot plays the second shot. Play then continues as a *greensome*. Such a format is known as either *gruesomes*, *bloodsomes* or *gruesome greensomes*.

There is also a form of starting called "shotgun," which is mainly used for tournament play. A "[shotgun start](#)" consists of groups starting at different tees, allowing for all players to start and end their round at the same time.

Handicap systems

Main article: [Golf handicap](#)

A handicap is a numerical measure of an amateur golfer's ability to play golf over 18 holes. Handicaps can be applied either for [stroke play](#) competition or [match play](#) competition. In either competition, a handicap generally represents the number of strokes above par that a player will achieve on an above average day.

In [stroke play](#) competition, the competitor's handicap is subtracted from their total "gross" score at the end of the round, to calculate a "net" score against which standings are calculated. In [match play](#) competition, handicap strokes are assigned on a hole-by-hole basis, according to the handicap rating of each hole (which is provided by the course). The hardest holes on the course receive the first handicap strokes, with the easiest holes receiving the last handicap strokes.

Calculating handicaps are often complicated, but essentially are representative of the average over par of a number of a player's previous above average rounds, adjusted for course difficulty. Legislations regarding the calculation of handicaps differs among countries. For example, handicap rules may include the difficulty of the course the golfer is playing on by taking into consideration factors such as the number of bunkers, the length of the course, the difficulty and slopes of the greens, the width of the fairways, and so on.

Handicap systems are not used in professional golf. Professional golfers often score several strokes below par for a round and thus have a calculated handicap of 0 or less, meaning that their handicap results in the addition of strokes to their round score. Someone with a zero or less handicap is often referred to as a 'scratch golfer.'

Rules and other regulations

The *rules of golf*^{[14][15]} are internationally standardised and are jointly governed by the [Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews](#) (R&A), which was founded 1754 and the [United States Golf Association](#) (USGA). By agreement with the R&A, USGA jurisdiction on the enforcement and interpretation of the rules is limited to the [United States](#) and [Mexico](#). The national golf associations of other countries use the rules laid down by the R&A and there is a formal procedure for referring any points of doubt to the R&A.

The underlying principle of the rules is fairness. As stated on the back cover of the official rule book: "play the ball as it lies", "play the course as you find it", and "if you can't do either, do what is fair". Some rules state that:

- every player is entitled and obliged to play the ball from the position where it has come to rest after a stroke, unless a rule allows or demands otherwise (Rule 13-1)
- a player must not accept assistance in making a stroke (Rule 14-2)
- the condition of the ground or other parts of the course may not be altered to gain an advantage, except in some cases defined in the rules
- a ball may only be replaced by another during play of a hole if it is destroyed (Rule 5-3), lost (Rule 27-1), or unplayable (Rule 28), or at some other time permitted by the Rules. The player may always substitute balls between the play of two holes.

The *Decisions on the Rules of Golf* are based on formal case decisions by the R&A and USGA and are revised and updated every other year.

There are strict regulations regarding the amateur status of golfers.^[16] Essentially, everybody who has ever received payment or compensation for giving instruction or played golf for money is not considered an amateur and may not participate in competitions limited solely to amateurs. However amateur golfers may receive expenses which comply with strict guidelines and they may accept non-cash prizes within the limits established by the Rules of Amateur Status.

In addition to the officially printed rules, golfers also abide by a set of guidelines called [Golf etiquette](#). Etiquette guidelines cover matters such as safety, fairness, easiness and pace of play, and a player's obligation to contribute to the care of the course. Though there are no penalties for breach of etiquette rules, players generally follow the rules of golf etiquette in an effort to improve everyone's playing experience.

Winter Rules

Golf is best played in ideal conditions - a warm late spring, early summer, or early fall day. However, at times it is necessary to play in less than ideal conditions.

Assuming you are playing for fun and not in a competition, the rules are sometimes relaxed somewhat to accommodate the more arduous task of playing in "winter" conditions. This relaxation of some of the rules is often referred to as "Winter Rules". The rules that are relaxed should be agreed to by the other players. For example:

A "leaf ball": Normally if you lose your ball, you lose both a stroke and distance, and have to return to the tee and play another ball. If you think you might have lost the ball, it is best to declare it, and hit a "provisional" ball. You can play the provisional, with more strokes, as long as you are not past where you think you lost the first ball. Then if you find the first ball, you play it. If you do not find it, you continue to play the provisional ball.

Now sometimes you think you will find the first ball, and you are unable to, and have not hit a provisional ball. Then you have a problem with slowing down play, and holding up everyone, if you go back to the tee. So you drop another ball where you think the first ball was lost and play from there. You lie two with the dropped ball.

Here is where the "winter rules" come into effect. Suppose you cannot find the ball because all the leaves have been blown from the fairway into an area that is normally clear of leaves. And where normally you would have been able to easily find your ball. Then you can declare that your ball is a "leaf ball"

and it is hidden in the leaves that would not normally be there. Then you can drop another ball where you think the "leaf ball" would be (but no closer to the hole, of course) and play from there. You lie one with the dropped ball. So you are not charged a stroke because you are playing "winter rules" and have a "leaf ball".

Now there is another case which is similar: Suppose you are playing on a day in which there are patches of snow on the course. It is a nice day, the sun is out, it is not too cold, and you have been inside all week. Again you hit the ball where you know you can find it. Again when you get there you are unable to find it because, this time, it is lost in a patch of snow. So you declare it, drop a ball and play it. You lie one, and are not charged a stroke, because you are playing "winter rules", and have a "snow ball".

Hitting a golf ball

To hit the [ball](#), the [club](#) is swung at the motionless ball wherever it has come to rest from a side stance. Many golf shots make the ball travel through the air (*carry*) and roll out for some more distance (*roll*).

Every shot is a compromise between length and precision, and long shots are often less precise than short ones. A longer shot may result in a better score if it helps reduce the total number of strokes for a given hole, but the benefit may be more than outweighed by additional strokes or penalties if a ball is lost, out of bounds, or comes to rest on difficult ground. Therefore, a skilled golfer must assess the quality of his or her shots in a particular situation in order to judge whether the possible benefits of aggressive play are worth the risks.

Swinging the golf club



[Tiger Woods](#) displaying the textbook position (course: St Andrews).

Putts and short chips are ideally played without much movement of the body, but most other golf shots are played using variants of the full golf swing. The full golf swing itself is used in tee and fairway shots.

A full swing is a complex rotation of the body aimed at accelerating the club head to a great speed. For a right-handed golfer, it consists of a *backswing* to

the right, a *downswing* to the left (during which the ball is hit), and a *follow through*.

The full golf swing is a complex motion that is difficult to learn. It is common for beginners to spend several months practicing the very basics before playing their first ball on a course. Even highly skilled golfers may continue to take golf lessons for years.

Relatively few golfers play left-handed (i.e., swing back to the left and forward to the right). The percentage of golfers in the U.S. who play left-handed is estimated to be anywhere from 4 percent to 7 percent.^[17] Even some players who are strongly left-handed in their daily lives prefer the right-handed golf swing. In the past, this may have been due to the difficulty of finding left-handed golf clubs. Today, more manufacturers provide left-handed versions of their club lines, and the clubs are more readily purchased from mail-order and Internet catalogues, as well as golf stores. A golfer who plays right-handed, but holds the club left-hand-below-right is said to be "cack-handed" or "cross-handed".

A golf ball acquires spin when it is hit. *Backspin* is imparted for almost every shot due to the golf club's *loft* (i.e., angle between the clubface and a vertical plane). A spinning ball deforms the flow of air around it^[18] similar to an airplane wing; a back-spinning ball therefore experiences an upward force which makes it fly higher and longer than a ball without spin. However, too much backspin can negatively impact distance travelled; the increased lift wastes the ball's momentum in gaining altitude rather than in traveling along its flight path. The amount of backspin also influences the behavior of a ball when it impacts the ground. A ball with little backspin will usually roll out for a few metres or yards while a ball with more backspin may not roll at all, or even roll backwards. *Sidespin* occurs when the clubface is not aligned perpendicularly to the plane of swing. Sidespin makes the ball curve left or right, and can be used intentionally or occur unintentionally. For a right-handed player, a subtle curve to the left is called a *draw*. A severe curve to the left and downward is a *hook*. A subtle curve to the right is a *fade*, while a severe curve away and upward is a *slice*. Draws and fades are caused by slight misalignments between the clubface and swing plane because of a slightly "open" or "closed" clubface at contact; a skilled player can control the amount of draw or fade to make the ball curve along the path of the fairway. Slices and hooks however indicate a severe misalignment, mistiming or other flaw in the player's swing, such as a swing not parallel to the desired line of travel, the club contacting the ball early or late in the swing, etc. They are generally undesirable as they reduce carry distance, are difficult to predict and therefore difficult to adjust for, and cause the ball to veer sharply off of the fairway and into hazards, trees and/or out-of-bounds.

Types of Shots

Strictly speaking, every shot made in a round of golf will be subtly different, because the conditions of the ball's lie and desired travel path and distance of the ball will virtually never be exactly the same. However, most shots fall into one of the following categories depending on the purpose and desired distance:

- A *drive* is a long-distance shot played from the tee or fairway, intended to move the ball a great distance down the fairway towards the green.
- An *approach* shot is made with the intention of placing the ball on the green. A drive may place the ball on the green as well, but the term "approach" refers to a high-loft, shorter-distance shot (usually from within 120 yards of the pin) that makes its first impact on the green and rolls very little thereafter.
- A *chip* shot is a very short lofted shot, generally made with an abbreviated swing motion. Chip shots are used as very short approach shots (generally within 35 yards), as a "lay-up" shot to reposition the ball on the fairway, or to get the ball out of a hazard such as a sand trap.
- A *putt* is a shot designed to roll the ball along the ground. It is normally made on the putting green using a [putter](#), though other clubs may be used to achieve the same effect in different situations. A *lag* is a long putt designed less to try to place the ball in the cup than simply to move the ball a long distance across the putting green for an easier short putt into the cup.
- *Punch* or *knock-down* shots are very low-loft shots of varying distance. They are used to avoid hitting the ball into the canopy of trees or other overhead obstructions, or when hitting into the wind which causes the ball to climb higher than normal.
- *Lay-up* shots are shots made from the fairway similar to a drive, but intended to travel a shorter distance than might normally be expected and/or with a higher degree of accuracy, due to intervening circumstances. Most often, a lay-up shot is made to avoid hitting the ball into a hazard placed in the fairway, or to position the ball in a more favorable position on the fairway for the next shot. They are "safe" shots; the player is choosing not to try to make a very long or oddly-placed shot correctly, therefore avoiding the risk that they will make it incorrectly and incur penalty strokes, at the cost of requiring one or more additional strokes to place the ball on the green.
- A variation of a chip shot is called the *bump and run* and combines the behaviors of a short chip and a putt. A medium- or high-lofted club is used with a putting motion to lift the ball over thicker grass such as that of the rough or fringe surrounding the green onto the green itself (the "bump"), where the ball then rolls similar to a putt (the "run").

Equipment

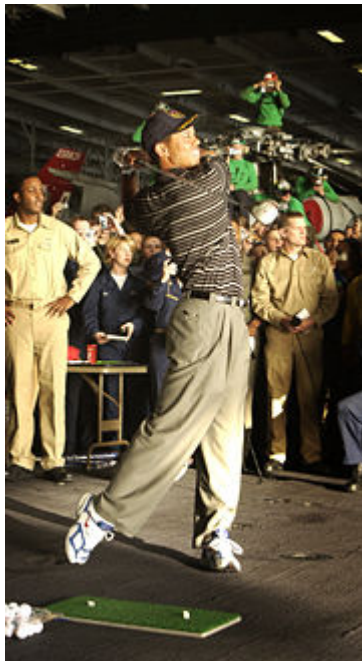
Main article: [Golf equipment](#)

A wide range of equipment exists for playing golf, ranging from [golf clubs](#), [balls](#), [tees](#), gloves, and shoes.

Professional golf

The majority of [professional golfers](#) work as club or teaching professionals, and only compete in local competitions. A small elite of professional golfers are "tournament pros" who compete full time on international "tours".

Golf tours



[Tiger Woods](#), who is the leading professional golfer in the world.^[19]

Main article: [Professional golf tours](#)

There are at least twenty professional golf tours, each run by a [PGA](#) or an independent tour organisation, which is responsible for arranging events, finding sponsors, and regulating the tour. Typically a tour has "members" who are entitled to compete in most of its events, and also invites non-members to compete in some of them. Gaining membership of an elite tour is highly competitive, and most professional golfers never achieve it.

The most widely known tour is the [PGA Tour](#), which attracts the best golfers from all the other men's tours. This is due mostly to the fact that most PGA Tour events have a first prize of at least [USD 800,000](#). The [European Tour](#), which attracts a substantial number of top golfers from outside North America, ranks second to the PGA Tour in worldwide prestige. Some top

professionals from outside North America play enough tournaments to maintain membership on both the PGA Tour and European Tour. There are several other men's tours around the world.

Golf is unique in having lucrative competition for older players. There are several senior tours for men 50 and older, the best known of which is the U.S.-based [Champions Tour](#).

There are six principal tours for women, each based in a different country or continent. The most prestigious of these is the United States based [LPGA Tour](#).

All of the leading professional tours for under-50 players have an official developmental tour, in which the leading players at the end of the season will earn a tour card on the main tour for the following season. Examples include the [Nationwide Tour](#), which feeds to the PGA Tour, and the [Challenge Tour](#), which is the developmental tour of the European Tour.

Men's major championships

Main article: [Men's major golf championships](#)

The major championships are the four most prestigious men's tournaments of the year. In chronological order they are: [The Masters](#), the [U.S. Open](#), [The Open Championship](#) (referred to in North America as the *British Open*) and the [PGA Championship](#).^[20]

The fields for these events include the top several dozen golfers from all over the world. The Masters has been played at [Augusta National Golf Club](#) in [Augusta, Georgia](#) since its inception in 1934. It is the only major championship that is played at the same course each year.^[21] The U.S. Open and PGA Championship are played at courses around the United States, while The Open Championship is played at courses in the UK.^{[22][23][24]}

The number of major championships a player accumulates in his career has a very large impact on his stature in the sport. [Jack Nicklaus](#) is considered to be one of the greatest golfers of all time, largely because he has won a record 18 professional majors, or 20 majors in total if his two [U.S. Amateurs](#) are included. [Tiger Woods](#), who may be the only golfer in the foreseeable future likely to challenge Nicklaus's record, has won 13 professional majors (16 total if his three U.S. Amateurs are included), all before the age of 32. (To put this total in perspective, Nicklaus had won nine professional majors and two U.S. Amateurs at the same age, and did not win his 13th professional major until he was 35.) Woods also came closest to winning all four current majors in one season (known as a [Grand Slam](#) completed first by Bobby Jones) when he won them consecutively across two seasons: the 2000 U.S. Open, Open Championship, and PGA Championship; and the 2001 Masters. This feat has been frequently called the *Tiger Slam*.

Prior to the advent of the PGA Championship and The Masters, the four Majors were the U.S. Open, the U.S. Amateur, the Open Championship, and the [British Amateur](#). These are the four that [Bobby Jones](#) won in 1930 to become the only player ever to have earned a Grand Slam.

Women's major championships

Main article: [Women's major golf championships](#)

Women's golf does not have a globally agreed set of majors. The list of majors recognized by the dominant women's tour, the [LPGA Tour](#) in the U.S., has changed several times over the years, with the last change in 2001. Like the PGA Tour, the (U.S.) LPGA^[25] has four majors: the [Kraft Nabisco Championship](#), the [LPGA Championship](#), the [U.S. Women's Open](#) and the [Women's British Open](#). Only the last of these is also recognized by the [Ladies European Tour](#). The other event that it recognizes as a major is the [Evian Masters](#), which is not considered a major by the LPGA (but is co-sanctioned as a regular LPGA event). However, the significance of this is limited, as the LPGA is far more dominant in women's golf than the PGA Tour is in mainstream men's golf. For example, the [BBC](#) has been known to use the U.S. definition of "women's majors" without qualifying it. Also, the [Ladies' Golf Union](#), the governing body for women's golf in the [UK](#) and [Republic of Ireland](#), states on its official website that the Women's British Open is "the only Women's Major to be played outside the U.S."^[26] For its part, the Ladies European Tour tacitly acknowledges the dominance of the LPGA Tour by not scheduling any of its own events to conflict with the three LPGA majors played in the U.S. The second-richest women's tour, the [LPGA of Japan Tour](#), does not recognize any of the U.S. LPGA or European majors as it has its own set of three majors. However, these events attract little notice outside Japan.

Senior major championships

Main article: [Senior major golf championships](#)

Like women's golf, senior (50-and-over) men's golf does not have a globally agreed set of majors. The list of senior majors on the U.S.-based [Champions Tour](#) has changed over the years, but always by expansion; unlike the situation with the LPGA, no senior major has lost its status. The Champions Tour now recognizes five majors: the [Senior PGA Championship](#), the [U.S. Senior Open](#), the [Senior British Open](#), [The Tradition](#) and the [Senior Players Championship](#).

Of the five events, the Senior PGA is by far the oldest, having been founded in 1937. The other events all date from the 1980s, when senior golf became a commercial success as the first golf stars of the television era, such as [Arnold Palmer](#) and [Gary Player](#), reached the relevant age. The Senior British Open was not recognized as a major by the Champions Tour until 2003. The [European Seniors Tour](#) recognizes only the Senior PGA and the two Senior

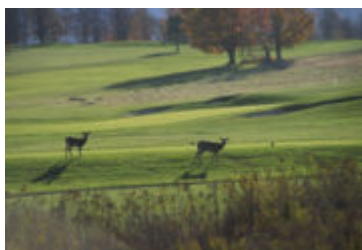
Opens as majors. However, the Champions Tour is arguably more dominant in global senior golf than the U.S. LPGA is in global women's golf.

Environmental impact

[Environmental concerns](#) over the use of land for golf courses have grown over the past 50 years. Specific concerns include the [amount of water](#) and chemical [pesticides](#) and [fertilizers](#) used for maintenance, as well as the destruction of [wetlands](#) and other environmentally important areas during construction. A notable toxic chemical used on golf courses is [diazinon](#); however, this substance was banned in the United States as of the year 2004.

These, along with health and cost concerns, have led to significant research into more environmentally sound practices and turf grasses. The modern golf course superintendent is often trained in the uses of these practices and grasses. This has led to some mitigation in the amount of chemicals and water used on courses. The turf on golf courses is an excellent filter for water and has been used in many communities to cleanse [grey water](#), such as incorporation of [bioswales](#). People continue to oppose golf courses for environmental and human survival reasons, as they impede corridors for migrating animals and sanctuaries for birds and other wildlife. In fact, the effective non-native monoculture of golf courses systematically destroys [biodiversity](#).^[27]

A major result of modern equipment is that today's players can hit the ball much further than previously. In a concern for safety, modern golf course architects have had to lengthen and widen their design envelope. This has led to a ten percent increase in the amount of area that is required for golf courses today. At the same time, water restrictions placed by communities have forced courses to limit the amount of maintained turf grass. While most modern 18-hole golf courses occupy as much as 60 hectares (150 acres) of land, the average course has 30 hectares (75 acres) of maintained turf. (Sources include the [National Golf Foundation](#) and the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America [GCSAA].)



Deer on a golf course.

Golf courses can be built on sandy areas along coasts, abandoned farms, strip mines and quarries, deserts and forests. Many Western countries have instituted significant environmental restrictions on where and how courses can be built.^{[28][29]}

In some parts of the world, attempts to build courses and resorts have led to significant protests along with vandalism and violence by both sides. Although golf is a relatively minor issue compared to other [land-ethics](#) questions, it has symbolic importance as it is a sport normally associated with the wealthier Westernized population, and the culture of colonization and globalization of non-native land ethics. Resisting golf [tourism](#) and golf's expansion has become an objective of some [land-reform](#) movements, especially in the [Philippines](#) and [Indonesia](#).

In [Saudi Arabia](#), golf courses have been constructed on nothing more than oil-covered sand. However, in some cities such as [Dhahran](#), modern, grass golf courses have been built recently. In [Cooper Pedy, Australia](#), there is a famous golf course that consists of nine holes dug into mounds of sand, diesel and oil, with no grass anywhere on the course. Players carry a small piece of [astroturf](#) from which they tee the ball. In [New Zealand](#) it is not uncommon for rural courses to have greens fenced off and sheep graze the fairways. At the 125-year-old Royal Colombo Golf Club in [Sri Lanka](#) steam trains, from the [Kelani Valley](#) railway, run through the course at the 6th hole.

[Extreme golf](#) is typically played on environmentally sustainable alternatives to traditional courses. A cross between hiking and golfing, the course layout exposes players to a wide range of natural obstacles and challenging terrains.

Based on the growing popularity of the U.X. Open Alternative Golf Tournament the extreme golf course features un-mowed meadows and forest instead of fairways, with "goals" scored on temporary greens (a circle 6 metres (20 ft) in diameter).^[30]

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