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10 Rules for Good Golf Etiquette

BY [ARNOLD PALMER](#)



I. Don't be the slowest player

In my casual games at Bay Hill, we get around in under four hours -- and that's in fivesomes. Evaluate your pace of play honestly and often, and if you're consistently the slowest one in your group, you're a slow player, period. Encourage everyone to move quickly enough so you find yourself right behind the group in front several times, both early and late in the round.

Remember the old staples of getting around in good time: Play "ready golf" (hit when ready, even if you aren't away) until you reach the green, be prepared to play

when it's your turn on the tee and green, and never search for a lost ball for more than five minutes.

II. Keep your temper under control

In the final of the Western Pennsylvania Junior when I was 17, I let my putter fly over the gallery after missing a short putt. I won the match, but when I got in the car with my parents for the ride home, there were no congratulations, just dead silence. Eventually my father said, "If I ever see you throw a club again, you will never play in another golf tournament." That wake-up call stayed with me. I haven't thrown a club since.

Throwing clubs, sulking and barking profanity make everyone uneasy. We all have our moments of frustration, but the trick is to vent in an inoffensive way. For example, I often follow a bad hole by hitting the next tee shot a little harder -- for better or worse.

III. Respect other people's time

Because time is our most valuable commodity, there are few good reasons for breaking a golf date. Deciding last-minute to clean the garage on Saturday, or getting a call that the auto-repair shop can move up your appointment by a day, just doesn't cut it.

Always make your tee times, and show up for your lesson with the pro a little early. Social functions are no exception.

IV. Repair the ground you play on

I have a penknife that's my pet tool for fixing ball marks, but a tee or one of those two-pronged devices is fine. As for divots, replace them or use the seed mix packed on the side of your cart.

Rake bunkers like you mean it. Ever notice that the worse the bunker shot, the poorer the job a guy does raking the sand? Make the area nice and smooth -- don't leave deep furrows from the rake. Before you exit the bunker, ask yourself, *Would I be upset if I had to play from that spot?*

V. Be a silent partner

During one of my last tour events as a player, I noticed another pro making practice swings in my field of vision as I was getting ready to hit a shot. I stopped, walked over and reminded him (maybe too sternly) that it was my turn to play. The point is, stand still from the time a player sets himself until the ball has left the club.

Even with the advent of spikeless shoes, the etiquette rule of never walking in someone's line of play on the putting green is an absolute. The area around the hole in particular is sacred ground. The first thing to note when you walk onto a green is the location of every ball in your group, then steer clear of their lines to the hole.

Know where to stand and when to keep quiet. Position yourself directly across or at a diagonal from a player setting up. Never stand on the line of play, either beyond the hole or directly behind the ball. When a player is about to hit a shot, think of the fairway as a cathedral, the green a library.

VI. Make your golf cart 'invisible'

Carts are very much a part of the modern game. Think about it: They're mentioned on the backs of scorecards, discussed in the *Decisions on the Rules of Golf*, bags and other items are designed specifically for them, and they're used at most courses. The sheer pervasiveness of them makes cart etiquette vitally important.

Your goal when driving a cart should be to leave no trace you were there. Because we tend to look where we're going and not where we've been, it's easy to damage the turf and not realize it. Avoid wet areas and spots that are getting beaten up from traffic. Golfers tend to play "follow the leader" and drive in single file out to the fairway before branching off. It's usually better to "scatter" -- everyone take a different route -- so cart traffic is spread out.

VII. Always look your best

From Bobby Jones and Walter Hagen to Ben Hogan and Sam Snead to Tiger Woods and Phil Mickelson, the best players have been meticulous about their appearance. Their clothing has been sharp, and not one of them has shown up on the first tee with his cap backward, mud caked on his shoes, or his shirttail hanging out. (My shirt often came untucked, but it was my swing that did it. I started with it tucked in!)

Your appearance speaks volumes about you as a person, and the neatly appointed golfer, like a businessman or someone headed to church, gives the impression he thinks the golf course and the people there are special.

VIII. Turn off the cell phone

Nobody knows less about technology than I do. But I know enough to recognize a cell phone when it rings in my backswing. If I had my way, cell phones would be turned off at all times on the course, but most clubs have given in to the fact that people are going to use them. I don't know all the gadgets and settings on those phones, but do whatever you have to do to keep it quiet. And if you absolutely have to make a call, move away from the other players. And keep the call so brief that they don't even know you made it.

IX. Lend a hand when you can

It's easy to help out your fellow players, if you just pay attention. One obvious way is looking for lost balls -- better yet, watching errant shots so they don't turn into lost balls. Pick up that extra club left on the fringe or the head cover dropped next to the tee, and return it to its owner after saying, "Nice shot!" And if you see a cart out of position or a provisional ball that needs picking up, don't just walk by.

X. Learn the little things

There are a hundred bits of etiquette I haven't mentioned, like laying the flagstick down carefully, tamping down spike marks when you're walking off a green, letting faster groups play through, and so on. All of these things are learned by observing, with a sharp eye and a considerate heart. Just know that golf has a way of returning favors, and every piece of etiquette you practice will be repaid tenfold.