

7 Strategies For Great Pace-of-Play

Pace-of-play is the single most important element of golf course etiquette and good pace helps us all enjoy our time out on the course.

1. Know What's Expected

Every golf course has a stated amount of time that you are expected to complete your round in. It may be four hours and ten minutes, for example. It would be printed on the scorecard or posted near the first tee. Knowing that expectation is important, but let's explore different ways you can maintain a great pace of play.

2. Start on time

This may sound obvious, but if you tee off late, it may be very difficult or impossible to catch back up. If your tee time is 9:20 for example, you will want to arrive to the first tee five minutes before that, with your golf balls marked and ready, tees and ball marker in your pocket and your handicap written on your scorecard.

Of course you'll want to be on the actual golf course about 45 minutes to an hour in advance to get everything handled, check-in, warm up, etc. before you get to the first tee.

If you're a foursome and you see the foursome ahead of you when you tee off, you should see them throughout your round. You'll know you're playing on-time when you get ready to hit a shot and the group in front of you is just leaving your intended landing area.

If you're driving in golf carts, it's a good idea for the two players in the front cart to tee off first, and then the other two players. This enables the players in the front cart to wipe down their clubs, return them to their bags, and be ready to pull away as soon as the other players hit.

3. Play When Ready And Safe

When the Rules of Golf book was updated in 2019, it brought pace-of-play more into focus and actually encourages ready golf. When playing a stroke play round, go ahead and play ready golf from tee to green, just make sure you aren't endangering or distracting them.

In Match Play, there is an emphasis on order of play and strategy. If you start to fall behind and you're not playing in a serious competition, ask your opponent to hit first or if you can hit first, regardless of who's turn it is. (In Match Play this must be done before each stroke you play out of order)

4. Try Playing a Scramble

Whether you're playing with more seasoned players or beginners, consider playing your round under a scramble format. Each of the players will tee off and you'll select the best one of those tee shots, and each of you will hit from there. That continues all the way until you hole out. You won't have to worry about a few bad shots, or even keeping score, it's a fun way to play with all the clubs in your bag, and keep a good pace-of-play.

Tournament organizers often select a scramble format to help speed up pace-of-play, but we often take even longer to play a scramble than a regular stroke play event.

- Order of play: only matters on the green
- Defer to the most senior competitor or the lowest handicap player to suggest the order of play on the green (and sometimes for an approach shot)
- Don't take extra time on every single shot, only a few key shots

5. Don't Rush To Get a Handicap

If you don't yet have an established handicap, there's no reason to rush out and get one.

- **Play as a twosome or a threesome**

If you're newer to golf and feel pressure to speed up when you see the group behind you with their hands on their hips, you may want to consider playing as a twosome or threesome. This may be allowed later in the day, as opposed to early morning tee times, but if your course does permit you to play with less than a foursome it's great way to feel a little less stressed about keeping up the proper pace of play and enjoying yourself.

- **Drop Your Ball In a Better Lie Or Next To Another Ball In The Fairway**

If you don't have a handicap yet, don't worry about playing every single shot. If you're in a tough lie, drop the ball in an easier location, or just throw it out of the bunker. If you hit a bad shot, don't hit another one from there, just go up to where your playing companion is hitting from and take a drop from there. Making it easier on yourself will help you gain more confidence and help keep up a great pace-of-play.

6. Pick Up At Your Maximum Score

If you have an established handicap, then you'll want to be able to post a score while playing at a good pace. If you're having a bad round or just struggling to keep up with the group in front of you, on a particular hole, remember that if this is not a tournament round you can pick up at your maximum score, which is a net double bogey. This may only happen a few times during your round, but it can really save your group valuable time, and help you stay relaxed and focused.

7. Watch Where All Balls Go

Trying to find a lost ball can add unnecessary time to your round, not to mention penalty strokes if you have to go back to the last place played under stroke-and-distance relief for a lost or out-of-bounds ball.

Each player should be watching each other's ball flight throughout your round to help determine if a provisional ball is needed, or where a ball may have last crossed the edge of a penalty area.