

FAQ 3: *In the past I've had conflicting advice, what is the correct procedure for taking a "free drop"?*

Applicable Rule(s): Rule 20-2 (Dropping and Re-dropping)
Rule 24-2 (Immovable Obstruction)
Rule 25-1 (Abnormal Ground Conditions)

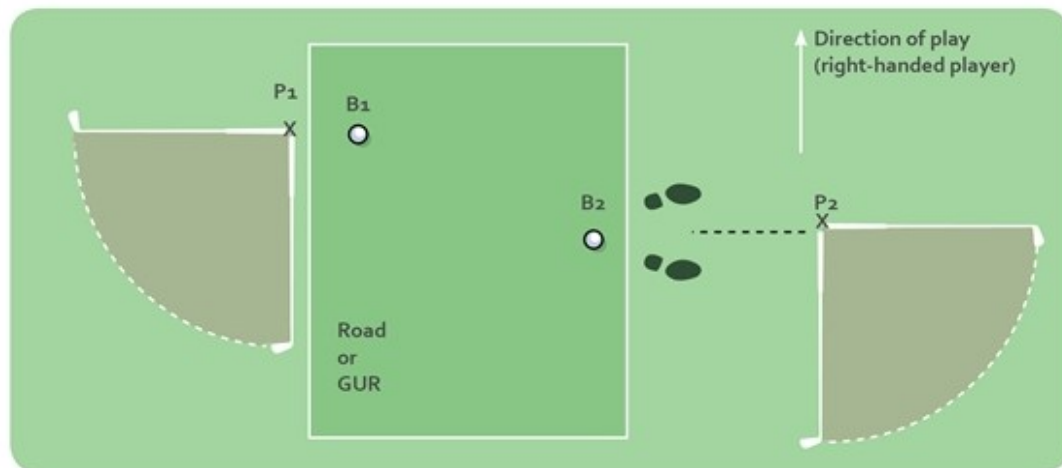
Nearest Point of Relief (taken from the Rules of Golf)

The "nearest point of relief" is the reference point for taking relief without penalty from interference by an immovable obstruction, an abnormal ground condition or a wrong putting green. It is the point on the course nearest to where the ball lies:

- (i) that is not nearer the hole, and
- (ii) where, if the ball were so positioned, no interference by the condition from which relief is sought would exist for the stroke the player would have made from the original position if the condition were not there

Answer:

The following diagram (courtesy of the R&A) illustrates the term "nearest point of relief" that is used in Rules 20-2, 24-2 and 25-1 in the case of a right-handed player. It shows two ball positions (B_1 and B_2) on a road or in GUR and their respective nearest point of relief (P_1 and P_2) as an example. Instead of a road/GUR it could just as well be a staked tree or a sprinkler head or any immovable obstruction.



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| B_1 | = position of ball on road, in ground under repair (GUR), etc. | | = notional stance required to play at P_2 with club with which player would expect to play the stroke |
| P_1 | = nearest point of relief | | |
| P_1 shaded area | = area within which ball to be dropped, radius of one club-length from P_1 measured with any club | P_2 | = nearest point of relief |
| B_2 | = position of ball on road, in ground under repair (GUR), etc. | P_2 shaded area | = area within which ball to be dropped, radius of one club-length from P_2 , measured with any club |

The simple answer is that you drop within one club-length of the nearest point of relief (the grey area shown above) and the ball can then roll up to two club-lengths from where it struck the ground.

There are conditions attached to dropping the ball depending upon where the original ball lay. e.g. the ball must be re-dropped if it:

1. rolls into and comes to rest in a hazard;
2. rolls out of and comes to rest outside a hazard;
3. rolls onto and comes to rest on a putting green;
4. rolls and comes to rest out of bounds;
5. rolls and comes to rest in a position where there is interference by the condition from which relief was taken;
6. rolls and comes to rest more than two club-lengths from where it struck the ground;
7. rolls and comes to rest closer to the hole than the nearest point of relief.

Note that if you are taking a “free drop” in a bunker, the dropped ball must remain in the bunker. If there is nowhere in the bunker to drop (e.g. it is completely full of water) then you may drop outside the bunker, but at the cost of a penalty stroke.

If your original ball was “through the green” (i.e. on the course but not on the teeing ground, putting green of the hole being played or in a hazard) you cannot drop the ball on the putting green.

One last important point – you cannot claim a “free drop” from interference by an immovable obstruction if that interference would occur only through use of a clearly unreasonable stroke, or an unnecessarily abnormal stance, swing or direction of play.