

USGA HANDICAP SYSTEM¹

Updated 1/1/2015

A. Purpose and Assumptions:

1. The purpose of the USGA Handicap system is to make the game of golf more enjoyable by enabling players of differing abilities to ***compete on an equitable basis***.
2. The system disregards high scores that bear little relation to the player's ***potential ability***.
3. ***Premise-1 is that each player will try to make the best score at every hole in every round.***
4. ***Premise-2 is that the player will post every acceptable round for peer review.*** This includes rounds that were not completed past the 13th hole and holes where the player picked-up the ball.

B. Definitions:

1. The ***Handicap Index*** indicates a player's ***potential scoring ability***. It is a number rounded to the nearest one decimal place (e.g. 10.4).
2. The Handicap Index compares a player's scoring ability to that of a scratch golfer on a ***course of standard difficulty (slope of 113)***.
3. A ***scratch golfer*** on a course with a ***“standard scoring difficulty (slope=113)”*** and a ***“scoring rating”*** of 69.9 is considered to have a ***“course scoring ability”*** of a 70 (69.9 rounded up).
4. A golfer on the same course on the same set of tees, with a handicap index of 12.9 would have a ***“course handicap”*** of 13 and would be considered to have a course scoring ability of 83 (69.9+13=82.9 rounded up to 83).
5. If both golfers played the round to their scoring potential (ability), they would tie at a NET 70.

C. Handicap Index Creation and Management:

1. A ***minimum of five (5) rounds*** are required in order to compute a Handicap Index.
2. Only a portion of a player's rounds are used to compute the Handicap Index (the player's “potential” scoring capability).
3. When a player records 20 rounds, in the past 12 months, only the lowest 10 rounds are used to compute the player's Index which is then automatically adjusted for unusually low tournament scores over the past 12 months. ***The table below is used to determine how many scores are used to compute the Index.***

Scores Available	Differentials Used
5 or 6	Lowest 1
7 or 8	Lowest 2
9 or 10	Lowest 3
11 or 12	Lowest 4
13 or 14	Lowest 5
15 or 16	Lowest 6
17	Lowest 7
18	Lowest 8
19	Lowest 9
20	Lowest 10

D. Scoring a Round versus Posting a Round:

1. All legitimate rounds should be posted, whether stroke play or match play.
2. For tournament formats based on total strokes, such as Low Gross or Low Net, holes should be played out for competition purposes, unless otherwise stipulated.
3. In either stroke play or match play, when the ball was picked-up, strokes should be counted that ***“the player” determines*** would most likely have been made to hole the ball, but total strokes should not exceed the Equitable Stroke Control limit.
4. When “posting” a round into the SCGA database, the total strokes should be adjusted for Equitable Stroke Control.
5. In other words, ***count total strokes in order to meet tournament competition rules but post adjusted strokes to meet the USGA Equitable Stroke Control (ESC) rules.***
6. The ESC Table is posted near golf course posting terminals and is included on members' SCGA membership cards:

Course Handicap	Max, Number “Posted” on any Hole
9 or less	Double Bogey
10 through 19	7
20 through 29	8
30 through 39	9
40 or more	10

E. Rounds that require posting:

1. When ***7-12 holes*** have been played, post a ***“nine-hole” score***. The holes should be consecutive and should be on holes that as a group, have been rated for rating and slope by the USGA/SCGA. For example, holes 1 through 9 and/or holes 10 through 18.
2. When ***13-18 holes*** have been played, post an ***“eighteen-hole” score***.
3. Post rounds played with other players or rounds played individually.
4. A scorecard does NOT have to be returned for posting. Only “scores” must be returned for posting purposes and must include the ESC strokes, Course Name, 9 or 18 holes played, course rating and course slope. A scorecard may be required for tournament competition, but is not required in order to legitimize the posting of a score.
5. The methods used to ***validate posted scores*** are: ***Handicap Chairman audits*** and, most importantly, ***club member “peer reviews”***. Members can use the ***scga.org Internet*** site to view scores posted by members using either member names or member SCGA numbers.
6. ***USGA/SCGA clubs are required to make member information available to all members to promote peer review.*** Members may not opt out of member information dissemination to other club members and still remain members of a USGA/SCGA golf club.

F. Scores posted on “picked-up” holes or Holes Not Played:

1. If a player picks up on a hole, the score to post for that hole is the number of strokes already taken plus any penalty strokes plus the number of strokes, in the “player's” judgment, to complete the hole from that point. The total number of strokes is not to exceed the ESC maximum for that hole.
2. For holes not played, the number of strokes to record are the number of par strokes plus any handicap strokes the player is entitled to based on the Course Handicap.

G. Posting of Scores – Timeliness and Methods:

1. **NOTE:** Scores must be posted immediately after a round is played at the club-house posting terminal. For the very infrequent case where that is not possible, a member may post via the internet (e.g., GHIN Mobile app, SCGA Mobile app, scga.org website, ghin.com website, IGN at a course not utilizing

GHIN services), but no later than 2 days after the playing of the round. Frequent internet posting and/or back-dated posting of scores or and/or incorrect posting of scores may be grounds for disciplinary action by the club's handicap committee.

H. Disciplinary Actions for Failure to Post or Manipulation of Handicap:

1. Disciplinary actions may vary according to the impact and frequency of infractions. Some examples of disciplinary actions include:
2. First failure to post or potential manipulation of scores may result in a verbal warning.
3. Second failure may result in a written warning.
4. Third failure may result in the appropriate penalty round issued for scores not posted.
5. A fourth or subsequent failure to post a score or continued manipulation of the score file will result in actions taken as the Handicap Chair and/or Handicap Committee deem appropriate, including possible withdrawal of index and/or withdrawal of Club membership.

1- Most information contained in this document is taken verbatim or near-verbatim from the USGA Handicap System Manual (2008-20011) and the SCGA Handicap Certification course materials.