

How to single-handedly ruin everyone's weekend (Slow play)

Slow play is the bane of golf as we know it. Ever since Tiger Woods came on the scene, golf courses have been jam packed now more than ever with new golfers coming into the sport with little training or knowledge of how to play.

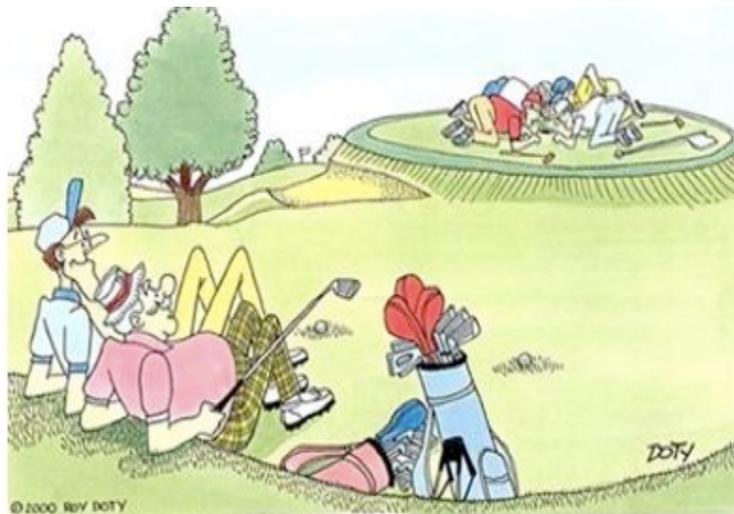
Unfortunately, golf isn't one of those sports that you can just "learn on the fly". The movements that make up a proper golf swing (not to mention the art of touch when pitching, chipping, or putting), are far more complex for the average person than shooting a basketball, hitting a tennis ball, fishing, or any sport you can think of. Fortunately (or unfortunately) anyone can play with a little money and a set of clubs. Unlike a pick-up game of basketball, your skill or lack thereof, won't get you kicked off the golf course for hacking for five hours as long as you pay your greens fee. There is no "winner stays/best player stays" rule intact, so for those of us that are faced with a Saturday or Sunday playing behind you, we hope you will take the following suggestions to heart.

For the beginner:

1. Please, for your own enjoyment, and for that of the other people around you. Visit a driving range several times before you attempt to play on "the big course". Golf is hard. TV makes it look easy. Hell, half the golfers on TV look like toothpicks, the other half looks like your regular coach potato buddies. Don't be fooled. These guys are good. Range time is the time to experiment, not your first round on the course (unless the course is empty).
2. If you are still hitting worm burners after several visits to the driving range, spend a few dollars more and get a couple of lessons from your local PGA pro. This will speed your development and learning ten-fold over trial and error.
3. Playing your first round can be intimidating, if you can, try and find a par three course to start on. If you can't play double bogey golf on the shorter courses, chances are the big course will eat your lunch. Am I saying you have to be ready to play bogey golf your first round out? No! But being able to get the ball in the air above knee cap level would be helpful to you and everyone else behind you.
4. If you are going to hit a bad shot and you know it, don't take so long to do it. Most people would rather play with a 30 handicapper that can keep pace than a 10 handicapper that has the glacial pace of turtle walking across the road in Alaska.

Let's pretend now, you can hit the ball in the air and you are sick of playing when no one else is around. It is time to learn proper pace. What is proper pace? If no one is on the course, you can take ten hours—who cares? Often times though, especially if you want to play on a Saturday or Sunday morning, you are going to have to play at some reasonable speed.

A good gauge is never let the group ahead of you get more than two shots ahead. If this happens, pick it up a bit. Another way to find out if you are playing too slow is to turn around and look at the group behind you. Are they pacing around in circles? Taking multiple practice swings? Can you faintly hear obscenities aimed in your direction? Do their arms look crossed or are they standing with one hand on the club and the other on their foreheads? Then they are telling you nicely, you are playing too slow.



**I would check the grain too, I think
this is for a snow man**

Here are some ways to increase your efficiency on the course:

1. Get to the course early. Stretch a bit. Hit a few shots on the range, putt or chip for a couple minutes more. This will get your golf muscles warmed up and it will also relax you. People that spend just a few minutes practicing before they play usually get some of the hacky shots out of their system before they start.
2. Agree to play ready golf with your buddies. What does that mean? When you are ready and your other partners are not, go ahead and hit the ball. Discuss this up front though. You don't want everyone ticked at you because you just aim and fire whenever you want.
3. Play the proper tees. If you can't play bogey golf, don't play anything other than what most courses consider the "Whites". It may be short. You may see really boney kids teeing off on deeper tees than you – who cares? Until you can play golf in the low 80's consistently, don't move back a tee box.
4. If you have to take a cart. Bring at least three clubs with you for every shot. Nothing is worse than watching someone walk twenty yards from their cart, check the yardage, and then walk back to get the ONE club they need to play.

5. If you lose a ball, look for five minutes, then move on. I know golf balls can get expensive. If the cost of balls is a problem, Wal-Mart will sell you 15 ball packs for like \$10. People that like to go off the course and find multiple balls are not looked upon favorably by other golfers. The term is ball-hawking. You don't want to ever be called that name.
6. If you hit a ball that looks remotely out of bounds or lost, immediately re-tee and announce to everyone your intention to play a provisional ball. Your provisional ball will only count if you can't find your first ball or if it lies out of bounds. It takes an extra sixty seconds. If you are new to the game, (I can't believe I am writing this) forget this rule, and simply drop where you think it went out. This will save a ton of time.
7. If you are driving the cart, drop your partner off (with three clubs), then drive to your ball. While you are driving, your partner should be attempting to play their shot. While you are preparing to hit *your* shot, they then, should be walking back to the cart. See how nice and easy this little dance is?
8. While you are walking to your ball, start thinking about what shot you want to play, how the wind is blowing, how bad/good the lie looks, where the flag is. This will help you keep your mind on the shot at hand.
9. When you can – WALK! It is faster!
10. When you reach the green to putt, again, play ready golf. If you are away and you putt to three feet, go ahead and knock your putt in (unless it is some kind of crazy side hill putt). This will greatly speed up play.
11. Also, on the walk up to the green, begin taking a look at your putt ahead. Begin reading it as soon as you mark your ball. Don't wait for everyone to play their shot before you (five minutes later) read your own putt.
12. After you finish a hole, write your score down on the next tee box. Don't linger by the green for three minutes more counting strokes and writing everyone's score.
13. If people are constantly waiting behind you, drop your ego and let them play through. Your round and theirs will be more enjoyable.
14. On the tee, pay attention to your playing partner's shots. This will help when an occasional shot is sprayed.
15. When playing behind slow pokes, don't stick to strict order on the tee box. If a shorter hitter can go ahead and play his shot, let him.
16. Leave your phone in the car.
17. If you are scoring four over par (or greater) on a hole, pick up your ball and proceed to the next hole (please). Again, this isn't a driving range.

What about gambling? Does gambling effect pace? Absolutely. My group always plays for something. The key is, only play for an amount you won't be truly pissed about losing. If you are playing for more than you are comfortable losing, then you are probably playing for too much. This will make you sweat over every three footer, make you look for nine minutes instead of five minutes when losing balls, and in general, will kill your pace. Don't do it.

Wait a minute now Joe, I do almost all of the above tips and my rounds are still slow. What about the golf course? Don't they have some responsibility?



“I thought we could play as slow as we wanted, that is why we booked Turtlewood in the first place”?

Yes, I think so. What can the course do to speed things up (golf courses operators comments are in italics):

1. Keep tee times precisely on their appointed time if the course is packed. *Don't tell me this; it will piss my customers off.* Sure it may make the late people a little mad, but what about the five other groups behind them that make it on time and are ready to play? You can't please everyone. I would rather keep the people happy that are courteous enough to show up on time than the people who are running “just a few minutes behind and will be there any minute”.
2. When people book their tee times over the phone, ask them clearly to show up fifteen minutes before they tee off. *I know, nobody will care, they will still show up late.* Really? What if in this conversation you told them they may have to wait up to an hour if they are late because of the full schedule of tee times you have for the day? If you pre-warn them, chances are they will make more of a point of making it on time to your course, all things being equal.
3. The starter or pro shop attendant should have a short speech prepared when customers arrive. The speech should sound something like, “Mr. Smith, we really appreciate you coming out to our course today (I never hear that, they just charge my card 99% of the time). If you haven't played with us before, we try to play in xxx number of hours... whatever your pace is. (Hopefully, it is somewhere around four hours). We ask you to please help us keep this pace so EVERYONE can enjoy their round, including yourself.

We don't want you to rush; we just ask that you play ready golf. You may from time to time see one of our friendly golf course assistant's (golf courses operators, quit calling them rangers – it has a negative connotation) drive by. They are here to ensure everyone keeps a healthy pace. If you see them, they may just stop and let you know you are on pace and thank you for playing. I doubt this will happen, but in the event your group falls behind pace, they will gently remind you to pick up the pace a bit. If they come by a second time, they may ask you to let a group or more go through. If they come by a third time, which has never happened but I should mention it, they will ask you to come back another day and you can get a rain check in the pro shop.

Again, I'm sure this won't be a problem with you guys, but you would be surprised how one slow group can ruin an entire afternoon for everyone behind them. Mr. Smith, thanks again for choosing our course, we really appreciate your business”.

That would take less than two minutes to spit out. *That speech would piss people off.* I think it would only piss off those that are slow in the first place. People that are your core repeat business would appreciate the move and you would probably attract more people to your course (good repeat business). After all, do you really want these slow pokes clogging up the course and pissing everyone off behind them?

4. For each bunker on your course, have a rake.
5. Have your course layout on flash card sized yardage books attached to your carts. Bonus: Have advice on how to play the hole for first timers to read.
6. Have more than the standard 200, 150, and 100 yard markers. Start at 250 yards out then have markers every 25 yards on each hole. Bonus: Have a 75 and 50 yard marker also.
7. Have a pin sheet on the cart or scorecard to follow.
8. Inform beverage cart people to never serve food/drinks on the green of any hole. This should be done only on the tee box if the course is busy.
9. If your carts aren't equipped with fancy touch screens to order food on at the turn, how about putting a phone on number nine tee box for people to place orders. I bet more people would order food and drinks from you + you would sell more cooked items as opposed to candy bars, raising your revenue.
10. Quit letting people start on number ten when my group is turning on nine. Nothing worse than playing the front in 1:30, then finding a group of strangers on number ten that want to play a leisurely 2:30 back nine with my group mercilessly stuck behind them.
11. Pay attention to pace. It is my belief that this (pace) has a greater effect on repeat business than you think. Watch five groups per day and see how they are playing. If it takes more than certainly 4:30 to play then something is wrong. Bonus: Give a bucket/bag of balls coupon to people (randomly) that keep a good pace. They will have to come back to use this ensuring you another round.
12. Space out your tee times. *I won't make as much money.* Then charge more. I would rather have less people playing for the same amount of revenue. This will keep your course in better condition for everyone. (100 people X \$50 = the same as 80 people X \$62.50). I think this would also set a standard among your competitors and make your course stand out. I would rather pay \$15 more and play at a “normal” pace, than pay a

cut-rate greens fee and have to wait on every shot. People pay for quality. The only business in the last two hundred years to survive on volume and price as is mantra is Wal-Mart. All others have failed at the price/volume premise for a reason.

I know most of these tips may sound like wishful thinking but enacting just a few of them would drastically change the enjoyment of our grand game for many who have been held hostage by the ignorance of a few.