

USGA Section 4 ADJUSTING HOLE SCORES

Definitions

Within each section, all defined terms are in *italics* and are listed alphabetically in Section [2](#) - Definitions.

The game of golf is based on the premise that a player will play as well as the player can play. Under the *USGA Handicap System*, each player is required to record a hole score for a hole not finished, not played, or not played under "The Rules of Golf," and to reduce any hole score when it is higher than the maximum number allowed under [Equitable Stroke Control](#).

4-1. Unfinished Holes and Conceded Strokes

A player who starts, but does not complete a hole or is conceded a stroke must record for handicap purposes the [most likely score](#). The [most likely score](#) may not exceed the player's [Equitable Stroke Control](#) limit, defined in Section [4-3](#). This [most likely score](#) should be preceded by an "X." (See Decision [4-1/1](#).)

There is no limit to the number of unfinished holes a player may have in a round, provided that failure to finish is not for the purpose of handicap manipulation.

Example 1: A and B are partners in a four-ball stroke play competition. On a hole on which neither player receives a handicap stroke, A lies two, 18 feet from the hole. B lies two, 25 feet from the hole. B holes a putt for a 3. A picks up on the hole, because A cannot better B's score. A records X-4 on the scorecard because 4 is A's [most likely score](#).

Example 2: A and B are playing a match. On a hole on which neither player receives a handicap stroke, A has holed out in 4; B has a 30-foot putt for a 5. B has lost the hole, and picks up. B records X-6 on the scorecard because 6 is B's [most likely score](#).

Example 3: A and B are playing a match. On a hole on which neither player receives a handicap stroke, A is one foot from the hole, lying 4. B is 10 feet from the hole, lying 3. B putts and misses. They both concede a half. Both players record X-5 because that is their [most likely score](#).

4-2. Holes Not Played or Not Played Under The Principles of The Rules of Golf

If a player does not play a hole or plays it other than under the principles of the Rules of Golf (except for [preferred lies](#)), the score recorded for that hole for handicap purposes must be [par](#) plus any handicap strokes the player is entitled to receive on that hole. This hole score, when recorded, should be preceded by an "X."

Example: A player with a [Course Handicap](#) of 10 receives a handicap stroke on the first 10 allocated handicap-stroke holes. If the player does not play the sixth allocated handicap-stroke hole, which is a [par](#) 4, because of construction on the green, the player must record a score of [par](#) plus one for handicap purposes, or X-5. (See Decision [4-2/1](#) and Section [5-2b](#).)

4-3. Equitable Stroke Control

All scores for handicap purposes, including [tournament scores](#), are subject to the application of *Equitable Stroke Control* (*ESC*). This mandatory procedure reduces high hole scores for handicap purposes in order to make handicaps more representative of a player's potential ability.

A handicap determined from scores to which *ESC* has not been applied may not be termed a **Handicap Index**.

ESC is used when a player's actual or [most likely score](#) exceeds a maximum number, based on the table below, for the player's [Course Handicap](#) from the tees played. (For nine-hole [Equitable Stroke Control](#) table, See Section [10-5c](#).)

EQUITABLE STROKE CONTROL

COURSE HANDICAP	MAXIMUM NUMBER ON ANY HOLE
9 or less	Double Bogey
10 through 19	7
20 through 29	8
30 through 39	9
40 or more	10

Example: A player with a [Course Handicap](#) of 6 has a maximum number of [par](#) plus two strokes (double bogey) for any hole. A player with a [Course Handicap](#) of 13 has a maximum number of 7 for any hole regardless of [par](#). A player with a [Course Handicap](#) of 42 has a maximum number of 10 for any hole.

A player without an established [Handicap Index](#) must use the maximum [Handicap Index](#) of 36.4 for men, or 40.4 for women, converted to a [Course Handicap](#), to determine a maximum [ESC](#) number.

There is no limit to the number of individual hole scores on which an [Equitable Stroke Control](#) reduction may be made.

Example: The round of a player with a [Course Handicap](#) of 23 includes individual hole scores of 9, 10, and 11. [ESC](#) reduces each hole score to the applicable maximum of 8. The player's [adjusted gross score](#) enters the [scoring record](#) for handicap purposes 6 strokes less than had [ESC](#) not been applied $(9-8) + (10-8) + (11-8) = 6$.

In consulting the [Equitable Stroke Control](#) table, a player uses the [Course Handicap](#) derived from that player's actual [Handicap Index](#), disregarding any strokes added or subtracted because of a condition of competition, a [handicap allowance](#), players competing from different tees, or men and women from the same tees. (See Sections [3-5](#), [9-3c](#), and [9-4](#).)

Example 1: A player with a [Handicap Index](#) of 35.4 and a [Course Handicap](#) of 39 might enter a competition in which the conditions of the competition establish a maximum [Handicap Index](#) limit of 25.4, which would yield a [Course Handicap](#) of 28. When applying [ESC](#), that player uses the [Course Handicap](#) of 39.

Example 2: A player with a [Course Handicap](#) of 30 might play in a four-ball stroke play competition in which the [handicap allowance](#) is 90 percent, or 27 strokes. When applying [ESC](#), that player uses the [Course Handicap](#) of 30.

Example 3: A player with a [Handicap Index](#) of 25.4 and a [Course Handicap](#) of 28 might enter a competition in which players are competing from different tees. The difference between the higher-rated set of tees (a [USGA Course Rating](#) of 73.0) and the lower-rated set of tees (a [USGA Course Rating](#) of 71.2) is 2 strokes $(73.0-71.2=1.8$ rounded to 2). From the course with the [USGA Course Rating](#) of 73.0, the player would receive two additional strokes, which would give the player a [Course Handicap](#) of 30 (see Decision [3-5/1](#) for the only exception). However, when applying [ESC](#), the player uses a [Course Handicap](#) of 28.

Example 4: A player with a [Handicap Index](#) of 25.4 and a [Course Handicap](#) of 28 is in a tournament where the player shot a score of 92 without applying [ESC](#). The player turns in the score of 92 for the tournament, but must include any [ESC](#) adjustments when posting for handicap purposes.

Under no circumstances must the procedures of this section be used by a player to manipulate a [Handicap Index](#). The [Handicap Index](#) of a player who uses this section for such a purpose must be adjusted or withdrawn by the [Handicap Committee](#) under Section [8-4](#).