

Basic Laws and Etiquette



Bowls is played best when players combine fair competition with respect for opponents, teammates, officials, and the green. Understanding basic laws and etiquette helps matches run smoothly and protects enjoyment for everyone.



Why It Matters

Confusion around simple rules and conduct can create avoidable tension. Good etiquette and sound rule awareness reduce disputes, support safety, and improve the quality of the game experience.

This public guide gives practical basics only. Formal competition should always follow the current laws and competition rules used by the host body.

LAW Governed by the current Laws of the Sport and any applicable Conditions of Play.

ETIQUETTE Accepted behaviour that supports fair, respectful, and enjoyable play.

LAW



Mandatory rules that govern play.

- Mat placement area
- Minimum jack length
- Who has possession
- When a bowl is dead
- Measuring and declaring
- Neutral umpire decisions
- Other Conditions of Play



Set the boundaries of fair competition.

VS

ETIQUETTE



Choices that show respect and good sportsmanship.

- Stand still and stay quiet
- Avoid in sight during delivery
- Acknowledge good bowls
- Be patient during measuring
- Respect decisions of officials
- Support safe, enjoyable play



Create a positive culture for everyone.

Key Ideas

Situation	What the Law Requires	Good Etiquette	Why It Matters
Mat placement	Deliver from within the mat area. Keep both feet on or above the mat while delivering.	Replace the mat carefully. Keep it tidy and clear of footprints and bowls.	Ensures fairness and safety and a consistent playing surface.
Minimum jack length	Jack must be played to the minimum length required.	Check distance with care. Avoid movement that can shorten the rink.	Protects game balance and prevents short-rink advantage.
Standing still	Stand still and clear of the mat area while an opponent delivers.	Be quiet and avoid shadows or distractions.	Supports concentration and accurate delivery.
Possession of the rink	The team whose bowl is being played holds possession until the bowl comes to rest.	Make it clear whose turn it is. Keep out of the active decision space.	Avoids interference and disputes.
Measuring etiquette	Measure only when required by the Laws or conditions.	Agree the result. Handle bowls and jack only when permitted. Use approved equipment.	Promotes accuracy and respect.
Respect for players and officials	Umpire/official decisions are final under the conditions.	Accept decisions calmly. Communicate respectfully at all times.	Maintains harmony and enjoyment for all.

Practical Example

Common situations and good practice

Situation	Good Practice
Mat moved or scuffed	Replace it square and level, no footprints inside the mat area.
Jack near the minimum	Play with care. Check distance without shortening the rink.
Opponent on their mat	Stand still behind them and keep quiet.
Result is close	Call for a measure if the conditions allow. Handle with patience and respect.
Uncertain whose turn	Pause and confirm possession calmly before moving bowls.

Common Mistakes / Things to Watch

- ⚠ Dropping below the shoulder across a live rink.
- ⚠ Walking in or across the line of sight during delivery.
- ⚠ Touching bowls or jack without permission.
- ⚠ Measuring without agreement when not required.
- ⚠ Disputing a decision or showing frustration.
- ⚠ Distracting opponents with noise or movement.
- ⚠ Forgetting local conditions or minimum length.
- ⚠ Assuming—when in doubt, pause and confirm.



Try This

Before your next session or match:

- Review local conditions and minimum length.
- Practise standing still and quiet during delivery.
- Confirm whose turn it is before moving.
- Agree to measure with patience and respect.
- Thank your opponents and officials after play.



Summary / Key Takeaway

Laws set the boundaries. Etiquette brings the game to life.

Know the basics, play with respect, and help everyone enjoy the game.

Respect the game. Respect each other. Enjoy every end.



Related Public Resource

Explore more in this series:

- How to Read a Head
- Choosing the Right Shot
- Weight and Line
- Building Heads
- Game Sense and Strategy

Visit your club or association website to access these free resources.