

## Rules Education: Practice Swings and “Whiffs”

### **Practice Swings**

You're out on the golf course, and you're getting ready to hit the ball. You stand just to the side of the ball, and you take a practice swing before getting ready to hit your shot for real.

Whoops. While you're taking your practice swing, you actually hit your ball. After your playing partner obnoxiously yells, "That's a stroke!" and you get over the initial embarrassment, then you wonder: Does that practice stroke count as a real stroke?

The answer, according to the Rules of Golf, depends on where the practice stroke was made.

If a golfer hits the ball with a practice swing when the ball is teed up or before the first shot of a hole, then the stroke doesn't count and the golfer can replace the ball to hit it again without penalty. That's because, under the Rules of Golf, a ball is not considered in play on a hole until the tee shot has been struck.

However, once the tee shot on a hole is struck, the ball is in play until it is holed. **From after the tee shot to when the ball is holed, when a golfer hits a practice stroke that hits the ball, the golfer actually incurs a one-stroke penalty.** The player has to take the penalty, pick up the ball, put it back where it was, and then hit the ball as they would have intended.

### **“Whiffs” – A swing misses the ball**

*Do I have to count the stroke if I swing and miss the ball?* The answer depends on the golfer's intent. If the golfer was *trying* to hit the ball, then, yes, it's a stroke. However, as noted above, if the golfer missed the ball intentionally, that "whiff" is not a stroke. Why would a golfer miss on purpose? We're talking about things such as a checked-swing, or a last-second distraction that causes the golfer to raise the clubhead and intentionally swing over the top of the ball.

If you whiff a shot that you meant to hit, be honest with yourself and your playing partners, admit it, count the stroke and move on.