Think handicaps are confusing? They don't have to be

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Understanding how golf handicaps work is essential for fair play and for tracking your improvement. The World Handicap System™ (WHS), administered by Golf Canada, provides a unified and accurate way to measure your scoring potential. Here's a simple breakdown of the key terms you'll see when managing your handicap.

Handicap Index: Your Scoring Potential

Your Handicap Index represents your demonstrated ability and allows you to compete fairly on any rated course. It's a standardized number calculated from your scoring history.

How it's calculated:

- Based on the best 8 of your last 20 Score Differentials
- Calculated to one decimal place

This system reflects your potential rather than your average score, ensuring that strong rounds have the most influence.

Course Handicap: How Many Strokes You Get

Your Course Handicap tells you how many strokes you'll receive for a specific round. Because every course — and every set of tees — plays differently, this number changes depending on where you play.

Course Handicap is based on:

- Course Rating
- Slope Rating
- The tees you choose

This adjustment ensures a fair comparison of scores between courses of varying difficulty.

Playing Handicap: For Competitive Formats

Your Playing Handicap is used in events where handicap allowances apply. It adjusts your Course Handicap based on the format being played, helping maintain fairness across team and individual competitions.

Playing Handicap considers:

- Event or competition format
- WHS Handicap Allowances

You'll encounter this number most often in tournaments, leagues, and organized play.

Score Differential: The Engine Behind Your Index

A Score Differential allows scores from different courses to be compared equally. It accounts for course difficulty and forms the basis of your Handicap Index.

It includes:

- Your Adjusted Gross Score
- Course Rating
- Slope Rating
- Potential Playing Conditions Calculation (PCC)

This creates a consistent, course-adjusted value for every round you post.

How to Establish Your Handicap Index

Getting your first Handicap Index is simple. You need scores totalling 54 holes, which can be completed as:

- Three 18-hole rounds
- Six 9-hole rounds
- Any combination adding up to 54 holes

Once posted, your Handicap Index will be generated automatically through the WHS.

How to Post Scores with Golf Canada

Once you have a Handicap Index, keeping your handicap accurate means posting your scores after every round.

Golf Canada's Mobile App

- Post hole-by-hole
- Track stats
- View your Handicap Index, Course Handicap, and Playing Handicap

Golf Canada's online Score Centre

- Log in from any device to record scores and view your scoring history