

Standardized rules of play^{[\[edit\]](#)}

American-style eight-ball rules are played around the world by professionals, and in many amateur leagues. Nevertheless, the rules for eight-ball may be the most contested of any billiard game. There are several competing sets of "official" rules. The non-profit [World Pool-Billiard Association](#) (WPA) – with national affiliates around the world, some of which long pre-date the WPA, such as the [Billiard Congress of America](#) (BCA) – promulgates standardized rules as *Pool Billiards – The Rules of Play*^{[\[6\]](#)} for amateur and professional play.

Meanwhile, many amateur leagues, such as the [American Poolplayers Association](#) (APA) / Canadian Poolplayers Association (CPA), the [Valley National Eight-ball Association](#) (VNEA, international in scope despite its historic name), and the [BCA Pool League](#) (BCAPL), use their own rulesets (most of them at least loosely based on the WPA/BCA version), while millions of individuals play informally using colloquial rules which vary not only from area to area but even from venue to venue ("[house rules](#)").

A summary of the international rules follows (*see the WPA/BCA or other leagues' published rules, which conflict on minor points, for more details*).

Equipment^{[\[edit\]](#)}

The table's playing surface is approximately 9 by 4.5 feet (2.7 by 1.4 m) (regulation size), though some leagues and tournaments using the World Standardized Rules may allow smaller sizes, down to 7 by 3.5 feet (2.1 by 1.1 m), and early-20th-century 10 by 5 feet (3.0 by 1.5 m) models are occasionally also used. WPA professional competition is generally on regulation tables, while the amateur league championships of various leagues, including ACS, BCAPL, VNEA, and APA, use the 7-foot tables, to fit hundreds of them into the hosting venue.

There are seven [solid-colored balls](#) numbered 1 through 7, seven [striped balls](#) numbered 9 through 15, an [8 ball](#), and a [cue ball](#). The balls are usually colored as follows:

- 1 and 9: yellow
- 2 and 10: blue
- 3 and 11: red
- 4 and 12: purple (TV: pink)¹
- 5 and 13: orange
- 6 and 14: green
- 7 and 15: maroon (TV: tan)¹
- 8: black
- Cue: white

¹Special sets designed to be more easily discernible on television substitute a rather light tan shade for the normally darker brown of the 7 and 15 balls, and pink for the dark purple of the 4 and 12; these alternative-color sets are now also available to consumers.

Setup^{[\[edit\]](#)}

To start the game, the [object balls](#) are placed in a triangular [rack](#). The base of the rack is parallel to the [end rail](#) (the short end of the pool table) and positioned so the apex ball of the rack is located on the [foot spot](#). The balls in the rack are ideally placed so that they are all in contact with one another; this is accomplished by pressing the balls together from the back of the rack toward the apex ball. The order of the balls should be random, with the exceptions of the 8 ball, which must be placed in the center of the rack (i.e., the middle of the third row), and the two back corner balls one of which must be a stripe and the other a solid. The cue ball is placed anywhere the breaker desires inside the [kitchen](#).

Break[\[edit\]](#)

One person is chosen (by a predetermined method, e.g., coin flip, win or loss of previous game, or [lag](#)) to shoot first, using the cue ball to [break](#) the object-ball rack apart. If the shooter who breaks fails to make a legal break (usually defined as at least four balls hitting cushions or an object ball being pocketed), then the opponent can call for a [re-rack](#) and become the breaker, or elect to play from the current position of the balls.



Long-exposure photograph of a break in eight-ball

According to World Standardized Rules, if the 8 ball is pocketed on the break without [fouling](#), the breaker may ask for a re-rack and break again, or have the 8 ball [spotted](#) and continue shooting with the balls as they lie. If the breaker scratches (pockets the cue ball) while pocketing the 8 ball on the break, the incoming player may call for a re-rack and break, or have the 8 ball spotted and begin shooting with [ball-in-hand](#) behind the [head string](#), with the balls as they lie. *(For regional amateur variations, such as pocketing the 8 on the break being an instant win or loss, see ["Informal rule variations"](#), [below](#).)*

Turns[\[edit\]](#)

A player (or team) will continue to shoot until committing a [foul](#), or failing to legally pocket an object ball on a non-foul shot (whether [intentionally](#) or not). Thereupon it is the turn of the opposing player(s). Play alternates in this manner for the remainder of the game. Following a foul, the incoming player has [ball-in-hand](#) anywhere on the table, unless the foul occurred on the break shot, as noted previously.^[6]

Selection of the target group[\[edit\]](#)

At some point in the game, one of the players can select balls 1–7 (the "solids") or balls 9–15 (the "stripes") as their group of object balls by legally pocketing a ball from one category. The other player is assigned to the other group. Balls pocketed on the break shot are not used to assign the target groups. Once the target groups have been assigned, they remain fixed throughout the remainder of the game.

Pocketing the 8 ball[\[edit\]](#)

Once all of a player's or team's group of object balls are pocketed, they may attempt to sink the 8 ball. To win, the player (or team) must first designate which pocket they plan to sink the 8 ball into and then successfully pot the 8 ball in that called pocket. If the 8 ball falls into any pocket other than the one designated or is knocked off the table, or a foul (see below) occurs and the 8 ball is pocketed, this results in loss of game. Otherwise, the shooter's turn is simply over, including when a foul such as a scratch occurs on an *unsuccessful* attempt to pocket the 8 ball. In short, a World Standardized Rules game of eight-ball, like a game of nine-ball, is *not* over until the "[money ball](#)" is no longer on the table. This rule is unusual to some bar and league players, because in American, Canadian and many other varieties of [bar pool](#), and in some leagues, such as [APA](#), such a foul is a loss of game. This is not the case in World Standardized Rules, nor in some other leagues that use those rules or a variant of them, e.g. [VNEA](#) beginning with the 2008/2009 season, [BCAPL](#), and [USAPL](#).

Winning[\[edit\]](#)

Any of the following results in a game win:

- A player legally pockets the 8 ball into a designated pocket, after all of that player's object balls have been pocketed
- The opposing player illegally pockets the 8 ball (e.g. before clearing all of that player's object balls, does so on the same shot as the last such object ball, or the 8 falls into a pocket other than the one that was designated)
- The opposing player knocks the 8 ball off the table.
- The opposing player commits any foul, including scratching the cue ball into a pocket, or knocking it off the table, in the course of a shot that pockets the 8 ball. (As noted above, a scratch or other foul while shooting for the 8 ball is *not* a loss of the game if the 8 is not pocketed or jumped from the table.)

Fouls[\[edit\]](#)

- The shooter fails to strike one of their own object balls (or the 8 ball, if all of said object balls are already pocketed) with the cue ball, before other balls (if any) are contacted by the cue ball. This excludes "[split](#)" shots, where the cue ball strikes one of the shooter's and one of the opponent's object balls simultaneously.
- No ball comes into contact with a cushion or is pocketed, after legal cue ball contact with the (first) object ball (or 8 ball, if shooting for the 8).
- If an attempt is made to pocket a ball, and the ball hits the pocket, bounces out and lands on the ground, the ball is placed in the pocket and the game continues.
- The shooter does not have at least one foot on the floor (this requirement may be waived if the shooter is [disabled](#) in a relevant way, or the venue has not provided a [mechanical bridge](#))

- The cue ball is shot before all balls have come to a complete stop from the previous shot
- The cue ball is struck more than once during a shot
- The cue ball is jumped entirely or partially over an obstructing ball with an illegal jump shot that scoops under the cue ball
- The cue ball is clearly pushed (shoved slowly, rather than struck), with the cue tip remaining in contact with it more than momentarily
- The shooter touches the cue ball with something other than the tip of the cue
- The shooter touches any ball (with body, clothing or equipment), other than as necessary to move the cue ball when the player has *ball-in-hand*
- The shooter knocks a ball off the table
- The shooter has shot out-of-turn
- On the break shot, no balls are pocketed and fewer than four balls reach the cushions (in which case the incoming player can demand a re-rack and take the break or force the original breaker to re-break, or may take ball-in-hand behind the *head string* and shoot the balls as they lie)

United States^[edit]



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Most commonly of all in American *bar pool*, it is sometimes required that all shots be *called in detail*, as to what balls and bank/kick cushions will be involved in the shot, with the shot considered a turn-ending (but not ball-in-hand) foul if not executed precisely as planned (and a loss of game if the "foul" shot pocketed the 8 ball).^[10] Contrariwise, some Americans hold that nothing other than the 8 ball has to be called in any way – i.e., that "*slop*" counts.

In informal amateur play in most areas, the table will only be considered open if no balls were pocketed, or an equal number of stripes and solids were pocketed, or the cue ball was *scratched* (into a pocket or off the table), on the *break*; if an odd number of balls were legally pocketed, such as one solid and two stripes, or no solids and one stripe, the breaker must shoot the balls that were pocketed in the greatest quantity (stripes in these examples). The table is almost never considered so *open* as for it to be legal to use a ball of the opposite *su*it, much less the 8 ball, as the first ball in a combination shot while the table is open (despite this being perfectly legal in WPA World Standardized and many US league rules). In non-*money games* it is fairly common for a foul break in which the rack was not struck at all (e.g., due to a *miscue*) to be re-shot by the original breaker.

Fouls, in common bar pool, that are not cue ball scratches generally only cause loss of turn, with cue ball left in place (even if it is *hooked*). Even in the case of a scratch, this only results in *ball-in-hand behind the head string*. Regionally, there is a great deal of bar pool variation in the handling of fouls while shooting at and/or pocketing the 8 ball. In some cases any foul while shooting at but not pocketing the 8 is a loss of game, in others only a foul while otherwise successfully pocketing the 8, and in yet others only certain fouls, such as also sinking an opponent's ball or touching the 8 ball and scratching.

What is considered a foul further diverges from established, published rulesets. Scoop-under *jump shots* are usually considered valid (these are fouls in WPA and most league rules, as they are *double-hits*, though few players realize it). When a cue ball is frozen or near-frozen to an object ball, shooting it

dead-on, in line with both balls, is a foul in formal rulesets (as another kind of double-hit), but is generally tolerated in bar pool.

Other US bar pool oddities varying from area to area include: Knocking the cue ball off the table on the break may be an instant loss; scratching on the break may be an instant loss; pocketing the 8 ball on the break (without scratching) may be either an instant win or instant loss (the latter being a rare variant); no safeties may be allowed at all – all shots may be required to be at least vaguely plausible attempts to pocket a legal ball; all jump shots may be banned; *massé* shots may be banned; it may be illegal to use the 8 ball in any way in combinations, caroms or kisses; the 8 ball may be required to be pocketed "cleanly" in the sense of no contact with other object balls (even if the *kiss* shot can be accurately called); failure to hit one of one's own object balls (or the 8 if shooting for the 8) may be considered a "table scratch" that gives the opponent a shot in-hand from behind the head string; failure to hit the 8 if shooting for the 8 may be a loss of game; and a "split" shot, where the cue ball appears to simultaneously strike a legal ball and an opponent's object ball, may be considered a legal shot, as long as it is called as a split shot, and the hit is in fact simultaneous to the naked eye.

"*Bank-the-8*" is a common American amateur variation, especially on coin-operated *bar tables* (because it usually makes the game last longer), in which the 8 ball must be *banked* off one or more *cushions* (*kick shots* may also qualify in some versions), into the *called pocket*; either player may suggest bank-the-eight at any time before or during the game, and the other may accept or refuse; all other rules apply as usual. Playing bank-the-eight may be considered rude if there is a long line of players waiting to use the table.

A similarly motivated variant is "*last-pocket*", in which the 8 ball must be pocketed in the same pocket as the shooting player's last object ball (i.e., each player may be said to eventually "own" a pocket in which their 8 ball shot must be played if they have already run out their *suit*); all other rules apply as usual. This variant is popular in Mexico.

Due probably to the influence of *nine-ball*, in which the 1 ball *must* be the apex ball of the rack, most American bar players traditionally rack a game of eight-ball with the 1 ball in this position. Racking is also typically done solid-stripe-solid-stripe-solid along the two sides of the rack, resulting in solids being on all three corners. This is not a legal rack in World Standardized Rules, nor any other notable league ruleset other than *APA*.