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## Allocation Of Handicap Strokes

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**Where Strokes Are Allocated On The Scorecard Can Often Lead To Long Arguments On The Golf Course. Part Of The Reason For This Is The Misconception Of Why The Strokes Are Allocated In The First Place.**

Strokes can be allocated based on match play or on stroke play. The majority of golf clubs allocate strokes based on match play, where strokes are given or received between players or teams in the same group (singles match play, four-ball match play, etc.). In match play, golfers are competing against another player or team on a hole-by-hole basis, so they receive strokes during the course of play as a way to equalize their differences in abilities. Because of this, the stroke hole allocation should not be based on the difficulty of a hole, but rather where players with higher handicaps need strokes in order to obtain a half in match play.

When allocating handicap stroke holes for stroke play or Stableford formats, the allocation should be based on the difficulty of each hole relative to par, as players are either competing against the field (not just one opponent or team) or scoring points on a hole based on a fixed score, usually par.

The USGA recommendation for determining stroke allocation involves collecting scores from players of varying handicaps. For match play, the focus is to determine which holes create the largest "spread" of scores for players of different abilities and then applying some slight adjustments (such as allocating odd and even strokes to opposite nines) to distribute strokes over 18 holes better. For stroke play or Stableford, the focus is to compare scoring averages for players across the spectrum of handicaps to par, which provides a fixed standard to evaluate the order of holes where strokes are needed in relation to the field or the course itself.

"Section 17" of "The USGA Handicap System" addresses all the USGA recommendations for allocating handicap strokes and can be found on the USGA website here:

<http://www.usga.org/Rule-Books/Handicap-System-Manual/Rule-17/>.

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