

Your Handicap Index® is converted into a Course Handicap™ every time you play; even at your home course from the tees you usually play. One common thought by some players is that a player establishes a Handicap Index from a given golf course or a particular set of tees. Actually, each time a player posts a score the following formula is used:

Handicap Differential = (Adjusted Gross Score - USGA Course Rating) x 113 / USGA Slope Rating.

Section 3-5 must be used in most forms of play anytime there is a difference of .5 or more in the Course Rating. Section 3-5 of 'the USGA Handicap System' manual can be found here: <http://www.usga.org/Rule-Books/Handicap-System-Manual/Rule-03/>

Different tees usually have different Ratings. Because a USGA Course Rating reflects the probable score of a scratch golfer, the higher-rated course is more difficult, and the player playing from the set of tees with the higher USGA Course Rating receives additional stroke(s) equal to the difference between each USGA Course Rating, with .5 or greater rounded upward. The additional stroke(s) are added to the Course Handicap of the player playing from the higher-rated set of tees.

How to Properly Apply Section 3-5:

Step 1: Calculate Course Handicap from tees played:
Handicap Index x Slope Rating of tees played, and then divided by 113.

Step 2: Apply any handicap allowance per Section 9-4 (if applicable).

Step 3: Calculate the difference in USGA Course Rating from tees played, with any difference of .5 or greater rounded upward.

Add the extra handicap strokes from step 3 to the Course Handicap of the player playing from the tees with the higher USGA Course Rating. **Alternatively, it is permissible to subtract the extra handicap strokes from the Course Handicap of the player playing from the tees with the lower USGA Course Rating.**

The USGA believes that players should play from any set of tees that they wish. Tees do not have gender or ability level stamped on them. Section 3-5 of "The USGA Handicap System" allows for a fair match or competition when players play from any set of tees, regardless of ability level or gender.

The Course Handicap formula, as mentioned above in Step 1, only uses the Slope Rating. The adjustment for the USGA Course Rating is necessary to keep the competitions equitable. The point that most people don't understand is that your Course Handicap represents the number of strokes that you need to adjust yourself back to the USGA Course Rating (not par). If two players who are playing from different sets of tees both play exactly to their handicap (USGA Course Rating + Course Handicap) then their NET scores will still differ by the difference in each USGA Course Rating. This is not equitable. If both players play exactly to their handicap, then the result should be a tie. To make the competition equitable, you must adjust both players to the same level (the USGA Course Rating from one set of tees.)

Please note the following Decisions:

3-5/1. Adjusting for the Difference in USGA Course Rating between Two Sets of Tees when Most of the Field is Playing from the Higher-rated Set of Tees

Q: When adjusting for the difference in USGA Course Rating between two sets of tees, a player playing from the higher-rated set of tees must add the difference in USGA Course Rating to the player's Course Handicap. In a competition with a field of 100 players, in which 88 are playing the back tees and 12 are playing the forward tees, instead of adding the difference in USGA Course Rating to the Course Handicap of each of the 88 players, could the committee subtract it from the Course Handicap of the 12 players playing the lower-rated set of tees?

A: Yes. The committee may subtract the difference in rating in such cases since the overall effect will be the same.

3-5/2. May a Golf Club Choose Not to Follow Section 3-5 of the USGA Handicap System

Q: May golf clubs choose not to follow Section 3-5 of The USGA Handicap System manual if the club's groups are competing from different tees?

A: No. Not applying Section 3-5 of The USGA Handicap System when players are competing from different tees would be waiving a Rule of Golf, and the committee in charge of a competition does not have the authority to waive a Rule of Golf.

Lastly, please visit the following links for further information:

http://www.usga.org/playing/handicaps/calculator/course_handicap_calculator.asp

<http://www.usga.org/ourexpertsexplain.aspx?id=2147496647>

http://www.usga.org/handicapping/articles_resources/USGA-s-Position-Paper-on-Competing-From-Different-Tees/

http://www.usga.org/HandicapFAQ/handicap_answer.asp?FAQidx=6