How do your scores change your Handicap Index®?

The USGA Handicap System™ enables golfers of all skill levels to compete on a more even basis. Each golfer can calculate a personal Handicap Index®, which can be used to determine the number of strokes that can be subtracted from the golfer’s score on a particular course (course handicap). It’s based on how well you play — a good scratch golfer may have a course handicap of 0, while a bogey golfer may have a course handicap of 20. In this activity, you’ll investigate how golf scores work by playing a made-up game for a real course.

What Do You Need?

- Paper
- Pencil

Course and Slope Ratings for a Golf Course

This activity is adapted from NBC Learn: Science of Golf, “Calculating a Golf Handicap Index” (www.nbclearn.com/science-of-golf)
What Do You Do?

1. Decide whether you will be a scratch golfer or a bogey golfer. Also decide whether you will “play” from the forward (easiest), middle, or back (hardest) tee position.

2. On the blank score card, make up golf scores for yourself for a full round (18 holes) for 10 days. Imagine you have both good and bad days, so that your scores vary.

3. Add up the total score for each day in the gross score column.

4. Find the five lowest total scores and calculate the handicap differential for each one. Use the course and slope rating numbers from the same tee position for all of them.

5. After calculating the differentials, find the lowest one. Use that to calculate the Handicap Index®.

6. Once you know the Handicap Index®, subtract that number from each gross score, and put the new scores in the net score column.

Formulas

To find the handicap differential, use the formula:

\[
\text{handicap differential} = \frac{(\text{gross score} - \text{course rating}) \times 113}{\text{slope rating}}
\]

- Take your gross score and subtract the course rating.
- Multiply the result by the standard slope rating of 113.
- Divide by the slope rating for the specific course you played.
- Round to the nearest tenth.

To find the Handicap Index®, continue with the formula:

\[
\text{Handicap Index®} = \text{handicap differential} \times 0.96
\]
What Happens?

Use the score card to record your results, and make more as needed.

What Does it Mean?

- What did you learn about the USGA Handicap System™?

- What effect does it have on the game of golf?

Challenge!

Figure out how your Handicap Index® would change if you used the same scores, but the course and slope ratings from a different tee position.

Find Out More

- Read Key Concepts at the back of this toolkit.

- Read Handicap: Background Information.

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This chart is adapted from Merion Golf Club, East Course, Haverford, PA.

Add this chart to your Test Lab Log!