8-ball and 9-ball rules summary

from "The Illustrated Principles of Pool and Billiards"
by David G. Alciatore, PhD ("Dr. Dave")
billiards.colostate.edu

Presented below is a concise summary of the "official rules of pool," based on the World Standardized Rules published by the World Pool-Billiard Association (WPA).

Figure 1 illustrates the required features of 8-ball and 9-ball racks. In **8-ball**, all 15 balls are used, and in **9-ball** only the balls numbered 1 through 9 are used. In an 8-ball rack, the only requirements are that the 8-ball must be in the center, one corner ball must be a **solid** (balls 1 through 7), and the other corner ball must be a **stripe** (balls 9 through 15). The remaining balls should be distributed randomly (i.e., solids or stripes should not be clustered together), although this is not a requirement. In a 9-ball rack, the only requirements are that the 1-ball must be in front and the 9-ball must be in the center. The objective of 8-ball is to pocket all of one of the groups (solids or stripes) and then pocket the 8-ball. In 9-ball, the objective is to pocket the 9-ball with the restriction that the lowest numbered ball on the table must always be struck first.

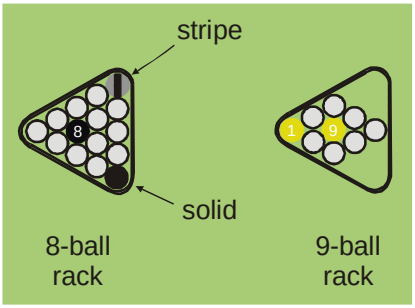


Figure 1 Proper 8-ball and 9-ball racks

The general rules that apply to both 8-ball and 9-ball include the following:

1. On the **break**, the first shot of the game, the cue ball must be played from behind the head string (i.e., in the "kitchen"). If an object ball is pocketed on the break, you get to continue with your turn, unless you **scratch** (i.e., you pocket the cue ball) on the break.

2. For a **legal shot**, the cue ball must contact a legal object ball first (see the specifics for 8-ball and 9-ball that follow); then, if an object ball is not pocketed, a ball (the cue ball or any object ball) must contact a cushion. If the first object ball contacted by the cue ball is frozen to a cushion, and nothing is pocketed, a ball must still hit a cushion after the frozen ball leaves the cushion.

3. Any of the following is considered a **foul**:

   a. the cue tip hits the cue ball more than once.

   b. the cue ball is pushed by the cue stick (i.e., the cue tip remains in contact with the cue ball much longer than with a normal impact stroke). There is an exception to this rule if the cue ball is touching (i.e., frozen to) an object ball. In this case, it is legal to hit the cue ball with a normal stroke, even though the cue stick will push the cue ball.

c. anything other than the cue tip (hand, clothing, cue stick, mechanical bridge, etc.) touches or moves any ball. The only ball contact allowed during a shot is a single hit of the cue tip onto the cue ball during stroke impact. NOTE – in some leagues and tournaments, only "cue ball fouls" are penalized. In this case if you accidentally touch or move a ball other than the cue ball, there is no penalty. However, your opponent has the option to return any improperly moved balls back to their original locations.

d. neither foot is in contact with the floor during cue ball impact.

e. the cue ball is jumped illegally, where the cue ball is struck far below center to lift it off the table surface with a miscue stick assist (e.g., to clear an obstacle ball). A **legal jump shot** requires that the cue ball be struck downward with an elevated cue so the cue ball bounces off the slate.

f. the cue ball or any object ball is driven (jumped) off the table, coming to rest off the playing surface (e.g., on the floor). Object balls driven off are not returned to the table and are considered pocketed (except the 8-ball or 9-ball per the specific rules that follow). NOTE – in some leagues and tournaments, object balls driven off the table (except the 8-ball in the game of 8-ball) must be **spotted** (returned to the table). To spot a ball, you place it on the foot spot if no other balls are in the way. If other balls occupy the foot spot space, you place the ball as close as possible directly behind the foot spot.

4. You relinquish control of the table (i.e., you end your "turn") when you fail to pocket an object ball on a legal shot, commit a foul, or scratch.

5. A scratch, foul, or illegal shot results in **ball-in-hand**, where your opponent can place the cue ball anywhere on the table in preparation for the next shot. The only exception to this is the break (see the 8-ball and 9-ball differences that follow).

<u>Additional rules specific to the game of 8-ball include:</u>

6. If you scratch on the break, your opponent can place the cue ball anywhere behind the head string (i.e., "in the kitchen"); and in executing the next shot, the cue ball must cross the head string before contacting any object ball.

7. If the 8-ball is pocketed on the break, the breaker (or the opponent in the event of a scratch) has the option to re-rack and break again or to have the 8-ball spotted. NOTE – in some leagues and tournaments, you win the game if you pocket the 8-ball on the break and do not scratch, and you lose the game if you pocket the 8-ball and scratch. This rule modification is appropriate on coin-operated tables where all pocketed balls are captured.

8. The table is considered **open** after the break, even if balls are pocketed on the break. In other words, solids or stripes are not yet chosen or designated. A group (solids or stripes) is assigned to a player only when he or she legally pockets a called ball in the group without a scratch or foul. When the table is "open," any ball except the 8-ball may be struck by the cue ball first in making a legal called shot (e.g., you can hit a "solid" first to pocket a called "stripe" when the table is "open").

9. Once the groups (solids or stripes) have been assigned (i.e., when the table is no longer open), for a shot to be legal the cue ball must contact a ball in the assigned group first.

10. A pocketed ball must be **called**, by designating the ball and intended pocket (e.g., "2-ball in the corner pocket"), unless it is totally obvious. The manner by which the ball reaches the pocket is of no consequence, provided the shot is legal. In other words, you do not need to specify rail contact, caroms, etc.

11. If an object ball other than the intended (called) ball is pocketed, it remains pocketed, regardless of whether or not the called ball is pocketed. However, if the object ball being called is not pocketed in the called pocket, you release control of the table. NOTE – in some leagues and tournaments, objects balls pocketed by accident when the called ball is not pocketed are spotted. However, this rule modification cannot be enforced on coin-operated tables that capture all pocketed balls.

12. Normally, when you make a legal shot, your "turn" continues. An exception is when you declare "**safety**" before executing the shot. Whether or not you pocket an object ball, you return control of the table to your opponent after the shot. The term "safety" is used because this practice is generally used to leave the cue ball in a difficult position for your opponent, which is safe for you.

13. You win the game when you pocket all of the balls in your assigned group and then pocket the 8-ball without scratching or committing a foul.

14. You lose the game if you:

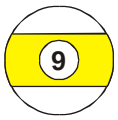
    a. foul or scratch when pocketing the 8-ball (except on the break). NOTE – in some leagues and tournaments, a scratch or foul in a failed attempt to pocket the 8-ball also results in a loss.

    b. drive (jump) the 8-ball off the table at any time.

    c. pocket the 8-ball before pocketing all of the balls in your group.

    d. pocket the 8-ball in the wrong (non called) pocket.

<u>Additional rules specific to the game of 9-ball include:</u>



15. If you scratch on the break, your opponent gets ball-in-hand.

16. On the first shot after the break, the player at the table (the breaker if a ball was pocketed; otherwise the opponent) has the option to "**push out**," where the cue ball can be hit anywhere, with or without contact with object balls or rails. The opponent then has the option of shooting next or returning control to the push-out player. The purpose for the push-out is to give the player some choice of whether or not to face the somewhat random post-break table.

17. You win the game when you pocket the 9-ball, at any time, even on the break, provided the lowest numbered ball on the table is contacted first. NOTE – in some leagues and tournaments, pocketing the 9-ball on the break does not result in victory. Instead, the 9-ball is spotted and the game continues.

18. No balls need to be called. In slang terms, "**slop**" or "**trash**" (making a ball by accident) counts. NOTE – in some leagues and tournaments, the 9-ball must be called, and spotted if it is pocketed without being called.

19. If the 9-ball is driven (jumped) off the table, it is spotted.

20. If you scratch or commit a foul when you pocket the 9-ball, it is spotted.

21. If you commit a foul on three consecutive shots, you lose the game.

The rules summary presented above is far from complete, but it covers most of the situations that come up in normal play.