

SEBA Umpire Handbook

The Basics

- I. The umpire is the authority figure. If you look the part and act the part, you'll get treated the way you should be: with respect. This starts the minute you show up at the field. The basics of umpiring are very simple:
 - a. Look professional
 - i. An umpire shirt will be provided and must be worn. An umpire who takes pride in his appearance also takes pride in his game. Respect is all about perception.
 - b. Act professional
 - i. Know the rules.
 - ii. Show up on time.
 - iii. Take charge: your authority is assumed to act that way. You are the umpire. You are in charge.
 - iv. Be pleasant. Be polite. But, be firm and confident out there.
 - v. Take your time on calls: Pause-read-react. There is nothing to be gained by rushing, except trouble.
 - vi. Your calls: Make 'em loud and make 'em proud – everyone has a right to know what your call is.
 - vii. Don't hesitate. The best way to avoid confrontations is to be in the correct position to make the right call, and to "sell" close plays with confident verbal and hand signals. Don't show off though, you are not the show.
 - viii. Don't argue. Listen to reason, but be firm. If you are sure you made the right call, say so, and move on with the game. If you are not sure, listen, use your best judgment, make the call, and move on.
 - ix. Don't be afraid to confer with your partner if you are not sure of something.
 - x. If a manager asks you to check with your partner, do it, but remember it's still your call.
 - xi. Even professionals make mistakes: treat each call as a new one. Don't try to "even things up" if you blow a call.
 - xii. Be a team out there: support your partner. Don't change his calls; you aren't supposed to. If you think your partner missed something, when the play is over, call time and go to your partner first away from the players and coaches. Talk it over. Get it right. Then, whoever made the initial call, announce clearly what the call is now.
 - xiii. Smile and be nice – it goes a long way towards making things run smoothly.
 - xiv. Always watch the BALL, and you will likely not miss an important play.
 - xv. Don't let inane comments bother you. Parents, and coaches will usually say things like "that looked close" and the like, but they are not meant to undermine your authority. Save your 'authority' for prevention of direct, mean spirited, or repeatedly disruptive personal attacks.
 - xvi. Never hover around a particular dugout, or mingle too closely with players and spectators, as this will cause problems. You don't want it to look like you favor one team or the other.
 - xvii. NEVER get into a shouting match with a spectator. Go to the offender's team manager, and politely ask him to control his parent(s).

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xviii. Always make calls with clear, firm decisiveness, and confidence.

II. Before the game

- a. Get to the game on time. Show up early (at least 15 minutes).
- b. Confer with your partner, if you have one.
- c. Make sure the managers have the field prepared on time.
- d. Have a plate conference. Introduce yourself to the managers, and learn their names. It is easier to have a discussion later if you refer to each other by name.
- e. Go over the ground rules at the plate conference: things like where dead ball territory is, keep gates closed, if there are holes in the fence what will happen if the ball goes through.
- f. Make sure the players are properly equipped and ready to play.
- g. Start on time.

III. During the game

- a. Help keep the game moving. Hustle the players into position and back to the dugout, including warming up pitchers.
- b. Stay near the plate during warm-ups, but out of the way near the backstop.
- c. Keep warm-up pitches to no more than 8 for a new pitcher, 5 for a returning one.
- d. Let the catcher get in position first, and then you set up.
- e. Keep equipment off the field. This means bats, balls, buckets, catcher's gear, etc. If you see it on the field during play, wait until the play finishes. Call time and have the equipment removed.
- f. Keep the players in the dugouts when they aren't on the field. The dugouts are for players, managers, and coaches only.

IV. After the Game

- a. As soon as the game is over, give the baseballs back to the manager who gave them to you.
- b. Put the equipment back clean in the umpire shed.
- c. Report any broken equipment to the UIC immediately.
- d. If there has been controversy during the game, you'll need to report it. It will eventually have to be in writing, but first talk to the site supervisor.

Umpire Signaling

I. PAUSE - READ – REACT

- a. Remember in each of these calls timing is everything. Selling the call is a matter of the game situation and each umpire will respond differently. There is nothing wrong with putting a little extra on the gesture and voice, in fact it is an important part of the game. In time each umpire develops his or her own personal sense of rhythm and timing, style and flair.

II. Play

- a. Along with strike and ball, this is the one call the plate umpire will make most often during a game. Pointing at the pitcher (or the plate) with the right hand and calling "play." The call is essential for the batter and catcher. The gesture is essential for the pitcher, defense and offense.

III. Strike

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- a. Always signaled with the right hand, each umpire develops a personalized system for signaling the strike.
- IV. Ball
- a. Never signaled. The general preference is that the verbal signal "ball" loud enough that both dugouts can hear it. Calling "Ball One," "Ball Two," etc. allows you to maintain the rhythm of your calls.
- V. TIME!
- a. Raising both hands into the air and calling in a loud voice "TIME!" All umpires on the field will immediately signal the time call. Sometimes the call must be made several times in order to shut things down. Once time is called every effort must be made by all umpires to stop the action-taking place. Umpires learn that there are many moments when time is out, and it has not been called. This is normal in the course of a game as the umpires change their field positions, players repair equipment, or hundreds of other reasons. It may be the simple lifting of the hands communication between crewmembers, or the plate umpire holding the stop hand up. Not all "t"ime is big-"T"ime.
- VI. The Count
- a. Balls are signaled using the left hand. Strikes are signaled using the right hand. Both hands extend to shoulder level at the same moment. A full count is always signaled as "three balls, two strikes" and never signaled using clenched fists. The count is relayed back to the pitcher after every pitch and a verbal report is made usually after the second or third pitch and from that point on. The count is always read aloud as "two balls, two strikes" and not "two and two" or "twenty-two" or other similar variation.
- VII. Safe
- a. Both left and right arms are raised together, to shoulder level, in front of the umpire and then a sweeping motion is performed over, parallel to the ground, palms down. The verbal call of "safe" may be made. To complete the call you normally return to the set position. To sell a safe call you might consider doing it two or three times in rapid succession. It is not always necessary to even make the sign or call. If the play is obvious, do nothing.
- VIII. Out!
- a. The clenched right fist and a short hammered motion seem to be favored by most umpires. Again, personal style is acceptable as long as it does not distract you from seeing any further plays taking place. Check that the fielder is really in possession of the ball. The signal can be made with only a gesture or can be sold with a loud call of "He's Out!" or "She's Out!" Signal every out.
- IX. On the tag!
- a. Point at the runner with the left hand; signal the out with the right hand. Complete the sign by saying "On the tag, he's out!" if you want to sell it a touch. (Remember you are the umpire, not the color commentator.)
- X. Missed the tag!
- a. A "selling it" call that occurs when a runner slides under the tag or the tag is high. You can save some grief by indicating a loud "Safe, he missed the tag!" and following it with a

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tapping motion where the tag was. Everyone will know you saw the tag and most will assume the runner had the bag before it.

- XI. Fair Ball
 - a. The right hand points into the field in fair territory. There is no call "Fair" ever made.
- XII. Foul Ball
 - a. The same signal as "Time" but the call becomes "Foul." Umpires often add a point into foul territory with one hand after giving the time signal. Once verbalized, this call sticks. The base umpire needs to pay specific attention to a ball hitting the batter in the batter's box. If the batter has not moved the base umpire will immediately call "Foul." If the batter is in motion the base umpire must delay to see if the plate umpire is going to make a call. Only if the plate umpire is silent, and the base umpire is certain the batter contacted the ball outside of the batter's box would the base umpire signal "Time, that's interference, the batter is out!" otherwise the call is "Foul!"
- XIII. No Pitch The same signal as "Time" but the call becomes "No Pitch." If you are the plate umpire, step away from the plate. It can be helpful to repeat "No Pitch".

