

50 tips for the new umpire, in no particular order...

1. **Clear the Catcher.** On a pitch that gets by the catcher, you must clear the catcher and keep your eye on the ball. A common mistake made by amateur umpires is to remain in one spot and focus on the runners stealing bases. *Nothing can happen without the ball!* You must turn, back off from the plate and watch the ball. You must watch for the possibility of the ball going out of play, or the chance of a lodged ball. Watching the passed ball allows you to keep out of the catcher's way, if he chooses to throw the ball to somebody to make a play on a runner. Let the ball lead you to the play. Finally, youth league batters often have the bad habit of backing out of the box on a wild pitch when they shouldn't. You have to watch the catcher's attempt to throw out a runner to rule on any possible interference by the batter.
2. **Don't say "Ball four, take your base!"** Saying this helps the offense. It is actually a form of coaching! As an umpire, you would never shout to a runner to slide or get back. When it is a ball four, **don't point to first base, either.** Most of the players know where it is. Your pointing arm could be confused as a strike gesture. Just say, "Ball," or, "Ball four."
3. **Never say "Strike three, you're out!"** Everyone knows he's out when you say strike three, adding the, "You're out" at the end of it is sticking it up his rear end, and also may get you in trouble. When the ball is not caught by the catcher, it might be strike three, but the batter may not be out until the catcher tags the batter or throws to first base. If you say, "He's out," prematurely, you might kill a viable play.
4. **Always put the ball back in play when there are runners on base.** After any dead ball situation, (i.e. foul, requested time-out, ball out of play, etc.) always verbally *command* and *physically* signal the pitcher to play. This is imperative when runners are on base as it prevents any misunderstanding when the defense attempts a play on a runner with a dead ball. It is not imperative with no runners on base; however, if you get into the habit of doing it all the time as a new umpire, it will be easier to tone it down later in your career.
5. **Insist that the ball be made live properly.** To make the ball live, the ball must be given to the pitcher, and the catcher and batter must be ready. As soon those conditions are met, put the ball back in play.
6. **Hold up the anxious pitcher.** Don't let a pitcher go into any pitching motion when the ball is dead. He must wait until you put the ball back in play. Explain to the pitcher that he must watch YOU and wait for the signal and command to play before he can pitch. If he does pitch, it does not count.
7. **Dress the part.** All of the players come out in their game uniforms. So should you. Walk onto the field looking like the game is important enough to *you* to dress properly for it. You don't want to appear like you just stopped off to ump the game while on your way to the beach.

8. **Look out for your partner.** As a plate umpire, never put the ball back in play until you are sure your base umpire(s) is ready. Especially at the beginning of an inning, your partner may have run to get a jacket from his bag behind the backstop, or he might be answering nature's call in the port-a-john. It is very embarrassing to have the lead-off batter of an inning ground-out to first base when nobody is there to make the call! While we're on this subject, do not point to your partner at the start of the game or inning to see if he is ready. Simply look down and see if he is ready. Give a little head nod if you'd like, but get rid of the point if you use it.
9. **Your palm means "time."** When a plate umpire holds up his hand(s) in the "stop" gesture, it means "time." The ball is dead, and any play or pitch is nullified. If you hold up your hand, you must then put the ball back in play. Don't say "pitch," "OK," "Go!" etc.; just say "play!"
10. **Keep the game moving between innings.** The pitcher is allowed 8 warm-up throws within one minute. (*Rule 8.03*) Some local leagues allow fewer warm-ups. Be reasonable, but firm. Don't let a team waste your time.
11. **Don't "shut down."** Shutting down, is the blunder of taking your attention away from a play too soon. This is a common mistake made by amateur umpires after a safe call, and usually at first base.

Example: The runner beats out a play on him at first. He is called safe. Immediately after making the call, the base umpire turns away and heads for his "B" position and misses something that happens after the play.

There are many things a runner can do that can get him tagged out *after* he gets there safely. When you call him safe, stay right there for a second or two and watch! When you do head into the infield, keep your eyes on the ball and the runner. He might fake at going to second base, or the defense might be attempting the hidden ball trick.

12. **Don't give time to fielders unless it is absolutely necessary.** Under normal game circumstances, fielders might ask you for time before throwing the ball back to the pitcher. Granting that fielder's request for time deprives the offense from benefiting from a possible wild throw. Don't give them time. Aside from a player's injury, lost contact lens, or some other special case, don't get into the habit of giving fielders time out when it isn't necessary.
13. **Don't be too quick to give time to runners.** Runners love to ask for time after sliding into a base. Since you're such a nice guy, you'll be inclined to grant it on the spot. However, you should develop the reflex to first quickly survey *all* the bases for any other possible movement or plays on other runners. If there are any other runners still moving on the bases, don't give time until all play has come to a natural end. If you call time while runners are moving, you've got to send them back! Even when you explain to

the offensive manager that HIS runner asked for the time, he'll tell you, "So! You didn't have to give it to him!" He is right.

14. **Don't let the fielders distract you.** When at position "B" or "C" on a regulation field (90' baselines) you might sometimes set yourself directly in the way of the shortstop or second baseman. If one of them calls, "Can you move over?" Fight the urge to turn around and look where he is. That's exactly the time the pitcher will balk, or attempt a pick-off at first base and you'll miss it. If a fielder asks you to move, just quickly slide over two steps to one side without response or averting your eyes from where you're looking. Similarly, if you're asked for the count, just put out your fingers so that it can be seen from behind you.
15. **Tell the PU it's OK to play.** Whenever a base umpire grants a time-out, he should communicate to the PU when the game can resume. As soon as the need for the time-out is over, the BU should hustle to his proper position (A, B, or C), and gesture (eye contact or a simple head nod will suffice, see #8 on this list) to his partner behind the plate that he can call "play" as soon as he is ready.
16. **Don't look at your indicator.** Looking at your ball/strike indicator, especially while resetting it, is a perfect time to get burned by a sudden pick-off attempt, or a quick-pitch, that you'll miss. Don't be distracted by the indicator, only *glance* at it. Reset it while *not looking* at it, and then glance again to make sure it's 0-0. If you must look at it when the ball is live, don't look down at it, *hold it up at your eye level*. Glance over at it while you're still watching the field.
17. **A foul tip is never a foul ball.** A foul tip is always caught by the catcher and it is live! Runners may advance on a foul tip. If the tipped ball is not caught by the catcher, it is a foul ball and it is a dead ball. An umpire should never declare, "Foul tip!" when it happens because the very mention of the word *foul* will cause runners to stop running and confuse everybody. On a foul tip, make the tip mechanic and do not say anything.
18. **Appeals:** The ball *must be live* to make an appeal (unless it happens at the end of an inning.) Therefore, runners can steal and advance during an appeal. Only fielders, not coaches, may ask for and make the appeal. If a fielder asks for time, and you grant it, then he makes an appeal, do not rule on it! Say something like, "I will rule on the appeal when the ball is properly made live." If the defense appeals an infraction by a runner *still on base*, they may also choose to tag the runner, instead of the base. Calling for, and receiving "time" *does not* nullify a team's opportunity to make the appeal when the ball becomes live.
19. **Ignore spectators.** Try not to react to spectator's shouts or questions. Don't give the count or the number of outs when a fan hollers at you for it. Allowing the spectators to communicate with you is a source of distraction that could cause you to miss a play. If fans are shouting discourteous comments about you or anyone else on the field, send a coach of the appropriate team to handle the problem.

20. **Don't accept a replacement baseball while the game ball is live.** At youth league games, often fans, coaches or players chase down a foul ball that has gone out of play. They're anxious to get it back to you and you're anxious to get it back. Don't allow yourself to be distracted by the helpful person returning the ball. If you hear, "Hey, here's that foul ball." Don't turn to accept it or even acknowledge the person until the ball is dead. Politely remind the helper to wait for a time-out next time.
21. **When you're not sure, sell the call!** From time to time, you'll see a tag or a force play where it was so close that you are not 100% sure if the runner is safe or out. If it was that close, then nobody else will be sure either. Make a decision, and make an emphatic call and animated mechanic. If you seem absolutely sure of your call, then people watching may be *sold* on it and it may save you an argument.
22. **Read the rule book often.** Then, re-read the rule book often. Look for opportunities to work with and discuss rules and game situations with more experienced umpires.
23. **Never verbally call a fair ball.** When you rule on a batted ball as fair or foul, only holler if you have a foul ball. Calling, "Foul!" kills the play and the runners will know to stop advancing. When a hit is fair, simply point. If you holler, "Fair Ball!" it can very likely cause confusion. In the clamor of any possible base hit, the word *fair* can sound just like *foul*. Players quickly learn to assume the ball is fair until they hear the ump cry, "Foul!"
24. **Park near your partner.** Since you will usually have some dressing and undressing to do, park next to your partner and begin your pre-game conference right there. After the game, you will be less likely to be annoyed by a disgruntled parent if you are not alone, but engaged in conversation with your partner as you both are undressing behind your cars.
25. **Walk onto and off of the field with your partner.** You and your partner are the third team on the field. It looks very professional to arrive onto the field together. If you are early, wait in the parking lot for your partner to arrive (see #24.) Similarly, when the game is over, leave the field together as well. You'll be less likely to be bothered by parents while on your way to the parking lot.
26. **Ask your partner to critique you.** Before every game, regardless of your partner's level of experience, ask him to watch you. Since many guys will not offer advice unless asked for, *ask for it!* Tell him to let you know, after the game, what he thought of your mechanics, timing, rulings, etc. If you're less experienced than him, it will be a great learning opportunity for you. If you're more experienced, it will encourage your "rookie" partner to ask questions and give him an opportunity to learn from you. He just might give you a new idea, too!
27. **Be pleasant, but firm.** Many umpires make the mistake of trying to either be everybody's friend or Mr. Nasty. You can never please everybody as an umpire. As soon as you make your first close call, half the people there will no longer want to be your

friend. On *every* call, somebody will be mad at you. Being too friendly and easy going will make you an easy target for constant complaints and chirps. This is because you will seem like the kind of guy who wouldn't have the backbone to put a stop to it. However, if you come on like an ogre, you'll be perceived as a bully and unreasonable. Keep your presence businesslike and approachable. Answer reasonable questions professionally with a respectful attitude. Appear sure of yourself and your decisions will get more respect and be more readily accepted.

28. **Keep an extra indicator in your gear bag.** Those little wheels on that ball/strike indicator will not spin forever. At the worst possible moment it will break, or you'll drop it and sand will clog it, or you'll drop it and the catcher will step on it.
29. **Keep extra things in your car, be prepared.** If my partner showed up without any clothes or equipment, I could probably lend him everything he would need! My car trunk is like an umpire's supply store. If you want to be extra well prepared pack extra shoelaces, plate brushes, mask straps, shin guard straps, belt, bag bags, hats, and protective cups. Any of these things unexpectedly could break, or get lost. Also, stow a first aid kit, emergency ice packs, some spring water bottles, and rule books.
30. **Don't let a coach make you get or give "help" to/from your partner on a call.** Don't offer advice to your partner on a call, unless he asks for it. You may never overrule a partner's call; you may only give him information that will allow him to overrule himself. If your partner requests help on a play, if you saw it, tell him what you saw. Don't make the call for him. Let him use your help and make the call himself. If your partner makes a judgment call and Coach Wally comes out and implores you, "Can you go help your partner out on that call?" Tell Wally to talk to your partner. Tell him to ask the man that made the call.
31. **Call balls and strikes honestly (but look for strikes at lower levels)** The objective is to get you to, "think strikes." Strikes lead to outs, and outs lead to innings, and innings get the game over with sooner. If the pitch is a bit inside or outside, and the catcher makes it look good, and it pops into the mitt just like a strike ought to sound, *ring it up!* If you're calling it right, only you and the catcher will know it was off the plate a bit, and he's not about to say anything! The zone will shrink as you move up in levels, but you can cross that bridge when you get to it.
32. **Give the close "fair" call to the batter.** Even if he often doesn't deserve it, the pitcher is the beneficiary of the "think strikes," attitude we are encouraged to follow as umpires. If we're going to give the close ones to the pitcher, then we have to keep things in balance and favor the batter sometimes, too. That time is the close fair/foul call on the hot line drive that sizzles down the line. *Call every hit as accurately as you see it*, however, when the ball lands so close to the line that you're *not sure* if it landed fair or foul; or if the ball bounced fair on the infield, then skipped close to the bag and you're *not sure* if it passed over the bag as fair or foul; give it to the batter! Call the uncertain ones fair.

33. **As a spectator, never criticize another official on the field.** Unless you're the first guy in the world who has finally reached perfection as an umpire, don't open your mouth to criticize your fellow official who's out there trying to be perfect, too. If you are at a game as a spectator, don't answer other spectator's (who know you umpire) questions like, "How did that one look to you?" Be vague. Cite a rule if you must. But if it's a judgment call, it is best to just say, "I didn't have as good a look at it he did, so I can't be sure if he was out or not."
34. **Get a professional interpretations/mechanics book (or video)** The "red book" is the manual for the 2 umpire system, and is the text version of the CD-Rom you saw in class. Also, the "Umpire's Manual" published by NAPBL (the Blue Book) is an excellent source of information on difficult rulings and game control.
35. **If it's a hot day, drink water.** It used to be considered a sign of weakness if an umpire had to leave the field during a game for any reason, even to get a drink of water! Most amateur umpires are not in top physical shape, so we shouldn't push our bodies to do extraordinary and dangerous things to preserve appearances. Studies have shown that one's acuity and judgment are compromised as you become dehydrated. Whether you prefer the commercial sports drinks or just plain old water is unimportant. It is critical to maintain your alertness, consistency, your judgment, and your *life*, so keep a proper level of liquids in your system.
36. **Get professional help.** Even if you are the best umpire in your town's youth league, if you have never been exposed to professional training, you are missing out on a very good thing! If you're the best umpire in your town's league, who can *you* learn from? There are a few dozen weekend camps held each winter around the country that are run by professional umpires that can make a real difference in your game. No matter how comfortable you are with your skills and knowledge, professionals will teach you new techniques and methods you never knew existed. They will catch little mistakes you make and improve the effectiveness of your calls and mechanics. For 300 to 500 dollars, you can become a ten times better umpire in the course of four days! And, the camp experience is a lot of good clean fun, too!
37. **Hustle!** Half the battle of winning the respect of coaches, players and spectators is knowing how to apply the rules and having good judgment. The other half is having a good appearance, both in your uniform and in the way you conduct yourself on the field. Your movements transmit the essence of your umpiring style. If you move slowly, drag your feet, allow a shirt tail to hang out, wear your hat backwards, speak in mild ineffectual phrases or groan when you squat down or get up, you will appear lazy and unconcerned. Once you step onto the field, think about everything you do and say, because you're always being watched and judged. *Hustle* is the key word. Keep your appearance sharp, in both uniform and movements. Jog instead of walk, speak in expedient and efficient sentences, using crisp conversational tones, and utilize precise mechanics and meaningful gestures.

38. **Show up early.** Allow for traffic delays on your way to the game. Always give yourself plenty of time to arrive early so you can get a good parking spot where your car is least likely to be hit by a baseball! By the way, if you are forced to park within batted ball range, face your car *away* from the field. At least you can still drive home with a smashed rear windshield. Another by-product of an early arrival is the extra time you will get to get into your uniform and be sure your equipment is on right. You'll have that extra moment to check everything twice so you don't walk onto the field and start the game and then realize you didn't put in your cup! Being hurried is distracting and causes concentration problems.
39. **Stretch out before the game.** Just as you would if you were a player in the game, you would take time to warm up and stretch your muscles. Whether you're the plate man or on the bases, the demands of hustling on the field as an umpire are not much different. Before each game, leave yourself time to do a set of squats, knee bends, trunk twists, and arm rolls. The last thing you want is to pull up lame with a strained hamstring while trying to get down to cover third base.
40. **Never warn with, "One more word..."** As the man in control, you often need to snuff out a player's or coach's objections with a quick and powerful warning to stop the complaining and get your game back on track. Prefacing your warning with the phrase, "Say one more word..." is a bad choice of words. Using that phrase ties your hands and commits you to toss the guy if he says *another word!* That word might be, "OK!" If you don't act on that "one more word," you'll be sending the message that, "It's OK to ignore my first warning, because I'll just give you more warnings." It's acceptable for the complainant to have the last word, as long as he says it while he's going away. When you need to give a warning be sure to choose words that still allow you the flexibility to act, or not, without appearing indecisive.
41. **Don't try to "even up" a bad call.** Occasionally you're going to accidentally make a bad call, and you'll know it. Under most circumstances, you cannot change the call because further play has already been made based on your bad call. What's worse, changing a call will undermine your credibility, too. Suppose you called a bad pitch a strike then, after reconsideration, changed it to ball, you'd appear indecisive and you'd then be constantly asked to change your mind on every other close pitch afterward! When you've kicked a call, even if the coach comes out and gives you an earful, you have to live with the bad call. Everybody inadvertently makes a mistake now and then. However, the worst thing you can do is *deliberately* make another bad call to favor the other team to "even things up." You just got rid of the first ranting coach. Now you'll have the other team's coach out there angry with you, too! Most reasonable coaches expect that the umpires will miss one occasionally, but nobody expects or wants to see an umpire to do it willfully.
42. **When the game is over, disappear.** Many times I've wanted to disappear in the *middle* of the game. Nevertheless, as soon as the game is over, get your things and, together with your partner, head for your cars. Either walk out through the outfield, or if you have to go out via a dugout, exit through the *winning team's* dugout. Don't expect any thanks as

you're passing through. Even the winners will still consider you a villain. The losers blame you for losing, and the winners figure they won in spite of you.

43. **Put safety first.** In any amateur contest, always remember that it's just a *game*. The kids have to be in school tomorrow and none of them should risk injury for the sake of a win. As much as they may want the game to continue, you have to balance their desire to play with the possibility of injury. You may end up being found not liable for an injury when some parent sues you. But do you even want to risk the wrenching hassle, expense and inconvenience of enduring a courtroom trial? Don't allow unsafe equipment to be used by the players. As soon as you see lightening, or if you find the field is too slippery in the rain, or it's getting too dark, or if the field is otherwise somehow unsafe, *kill the game!* There will always be many more tomorrows to play if you stop it now.
44. **Be prepared to do the plate.** Whenever you are headed for a game where you know you have been assigned to be the base umpire, always go prepared to do the plate. Bring all the clothes and equipment with you that you would need if you were assigned the plate instead. In all likelihood, even if you have been assigned to work just a few two-man games, sooner or later you will be "stood-up." For reasons that may range from forgetfulness to a flat tire, your expected partner will be a no-show. When that happens, the show must go on, and you're going to have to do a solo act today.
45. **Don't look for trouble...** because plenty of trouble will find you! There are several rules in the book that have little or no consequence in an amateur game. The application of many other rules must be tempered by considering the spirit of the rule, as well. Some rookies umpires make the mistake of memorizing the rule book cold, then they go out on the field trying to prove to everyone how well they know those rules. If a 12 year old shortstop comes out with a cap different from his teammates, it's a technical violation, but how does that give him an advantage? Ignore it! If there are no batter's box lines, but you think the batter may have stepped out by two inches when he bunted, how can you really know? Don't call it! If the pitcher asks for an extra warm up throw, is that going to turn him into Tom Glavine? Give it to him! Don't be a hard-headed umpire. Call the game by the correct playing rules, but if you find yourself enforcing too many extraordinary procedural rules that never seem to creep into most other guy's games, you need to think about if you might have become a nit-picker.
46. **Don't accept being called "Blue"** Introduce yourself to the coaches by the name you wish to be called during the game, and call them by whatever they introduce themselves by. Being called "blue" is an insult at the professional level and should be considered so at the amateur level, too. To shed light on this, think about going through a day at your regular job and only referring to the people you interact with by the color of their shirt instead of using their name. It's unprofessional and is a habit that can be easily changed at the amateur level. If, during the course of the game, you are called "blue," politely (but firmly) remind them that your name is ____.
47. **As the base umpire, stay away from the pitcher!** Unless you have something critical to tell him, there is no reason for you to be near or say anything to the pitcher.

48. **Do not give the new pitcher any information when he enters the game.** This is coaching and is for the coaches to do, not the umpire. During his warm up pitches the plate umpire should take a look at a couple of pitches to get familiar with his motion and delivery, and the base umpire should move to the outfield a few feet off of the dirt and away from players. When he finishes his warm up pitches, start the game up right away.
49. **Keep your words to a minimum when in an argument.** The more you say during an argument, the greater the possibility you will talk yourself into a corner. Listen to what the coach has to say and respond with precise and accurate answers.
50. **Wear the proper uniform.** Nothing is more aggravating to me than to show up at a game and see guys wearing improper uniforms. White socks, white sneakers, a hat on backwards, their college jacket at a high school game, a shirt with no state patch on it, a white undershirt, a belt that is too small for the belt loops (or, worse yet, no belt at all,) are all things that get under my skin. If you worked at McDonald's and showed up in a Burger King uniform you'd get fired.