

# Pickleball Terms

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[Pickleballkitchen.com](http://Pickleballkitchen.com)

## Terms used while playing pickleball

**Side out** – So yeah, this is pretty simple and is the one that I was the most confused about. Whenever the second serve on a team loses the point, the official will call “side out” meaning that their side is out, and the other team now serves. It has nothing to do with the sidelines, as I thought for many months.

**Nice get!** – These next few terms are compliments, including this one. If someone yells at you “hey, nice get” then that means you hit a ball that was extremely difficult to reach or return. Besides someone saying “hey, you’re literally a god”, this is one of the best compliments you can get on the court.

**Nice setup!** – In general, a setup in pickleball means that you manipulated an opponent to move to a certain area of the court so that you can then hit to an exposed section of the court that’s not covered by the opposing team. For example, if I hit a really nice cross-court shot, it may force that opponent to move outside the sideline to hit the ball. That player has a high chance of popping up the ball for my partner to smash. That would be a really nice setup!

**Nice rally!** – This is often a court-wide compliment to both teams. A rally is a long streak of shots between both teams. Similar to keeping a hacky sack in the air, rallies are long and very intense.

**Dead ball** – This one is pretty simple. This just means that the ball has gone out, and the current point is over.

**Double bounce rule** – I explain this more [in an article that I wrote](#), but in general, you have to let the ball bounce both on the serve and the return. If you don’t, it will be a fault.

**Fault** – A rule violation. Yup, that simple.

**Put away** – This is a shot that almost guarantees you will win the point. Oftentimes people will say “nice put-away!” It just means that it was a nice, aggressive shot that closed out the point for your team.

### Terms used for talking about pickleball paddles

Sometimes talking about pickleball paddles can be confusing. It's easy to get into conversations while waiting for a game to start, and sometimes these terms will pop up. Here's a list of some of the common ones.

**Composite** – A composite material is simply any single structure that's created from multiple parts. An example of a composite paddle is one that's made from a polymer core but has a graphite face. Or even a composite core that has a fiberglass face. When you hear composite just think about multiple materials that make one thing! Nearly all pickleball paddles that are made these days are composite paddles meaning the core and face are going to be made from different materials that produce a unique product.

**Paddle core** – The paddle core material makes up the majority of a pickleball paddle. This is what the inside of the paddle is actually made of. The following three examples are the most popular types of paddle cores.

**Nomex** – When the first composite paddle was made back in the 1960's, it was made with a nomex core. Nomex is used in a variety of products including airplanes and firefighters helmets. In pickleball, it's used to create power paddles that give you some of the most powerful smashes in the game. A great example of a nomex paddle is the [Onix Z5 Graphite](#). Keep in mind, the 'graphite' part of this paddle is the face, not the core.

**Aluminum** – Everyone knows what aluminum is. But what does it mean in pickleball? Aluminum is used in the construction of pickleball paddle cores. These types of paddles are known for being lightweight and soft. The reason is not only because is aluminum very light, but it will absorb more force than the other paddles making your shots easier to control. One great example of an aluminum paddle is the Selkirk 300A paddle.

**Polymer** – Of the three cores used in pickleball paddle manufacturing, this is the most popular type. It's also short for the term polypropylene. Polymer cores are popular because they're the newest type of technology that gives you both power and control over your shots. Right now, manufacturers are developing their own polymer technologies that are patent pending. For example, Selkirk has one called PowerCore™ that they use in their popular [30P XL Epic Enrique Ruiz](#) paddle.

**Polypropylene** – (polly-PROPE-uh-leen) Don't worry, we're not about to go into a chemistry lesson. Besides, I slept through a lot of chemistry in high school. Hey don't judge me, it was right after marching band practice. Ok, this one isn't so common, but you will see it on websites sometimes. The reason why I'm including this is because it is the fancy word for the plastic that's used in polymer paddles.

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**Paddle face** – This is the material that’s used to cover the surface of a paddle. This is layered over the core of the paddle and protects it from damage, but can also provide a different feel or playstyle as well. At the time of this writing, there are only a small amount of paddle faces available.

**Graphite** – This is a term that you hear a lot in sports, not just pickleball. In our sport, graphite is the most popular material that’s used for pickleball paddle faces. Graphite is lightweight but provides excellent feeling to the strike. Oftentimes people will talk about how the ball “pops” off the face of a graphite surface. It just feels solid.

**Fiberglass** – Although not as common as graphite, this is another type of face material used in pickleball. It is typically heavier, rougher (as explained next) and offers a bit more power.

**Roughness** – I love this term! When people talk about the roughness of a paddle face, they’re talking about how well the face will grip the ball when struck. Just to take an extreme example for clarity, a glass face has no roughness, whereas a sandpaper face will have an absurdly high amount of roughness. To get a paddle approved by the [USAPA](#), it can’t go over a certain roughness threshold.

## **Some things you’ll hear about pickleball courts**

**Baseline** – This is the line at the back of the court that you can’t cross when you serve.

**Sideline** – Yup, you got it, those are the lines on each side of the court.

**Non-volley zone** – This is the section of the pickleball court near the net that makes the sport unique. There are [multiple rules around the non-volley zone](#). The basic idea behind the non-volley zone is that you cannot be standing in the zone, and volley a ball at the same time.

**Kitchen** – This is the colloquial term for the non-volley zone. It’s also what most people call the non-volley zone. I mean, it’s just more fun, right?

**No man’s land** – I’m not sure how popular this one is, but I’ve heard it where I play. The ‘no man’s land’ is the area in the middle of the court 4-5 feet away from the kitchen line. Typically you don’t want to be standing here because balls can easily be hit to your feet!

## **Want to talk about pickleball skills?**

**Groundstroke** – A groundstroke is simply a shot where the ball has bounced first before being struck. Groundstrokes oftentimes have less power, because the ball has lost speed due to hitting the ground.

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**Overhead Smash** – Oftentimes referred to a ‘smash’ for short, this is one of my favorite things to do in pickleball. This is an overhead shot where you hit the ball above your head. Because the ball is so high up in the air, you can get a lot of power behind the shot which makes it very difficult for the opponent to deal with.

**Volley** – Volleys are shots where the ball has not touched the ground before being struck. Overhead smashes are examples of a volley.

**Rally** – As mentioned earlier, a rally is a long series of shots that are typically exciting and intense.

**Serve** – This is the shot that starts the game! Make sure you call out the score before you serve.

**Dink** – A dink is a very soft shot, typically made at the kitchen line. Dinks are designed to keep the ball as low as possible over the net so that the opponent cannot smash the ball. Dinking is an essential skill to learn for any pickleball player.

**Cross-court dink** – This is a dink that is executed from one side of the court to the other, typically landing in the opposite opponent’s kitchen. This is an extremely difficult, but effective shot to use. Due to the angle of this shot, it is very difficult to return.

**Lob** – This is a very high shot that goes over the heads of your opponents and into backcourt. The purpose of this shot is to make your opponents run for the ball, putting them out of position.

**Poach** – Poaching is a controversial subject in pickleball. Poaching is where one player will take the shots going towards their partner, instead of letting the partner deal with it. Poaching typically happens when one player is on a much higher skill level than their partner. It’s obviously a good strategy if the opponent team is picking on the low skilled player, however, it can be very frustrating for that player as well.

**Ace** – An ace is a serve that has not been hit by the return player, but was legal and therefore wins the point.

**Third shot drop** – This is another difficult and crucially important shot in pickleball. This is a shot that transitions the game into a dinking pattern at the net. I’ll be talking about this more in the future, but the third drop shot is a relatively high shot that lands in the kitchen so that your opponent can’t smash or drive the ball. This allows your team to approach the net safely so that you can begin dinking.

**Backhand** – Oftentimes the most awkward shot for beginners, the backhand is a stroke where the back of your dominant hand is facing forward through a stroke. Typically, you have to cross your arm over your chest to perform a backhand stroke.

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**Forehand** – This is a stroke where your dominant hand's palm is facing forward through the stroke. For a lot of people, this is the most comfortable type of stroke.

**Backspin** – Backspin is primarily used to trick players into where the ball is going. Certain shots can produce backspin which makes the ball not only bounce softly on the ground but makes them bounce in another, usually unpredictable direction.

**Split step** – This is a technique used in most racket sports where your feet are parallel with each other and are wider than shoulder-width apart. You could call this the 'ready' position. It's used to be as neutral as possible in order to return backhand and forehand shots easily.