

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a white tennis racket and a bright yellow-green tennis ball. The person is wearing an orange long-sleeved shirt. The background is a solid, vibrant blue. An orange banner with a white border is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text 'Ultimate Tennis Guide' in white. The racket is held vertically, and the ball is held in the person's left hand, positioned near the racket's head.

# Ultimate Tennis Guide



# Includes

- Introduction
- Finding a Place to Play
- Equipment
- Scoring, Rules,  
and Terms
- 5 Basic Strokes
- Tips and Tricks
- Resources



# Introduction

If you've always wanted to play tennis, but have been intimidated because you don't know the difference between a game, a set, and a match...

## This guide is for you!

Tennis is an amazing sport for people of all ages. Because it requires speed, strength, flexibility, and quick reflexes, it's a sport that gets your entire body (and entire mind!) involved in the game.

There's so much to learn about tennis, but this guide is written with beginner players in mind. Sometimes hearing too much information keeps the important ideas from sticking, so we've only included the information you need to get started playing.

### **In this guide, you'll learn:**

- How to find a place to play
- What equipment you'll need
- Score-keeping, special terms, and basic rules
- The 5 basic swings
- Tips to improve faster
- Resources to learn more

**Ready to learn how to serve, volley, and slam?**

*let's get started!*





# Finding a Place to Play

## A. Courts: Private, Public, and Clubs

Lots of communities have tennis courts within a reasonable distance, if you know where to look!

The Global Tennis Network website is a great resource for beginner players looking for a court nearby. You can filter by type (private, public, or club), fee, whether the court is indoor or outdoor, how many players the facility can hold, and other factors.

The best court is usually the one that you can get to easily, so you don't have to think about a long commute for your practice! We would recommend trying the closest option first to see if it's a good fit, and then branching out to try other locations.

### **Some other things you might want to keep in mind when selecting a court are:**

- Different courts will have different availability policies. Some operate on a first come, first serve basis, some use a reservation system, and some combine the two (i.e. courts are first come, first serve, unless there are reservations).
- If you're playing at a first come, first serve facility, you should be prepared that you might find a line ahead of you. You can combat this by trying to arrive outside of peak hours, or on days that aren't as busy.
- If you want to reserve a court, you'll want to check and make sure you know what the reservation window is.
- Similarly, some courts are free to play, some require a fee, and some require a membership. Like availability systems, you might also see that some facilities have a combination of private and free courts available.



## B. Lessons, Coaches, and Group Clinics

Most of these facilities also often offer lessons, which are particularly useful to beginning players who might not have regular partners to practice with yet. Coaches might be associated with a club, but they might also book separately.

You might also have a choice between group clinics (which are basically group lessons), or 1-on-1 private lessons. Both will be extremely helpful for beginner players: group clinics will help you find other beginner players and potential practice partners, while 1-on-1 classes will give you quality instruction time with a coach.

**The choice is up to you, but many players prefer going to group clinics first. Being with other people at your skill level while you're getting a feel for the game can make improving a lot simpler, and a lot faster!**

Additionally, getting a feel for the game in a group setting before doing private lessons can help you get more out of private instruction later on. If you go to a 1-on-1 lesson with some experience, you'll have a better sense for what questions to ask, and will be able to spend more time improving.



## C. At-Home Practice

One of the simplest ways to practice at home is shadow stroking: swinging with the racket, but without the ball. Because the foundation of tennis is based in your swing, simply practicing this motion helps you build up the strength and muscle memory to excel on the court.

If you have a large enough area, you can also practice with both racket and ball. A basement is an especially good option if you have one, but garages, porches, patios, or the side of a building can work, too.

**There are also some great tools and equipment you can find for home practice!**



**Catch rackets** look just like your average racket frame, but have a net you use to catch the ball after serving. You can practice serving without worrying about having to chase the ball everywhere.

**Pitch rebounders** are a great option if you have limited space. You set up a frame with a diagonal net or sheet to rebound your pitch back to you.

Other swing trainers use **a tennis ball connected by a cord to a stand**, again saving you from having to run after your ball after hitting it.



A blue tennis racket with yellow strings and a yellow tennis ball are positioned on a blue background. The racket is angled towards the bottom right, and the ball is to its left. The word "Equipment" is written in large white letters across the center.

# Equipment

## A. Racket

**We'll start with the obvious one – if you want to hit anything, you need a racket!**

Your racket consists of 3 general sections: the head, shaft, and handle. The head is the oval-shaped strung frame, the handle is the elongated section where you grip, and the shaft is the space connecting the two.

The proportions of these sections, as well as the material your racket is made out of, is what makes a huge variety of rackets available for different play styles.

**Generally, rackets fall into 3 categories:**

**1.Power Rackets** – these have a large head size, extended length, and light, rigid frame.

They're a great choice for beginners who are working on developing strength.

**2.Control Rackets** – these have a smaller head, standard length, and flexible frame. They typically weigh more, and are a better choice for more experienced players.

**3.Intermediate ("Tweener") Rackets** – like the name suggests, these are a happy medium!

If your beginner racket isn't letting you hit with the accuracy you'd like, consider trying one of these!

Although choosing strings and having your racket strung at a shop is one way to customize your racket's performance, it isn't necessary for beginners, who should be focusing on building their form and technique. Look for a pre-strung racket to keep it simple.

Rackets also vary a lot in price, some around \$30, and some around \$300! You don't want something so poorly built that it breaks after one use, but you also don't need to drop a bunch of money for features that won't be useful to you as a beginner.

All in all, you'll want to look for a beginner racket with a large head, weighing around 12 ounces, pre-strung if possible.

## B. Balls

### Now, you need something to hit!

Just like rackets, there's a huge variety of brands providing different construction options for tennis balls. And, also like we mentioned for rackets, you probably don't need to worry about finding specialized features just yet.

You can find beginner balls for learners, which are slightly slower than your average tennis ball. The slower speed gives beginners more time during play and practice, so if you can find them, pick some up!

It's a good idea to have around 4-6 balls on hand at any given time.



## C. Racket Bag



Racket bags transport not just your racket, but also your other equipment and supplies. Your racket might come with a bag, but even if it does, it's worth looking at other bags to see if something would fit your needs better.

You should also make sure your bag looks like it's going to offer your racket some protection from occasional bumps. Even if you're careful with your racket, it never hurts to be cautious!



## D. Tennis Shoes

Tennis shoes have the same standards as any other athletic shoe: they should be comfortable, secure, and durable. Tennis shoes can be designed to perform best on different terrains, so it's something to think about when you're picking a pair.

Shoes made for clay courts usually have zigzag designs on the sole to keep clay from building up on your shoes. Shoes made for grass courts are the least versatile, and shouldn't be used on other surfaces, because the soles are designed to grip into the softer ground and grass.

Shoes made for hard, permanent courts have very durable soles that will give good traction on a hard surface. These are also usually the most versatile shoes, if you're unsure which kind of court you'll be using the most.



## E. Clothing

Public courts don't usually have a dress code, but clubs or other private facilities might. If you're playing at a public court, you can wear whatever you want, but if you're not, wearing gym clothes, t-shirts, or standard athletic gear won't be allowed.

A short-sleeved collared polo shirt is the standard choice. Shorts of any length are also conventional, as long as they're made for tennis playing. You can also add layers and leggings under your gear for colder months, and as long as you're practicing instead of playing a match, tennis warm-ups or tracksuits are fine. Women can wear tank tops, skirts, and skorts, in addition to the polo-and-shorts combination.

Outdoor players will get a lot of benefit out of a visor or cap with a brim to keep the sun out of their eyes, too!



# Scoring, Rules, and Terms

## A. Scoring

You can think of games, sets, and matches like cups, quarts, and gallons. Just like there are 4 cups in a quart, and 4 quarts in a gallon, tennis matches break down in the same way.

- a **game** is played until one player scores 4 points
- a **set** is a collection of games, played until one of the player wins 6 games
- a **match** is a collection of sets, won when one player gets the best of 3 sets (or best of 5)

When a **game** begins, each player's score is 0. The score is expressed like this:  
**0 x 0.**

The serving player's score is read first, so the server's score would go on the right, and the receiving player's score would go on the left.

The 4 points of a game are called **15, 30, 40, and game**. Therefore, as the game progresses, each player earns points in a race to see who will get to the **game point** first.

If both players win 3 points (meaning that the score is 40 x 40), one will need to get a margin of 2 points to win the entire game, so the players will continue playing until one achieves a lead of 2 points.

When one player achieves the necessary lead, the game is finished, and the players reverse who was serving and who was receiving. The scoring goes back to 0 x 0, and a new game begins.

A **set** is the scoring stage when a player accumulates enough games. This is usually 6, so a player would have to win 6 games before their opponent can win 5. If Player A wins 6 matches and payer B wins 4, the set score is expressed like this: 6 x 4.

But, if each player ties at winning 5 games each, meaning the score is 5 x 5, they need to win by a margin of 2 games before their opponent wins 1 more game. If Player A can make the score 7 x 5, they win the set, and bring the score back to 0 x 0.

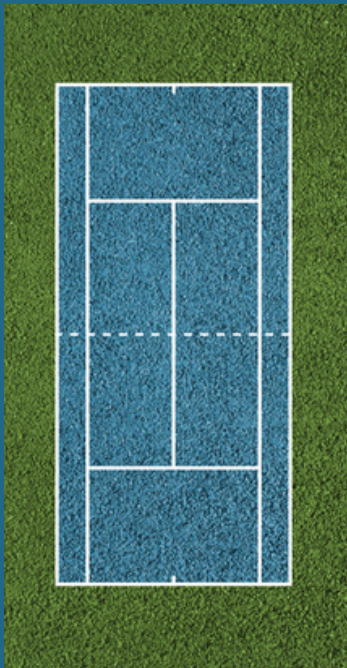


Lastly, if players tie at 6 x 6, a **tiebreaker** is needed. The points in a tiebreaker are counted as regular numerical points (0, 1, 2, etc.) until one player reaches a total of 7 points. If both players tie at 6 x 6, the winning player will need a 2-point advantage.

And, finally, a **match** is won when a player wins 2 out of 3 sets.

Now that you understand scoring, we can talk about the important stuff: how to win points!

## B. Rules



The most basic way to understand winning a point is when you hit the ball onto your opponent's side, and they fail to return it to you before it bounces twice.

The court is divided into two boxes by the net, called the service boxes. The first player serves the ball by standing behind the baseline, a line across the back of the court. Their goal is to serve it into the other player's service box. If they fail to do that, it's a fault, and two faults will add a point to the receiver's score.

There are 2 sets of lines running along the long sides of the court, called tramlines. The inner tramline is the edge of the service box, and the outer bound of the court during singles play (the outer line is used during doubles play).

Shots must land within the relevant tramline to be considered within bounds. If a player hits the ball out of bounds, a point is added to the other player's score.

A point will also be subtracted from a player who hits the ball into or against the net.

Players take turns serving the ball from game to game. This is different in tiebreaker rounds, however, when the first player serves once, and then each player serves twice in a row until the winning score is achieved. The players will also switch sides after every 6 points.

# C. Terms

## Score Terms

- Advantage: the point played after the deuce
  - This is abbreviated as “ad” – if the serving side scores, it’s “ad-in”, and if the receiving side scores, it’s “ad-out”
- All: an even score. For example, a game score of 20 x 20 would be expressed as 20-all, or a set score of 3 x 3 would be 3-all
- Deuce: a game with a score of 40 x 40
- Love: a score of 0

## Gameplay Terms

- Backhand: the stroke used to return balls hit to the left side of a right-handed player, or the right side of a left-handed player
- Doubles: a match with 4 players total (2 teams of 2 players)
- Forehand: the stroke used to return balls hit to the right side of a right-handed player, or the left side of a left-handed player
- Ground stroke: a stroke made after the ball has bounced once
- Lob: a stroke that sends the ball high into the air
- Overhead: a stroke made during play that involves striking the ball overhead, similar to an overhand serve.
- Rally: a series of uninterrupted back-and-forth hits between players
- Return: the act of hitting the ball after it’s first put into play
- Serve: the act of putting the ball into play for each point
- Spin: the rotation of the ball
- Volley: a stroke made by hitting the ball before it touches the ground



*Doubles Match*



*Spin (Ball Rotation) Example*



# 5 Basic Strokes

A stroke in tennis is a fundamental movement you need in order to play well. Just like you need to know letters to spell words, you need to know strokes in order to play successful games.

These instructions will be written with right-handed players in mind to keep things simple. If you're a leftie, just reverse the directions!

## 1. Serve

**This is the stroke you'll use to put the ball into play at the beginning of a game.**

1. Stand sideways behind the baseline, your front foot facing the direction of the net, the toes of your back foot behind your front heel
2. From holding your racket and ball at hip height, drop both arms, then toss the ball up, releasing it just as it reaches the top of your head
3. Keeping your wrist relaxed, shift your body weight onto your front foot and move your racket up until it's level with your head, pointing to the sky
4. Push off the ground, keeping your legs straight and letting your racket point downwards behind your body as you jump upwards
5. Extend the racket upwards and forwards until the strings make contact with the ball
6. Allow your right arm to continue turning while the hip and upper body rotate to face forward



## 2. Forehand



**This stroke is a powerful way to return the ball after it's touched the ground once.**

1. When your opponent's racket makes contact with the tennis ball, take a wider stance
2. Rotate your hips and shoulders to the right, shifting your weight onto your right leg
3. Dropping your right arm, allow your body to unwind the rotation, guiding your arm towards the ball
4. Continue the rotation, bringing your body to fully face the net, while swinging your racket up to make contact with the ball
5. As the ball moves away from you, continue the rotation forward and across your body to the left
6. Complete the stroke by shifting your weight to the left foot and allowing your body to end the rotation, with your racket at level with your left shoulder

## 3. Backhand



**The backhand is typically less powerful than the forehand stroke, but allows for more control when hitting, as slight changes in the angle of your racket will change the ball's trajectory.**

1. Like with the forehand stroke, take a wider stance
2. Rotate your hips and shoulders to the left – some players move their right foot to the front at a diagonal to their left foot for a fuller rotation, putting their weight on the left foot
3. Bring your racket around until it's level with your head, your shoulder pointing at the ball
4. Like the forehand, begin to drop your arm as you start releasing the rotation
5. Continue to release the movement, allowing your right arm to unwind until you make contact with the ball
6. Complete the motion by allowing your right arm to extend backwards, allowing your weight to shift onto the right foot again



## 4. Volley

**A volley is a shorter stroke that hits the ball out of the air, before it bounces off the ground. It can be done forehand or backhand.**

1. Approach the net when you see your opponent make contact with the ball, your racket held in front of you
2. As the ball approaches, take a slight rotation (to the right for forehand, to the left for backhand) to prepare for the stroke
3. Release the rotation, swinging your arm around to hit the ball, shifting your weight forward as you strike
4. Shift your weight back to complete the movement and bring your racket back to center, prepared for the next stroke



## 5. Overhead

**An overhead (or overhead smash) is a stroke where the racket makes contact with the ball over the player's head. The motion looks similar to a serve.**

1. Watch the approach of the ball with a wide-legged stance
2. As the ball gets closer, focus on the idea of keeping the ball in front of you, moving back until you judge that you can hit it over your head with a slight jump
3. Rotate your body to the right, bringing the racket around slightly over your head, bending your knees
4. When the ball is within striking distance, let your forearm drop as you launch your body upwards
5. Swing the racket up, continuing your rotation through the jump, and make contact with the ball
6. Complete the swinging motion down to the left as your feet touch the ground







# Tips and Tricks

- 1. Swing low to high** – No matter what stroke you're using, always think about taking your swing from low to high in order to build a nice, fluid momentum.
- 2. Stay on your toes** – It might feel strange at first, but keeping your weight on your toes will give you some extra agility when chasing the ball.
- 3. Get a sense of distance** – Most beginners struggle with getting too close to the ball. Practicing swings will help you get a feel for this!
- 4. Take small steps to approach** – When approaching the ball, use longer strides to gain distance first, and then smaller steps to get in close for an accurate stop.
- 5. Warm up and cool down** – Because tennis involves a lot of quick movements, make sure you stretch before and after to avoid joint or muscle injuries.
- 6. Complete the swing** – When you don't complete a stroke, you hold back on some of the momentum you can use to launch the ball farther.
- 7. Find your favorite moves** – A well-rounded player will be able to pull any maneuver out of the bag when needed, but if you find certain strategies work best for you, use them!
- 8. Think about position** – While force is important, the direction of your swing is just as crucial to scoring a point, especially when serving the ball.
- 9. Always recover** – Recovering means going back to your initial position after a swing completes, which will let you transition into the next stroke more easily.
- 10. Consider additional workouts** – Although practicing tennis will build both speed and strength, you can improve your game by implementing some cardio, stretching, and strength training into your lifestyle, as well!

## Resources

The Global Tennis Network court locator:

<https://www.globaltennisnetwork.com/tennis-courts/courts>

Tennismaps.com's Court, Tournament, and Coach locator:

<https://www.tennismaps.com/>

The United States Tennis Association website:

<https://www.usta.com/en/home.html#>

Improve Your Tennis's resource guide:

<http://www.improve-your-tennis.com/tennis-resources.html>

The Tennis Warehouse forum:

<https://tt.tennis-warehouse.com/index.php>

## Recommended Equipment

Affiliate link 1

Link 2

Link 3

Etc.