

# How to Play Pickleball

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Last Updated: April 29, 2024

Pickleball is a fast-paced game that combines elements of tennis, badminton, and ping pong. It's an extremely popular paddleboard sport partly because it doesn't require much equipment and it's super easy to learn and play. All you need are paddles, a pickleball, and a pickleball court. Whether you're playing singles or doubles, learn the layout of the court and follow a few simple rules for an exciting back and forth competition!

## Things You'll Need

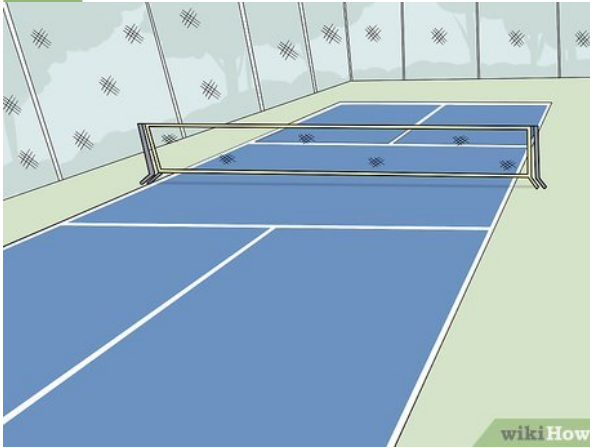
- Pickleball paddles
- Pickleball
- Water and towel

Method

1

Method 1 of 4:

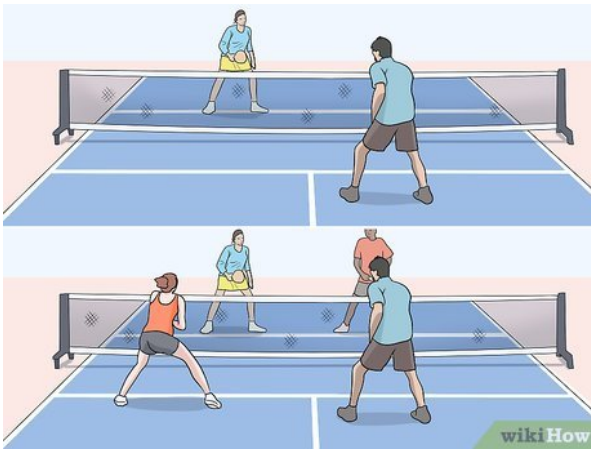
### Starting a Game



**1 Find a pickleball or badminton court to play a game.** Pickleball and badminton courts have the same size measurements, but a pickleball court will have the net lowered to the ground so it's at a height of 34 inches (86 cm). Search online for pickleball courts near you or find a gym that has badminton and pickleball courts that you can use to play a game.

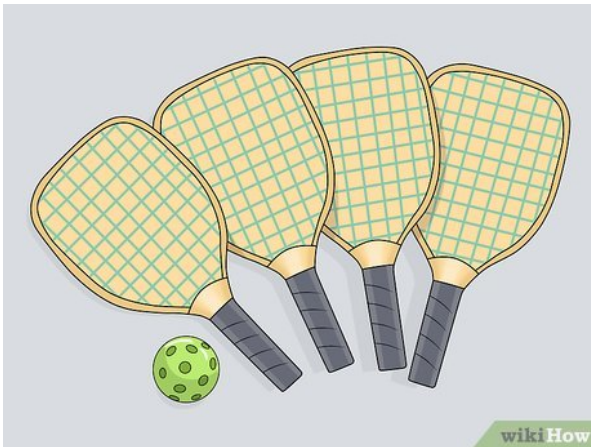
- Pickleball courts can be located outside or indoors.

**Tip:** If you're using a badminton court, make sure you adjust the net so it's at the right height for a game of pickleball.



**2 Play with 2 people for singles or 4 people for doubles.** Pickleball can be played with 2 people competing against each other, which is known as singles play, or with 2 teams of 2 people playing against each other, which is called doubles play.<sup>[1]</sup> Games of singles and doubles both use the same court, have the same number of faults before losing their serve, and are often played to 11 points.

- Doubles is the most popular way to play pickleball.



**3 Use 1 pickleball and have each player use a pickleball paddle.** Pickleball specially designed paddles, which are smaller than tennis racquets, but larger than ping-pong paddles. Each player needs to have 1 paddle.<sup>[2]</sup> You also need to use a pickleball, which is a lightweight ball with holes through it like a whiffle ball.

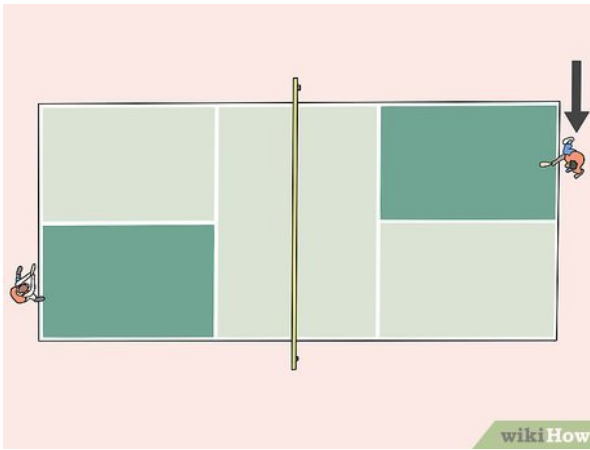
- There are a variety of colors you can choose for your pickleball.

Method

2

Method 2 of 4:

**Serving the Pickleball**



**1 Stand behind the baseline of the right service court to start a game.** A serve, which is the strike that starts a game or round of pickleball, is always performed from behind the baseline, which is the 20 ft (6.1 m) line at the end of each side of the court. When you're starting a game of pickleball, stand behind the baseline on the right side of the court.<sup>[3]</sup>

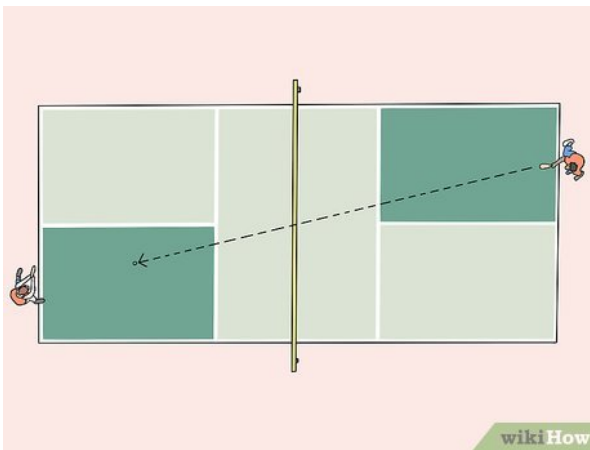
- The 2 squares in front of the baseline are known as the right and left service courts.
- Once a game is in play, you'll alternate which service court you stand behind to serve.

**Note:** In a singles game, the server serves from behind the right service court to start a round after a fault when their score is even and from the left service court when the score is odd.



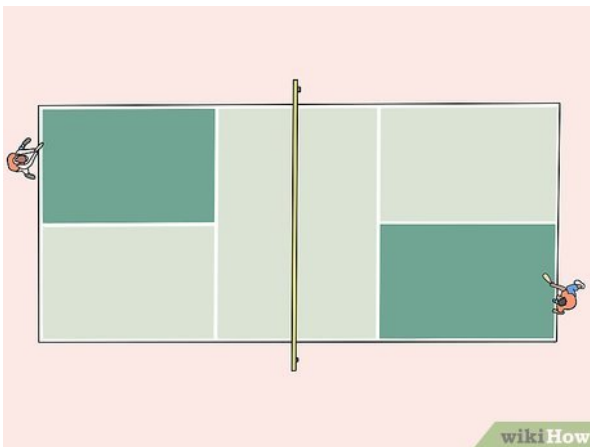
**2 Hit the pickleball with an underhand strike below waist level to serve it.** Hold the pickleball at your side with 1 hand and hold your paddle steady with another.<sup>[4]</sup> When you're ready to serve, drop the pickleball and strike it with an underhand motion with your paddle.<sup>[5]</sup>

- If you hit the pickleball above waist level, or if the ball bounces off of the ground, then it's a fault.



**3 Clear the net so the ball bounces once on the opposite service court.** Aim for the service court diagonally across from you when you serve the pickleball so it bounces on it once.<sup>[6]</sup> Avoid hitting the net with your serve, or hitting the pickleball past the opposing team's baseline before it bounces off of the ground in the opposite service court.<sup>[7]</sup>

- For example, if you're serving from behind your right service court, you must bounce the ball once on the opposing team's right service court, which is diagonal across from you.
- If your serve hits the net or goes past the opposing team's sideline or baseline before it bounces on the service court, then it's a fault.

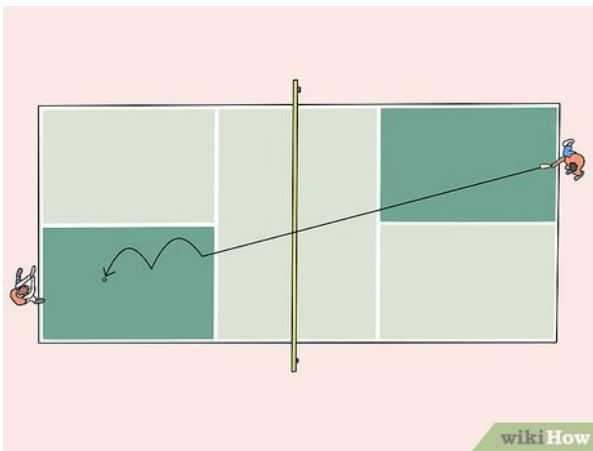


**4 Switch to the other service court when you score a point.** When you serve the pickleball and it bounces off of the opposing team's service court, the ball is in play and is hit back and forth until a fault is committed, such as the ball going out of bounds, hitting the net, or bouncing more than once on the court. If the opposing team commits a fault when it's your serve, then you score a point. Whenever you score a point, start your next serve from behind the other service court.<sup>[8]</sup>

- For instance, if you serve the pickleball from behind the right service court, and then the other team commits a fault and you score a point, your next serve will be from behind the left service court.
- Only the team that is serving can score a point!



**5 Allow the other player or team to serve when you commit 2 faults.** If you're playing singles, or 1 on 1, you get to commit 2 faults before you turn over the serve to the other player so they can have a chance to score. If you're playing doubles, or 2 on 2, whenever a player on a team commits a fault, then their partner gets to serve. Whenever the team commits 2 faults, then the other team gets to serve.<sup>[9]</sup>



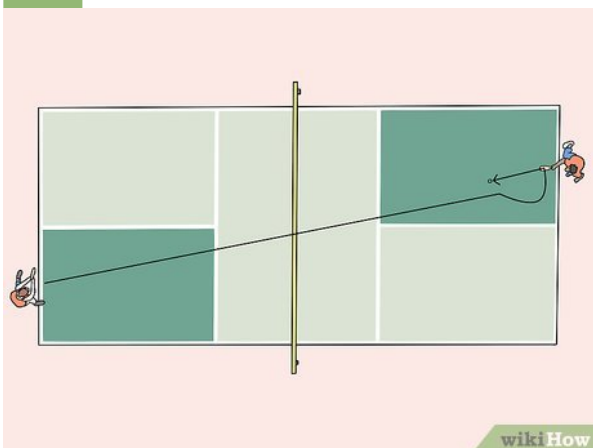
**6 Score a point when it's your serve and your opponent commits a fault.** After the ball is served and the 2-bounce rule is observed, both teams volley the ball back and forth and keep it in play. Whenever a team commits a fault, such as the ball going out of bounds or bouncing twice on the court, then the play stops and the ball is served. If it's your serve and the opposing team commits a fault, then your team earns 1 point.

- If it's your team's serve and you commit a fault, then no points are awarded. However, if you commit 2 faults, then it becomes the other team's serve.

Method  
3

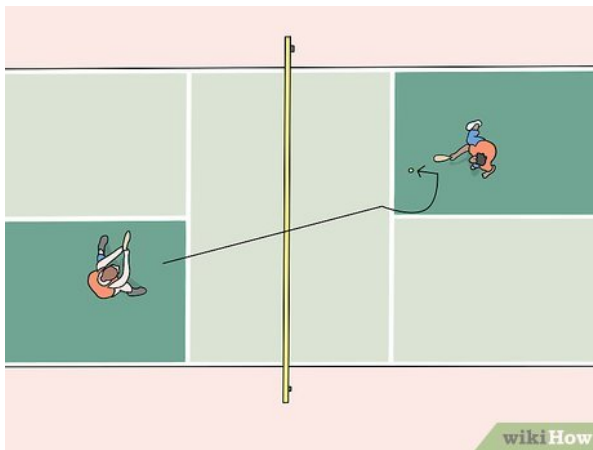
Method 3 of 4:

### Volleying the Pickleball



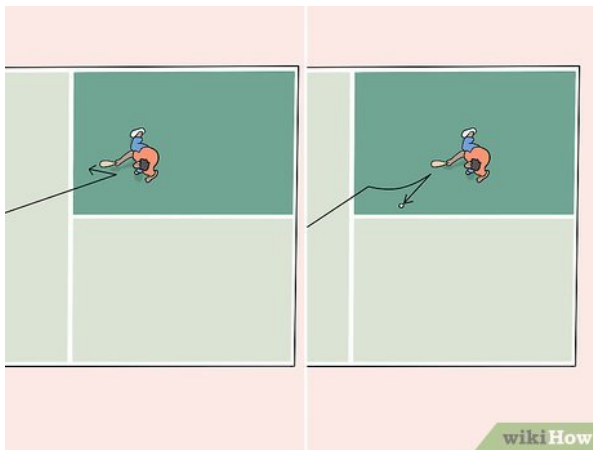
**1 Wait until the serve bounces on the service court before returning it.** When the ball is served, it must be allowed to bounce 1 time on the service court. Once the ball bounces on the service court, use your paddle to return the ball to the other side of the net so it can bounce on 1 of the service courts.<sup>[10]</sup>

- The return ball can be bounced on either of the opposing team's service courts.



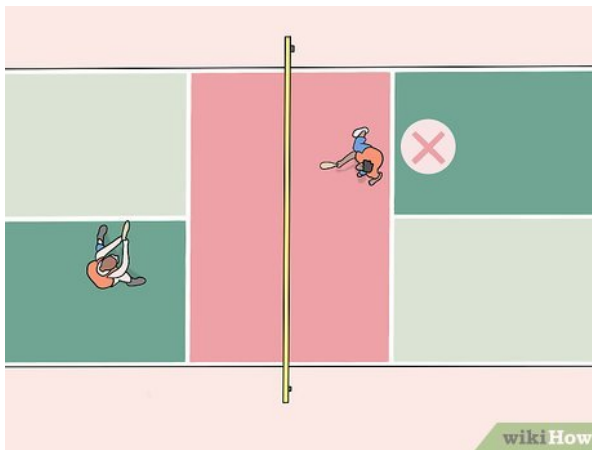
**2 Allow the return to bounce once on the court before you hit it back.** The two-bounce rule requires both the serve and return ball to bounce 1 time on the service court before the ball is allowed to be volleyed back and forth.<sup>[11]</sup> After you send your serve and the opposing team returns it, wait until the ball bounces on the service court and then hit it back over the net with your paddle.<sup>[12]</sup>

- If the return ball doesn't land on one of the service courts to bounce, then it's a fault and the serving team scores a point.



**3 Hit the ball before or after it bounces once the two-bounce rule is followed.** Once the two-bounce rule has been observed, volley the ball back and forth by hitting it either before it touches the ground or after 1 bounce.<sup>[13]</sup> Keep the ball in bounds and avoid hitting the net as you hit it to the other side. <sup>[14]</sup>

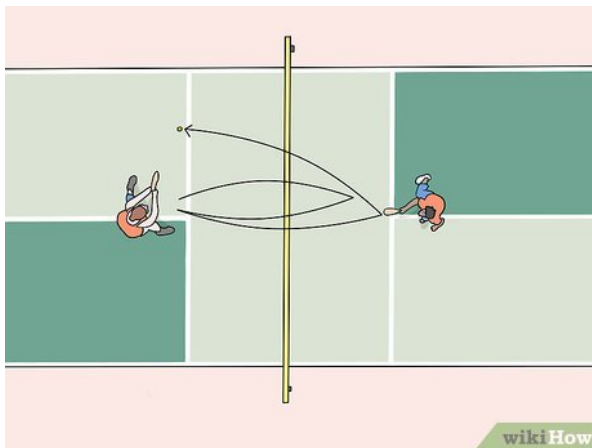
- You can't hit the ball more than once or pass it off to a teammate.
- If the ball bounces on sideline or baseline, then it's still in play. If the ball hits outside of the lines, then it's out of bounds, which is a fault.



**4 Avoid standing in the kitchen when you're volleying the ball.** The kitchen, also called the non-volley zone, is the small rectangular zone in front of each side of the net. You can't volley the ball if you're standing in the zone, or if your foot is on the line, or it's a fault.<sup>[15]</sup> Before you volley the ball back to the other team, make sure you aren't in the kitchen.<sup>[16]</sup>

- It's also a fault if a serve lands in the kitchen.

**Note:** If your foot touches the kitchen line because your momentum carried you, it's a fault, even if you touch the line after you already hit the ball.



**5 Continue volleying the ball until a fault is committed.** Keep the ball in play and hit it back and forth to the opposing team. There is no limit to the number of volleys you can perform. If it's your serve, and the opposing team commits a fault, then your team scores a point and the ball is served again. If you commit a fault while it's your serve, then you get to serve the ball again and no points are scored. If you commit 2 faults while it's your serve, then the opposing team gets to serve.<sup>[17]</sup>

- Games of pickleball are often played to 11 points, with 1 team needing to be ahead by 2 points in order to win. However, tournament games can go to 15 or 21, with a team needing to be ahead by 2 points in order to win.

Method  
4

Method 4 of 4:

**Winning a Game**



**1 Score 11 points to be eligible to win a game.** As you play a game, keep track of the points that are scored by each team. Once a team reaches 11 points, they're eligible to win the game. If they already have a 2-point lead whenever they reach 11 points, then they win the game.

- For instance, if the score of a game is 10 to 4 and the team with 10 points scores again, then they win the game.



**2 Earn a 2-point lead once you have 11 points to win.** Once a team scores 11 points, if they have a 2 point lead, then the game is over and they win. But, if a team scores 11 points, and they don't have a 2 point lead, then the game continues until they do.

- For example, if you score 11 points, but the opposing team has 10 points, then you must score another point to make the score 12 to 10 in order to win the game.

**Note:** Pickleball tournaments often have games that are played to 15 points, with a 2 point lead required to win.





**3 Play 3 total games to decide the winner of a match.** Pickleball is fast-paced and points are scored often, so matches of pickleball usually consist of 3 total games. Win 2 out of 3 games in order to win a match.

- Some pickleball tournaments may have matches of 5 games.



## Expert Q&A

### Question

What scoring method is used in pickleball?



**Jeremiah Thomas**  
Pickleball Expert  
Expert Answer

In pickleball, there are two primary scoring methods: rally scoring and traditional scoring. Rally scoring operates by awarding a point to the side that wins each rally, regardless of who served. This means that even if the serving team loses the rally, the opposing team can still earn a point. The server changes after each point, irrespective of which team wins the rally. On the other hand, traditional scoring in pickleball resembles the scoring system used in sports like volleyball. Points can only be won by the serving team. If the receiving team wins the rally, they do not earn a point, and the serve passes to the other team. The choice between rally scoring and traditional scoring often depends on the setting. While certain leagues may prefer rally scoring, most tournaments opt for traditional scoring. Additionally, recreational play in parks typically follows traditional scoring rules. It's worth noting that some games played with traditional scoring may have a point cap, often ending when a team reaches nine points.

Helpful  Not Helpful

## Expert Interview

Thanks for reading our article! If you'd like to learn more about pickleball, check out our in-depth [interview with Jeremiah Thomas](#).

## References

1. ↑ Jeremiah Thomas. Pickleball Expert. Expert Interview. 16 February 2024.
2. ↑ Jeremiah Thomas. Pickleball Expert. Expert Interview. 16 February 2024.
3. ↑ <https://usapickleball.org/what-is-pickleball/official-rules/rules-summary/>
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17. ↑ <https://youtu.be/fTvPYdKZqO0?t=90>

## About This Article



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Pickleball Expert

This article was co-authored by **Jeremiah Thomas**. Jeremiah Thomas is a Pickleball Expert and the Founder of Doylestown Pickleball based in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. With over 50 acres of facilities, Jeremiah and his team offer a wide variety of programming for kids looking to create, be active, and play on their dozens of courts and fields. Jeremiah is a certified PPR (Professional Pickleball Registry) instructor as well as a former college tennis player and instructor. He received his Bachelor of Education in Elementary and Early Childhood Education from Gwynedd Mercy University as well as a Master's in Educational Leadership and Administration from Delaware Valley University. This article has been viewed 58,009 times.

★★★★★  
19 votes - 94%

Co-authors: **20**  
Updated: **April 29, 2024**  
Views: **58,009**

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