

# MTG Competitive Event Guidelines for Players

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Magic events held at Competitive Rules Enforcement Level (REL) represent a significant step up from more laid back events like Friday Night Magic or Prereleases. The standards of rules enforcement are higher, and breaking the rules, even unintentionally, can lead to significant penalties.

Whether you are a new player heading to your first Competitive Magic event, or a grizzled veteran grinder with many years of experience, here are a few tips to keep in mind to avoid problems and penalties.

## 1. Communicate clearly and explicitly with your opponent during games

A large number of problems during a match can be avoided by clearly and explicitly communicating with your opponent at all times. Rather than rely on shortcuts and ambiguous gestures, it is always a good idea to verbalize your actions clearly as much as possible.

Examples:

- Say “go” or “pass turn” rather than using a hand motion to indicate that you’re done with your turn;
- Explicitly announce your targets, rather than pointing at things on the battlefield;
- Say “in response,” “hold on,” or “wait, I’m thinking” to indicate that you are holding priority before letting your opponent’s spell/ability resolve.
- **\*\*Explicitly announce each life total change, including confirmation of both players’ life totals after the change;**
- **\*\*Explicitly announce any mana left floating in your pool after taking an action**
- If you’re not sure about the timing of a sequence of actions your opponent is taking, ask them to slow down or clarify as necessary (e.g. “hold on, are you doing this in your Main Phase or in Beginning of Combat?”)

**\*\***: These are not just good ideas, they are actually **required** by the rules, and failure to do so can result in communication infractions

**IMPORTANT NOTE**: While clear communication is paramount for most game interactions, **triggered abilities are a partial exception**, in that responsibility for acknowledging and communicating the trigger falls upon its controller. Players are never under any obligation to remind their opponents about triggered abilities from cards their opponents control.

## 2. Prepare your decklist ahead of time (for constructed events)

One frequent pitfall for both new and experienced players is mis-registering their decklist, which comes with a **penalty of a Game Loss**. This is often a result of filling out the list last minute before the tournament.

Instead, it is a good idea to prepare your list ahead of time, preferably using a tool like <https://decklist.org/> to generate a printed list. That way, you minimize the chance of error due to being in a hurry, and even if you want to make a couple of last-minute changes, the risk of error is much smaller when you manually correct one or two lines on a prepared list than when you are completing your entire list at the last minute.

## 3. Be on time!

Make sure to arrive at the event venue at least 20 minutes before the announced start time, to ensure that you have time to complete your enrollment in the event and deal with any technical issues which may arise.

Players who arrive late are penalized for Tardiness, which carries a **penalty of a Game Loss** (after a 1-minute grace period). This includes players who are physically present but who do not have their decklist ready to hand to a judge when decklist collection begins!

## 4. Bring pen/paper and other necessary materials with you

At competitive tournaments, the rules **require** that you use a reliable method to keep track of status information, including life totals, counters on players (like poison counters), game status (like night/day or who is the monarch), floating mana in a player's mana pool, and location in a dungeon. **The best way to keep track of this info is to use a pen and paper at all times.** Importantly, **using dice to track life totals is NOT acceptable**, since they can easily be nudged or knocked over accidentally.

Use of the life tracker on the official Companion app is permitted, but the device must always be in plain view of both players at all times, and it should be noted that the app does NOT track life total change history, which makes it less reliable than pen and paper.

Additionally, it is a good idea to bring any tokens which you may require as part of playing your deck. Using scraps of paper is fine, but it is always best to use physical tokens when possible to avoid ambiguity. Importantly, **using dice on their own to represent tokens is NOT acceptable**, because it is difficult to represent the tapped/untapped status of a token using a die.

Finally, tournaments very rarely include any breaks for players to eat or drink, so it is a good idea to bring snacks and a water bottle. Note, however, that these must be kept clear of the play area at all times, and drinks should be kept in watertight sealable containers.

## 5. When using foils or altered-art (i.e. painted) cards, be careful (and check with the Head Judge!)

Foil cards, as well as cards that have been altered by painting over the art, are notorious for potentially being marked. Due to changes in ambient temperature or humidity, they may easily become curled, to the point that they stand out from the other cards in the deck.

Marked Cards carry a **penalty of a Warning** by default, however if there is a pattern (such as one playset of cards in the deck being warped), then it is **upgraded to a Game Loss**.

The best advice is to **avoid the use of foils and altered-art cards** in Competitive REL tournaments altogether. Failing that, if you must use these cards, then you should always **approach a judge** before the tournament starts to have your foils/alters approved, and **be ready to replace them** if they are not deemed acceptable! Note that judges DO NOT issue proxies for foils or altered cards that are considered marked! If you cannot find suitable un-marked replacements for your foils/alters, then you will be obliged to replace them with basic lands.

Finally, for altered cards specifically, the guiding principles require that artistic alterations:

- Do not obscure or change the name or mana cost of the card
- Do not make the original card art unrecognizable
- Do not contain substantial strategic advice
- Do not contain offensive images

Ultimate discretion on whether or not an alter meets these requirements rests with the Head Judge, and you should **always** have your alters approved by the Head Judge before **each** tournament. Failure to do so could lead to penalties for Deck Problems if your alters are deemed unacceptable during a deck check.

## 6. Make sure your sleeves are in good condition and opaque

Sleeves naturally get worn out with time, getting creased, bent at the corners, wavy, dirty, or otherwise marked. This can lead to penalties for Marked Cards (Warning or Game Loss), so you should always check that your sleeves are in good condition and clean before the tournament. If possible, use fresh sleeves for each Competitive REL event (if your sleeves are deemed to be marked, the judges will require you to change them anyway!)

If using double-faced cards in your deck, the **best advice is to use substitute/checklist cards** to replace them in your deck. Failing that, it is **essential that your sleeves are fully opaque**. Dark-coloured sleeves tend to be better than light-coloured ones for this purpose. Failure to ensure full opacity may result in penalties for Marked Cards. If you are unsure, ask at your local game store for brand recommendations.

## 7. **Keep ONLY your deck and sideboard in your deckbox, and NO OTHER CARDS/DECKS**

Any cards stored with your deck or in your deckbox, with a small number of exceptions, are considered to be part of your sideboard. Therefore, if you keep extra cards with your deck, or you keep your deck in the same box as another deck, you will be committing a Deck Problem infraction which, if caught during a deck check, carries the penalty of a **Game Loss**.

Exceptionally, you may store the following additional cards in your deckbox:

- Promotional cards received during the current tournament.
- Double-faced cards represented by substitute cards in the deck.
- Damaged cards that have been officially proxied (by a judge) for the tournament.
- Double-faced cards being used to represent the back side of cards in the deck. These cards must not be sleeved in the same way as cards in the main deck and/or sideboard.

## 8. **Only consult outside notes (sideboard guide) BETWEEN games (not during!)**

Players are permitted to have a set of external notes to reference between games of their match, typically for sideboarding purposes. These notes must not be excessive (no more than two sheets of paper or equivalent), must be physically printed (accessing notes on an electronic device is NOT allowed), and may NOT be referenced DURING games. Doing so is considered Outside Assistance, and in this case carries a penalty of a **Game Loss**.

## 9. **When spectating another match, do not intervene to fix perceived problems yourself! At most, you may ask the players to pause while you call a judge, then explain what you think went wrong away from the table.**

Attempting to fix a problem in a game you are watching may result in your inadvertently giving players play advice or reminding them of triggers which they otherwise would have missed. Doing this, even with the best of intentions, is considered Outside Assistance and carries the very **severe penalty of a Match Loss**. Notably, if you have already finished your match, the penalty will be applied to your next round!

To avoid this, never intervene directly. Instead, you may ask the players to pause while you call a judge. Then, explain to the judge **away from the table** what you think went wrong. The judge will determine whether any corrective action is necessary.

**10. Do not offer your opponent anything in exchange for a match result, or accept any such offer from an opponent. Do not offer to determine the winner of a match in an improper manner, or accept such an offer.**

Situations can sometimes arise in tournaments (frequently in the last rounds of swiss) where players get into trouble because they take actions or make agreements in an attempt to maximize their expected value, but which compromise the integrity of the event.

For example, in the last round, players in a match might be in the situation where they will both be knocked out of contention for Top 8 if they draw, but if one of them wins then that player makes the cut. The match runs to time and at the end of extra turns neither player is able to win. They might decide to roll a die or play rock-paper-scissors to choose a winner rather than accept a draw. They might look at the top card(s) of their decks to see who “would have won” if only they had a few more turns. They might agree that one of them will concede the match, in exchange for the other giving them a portion of their winnings from the Top 8.

ALL of these agreements/actions are strictly prohibited, and at the VERY LEAST will result in a **Match Loss** for the players involved (assuming it is determined that they didn't know that this act was illegal). In most cases, however, the players involved will be **Disqualified**, since the prohibition against this behaviour is commonly known.

ALSO, making any statements which can reasonably be construed as an attempt to bait your opponent into making an illegal offer is equally penalized. For example, a player says “Oh no, we're going to draw, that's terrible for us. If only there were something we could do about it.”

**The ONLY guaranteed way to avoid getting in trouble is to simply not participate in any such agreements and play out your matches to completion under the rules.** If that means accepting a draw that knocks both players out of contention for prizes or Top 8, then so be it.

If you want to propose something to your opponent which involves prizes (since prize splits are legal if they are not linked to match results), **ALWAYS call a judge, and talk to the judge away from the table** before saying anything to your opponent, to ensure you are in the clear.

**11. When in doubt, call a judge!**

Judges are here to help you! While we sometimes have to assess penalties for rules violations, this is neither our primary purpose nor something we look forward to (in fact, the whole motivation for preparing this document is to help you avoid penalties as much as possible!) Rather, we enjoy helping players to understand the rules and generally have a good time, while preserving tournament integrity.

If at any time you have a question about anything related to the event (including anything written in this guide above), don't hesitate to approach us to ask! Likewise, if something goes wrong in your match, or you aren't sure how a card interaction works, or even if you just need a

translation of your opponent's foreign-language card, **just raise your hand and call for a judge**, and it will be our pleasure to help you out!

If your event has more than one judge, then one of us will be the Head Judge. If you receive a ruling from a Floor Judge which you think is incorrect, you may appeal the decision to the Head Judge. The Head Judge's ruling is final and may not be appealed. Before appealing, it is important to let the Floor Judge finish delivering the initial ruling completely, and **interrupting a ruling to appeal prematurely is penalized as Unsporting Conduct - Minor**. Remember that all participants in a tournament are entitled to mutual respect and politeness, and this includes judges.

### References / Further Reading

Magic Tournament Rules:

[https://media.wizards.com/2022/wpn/marketing\\_materials/wpn/mtg\\_mtr\\_2022jul1\\_en.pdf](https://media.wizards.com/2022/wpn/marketing_materials/wpn/mtg_mtr_2022jul1_en.pdf)

Magic Infraction Procedure Guide:

[https://media.wpn.wizards.com/attachements/mtg\\_ipg\\_5feb21\\_en\\_0.pdf](https://media.wpn.wizards.com/attachements/mtg_ipg_5feb21_en_0.pdf)