

USA Softball Slow Pitch Umpire Study Guide for New Umpires (2019)

Congratulations on deciding to become a USA Softball umpire! You are joining an organization dedicated to helping umpires pursue excellence. To help you reach your potential, USA Softball has established the best softball umpire training program in the world. This study guide is designed to help you get ready to take the field, wearing the blue uniform as a USA Softball umpire. Welcome to the Blue Team!

To assist you in your ongoing development as an umpire, USA Softball has produced two critically important manuals. The *“Official Rules of Softball – Participant Manual (2019)”* describes the rules of the game. The *“Umpire Manual (2019)”* describes the mechanics needed to umpire successfully. This Manual may be downloaded from:

<https://www.teamusa.org/USA-Softball/Umpires/Umpire-Manual> You will want to master the basic content of both manuals. You will encounter game situations that will send you back to these manuals to see how well you managed a given game situation. Your game experiences coupled with a growing understanding of both the rules and mechanics of the game will help you develop your skills. Ultimately, you are responsible for studying the rule and mechanics manuals, learning from other umpires, and attending USA Softball clinics and national schools. But the rest of the Blue Team of your fellow umpires are anxious to be part of your growth. Seek information from our umpire trainers, the State or Metro staff including the UIC, and fellow umpires. Observe and learn from watching good umpires at work.

Now let’s get acquainted with the USA Softball Manuals and start learning the basics of umpiring. Each of the items below will require you to get into the manuals and make notes about the topic being explored. Write (or type) and an answer for each section. List a reference(s) for your answers. **The numbered study guide questions require a written response** after you have “found” the answer in the manuals. Before you take the field for your first USA softball games as an umpire, you will need to share and discuss your notes with your USA umpire trainer. Make a list of any additional questions you may have. Your trainer(s) will be happy to help you explore those issues.

THE MANUALS

The *“Official Rules of Softball – Participant Manual (2019)”* records all softball rules.

1. Review the “Playing Rules Table of Contents” on page 14. **List the first 10 rules.** This framework for the manual will help you as you seek to learn more about specific rules.
2. Starting on page 120 is a section entitled, *“Rules Supplement”*. It provides a topical summary of frequently used rules. Review and **write out a summary in your own words describing “37. Over-running First Base”**.

3. A detailed Index for the rules and rules supplement begins on page 150. The *“Safety Awareness Guide”* portion of the manual begins on page 176. Look through this section. Read the *“USA Softball Guidelines for Lightning Safety”* section in pages 192-194. **Write a summary list of the umpire’s responsibility regarding lightning.**

The *“Umpire Manual (2019)”* may be downloaded from the USA Softball website location listed above. While there is much valuable information in the Manual, you will want to pay special attention to pages 1-4, 16-115. There are DVD clips about specific mechanics embedded in the online manual. You may choose to print part of the Manual to make it easier for you to study.

4. Review the *“Table of Contents”* starting on page 2. You will especially want to become familiar with the information in the sections on signals, plate mechanics, base mechanics and movement in the one and two umpire system. Read the *“Code of Ethics for Umpires”* starting on page 27. After you have read them, review #6. **Write a 2 or 3 sentence response to what you think this should mean to you as an umpire (including if you are still playing softball).**
5. Examine the structure of the *“Two Umpire System – Slow Pitch”* starting on page 80. There is a detailed description of plate umpire and base umpire responsibilities for each of the base runner scenarios you will encounter at the start of a pitch and then as a batted ball is put into play. **What are the three batted ball scenarios described for each base runner situation?**
6. **List the base umpire starting positions for each of the scenarios starting with “No Runners on Base” through “Bases Loaded”.** Note that there are two slow pitch base umpire starting positions. Be sure to understand these positions.

The USA Softball website has a section for umpires. It can be found at:

<https://www.teamusa.org/USA-Softball/Umpires> Much interesting and helpful information for umpires can be found here. One section is entitled, *“Rules-Clarifications and Plays”*. Almost every month the National Offices posts plays and comments to help umpires better understand softball and umpiring. Go to the web page:

<https://www.teamusa.org/USA-Softball/Umpires/Rule-Clarifications-and-Plays>

Then open and review the August 2017 section.

7. Review the first play under the heading *“Plays and Clarifications”*. This section gives plays and rule clarifications to help all umpires increase their understanding of the game. This is a website location you will want to check each month. Also you will benefit from reviewing postings from the past.

THE RULES

Using your Rule Book, write out (may be typed and/or in outline form) the answers to the following rule questions. Include a reference(s) for each of your answers.

Foul-Fair, Foul Tip

8. What determines whether a batted ball is foul or fair?
9. What is a foul tip and how is it different from a foul ball?

Catch-No Catch

10. How do you judge whether or not a line drive or fly ball has been caught?

Strike Zone

11. What is the strike zone for slow pitch softball?

Interference – Obstruction

12. In your own words define Interference?
13. In your own words define Obstruction?
14. Which one – interference or obstruction -- results in a “delayed dead ball”?

Overthrow

15. When are bases awarded on an overthrow?
16. How do you determine how many bases to award?

Infield Fly Rule

17. Describe the infield fly rule in your own words.
18. Under what circumstances may runners advance?
19. How do you determine if the ball can be caught with reasonable effort?

Slow Pitch Pitching

20. What are the legal height restrictions for slow pitch softball pitches?
21. What are the speed requirements? How is this gauged?
22. If a pitch crosses through the strike zone, the batter does not swing, and the ball hits the plate – is the pitch a strike or a ball?
23. What is a “quick pitch”?

Runner leaving a base

24. When may a runner legally leave base to advance to the next base after a pitch?
25. When may a runner legally leave base to advance to the next base on a caught fly ball?

Force out

26. What is a force out?

Run Scores or Does Not Score

27. How do you determine whether or not a run counts in relation to the third out of the inning being recorded?

Bunting

28. What is a bunt?

29. Is it legal in slow pitch softball?

Coed – Walk to a male batter

30. How many bases does a male batter advance when walked?

31. When does a female batter have an option to bat or take a walk?

Base Line – Base Path

32. What is the difference between a base line and a base path?

Batter's Box

33. What are the dimensions of the batter's box (excluding 16" softball)?

34. What restrictions does the batter have regarding the batter's box?

UMPIRE PREREQUISITES

Using your Umpire Manual, review Chapter 1 entitled "Prerequisites for Good Umpiring". Include a reference(s) for each of your answers.

35. List the three qualities all good umpire possess.

36. List the nine elements of a successful umpire.

37. Which of the nine elements should be the easiest for an umpire to achieve? Why?

38. Which of these elements do you think will be the most challenging for you as a new umpire? Why?

UMPIRE SIGNALS

Using your Umpire Manual, review Chapter 2 entitled "Communications and Signals". Include a reference(s) for each of your answers.

39. The use of these signals is designed to enhance communication with [complete the sentence]

40. Which signals require the umpire to have one or both hands above their head?
41. To signal the pitcher to “hold up play”, which hand (right or left) do you hold up? Why?
42. When giving the count, how high should your hands be?
43. When giving the count, which hand is used to: signal the number of balls; signal the number of strikes? [also note the reference to consecutive fingers]
44. What is the signal for “delayed dead ball” and/or “obstruction”?
45. Which signals require a verbal response from the umpire?
46. What is the difference in the signal and verbal response from the umpire for a foul ball versus a fair ball?
47. Which of the signals in this chapter do you think you will use most frequently?
48. Non-written assignment: Practice each of the signals in front of a mirror. Imitate the signals as described in the words and pictures in the chapter on signals.

PLATE MECHANICS

Using your Umpire Manual, review: the Definitions in Section 2 (pages 22-23), Chapter 4 on Plate Mechanics (begins on page 44), and the section on the “Two Umpire System – Slow Pitch” in Chapter 6 (begins on page 80). Include a reference(s) for each of your answers.

49. What is the “slot”? Where is your head when you are positioned properly in the “slot”?
50. What is the “heel to toe stance”? How do you determine the correct alignment?
51. When do you go to the set position to observe a pitch?
52. What is the difference between the way the plate umpire signals/announces a “swinging” strike versus a “called” strike (with no swing)?
53. Describe the timing that is “crucial” when calling a pitch?
54. Describe the plate umpire’s movement when trailing a batter-runner to first base.
55. What is the purpose of trailing the runner to first?
56. Describe the plate umpire’s movement to third base.
57. What is the plate umpire’s optimal position for a tag play at third base?
58. What is the plate umpire’s optimal position for a tag play at home plate?
59. Under what circumstances should the plate umpire call “infield fly rule, the batter is out”?
60. What runner(s) is the plate umpire responsible for the tag up on a caught fly ball?
61. Describe the plate umpire’s responsibilities on a fly ball hit to the outfield with runners on 1st and 2nd base.
62. What is the holding zone? Where is it? When does the plate umpire go there?
63. When\Under what circumstances should an umpire call time?

BASE MECHANICS

Using your Umpire Manual, review: the Definitions in Section 2 (pages 22-23), Chapter 5 on Base Mechanics (begins on page 54), and the section on the “Two Umpire System – Slow Pitch” in Chapter 6 (begins on page 80). Include a reference(s) for each of your answers.

64. A play consists of four elements. List the four elements.
65. What is the difference between a “primary position” and a “secondary position”?
66. Describe the “ready position” assumed at the start of the pitch by a base umpire?
67. Describe the base umpire starting position with no runners on base.
68. Describe the base umpire starting position with a runner on first base.
69. What does the “inside/outside theory” mean for base umpire movement and positioning?
70. In umpiring, what is a “buttonhook”?
71. What should the base umpire be doing as they move inside the diamond on a ball that goes outside the infield?
72. Describe the base umpire’s optimal position for calling a force out at 1st base.
73. Describe the base umpire’s optimal position for calling a tag play at 2nd or 3rd base.
74. What are the four situations on a batted ball when the base umpire might make a call at third base?
75. What runner(s) is the base umpire responsible for the tag up on a caught fly ball?
76. Describe the base umpire’s responsibilities on a base hit to the outfield with a runner on second base.

Note: This Study Guide has several limitations including:

- Does not provide a comprehensive guide to rules or mechanics – only a brief introduction.
- Does not take the place of training in clinics, schools or from mentors.
- Does not eliminate the needs for ongoing coaching.
- Does not address one umpire or three umpire mechanics.
- Does not address mechanics adjustments (sometimes required for some more unique situations) or rule interpretations.
- Does not address rules or mechanics specific to fast pitch softball.
- Does not include case studies.

Welcome to the Umpire Family. Happy Umpiring!