

Skill-Level Rating Scale (Beginner through 4.0) – Brief Version

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The pickleball skill-level descriptions below are a guide for **evaluating your own skill level** and determining the level at which you play. The purpose of this rating scale is to encourage a consistent and competitive level of play for all players in a game or skill-session when appropriate, and to provide information for skills that are needed to move up to the next level. Percentages indicate % of attempts that are successful.

The criteria comes from USAPA & IPTPA skill assessment sheets. See the [2-page version](#) of “BPC Skill-Level Rating Scale” for more details, and information for levels 4.5 & 5.0.

(Descriptive level names in parentheses are for BPC reference.)

Level 1.0 (Beginner/ Newbie)

- New and has only minimal knowledge of the game and the rules.

Level 1.5 (Beginner)

- Played a few games and is learning the court lines, scoring, and some basic rules of game;
- Limited rallies;
- Learning how to serve;
- Developing a forehand;
- Fails to return easy balls frequently and may miss the ball entirely.

Level 2.0 (Lower Novice)

- Knows some of the basic rules including the “two-bounce rule” and how to score;
- Knows where to stand as the serve team and the return team;
- 40% of serves, service returns, forehand and backhand groundstrokes, volleys, and dinks.

Level 2.5 (Upper Novice) *Previous level skills plus:*

- Approaches the net to hit volleys;
- Uses the forehand lobs;
- Keeps the ball in play on short rallies;
- Demonstrates control (direction, depth, placement) on 60% of forehand groundstrokes;
- 60% of serves, service returns, and volleys;
- 50% of dinks;
- 40% of overhead slams drop shots from mid-court.

Level 3.0 (Lower Intermediate),

Skills from previous levels plus:

- Quickly approaches net rather than staying back;
- Uses deeper & higher service returns to allow more time to approach the net;
- Returns the ball lower over the net;
- Displays sound footwork;
- Exhibits correct court positioning for doubles and how to “move as a team”;
- Demonstrates control (direction, depth, placement) on 60% of forehand & backhand groundstrokes;
- 70% of serves, service returns, forehand and backhand groundstrokes, and volleys; controls their direction, depth, height & pace;
- 60% of dinks, forehand lobs, overheads, AND drop shots from baseline.

Level 3.5 (Mid-Intermediate),

skills from previous levels plus:

- Knows all main rules including how to correct the score, and correct who serves;
- Consistently returns lower balls over the net;
- Avoids hitting opponents’ shots that are going out;
- Consistently adjusts to differing ball speeds;
- Uses slower-paced shots to advantage;
- Able to create and hit to coverage gaps;
- Able to play with partners effectively using court strategies like partner communication (conditions, opponent left & right hand, shot strategy) and changing a losing game;
- 80% of serves, service returns, forehand and backhand groundstrokes, and volleys; controls their direction, depth, height and pace;
- Initiates & sustains dink exchanges 70%;
- 60% of forehand lobs, backhand lobs, overheads, and drop shots from baseline.

Level 4.0 (Lower Advanced), *skills from previous levels plus:*

- Able to change between slow-paced and fast-paced strategies;
- Can block and return 60% of fast, hard volleys;
- Controls play at the non-volley line, keeping opponents back, driving them off the line and controlling the speed or placement of the ball;
- Recognizes and exploits weaknesses in opponents;
- Poaches effectively;
- Maintains patience in rallies;
- Knows & implements appropriate shots to control game;
- Moves effectively with partner, easily switching sides, and communicating when required;
- Consistently creates coverage gaps & hits to them;
- 90% of serves, service returns, forehand and backhand groundstrokes, and volleys; controls their direction, depth, height and pace;
- 80% of dinks, overheads, and well-placed lobs;
- 70% of drop shots from baseline;

4.5 and 5.0+

See regular version of BPC Skill Rating Sheet, and/or <https://www.usapa.org/player-skill-rating-definitions/> and <https://iptpa.com/iptpa-rating-skills-assessment/?>

Glossary

- **Block:** A shot, typically made from near the non-volley zone, whereby a player returns a hard-hit ball by simply holding up his/her paddle versus having to swing.
- **Dink:** A soft shot that arcs over the net and falls into the opposing non-volley zone.
- **Drive:** A low shot hit straight & deep into the opposing backcourt.
- **Drop Shot:** A soft shot done to take speed of the ball and return it short, near the net. It is usually initiated from mid- to back-court, arcing just over the net and landing within the opponent's no volley zone.
- **Fault:** A fault is any action that stops play because of a rule violation.
- **Foot Fault:** When a player's foot illegally touches the non-volley zone while volleying, or if both feet are not fully behind the server's service court during the serve.
- **Forehand:** Paddle stroke on the same side of the body as you are holding the paddle. A right handed player's forehand would start with their right hand behind them.
- **Groundstroke:** Hitting the ball after one bounce (compared to a volley which is hit midair).
- **Line Calls:** Verbal indication said out loud indicating if the ball bounced inbounds or out of bounds. Normally players call the in/out on their side and opposing team makes calls on their respective side.
- **Lob:** A return shot sent as high and deep, thereby forcing the opposing side back to the baseline.
- **No-Volley Zone/NVZ (KITCHEN):** The 7-foot section of court on either side of the net. No part of the player or their equipment can touch this area during a volley, including momentum following the volley. It includes all lines surrounding the zone
- **Overhead Shot:** Any shot hit where the paddle starts high above your head and drives downward.
- **Poach:** In doubles pickleball, to cross over into your partners side of the court to hit a shot.
- **Rally:** Continuous play, hitting the ball back and forth between opposing sides.
- **Serve:** An underhand stroke used to put the pickleball into play. Each player of the serving team serves until a fault occur (with the exception of the first server at game start). Paddle must contact the ball under the server's waist level, below the wrist, and with an upward motion.
- **Service Court:** The area on either side of the center line, bounded by the non-volley line, the baseline, and the sideline. All lines are included in the service court except the non-volley line.
- **Service Return:** Returning the ball to the other of the net, after the ball has bounced on your side. The goal is to keep the ball in play, generally by returning it deep to keep the serving team at the baseline.
- **Score correction:** Knowing how to correct the server or score, (based on who was the original 1st server of the game, and of this serving sequence).
- **Two-bounce Rule:** after the ball is served, the receiving team must let the ball bounce before returning, and then the serving team must also let it bounce before returning. After the 3rd hit, the ball can be volleyed (hit midair without bouncing).
- **Volley:** Hitting the ball in the air before the ball has a chance to bounce onto the pickleball court.