

Before you start to play it is useful to know a few of the basic facts

How to Play

How to grip the bat

In Europe the shake-hands grip is the most common and probably the most versatile. 'Shake hands' with the bat. The thumb and forefinger lie roughly parallel to the straight edge of the rubber. The remaining three fingers are wrapped loosely around the handle for stability.

To decide who serves

Toss a coin at the start of the game to decide who serves or receives first, or to start play at either end of the table. The server then changes every 2 points, unless both players have scored 10 points, in which case service changes every point. The player serving first in a game receives first in the next game.

How to serve

The ball must rest on the flat palm of the hand, above the height of the table and behind the end line. Throw the ball up at least 16cm, as near vertical as possible, making contact when the ball is falling. It must bounce once on any part of the server's side of the table, clear the net and then bounce on any part of the receiver's side.

How to return a serve

Strike the ball after it has bounced once on the receiver's side of the table and before it bounces twice. The ball must clear the net and land on the server's side of the table.

How to play a point

Each player strikes the ball after it has bounced once on their side of the table, to clear the net and land on the opponents side. A point is won/lost when a player misses the ball, the ball bounces twice, the ball does not land on the table or does not clear the net.

How to win a match

A match consists of the best of any number of odd games – normally 3 or 5 in school matches. Each game is up to 11 points, unless both players have scored 10 points in which case the winner is the first to gain a lead of 2 points.

Doubles

In doubles, every serve must be made from and to the right-hand side of the table. Players must then strike the ball alternately in strict rotation. The player first to receive service becomes the next server. After serving for 2 points, a player must move from the right hand side of the table to allow his partner to receive service. Example: If A & B are playing X & Y – for 2 points A serves to X, then for 2 points X serves to B, then B to Y, Y to A and A to X in the next game the order is reversed – X to A, A to Y, Y to B and B to X and so on.

The full set of laws are published by the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) and can be found on their website www.ittf.com