# Instructions to Base Umpires

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## 1) Positioning

In Little League Baseball, the base umpire has two major responsibilities:

1) To call plays which occur on the base paths.

2) To enforce Rule 7.13, "Leaving Base Too Soon".

An umpire must position himself so that he has the best chance of making any call that falls to him.

In my eyes, being in position to call a safe-or-out play is more important than being in position to enforce Rule 7.13. No one can predict what will happen to a baseball hit into the outfield, especially in Little League. As a result, I concentrate on the right place to be when the ball is hit within the infield.

There are eight combinations of base runners, ranging from bases empty to bases loaded. Most of these dictate one position for the base umpire. However, in a few cases, the umpire's position depends on the number of putouts recorded in the inning.

With the bases empty, the base umpire stands behind first base (on the outfield grass) and outside the foul line. He stands in foul territory so that, if a screaming line drive comes down the first-base line and he gets hit by it, it must be a foul ball. Of course, if the ball bounces past first base in fair territory, it's a fair ball and the umpire has to get out of its way.

The first-base position also applies with only a runner on third base. Odds are that a ground ball will be played either to the plate (the home plate umpire's call) or to first base (your call). The chance of a line drive being caught and returned to third base to double-up the runner is slim. From first base, you can still see a runner leave third base too soon.

With a runner on first base, the base umpire takes a position on the edge of the outfield grass on an extension of the line from third to second base. From this position, you can see the force play at either first or second. You also have enough time to move around and cover a following play at third.

The same position applies when runners are on first and third. Again, the force at first or second is more likely than a play at third base.

That position, on the first-base side of second, may also be used for situations with runners on second and third or with the bases loaded. With runners on second and third, there is no force play, so the most likely infield play is home or to first. Your position allows you to see either runner leaving too soon.

With the bases loaded, a force is likely at any base, and the only disadvantageous play to you is the play at third. However, unless the ball is hit to the third baseman, third base is the least likely place for the ball to go. And if the ball is hit to third, it's a force play at third, so the call is easier anyway.

The only two situations that remain are a runner on second base, and runners on first and second. For these situations, the umpire's position varies with the number of outs.

With fewer than two out, the umpire should take a position on the outfield grass, on the line from first base through second. This gives a much better view of the runner(s) leaving too soon, and by cheating a few steps, you can still see a force play at first base. (This assumes that the plate umpire has asked you to cover third base. If he assumes responsibility for third, stay on the first-base side of second.)

However, with two out, you may want to move to the first-base side of second again. The infield play will generally be to first base, in order to retire the side.

With runners on first and second, the home plate umpire should be ready to cover a force at third. However, he must also be ready in the case of an overthrow which would enable a runner to try for home. Whichever position you take, be ready to call a play at third -- but bear in mind that with two out, the play at first is still more likely.

When the ball is hit into the outfield, and you're standing by first base, start following it. Stay in the outfield, and edge over in the general direction of the ball, but don't go too deep into the outfield grass. If the ball drops, this moves you into a better position for a call at second or third base.

If the situation calls for it, you can cut across the diamond to cover an obvious play at third base when a batter tries to leg out a triple. Otherwise, using the positioning above, you should be able to call just about everything from the outfield.

The rule of thumb is to start the play in a spot where you'll be able to see a play at the base where you teach your players to make the play in that situation. You can't be 100 percent sure, because Little Leaguers are unpredictable. But in most cases, by using this guideline, you'll be in a good position to see most plays.

Even if the plate umpire never seems to move from behind the plate, don't be afraid to ask him for help if you're not sure of a call. He'll especially be of help if you're not sure of a rule, and he'll probably be able to help you out on force plays, especially at third. On the other hand, if you're certain you had position and you made the right call, you don't have to confer.

Finally, remember that communication with the plate umpire is essential. Spend a few minutes before the game discussing who has which plays (third-base plays, Infield Flies, etc.). The payoff comes in better control of the game.

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### 2) Force Plays at First Base

Baseball people, including media commentators, will often refer to a close play at first base as a "look-and-listen" play. This comes from the umpire's best help at first base: his ears.

To call a play at first base which the first baseman fields on a throw, and you're standing at first base: Take a few steps into fair territory, to get an angle on the base. When the ball is thrown, look at the base, watch the fielder to make sure he stays on the base, and watch the runner. At the same time, listen for the "thwack" of the thrown ball in the first baseman's mitt. If the runner's foot got to the bag before the "thwack", call he runner safe. If the "thwack" beats the runner and the fielder held the bag, then as long as he still has the ball, or he's cleanly taken it out of his glove (to throw it to the pitcher or around the infield), the runner is out.

This is the only situation in which it's not advisable to watch the ball. It's better to watch the runner and listen for the ball.

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### 3) Interference and Obstruction

These two terms are not interchangeable. Interference is the act of a runner who gets in the way of a fielder trying to make a play. Obstruction is the act of a fielder who stops a runner from advancing to the next base.

If a ball is hit in the infield, an infielder has the right to play it. For instance, the first baseman has the right to play a ball hit to him, and a runner from first has the obligation to avoid that fielder. Running in front of a fielder playing at "normal" depth is accepted, but if the runner makes contact with the fielder or stops in order to distract him from making a play, interference should be called.

Only one fielder gets the benefit of the interference rule on any one batted ball. The umpire must decide which fielder had the best chance at fielding the ball. Contact by a runner with any other fielder is not interference (and may indeed be obstruction).

It is also interference if a batted ball touches a runner while an infielder still has a chance to play it. However, if the ball has already touched any infielder, including the pitcher, the runner is not out (unless he deliberately touches the ball, such as by kicking it), and the ball remains alive and in play.

Interference makes the ball dead. Generally, the runner who interferes is out, although in some cases, the batter is out (or both batter and runner are out, in the case of a runner who willfully interferes in order to break up a double play). No other runner may advance once interference is called.

On the other hand, once the ball has been touched, the runner has the right to the base line. Any infielder (including the pitcher) who touches the ball ends the interference call. A fielder who blocks the base path and prevents a runner from reaching a base or advancing to the next base is guilty of obstruction, unless he has the ball and is waiting to make the tag. (In that case, if the runner leaves the base line, he is out.)

Obstruction usually does not make the ball dead. An umpire who sees obstruction should raise his hand, wait for the play to end, and then call "Time". Then, the two umpires should confer and award any additional bases they deem necessary.

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**4) Coach's Interference**

Offensive interference occurs when the base coach physically assists a runner advancing or returning to a base. The runner is out and the ball is dead. It's also coach's interference if he does not get out of the way of a fielder making a play. The runner on which the play is being made is out and the ball is dead.

An umpire should not flag a base coach merely for standing outside the coach's box. However, the coach is not allowed to do anything to distract the fielders. If he does, the runner may be called out for interference.

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**5) Catcher's Interference**

This is a different animal. The ball is not automatically dead on catcher's interference. If a play follows, the offense has the option of taking the penalty (batter gets first base, runners advance if forced) or the result of the play.
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### 6) Appeal Plays

Except when a runner passes a preceding runner on the base paths, there are no automatic outs for base-running violations. All calls of missed bases or failure to tag up are appeal plays.

a) Failing to "Tag Up"

A runner may not advance on a caught fly ball until a fielder has touched the ball. If a runner is off his base when a caught fly ball is touched, he must retouch his base (tag up) before advancing.

On appeal, the runner who fails to tag up is out if either he or his base is tagged by a fielder with the ball. However, even though this is classified as an appeal play, there is no need to verbally appeal or return the ball to the pitcher's mound unless "Time" is called before the appeal takes place.

b) Missed Bases

The traditional appeal is for the pitcher to get the ball on the mound, wait for a batter, make sure the ball is in play, and then step off the mound and throw the ball to the base he suspects the runner missed. This action is unmistakably an appeal play. (In 1979, after Mark Zielinski caught a ball in left field for the first out against Hasbrouck Heights, Rutherford National pitcher Steve Zak stepped off and threw to Dave Brooks, appealing that the runner left third too soon. The out was granted. The runner now on third, thinking he had been called out for some reason, jumped up and down in protest. Brooks tagged him for the third out.)

However, the act of appeal can be a lot simpler, provided the ball remains in play. All the fielders have to do is get the ball to the missed base, get the umpire's attention, and verbally appeal. As long as the ball is live, and there hasn't been another pitch or play, an appeal is in order. If the defense tries to appeal on a dead ball, do nothing. Wait for the ball to be live.

Even in the case of an obvious, traditional appeal, if there is any chance of confusion as to which runner is being appealed, the defense shall make the appeal verbally. For instance, if two runners rounded third base and the defense appeals that one of them missed the bag, they have to specify "the lead runner", or "the trail runner", or "the runner who came from second", or "the batter".

c) Impact of an Appeal on Other Plays, and Vice Versa

An appeal is not to be interpreted as a play or an attempted play. That said, bear in mind that all appeals in baseball take place on a live ball (unlike softball, where appeals take place on a dead ball), and the appeal must happen before the next pitch or play.

As a result, the offense can start another play during an appeal. If they have a runner on first, it's legal to try to advance to second during an appeal at third (because the pitcher is no longer in pitching position). The appeal is still valid if the defense makes no other play, but if the pitcher is distracted and throws to second base, that's a new play and the appeal is off.

Also, if the pitcher fails to step off before making an appeal-play throw, he's considered to have made a play. If the pitcher balks, or accidentally throws a legal pitch from the rubber instead of stepping off and tossing the ball to the catcher for an appeal at the plate, that's a play and the appeal is off.

NOTE: If the defense appeals at home base, and the pitcher properly steps off before throwing to the catcher, but the batter swings at the thrown ball, the batter is guilty of interference and he shall be called out.

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**7) Rule 7.13 - Leaving Base Too Soon**

The rule states that if a runner leaves his base before the pitched ball reaches (or is hit by) the batter, a violation has occurred. In general, the penalty is that all runners not put out on the play must return to their respective bases unless forced by virtue of the batter's action.

When you see a violation, drop your signal flag immediately. If any runners advance on the play, wait for the play to end. Then call "Time" and alert the plate umpire to the violation.

In past seasons, some umpires would give warnings, either to the base runners or to the manager at the end of the inning. To make the rule's enforcement uniform, throw the flag right away. This, along with the penalty, will provide sufficient warning.

Any penalties under the rule can be worked out between you, the plate umpire, and the official scorer.

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**8) Fair and Foul Balls**

If you are standing on the foul line and must call a ball fair or foul, remember: A ball is fair if it lands in fair territory on the line beyond first or third base, or if it bounces past

the base in fair territory, or bounces over (or hits) the base. The chalk lines are in fair territory.

Never yell "Fair ball!" You are certain to confuse several players into thinking you said "Foul". Instead, point in the direction of fair territory and then move into position for the following play.

On the other hand, if the ball is foul, raise your arms into the air and yell "Foul!" This will alert everyone and kill the play.

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**9) "Time"**

Players will always be looking at you and asking for "Time". (Actually, they'll be looking at you and saying, "Time out! Time out!" While football and basketball have charged time-outs, baseball has dead ball situations created by, among other things, the umpire when he suspends play by calling "Time".)

When a player requests "Time", the ball does not become dead until the umpire grants "Time". It is up to you to make sure that no further action is taking place before you call "Time".

Never give the defense "Time" unless the ball is in the possession of an infielder (including the pitcher or catcher) in the infield, and no base runners are advancing. If a runner is dancing off a base, make sure he is heading back to a base and the defense is not trying to put him out before granting "Time".

Base runners often ask for "Time" to stand up and dust themselves off after sliding into a base safely. Give a quick glance around the field and make sure no other runners are advancing before granting "Time".

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**10)Injury Situations**

We know that if a runner is hit by a fair ball before an infielder has a chance to play it, the runner is out. (The ball is dead, no runner advances unless forced, and the batter gets a base hit.)

But what happens if a fielder gets hit by a line drive? For an umpire, common sense and safety must prevail.

Generally, the rule of thumb is not to kill a play by calling "Time". But if the fielder requires immediate attention -- for instance, if the pitcher gets nailed by a comebacker -- you (or the plate umpire) have the right to call "Time" immediately and tend to the injured player. (In this case, you would confer with the plate umpire and place the

runners accordingly. A good way to handle it is to give each runner, including the batter, one base.)

No one will fault you if you call "Time" because you believed a player on the field to be in serious danger.

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## 11)Important Rule Changes

In 1996, Little League Baseball eliminated the on-deck position. This is in effect at all times, including between innings. Both umpires should be checking to make sure no player is taking extra swings as an on-deck batter.

Head-first sliding by a player advancing to a base is illegal. A player who slides head-first while advancing must be called out. A head-first slide when a player returns to a previously occupied base (as in a rundown or pickoff) is still legal (although undesirable), but if the runner has never had legal possession of the base he slides head-first into, he is out.

For timing purposes, the out is recorded when the player sliding head-first touches the ground with a body part other than his feet (usually the hands or stomach). If the head-first slide is the third out, no run may score after the player hits the ground.

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