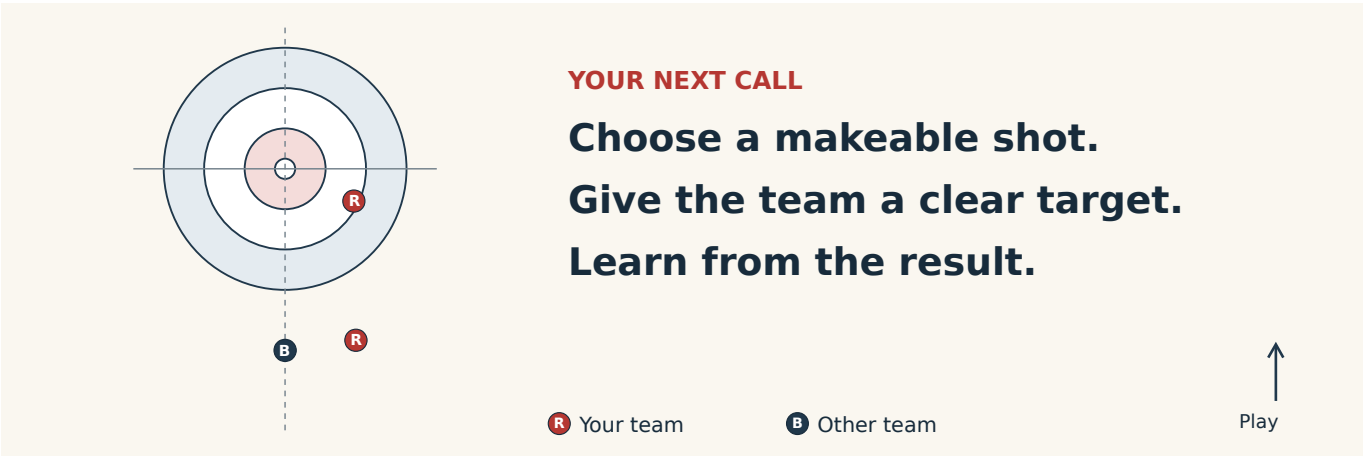
A Basic Guide to Skipping a Curling Team

A simple starting point for new skips in four-player curling.

The skip helps the team choose each shot. You do not need to know every possible play. Start with a clear goal, choose a shot your teammate can make, and explain what a useful miss would look like.

This guide explains how the last-stone advantage changes your plan, how the five-rock rule protects early guards, and how to make calm, clear calls.



Read the house, choose a target, and keep the next shot in mind. All diagrams look down at the playing end. Stones travel from the bottom toward the house.

Diagram key: R = your team. B = the other team. + = possible target. Stone symbols are enlarged.

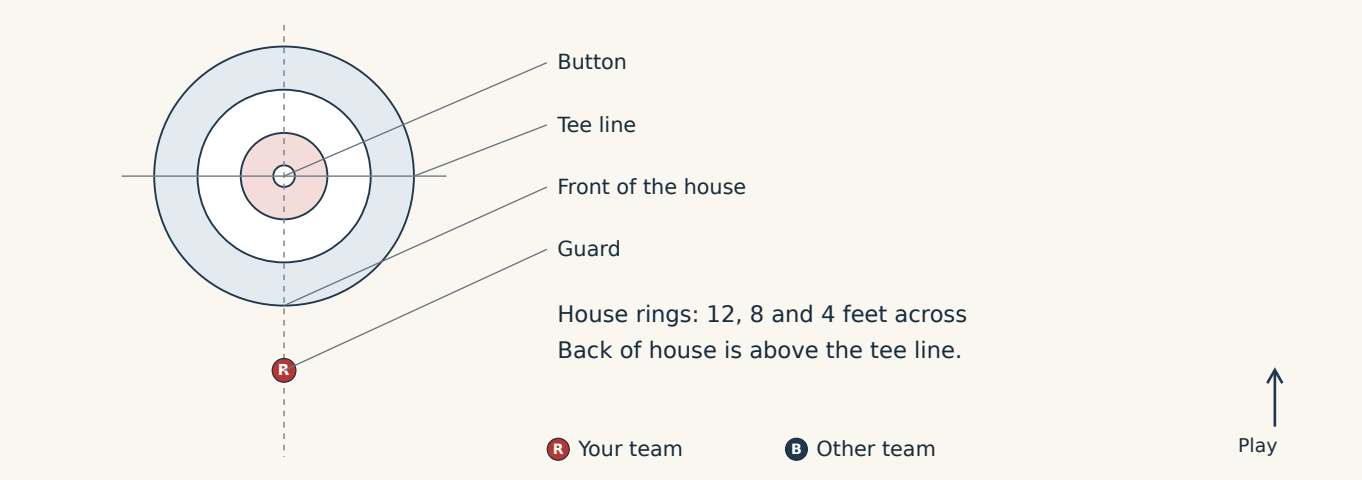
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For four-player curling. Mixed doubles has different rules and tactics. Check your club or event rules before play. Rules checked in October 2026.

The words and the picture

Learn these few terms first. They will make the calls much easier to follow.



The house is the scoring circle. The tee line runs across its centre. The front of the house faces the thrower. A guard sits in front of the house. The button is the small circle at its centre.

End. One round of play. Each team delivers eight stones, alternating with the other team.

Hammer. The last stone of the end. This gives your team the final chance to change the score.

Draw and guard. A draw stops in the house. A guard stops short of the house to help block access to another stone or area.

Takeout. A shot that knocks another stone out of play. A hit and stay removes that stone and leaves yours in play.

How an end is scored

Only one team can score. It gets one point for each stone in or touching the house that is closer to the centre of the house than the other team's closest stone. A stone touching the outer edge of the house can count. Ask for a measure if the distance is too close to judge.

After a team scores, the other team has the hammer. If nobody scores, the end is blank. In four-player curling, the team with the hammer keeps it after a blank. A blank does not require every stone to be off the sheet. [1, 2]

Make a plan for the end

Before the first stone, agree on what a good result would be. Check the plan again as the end changes.

1 Check the score and the ends left

Are you ahead, tied, or behind? How much time is left to catch up? A team protecting a lead may choose simpler, more open play. A team that needs points may accept more stones and more risk.

2 Ask who has the hammer

With the hammer, a common goal is to create a chance for two or more points. Without it, a common goal is to hold the other team to one. These are starting points. Taking one is the right call if one wins the game.

3 Use what you know about the ice

Watch both teams. Notice how far stones slide and how much they curl, or bend. A familiar draw path may be safer than a new one. Ask your teammates what they are seeing.

4 Choose a shot this player can make

A simple shot made well is often more useful than a clever shot with little chance of success. Ask whether the player is comfortable with the weight, which means the speed needed for the shot.

5 Name the useful miss

Think about where a slightly short, long, wide, or narrow shot would finish. Which miss still helps? Which miss helps the other team? There is no single safe miss for every shot.

Then look one shot ahead

Ask: If we make this, what is their easiest reply? Leave yourself a workable next shot. When the picture changes, change the plan.

Try this before each call: What do we need? What can we make? Where can we miss? What happens next? [3, 4]

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Play with the hammer

The last stone gives you options. In a close game, look for a realistic chance to score two.



One possible early setup: blue has a centre guard. Red has a corner guard to the right. Later, a red draw behind the corner can build a scoring chance away from the centre. The open middle still matters.

Use space to build a chance for two

A corner guard is a guard away from the centre line. It can give you cover for a later draw. Putting your stones in different parts of the house can make it harder for one opponent's shot to remove both.

Keep checking your route to the button. You may need an open draw with your last stone. Too many stones in the middle can make that shot harder.

Take the points the end allows

If two becomes unlikely, protect a good chance for one. Do not turn a safe score into a steal for the other team just because the original plan was two.

A blank may be useful when keeping the hammer helps your next end. Try it only when the shots needed are sensible for your team. A risky blank can give away points.

This is one option, not a fixed opening. The score, ice, other team's shots, and your team's skills can all make a different start better. [3]

Play without the hammer

Make the other team's last shot less useful. Aim to hold them to one when the game situation supports it.



One possible setup: red has a centre guard. Blue has a stone on the right side of the house. A red draw into the front of the four-foot circle may use the centre guard as cover.

Work near the centre when it helps

A centre guard sits on or near the centre line. It can help you hide a stone close to the button. That may leave the other team a harder way to score more than one.

A stone in the front of the house often leaves more options than one behind the tee line. A stone behind the tee may give the other team something to stop against.

Know the difference between a force and a steal

A force means holding the team with the hammer to one point. Your team then gets the hammer. A steal means scoring when you do not have the hammer.

Take a good chance to steal, but watch the risk. An extra guard can protect your scoring stone. It can also make a dangerous group of opponent stones harder to reach.

Change the plan when the score calls for it

If you lead late, removing open opponent stones may matter more than building a steal. If you must steal to stay in the game, keeping stones in play may be worth the risk. A guard can help either team, no matter who threw it. [3]

Understand the five-rock rule

Count stones from both teams together. The protected period is shots 1 through 5 of the end.



The shaded area is the free guard zone at the playing end. Blue's guard is in it. Red's stone touches the house, so it is not in the free guard zone. The house is excluded from the shaded zone.

What is protected

The free guard zone, or FGZ, is the area between the playing-end hog line and tee line, outside the house. During shots 1 to 5, you cannot knock an opponent's stone from this zone out of play. You cannot remove it by hitting another stone into it either.

If you do, your delivered stone is removed. Stones moved by the shot are put back where they were before the shot.

What the rule does not protect

It does not protect a stone in or touching the house. It protects an opponent's FGZ stones, not your own. On shot 6, this early guard protection has ended. Other rules still apply.

The second player's first shot is number 5 for the team without hammer, so it is still restricted. The hammer team's next shot is number 6.

Moving a guard while leaving it in play can be legal under this rule. The no-tick rule adds a restriction for some centre guards. See page 7. [1, rules R6 and R7]

Know the no-tick rule and make clear calls

Check the rules before the game. Then make each call simple enough for the whole team to understand.

The no-tick rule adds centre-line protection

Under the current World Curling rule, during shots 1 to 5 an opponent's FGZ stone touching the centre line must finish still touching that line and still in the FGZ. You cannot tap it off the line or push it into the house, even through contact with another stone.

If this happens, the other team may accept the result or have your delivered stone removed and the moved stones put back. If the protected guard goes out of play, the five-rock rule requires the stones to be put back.

Ask which rules your club or event uses. Local play may use a different rule set. Do not assume the no-tick rule applies just because the five-rock rule does. [1, rules R6 and R7]

Before the shot

Say the shot, the target, and the weight. Show the broom clearly. Agree on the turn, which is the direction of rotation. Name the useful miss.

For example: Draw to the front of the four-foot. A little short is okay. We want to avoid going behind the tee line. Then show the broom and confirm the turn.

During the shot

Agree on your team's sweeping words. Sweepers report the weight and where the stone is likely to stop. The skip watches the line and helps decide when sweeping is useful. Keep the calls short and calm.

After the shot

Use what you learned about the ice. Thank teammates for useful information. If a shot misses, reset for the next one. Ask questions without blame.

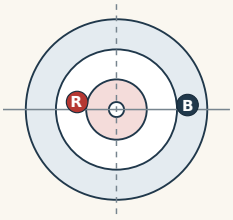
When the skip delivers, the vice-skip, the teammate who stands in for the skip, takes charge of the house. Agree on the shot and target first. Skipping is shared problem-solving. Everyone has information the team needs.

What would you call

Red is your team. Only the stones shown are in play. Talk through your choice, then turn to page 9.

1 A chance for two

The game is tied in end 3 of 8. You have the hammer and are throwing the last stone. Red is already in position to score one. The middle is open, and your player is comfortable with a draw. What would you call?



TIED | END 3 OF 8

Red has the last stone.

Red is closer. The middle is open.

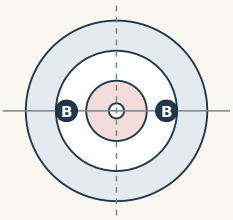
R Your team B Other team

Play

Red is closer to the centre of the house than blue. There is open space near the button for another red stone.

2 Protect a three-point lead

You lead by three in the final end. You have no hammer and are throwing shot 15. Two blue stones are open in the house. Your player is comfortable with takeouts. Do you need to score, or can a simple hit finish the job?



RED LEADS BY 3 | FINAL END

Red is throwing stone 15.

Blue has only two stones in play.

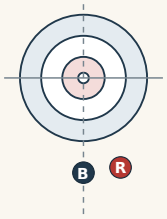
R Your team B Other team

Play

Two blue stones are far apart. No red stones are in play. Either blue stone can be reached directly.

3 An early centre guard

The game is tied. You have the hammer and are throwing shot 4. Blue's guard touches the centre line. The no-tick rule is in use. Can you peel it (hit it out), tap it off the line, or choose a draw?



TIED | STONE 4

The no-tick rule is in use.

Blue touches the centre line.

R Your team B Other team

Play

Blue has a centre guard. Red has a corner guard. Blue's other delivered stone is out of play.

The calls explained

These calls fit the situations on page 8. Different ice, skills, or stone positions can change the best choice.

1 Draw to the open front of the four-foot

You already have one point in position. Use the open draw to try for two. The new stone needs to finish in the house and closer to the centre of the house than blue.

Choose a clear target away from your own stone. Talk about a miss that still leaves your first point safe. You do not need to touch the button to score two.

Sample call: Draw to the front four-foot on the open side. We have one already. Let's give this one a good chance to count too.

2 Remove one blue stone

A successful simple takeout does the job. Blue would have only one stone left in play and at most one more stone to throw. That is no more than two possible points against your three-point lead.

Your stone does not need to stay in the house. A roll out is fine if blue is removed. In the final end under World Curling rules, play stops as soon as the other team can no longer tie or win.

Sample call: Take out this blue stone. Staying is fine, and rolling out is fine. The important part is removing blue.

3 Choose a legal draw

A draw toward the open side, or behind your corner guard if the path suits your team, is a sound choice. Keep a route to the centre in mind.

You cannot peel the blue guard out on shot 4 because it is an opponent's stone in the FGZ. A peel is a firm takeout intended to clear a stone. You also cannot tap this guard off the centre line when the no-tick rule applies.

Sample call: Let's draw on the open side. We are still in the first five stones, so we are leaving that centre guard alone.

For each answer, name the goal, the useful miss, and the other team's likely reply. The legal-shot checks come before the tactical choice. [1, 3]

Your rink-side checklist

Keep this page handy. A short, clear plan is enough to get started.

Before the end

Check the score, the ends left, and who has the hammer.
Agree on a realistic goal.
Confirm the five-rock and no-tick rules in use.

Before each shot

Check which stones count and which guards are protected.
Choose a shot this player can make.
Show the broom and agree on the turn, weight, and target.
Name a useful miss and think about the next shot.

After each shot

Listen to the team's feedback about the ice.
Update the plan.
Keep the next call calm and clear.

Practice together

Set up one diagram from this guide. Each teammate names a call and a useful miss. Try the shots. Change one stone or change the score, then discuss how the plan changes.

Sources and rule checks

1. World Curling, The Rules of Curling, 1 September 2026. R4, R5, R6, R7 and R12. Current rules and downloads. Read source

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3. Curling Canada and World Curling, Discover Curling. Basic strategy, pages 55 and 57 to 64. Older rule examples are superseded by source 1. Read source

4. Curling Canada, House Call Don't Skip Out on Skipping, 28 January 2015. Choosing makeable shots and useful misses. Read source

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