

## What Does the Word “Slope” Mean in “USGA Slope Rating”?

A standard dictionary indicates that the word “slope” references an inclined surface, such as a foothill or a bluff. However, as is often the case in the game of golf, common words can take on completely different meanings.

The term "slope" in USGA Slope Rating has nothing to do with the topography of a golf course - though topography IS one of the ten obstacle factors evaluated in course rating. Slope actually indicates the *mathematical slope of a line* – “rise over run” - when plotting scores on a graph against a Handicap Index.

Why is all of this complicated math important?

Before slope, courses were rated for one player – the scratch golfer. Your relation to the performance of that scratch golfer was your handicap. The problem with this system is that it was one-dimensional and flawed! Statistical analysis made it apparent that a handicap established on an easy golf course would change once a golfer started playing a more difficult course. And golfers who established their handicaps at relatively harder courses had an advantage over players that developed their handicaps at relatively easy courses.

Then came a bit of brilliance by the USGA that refined the system: the introduction of “Slope Rating”. This gave us a second point to plot onto the graph – the scores of the bogey golfer.

In this modern, two-dimensional system, each course is rated for predicted score for both the scratch and the bogey golfer. Connect the dots, and that's the Slope Rating.

Even though it's all a little complicated, the net result of the USGA Course Rating System, including Slope Rating, is that it allows a player to move from golf course to golf course and get a fair indication of their level of play, regardless of where they play, which set of tees they play, or their ability level.