

Umpire Signs and Signals

PAUSE - READ - REACT. These are probably the most essential elements of successful umpiring. Good timing is essential. From the set position, observe the ball, pause to read the situation, see the developing action and react in the appropriate manner. The few extra moments can be the difference between proper reaction and running off in the wrong direction. Take advantage of that extra second before calling a strike. Wait and see if that throw pops out of the glove. You'll be a better umpire, have fewer problems and will avoid some of those embarrassing situations, such as making an out call and then seeing the ball rolling away on the ground.

Selling the call is a matter of the game situation and each umpire develops a feeling based on experience and reputation. Selling the call is a required aspect of your game, when appropriate. Knowing when to sell it and then doing so can be a great help in avoiding unpleasant situations.

The call sequence is hands-on-knees-set, PAUSE, READ, REACT, CALL, return to the set position. This forces that extra second so allowing more time for proper judgment or for that inevitable unexpected occurrence, such as a dropped ball. Slow and proper timing should be an integral part of your mechanics. You also look better, make fewer errors in judgment and will have less problems on the field.

Never make a call or a decision while moving. Always get to the best location possible and pull up to see the play and make the proper call. After making the call, one should return to the set position, either standing or hands-on-knees, or gravitate to a better location on the field to be ready for any possible subsequent action.

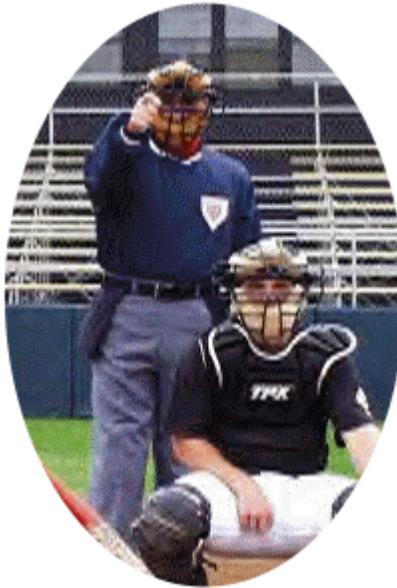
Consistency is the aim, Concentration the objective and Communication is the key.

Essential Signs for the Players and Fans

The plate umpire's right hand signals play, strike, out, fair ball - "the ball's alive", and on the rarest of occasions "infield fly" and hopefully even rarer, an ejection. The left hand does everything else including awarding bases, controlling the pitcher and holding the indicator and the mask. Remember that simple instruction and almost everyone, coach, player and fan, will be crystal clear about your intentions.

Play

Along with strike and ball, this is the one call the plate umpire will make most often during a game. Pointing at the pitcher (or the plate) with the right hand and calling "play." The call is essential for the batter and catcher. The gesture is essential for the pitcher, defense and offense.



Strike

Always signaled with the right hand, each umpire develops a personalized system for signaling the strike. Some do the traditional clenched fist, some indicate the strike out to the side with an open hand.. Some umpires face forward, some turn. Some call strike then signal, others do both simultaneously. One essential element is not to turn away from the action particularly in a two man system. In a two or three man system, by not facing forward, an umpire might even miss a play at the plate while going through their actions.



Ball

Never signaled. Alright, maybe a touch of body english but no hand gestures. The general preference is that the verbal signal "ball" loud enough that both dugouts can hear it. Calling "ball" allows you to maintain the rhythm of your calls. Never indicate why a pitch was a ball, for example: "High, Ball One"

Ball Four

Ball four is the one ball count that an umpire should announce aloud. You should NEVER point to first base even with the left hand. Just say "BALL FOUR". If the umpire points to first after the pitch and the defense thinks it's strike 3 and starts to leave the field chaos abounds. Even if you use the left hand, the players may not take note of which hand it was and be confused. Professional umpires never point to first.

Why ball four? It is an important count, but even more important is that you may arrive at a point where you will have to "sell" the walk. Having adopted a vocal call you are now in a position to act with authority should you need to.

Time

Raising both hands into the air and calling in a loud voice "TIME." All umpires on the field will immediately signal the time call. Sometimes the call must be made several times in order to shut things down. Once time is called every effort must be made by all umpires to stop the action taking place. It is preferred that umpires maintain the time signal with at least the right arm until play is prepared to resume.



The Count

Balls are signaled using the left hand. Strikes are signaled using the right hand. A full count is always signaled as "three balls, two strikes" and never signaled using clenched fists. The count is relayed back to the pitcher after every pitch and a verbal report is made usually after the second or third pitch and from that point on. The count is always read aloud as "two balls, two strikes" and not "two & two", or "twenty-two" or other variation.



Safe

Both left and right arms are raised together, to shoulder level, in front of the umpire and then a sweeping motion is performed out, parallel to the ground, palms down. The verbal call of "safe" may be made. To complete the call you may elect to return to the set position. To sell a safe call you might consider doing it two or three times in rapid succession. It is not always necessary to even make the sign or call if the play is obvious.



"Out!"

The clenched right fist and a short hammered motion seem to be favored by most umpires. Again, personal style is acceptable as long as it does not distract you from seeing any further plays taking place. It is advisable to wait a second or two before making this call. Watch that the ball does not come loose and check that the fielder is really in possession of the ball. The call can be made with only a gesture or can be sold with a loud call of "Out!" Signal every out.



Never say "Strike Three - You're Out!"

Dropped Third Strike

Where this call is made the base umpire is often in a better position to relay the possession or trapping of the ball to the plate umpire. Signaling, not calling, a small discreet "out" means the ball was caught. Pointing to the ground with your right hand can mean the ball was trapped or not caught.

Out on the force!

This is a simple out call but the concentration is on the base. Raise both hands together, just like you are going to call "safe". Point towards, or focus on, the base then signal the out with the right hand, the left hand usually moves up to your chest.

Out on the tag!

Point at the runner with the left hand, signal the out with the right hand. Complete the sign by saying "out" plus "on the tag" if you want to sell it a touch. (Remember you are the umpire, not the color commentator.)

Safe, he missed the tag!

A "selling it" call that occurs when a runner slides under or around the tag or the tag is high. You can save some grief by indicating a loud "safe" and following it with a tapping motion where the tag was. Everyone will know you saw the tag and most will assume the runner had the bag before it.

Fair Ball

The right hand points into the field in fair territory. There is no "Fair" call ever made.

Foul Ball

The same signal as "Time" but the call becomes "Foul." (not "Foul Ball"). Umpires often add a point into foul territory with one hand after giving the time signal.



Dead Ball

The same signal as "Time" but the call becomes "Dead Ball" or is simply left at "Time."
The base umpire needs to pay specific attention to a ball hitting the batter in the batter's box. The base umpire will immediately call "Time" or "Dead Ball" if the plate umpire did not see the infraction. Never say "foul" in this situation.

No Pitch

The same signal as "Time" but the call becomes "No Pitch." If you are the plate umpire, step away from the plate. You will use this call most often in a softball game. It is used to indicate a leading off violation in some leagues. The call is a clear "No Pitch" and the "Runner is Out!" with a point and Out signal..

The Run Counts

Here there are two schools of thought. Often you will see an umpires point at the plate each time a run crosses the plate legally. Scorers often key on this gesture (as well as catchers!) This can be important on the "time-play" or a "third-out" situation.

The Run Does Not Count!

Signal and announce when the runner does not score so that the scorer and coaches maintain accurate records. The signal, done by the plate umpire, begins by forming an 'X' with the arms in front of the body then sweeping the arms out to the "time" position. The gesture is repeated and the call "The runner does not score!" is made.

Called Strike

First, point at the batter with your left hand then signal the strike with your right. It is good practice to verbalize something like "He went - strike." One very effective call is the pointed "Haaaw ... strike! (use your best banger).

The "Check-Swing" or Appealed Strike

The plate umpire does not have to be asked for help, he can simply request it himself. Experienced catchers will immediately ask you to get help from the base umpire after a check swing which you called a ball although in younger leagues with the coach and three players yelling you often say to the catcher, "Do you want to ask if that was a swing or not?". In some leagues the request to appeal can come from anywhere on the field,

even the manager. A request should never be refused. With your left arm gesture clearly to the base umpire and ask "Did he swing?" or "Did he go?" If the answer is yes the base umpire signals - "Strike." If the answer is no – use a safe sign and restate the count.

The Foul Tip

A two part signal. Extend you left arm up, in front of your body, palm down, to at least shoulder level. Brush the fingers of the right hand over the back of the left hand two or three times. The signal is completed by signaling the strike with the right hand. Because the ball is alive and runners can advance never say "Foul Tip." Announcing "foul" anything could stop the action.

Infield Fly Called

All umpires point into the air with their right hand. On some crews every umpire on the field echoes the infield fly call, on others only the gesture is echoed. This should be dealt with in the pre-game conference.

Home Run or Ground Rule Double

First, the ball is dead. Make sure any unnecessary action is killed, particularly if the ball has rebounded back into the field. The signal for a home run is circling the right arm and index finger overhead. The ground rule double is awarded by signaling "two bases" with two fingers held up usually on the left hand.

Awarding Bases

Using the left hand point clearly at the runner and state "You second base" or "You third base", "You home" whatever the case may be. The runner is protected all the way to the base but not one inch beyond it.

That's a Balk!

Balks must be called with reference to the action. Remember, if the pitcher completes the delivery of the ball, or throws to a base, you are in a delayed balk situation. The sequence of arriving at that signal is: point at the pitcher, arm at shoulder height, and say "That's a balk" now if the pitcher hesitates in his delivery call "Time" and award the bases "Runner, second base." etc. Pointing at the pitcher will allow sufficient time to determine a delayed balk call situation.

The Interference Call

An immediate decision is needed: "dead ball" or "delayed dead ball." Point at the offensive player and make the call "That's Interference" followed by your decision on whether or not the ball is dead, announced with a loud gestured "Time" or (...nothing...) meaning a delayed dead ball. If the ball remains alive avoid any signal that looks or sounds like "Time" until the appropriate moment. If the ball is dead call "Time" immediately and shut down any remaining play on the field.

The Obstruction Call

This call is like interference except the ball may remain alive. In all cases the call "That's Obstruction" is made while pointing at the defensive player making the obstruction. If a play is being made on the obstructed runner the ball is dead so immediately signal "Time." This is followed by an awarding of a base or bases either after play has stopped or even while play remains ongoing. Unless a play was being made on the obstructed runner the ball remains alive.

Any gesture which resembles "Time" being called can cause problems on a diamond. This is one reason why some umpiring organizations teach to initially extend the left hand horizontally with a clenched fist. The professional baseball umpires point at the fielder with one hand only.

Catch or No Catch

When signaled the "catch" resembles the "out" signal. No verbal indication needs to be given. The "no-catch" signal resembles the "safe" signal except the call of "No Catch" is clearly given. Sometimes it will be necessary to repeat this sign several times. An addition to the "No Catch" is the juggling routine which indicates the fielder did not have possession. Juggle when the fielder is on the base for the force out but not in full possession of the ball.

Some crews give the safe signal and then point to the ground several times saying "on the ground, on the ground" when the ball is dropped. The terms "Catch" and "No Catch" could be mixed up over the crowd noise.

The verbal call needs only to be given on a trouble ball, for example: a ball caught diving or below the fielder's knees. Routine fly's can be signaled or not signaled depending on crew and local practice. If a ball is on the foul lines first signal whether the ball is fair or foul, then the catch or no-catch status if desired.

Communicating with your partners

The umpiring crew has a set of signals used for communication between partners. These often vary by region. The important fact here is that you **are** indeed communicating with each other and are on the same page at all times during the ballgame. Remember to always have a pre-game with your partner, even if you've worked together before.

Infield Fly: Most crews use the touching of the cap while pointing upward with the first finger for a one out situation or a closed fist in a no out situation. Other crews touch their right hand to their chest. Makes certain that the crew is aware of a possible infield fly situation.

Time Play: Touching of the left wrist with the first two fingers of the right hand is often used. I also point to the plate to let my partner know I'm staying home for a possible time play when I am the plate umpire.

Covering First to Third (Rotation Play): As the potential situation is developing, move from the plate toward third to the left of the foul line stating, "I've got third if he comes." If the runner then proceeds to third and the ball is coming to the base, move to the cutout and state, "I've got third." Keep in mind that you need a ball and a runner for a potential play.

Lost Count: Get your partner's attention and twirl your hands around each other in small circles. Lets your partner know you need a count reload.

Outs: Right arm pointed downward and facing outward with the appropriate number of fingers extended. Do this on a regular basis when runners are on base.

On the Ball / Line: In situations such as runner on first with a possible first to third, the base umpire is inside the diamond. If a possible fair-foul ball is hit down the right field line, for example, the plate umpire must make the call and cannot hustle down to third. "I've got the Ball" for the left field line, "I'm on the Line" for the right field line.

Help on a Rundown: When coming to assist your partner on a rundown play, you should communicate "I've got this half", but not until you are there and actually have half of the play. The original umpire must handle the entire rundown until you are there. Move in only when the play is moving away from you. If you are unsure who should make the call, make eye contact with your partner to determine who will take it, and / or state, "I've got it" to your partner.

Base Umpire Leaving the Infield: After pausing, reading and reacting the field umpire will communicate "I'm going" or "I'm going out" to his partner. This informs the plate umpire of his additional responsibilities emanating from the situation. As the field umpire, **never** leave the infield with runners on base. With no runners on, only go out on a possible fair-foul call or a possible trouble ball from center field to the right field line.