**Service faults**

Badminton has several rules about serving, most of which are meant to limit the advantage that can be gained from a serve.

In club badminton play, disputes over the legality of serves are common. It helps to know the rules before you argue over them!

With the exception of delays, breaking any of the following rules is a *fault*. In the case of delays, the umpire will normally warn the players first. If the players continue to delay, then the umpire would usually call a fault.

**Definitions**

9.2 - Once the players are ready for the service, the first forward movement of the server’s racket head shall be the start of the service.

9.3 - Once started, the service is delivered when the shuttle is hit by the server’s racket or, in attempting to serve, the server misses the shuttle.

These rules define when the service starts, and when it is delivered. These definitions get used in some of the rules below.

**Delays**

9.1.1 - Neither side shall cause undue delay to the delivery of the service once the server and the receiver are ready for the service. On completion of the backward movement of the server’s racket head, any delay in the start of the service (Law 9.2) shall be considered an undue delay.

This is really two rules rolled into one:

* First, you cannot hold your serve indefinitely, hoping that the receiver will lose concentration or become uncomfortable.
* Similarly, the receiver cannot delay indefinitely.

How long is an undue delay? The rules don’t say, because it’s left to the umpire’s discretion.

In club play, you just have to be reasonable. I suggest you should not take more than five seconds to serve (once ready).

The second part of the rule is a convoluted way of saying something quite simple:

-when serving, you cannot pause between backswing and forwards swing.

Many club players use this pause to upset the receiver’s timing. That is against the rules: it’s a fault.

You might be sceptical about my interpretation here, but I am following official guidance from *Badminton England*. If you pause between backswing and forwards swing when serving, you’re breaking the rules.

Of course, you don’t have to keep the same *speed* of swing, and you can also serve without using a backswing at all.

Note that this rule also forbids an extremely slow serving action, because that would constitute an *undue delay*.

**Where the server and receiver must stand**

9.1.2 - The server and receiver shall stand within diagonally opposite service courts, without touching the boundary lines of these service courts.

You’re not allowed to put your feet on the lines, when serving or receiving. Note that this rule is only about *touching* the lines: you may lean forwards or sideways so that your **racket** is outside the service court.

**Keep both feet on the ground**

9.1.3 - Some part of both feet of the server and the receiver shall remain in contact with the surface of the court in a stationary position from the start of the serve (Law 9.2) until the service is delivered (Law 9.3).

Both feet must stay on the ground until the server contacts the shuttle. Only *some part* of each foot has to stay on the ground; this allows you to shift your weight and even turn your body (as in a forehand high serve).

You may not drag a foot along the floor, however.

**Hit the base of the shuttle first**

9.1.4 - The server’s racket shall initially hit the base of the shuttle.

This rule seems incongruous unless you know its history. It was introduced to prevent players using a particular style of low serve. The serve was called the *Sidek* serve or *S-serve*, after the Sidek brothers who popularised it in the 1980s. It was mainly used as a backhand serve.

The S-serve involved slicing sideways across the feathers of an inverted shuttle, making it spin chaotically so that the receiver had difficulty controlling his return. The S-serve was so effective that many people felt it was ruining the game; eventually, the serve was banned by introducing rule 9.1.4 (above).

Tournament video footage of the S-serve is hard to find, but here’s [one example](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvldP5KCobw) where both sides are mainly using S-serves (a good example is at 7:41). Note the wild, downwards-swerving path of many serves. The receivers make a large number of errors, and rarely succeed in attacking the S-serves.

Although the S-serve is against the rules, other spinning serves are not. You may still slice the serve, and you may even hit the feathers, providing you hit the base first. These techniques may cause the shuttle to spin, wobble, or swerve, although the effect is far less dramatic than an S-serve.

**Serve from below the waist**

9.1.5 - The **whole shuttle** shall be below the server’s waist at the instant of being hit by the server’s racket. The waist shall be considered an imaginary line round the body, level with the lowest part of the server’s bottom rib.

This is an important rule: it’s the one that prevents you from playing a smash as your serve!

Note that the waist is not the same as the line of your shorts: it’s actually the lowest part of your ribcage. To judge how high you can serve from, feel for your lowest rib: the shuttle has to be below this.

**The angle of the server’s racket**

9.1.6 - The shaft of the server’s racket at the instant of hitting the shuttle shall be pointing in a downward direction.

At first, this seems an unnecessary rule. We already have rule 9.1.5 to enforce a height limit; why do we need another one?

This rule is useful because it prevents players from applying heavy top-spin to their drive serves. These serves travel fast and flat, and can actually swerve *downwards* after passing the net so that they reach the receiver below net height. They are almost impossible to attack.

Drive serves can be perfectly legal, but this rule ensures that all legal drive serves will travel upwards as they pass the net — making them vulnerable to attack by an alert receiver.

**No stop-start serving**

9.1.7 - The movement of the server’s racket shall continue forwards from the start of the service (Law 9.2) until the service is delivered (Law 9.3).

Many servers like to shake their racket back-and-forth behind the shuttle, as an attempt to disturb the receiver’s timing. That is a fault.

This rule, together with rule 9.1.1, ensures that the service action must be one continuous movement with no double-action feints. To be precise, you are allowed to serve with either of these actions:

* **One** backswing immediately followed by **one** forwards swing
* **One** forwards swing on its own (no backswing)

**Where you have to serve**

9.1.8 - The flight of the shuttle shall be upwards from the server’s racket to pass over the net so that, if not intercepted, it shall land in the receiver’s service court (i.e. on or within the boundary lines).

A serve that hits the line is *in*.

The rule *appears* to suggest that, even if the receiver hits it back, a serve that was travelling *out* should be faulted. **That is a misinterpretation of the rule**: notice that the rule says shall land, not would land!

So the rule is technically correct, but it’s still badly worded.

Some silly stuff: even if you were three metres tall and could hit a serve downwards, it would still be against the rules, because the serve must travel upwards. You also are not allowed to use some sneaky trick serve that swerves around the sides of the net posts!

**No second chances**

9.1.9 - In attempting to serve, the server shall not miss the shuttle.

If you miss the shuttle on serving, you lose the rally. I recommend practising your serve more.

Although it’s not explicitly mentioned anywhere in the rules, you also don’t get a second serve. This is different from tennis, where the server gets two attempts to put the ball inside the service court.