

## **The Art of Calling Pitches** **An instructional aid for umpires**

*Excerpts from a Reeg Industries pamphlet for the youth level umpires  
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Here are some helpful hints to help you find “the zone.”

### **Strike:**

A pitch shall be considered a strike when ANY part of the ball passes through ANY part of the strike zone. Your strike will not start out as a ‘text book’ zone. As we acquire experience, our zone will get closer but most likely be unique to each of us through our career as umpire.

**Timing:** Good (slow) timing is everything when calling pitches. Try to use a “one, one thousand” count before you call the pitch. Consistency is essential. Keep your head steady and follow the pitch with your eyes in to the catcher’s glove. If you feel you should make adjustments, make small ones.

**Think Strikes:** As umpires, we are thinking strikes and outs. Many umpires find it easier to consider every pitch a strike until they see it’s a ball. Any “Fringe” pitches that could go either way should be called a strike. You will be more consistent if you do so.

**Calling the catch:** Where a catcher catches the ball does influence the call. If the catcher makes a strike look like a ball, call the pitch a ball. For example, if a pitch comes in through the low part of the strike zone, and the catcher misses it so it rolls to the backstop, DON’T call it a strike! Strikes are “catchable.”

**Strike Three:** Have patience and take your time. Your well practiced third strike punch out move looks pretty silly with a 3<sup>rd</sup> strike passed ball with the batter/runner heading toward first. (Upper level). Make sure to face forward and look at the ball.

**Oh no, I blinked:** Don’t get discouraged; all umpires have this natural reaction. What to do if this happens? Look at the batter to see if he swung at the pitch. Second, look to see where the catcher caught the ball. If all else fails, remember, we typically don’t blink on balls that are in the strike zone.

**Mechanics:** Be ready for every pitch. Never setup behind the plate without your mask in place. Make sure you call both balls and strikes. For balls, just say, “Ball.” For strikes, say “Strike” and make a visual indication. Don’t verbalize obvious balls or swinging strikes. When you indicate a strike, keep your eyes on the ball.

Call every pitch using the same timing and tone. Indicate the count verbally and visually between each pitch. Remember, “check swings” can be appealed if you call it a “ball.”

**Using an indicator:** in the Left hand to help us keep track of the count.

Adjust the diagram below for Little League through Junior. Level. The strike zone is from the top of the knees to the armpits from a batter’s *normal* swinging stance. The smaller diagram to the right is for upper level ball: Big league and Seniors.

Remember, the strike zone is 3D with: width, depth, & height.

## The Strike Zone



**Diagram of the Strike Zone**

**Each ball represents a pitch location that would be considered a strike.**