

Introduction

Soccer is more interesting and challenging because teams have to work the ball into an attacking position through teamwork, skill and strategy.

If all teams had to do was make long forward passes to team-mates waiting near their opponents' goal area to shoot balls past the goal keeper from short range there wouldn't be as much 'sport' in the sport.

The off-side law makes scoring goals a genuine and difficult sporting challenge by restricting forward passes from team-mates in their opponents' half of the field.

The basic off-side (forward pass) rule is ...

A player is not allowed to receive a forward pass if they're in an off-side position.

The more detailed rule is ...

In their opponents' half of the field..

A player is not allowed to receive a forward pass

... or interfere with play or gain an advantage ...

if they were in an off-side position

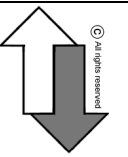
... when a team-mate last touched the ball.

A player is in an off-side position only if they are **both** closer to their opponents' goal-line than ... 1) The ball AND 2) The 2nd last opponent ... at the same time.

If only one of these things is true at the same time then you aren't in an off-side position - and therefore can't be ruled off-side. There's different ways of saying this. Some may find one way clearer to understand than another. E.g. You could also say you're in an off-side position when you're in front of the ball AND the 2nd last opponent.

"Nearer their opponents' goal line" refers to any part of a players' head, body, legs or feet, but doesn't include arms or hands.

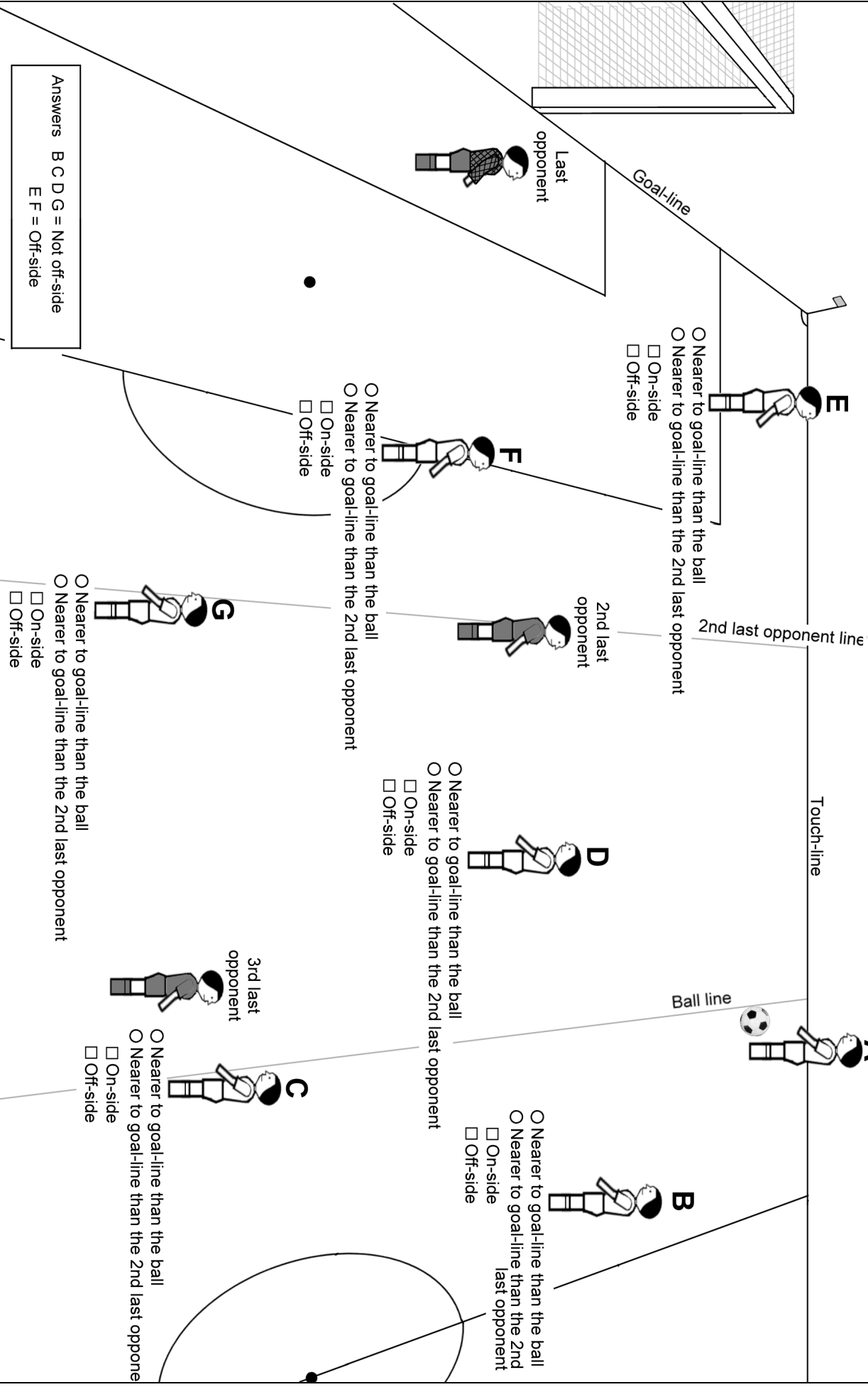
Complete the Off-side Exercises Sheets 1 and 2.



- Tick the circles if they're true. Cross the circles if they're false.
 - Tick the correct square for each player's off-side status.
 (If both circle statements are true, then the player is in an off-side position.
 If only one of the circle statements is true then the player is not in an off-side position).

Off-side Exercise 1

A player is in an off-side position if they're nearer their opponents' goal-line than the ball AND the 2nd last opponent.



Answers B C D G = Not off-side
 E F = Off-side

Nearer to goal-line than the ball
 Nearer to goal-line than the 2nd last opponent
 On-side
 Off-side

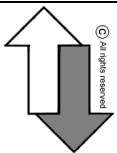
Nearer to goal-line than the ball
 Nearer to goal-line than the 2nd last opponent
 On-side
 Off-side

Nearer to goal-line than the ball
 Nearer to goal-line than the 2nd last opponent
 On-side
 Off-side

Nearer to goal-line than the ball
 Nearer to goal-line than the 2nd last opponent
 On-side
 Off-side

Nearer to goal-line than the ball
 Nearer to goal-line than the 2nd last opponent
 On-side
 Off-side

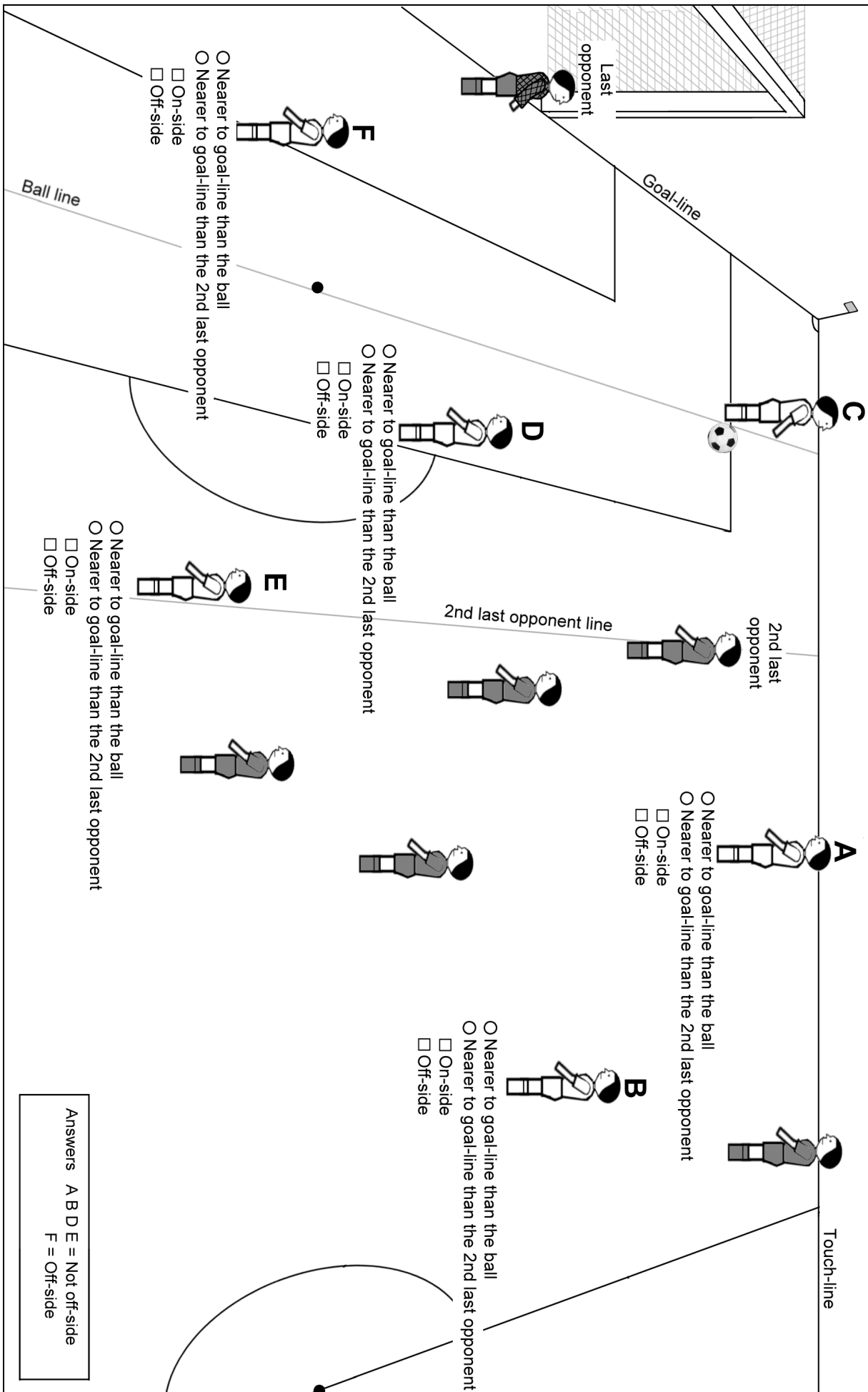
Nearer to goal-line than the ball
 Nearer to goal-line than the 2nd last opponent
 On-side
 Off-side



- Tick the circles if they're true. Cross the circles if they're false.
 - Tick the correct square for each player's off-side status.
 (If both circle statements are true, then the player is in an off-side position.
 If only one of the circle statements is true then the player is not in an off-side position).

Off-side Exercise 2

A player is in an off-side position if they're nearer their opponents' goal-line than the ball AND the 2nd last opponent.



Answers A B D E = Not off-side
 F = Off-side

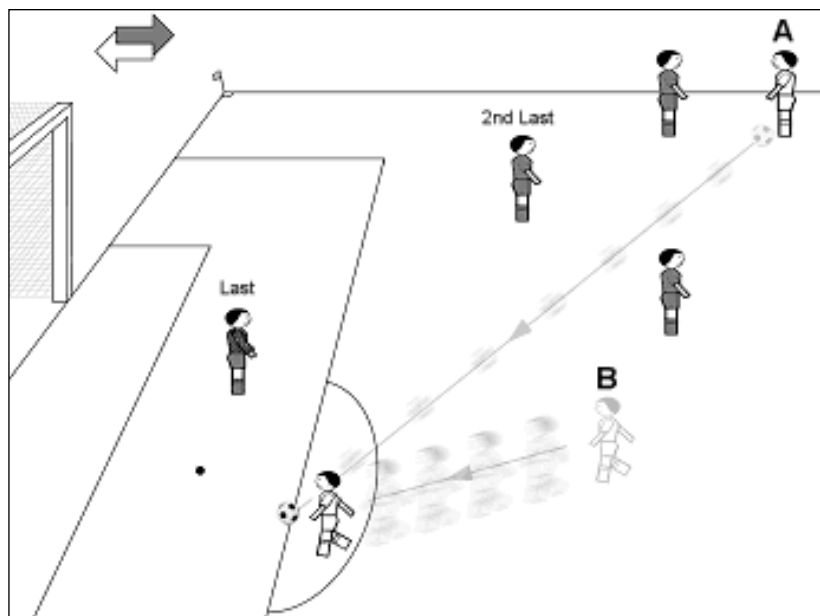
Because players are usually constantly moving around its important to understand the actual moment when a position becomes off-side.

Off-side positions are set at the moment the ball was last touched by a team-mate. This means off-side is about where players **WERE** when a team-mate last touched the ball. Off-side is **NOT** about where players moved to **AFTER** a team-mate last touched the ball.

Attack Strategy Using the Off-side Rule

A player can be on-side when a team-mate last touched the ball, but then can run forward and receive a forward pass further up the field in an otherwise off-side position. (Commonly called a 'through-ball'). When they do this they are **NOT** guilty of an off-side offense - because they *were* on-side when their team-mate last touched the ball - and that's the only moment that counts.

Using through-balls can be a very effective attack tactic that can put team-mates in very strong goal scoring positions.



The white player B here has not committed an off-side offense because they were in an on-side position when their team-mate A made the pass to the space in front of them. Even though B ran forward and received the ball in an off-side position they've done nothing wrong - because B was on-side when their team-mate last touched the ball. Teams and players who understand this aspect of the off-side law can use it to gain a strong advantage in breaking

though their opponents' defense via through-balls.

Through-balls need a good understanding of the off-side rules and good timing between the passer and the receiver. If B runs starts to run forward before A kicks the ball, then A has to time their kick before B passes the line of the 2nd last defender. It's a powerful attack tactic and well worth understanding.

More Attack Strategies - When the Off-side Rule Doesn't Apply

As well as knowing when, where, and how you can be off-side, it's just as important to know when, where, and how you can't be off-side.

You **CAN** be off-side from ...

- All types of free-kicks, direct and indirect.
- All other normal playing events on the field.

You **CAN'T** be off-side...

- In your own half of the field.
- Receiving the ball **DIRECTLY** from a throw-in, goal-kick, or corner-kick.

("Directly" means the first player to touch the ball after the event).

Can't Be Off-Side from a Throw-In

If your team is taking a throw-in they can throw the ball as far as they can up the field to a team-mate who's totally off-side but won't be penalized for it. This can be a big advantage in some situations, especially on narrow or short fields where a good thrower could throw the ball straight to an off-side team-mate near or even in their opponents' penalty box.

Can't Be Off-Side from a Goal-Kick

It sometimes takes opponents by surprise if you receive the ball directly from a goal-kick deep in your opponent's half, completely off-side, and aren't penalized for it. In junior games, where goal-kick takers can't usually kick the ball into their opponents half anyway, it's probably not a very useful aspect of the rule. However if you're playing on a short field and you have a powerful goal-kick taker then it may be useful to know, and can take an unprepared opponent defense by complete surprise if they're 'asleep'.

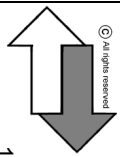
Can't Be Off-Side from a Corner-Kick

Many players learn this off-side rule exception from early on. The first team-mate who touches the ball directly from a corner-kick can't be penalized for being off-side. However, the corner-kick taker is often in an off-side position immediately after their kick and so must not receive a pass until they're on-side again.

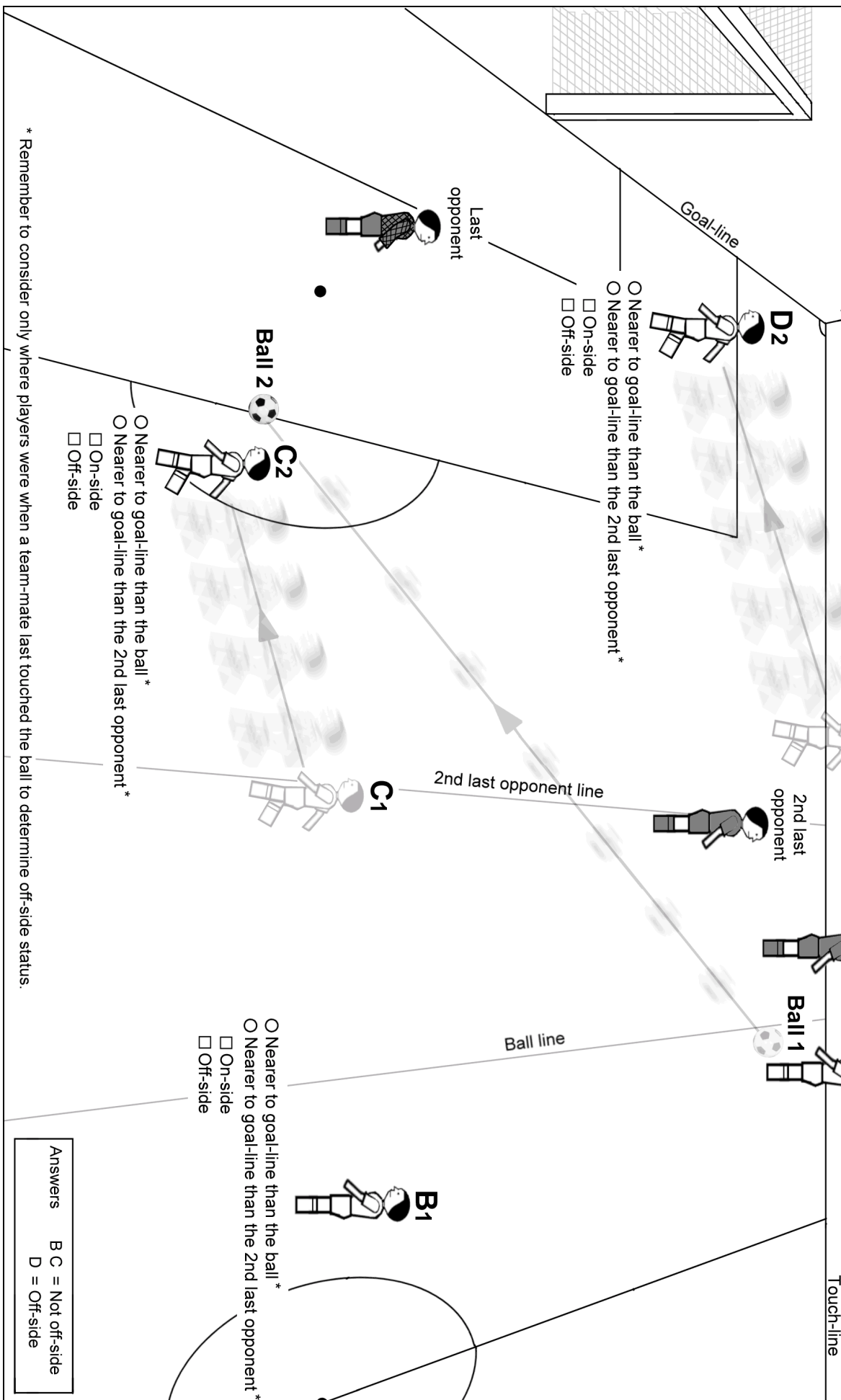
Complete the Off-side Exercise sheets 3

Off-side Exercise 3

A player is in an off-side position if they're nearer their opponents' goal-line than the ball AND the 2nd last opponent when the ball was last touched by a team-mate.



- Tick the correct square if they are correct about each player's 1 position. Cross them if false.
- Tick the correct square for each player's off-side status. (If both circle statements are true, then the player is in an off-side position. If only one of the circle statements is true then the player is not in an off-side position).
- 1 = position when a team-mate last touched the ball.
- 2 = position a short time after a team-mate last touched the ball.



D2
 Nearer to goal-line than the ball *
 On-side
 Off-side

C2
 Nearer to goal-line than the ball *
 On-side
 Off-side

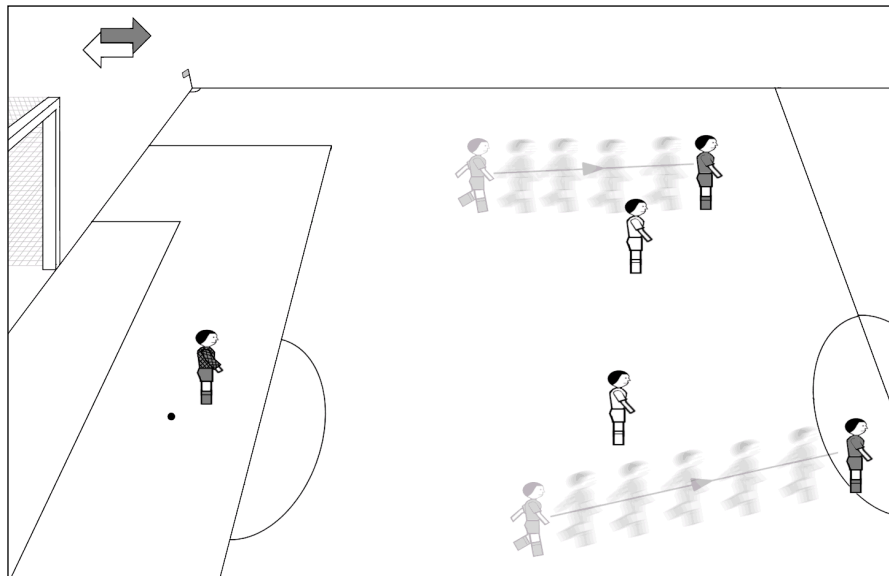
B1
 Nearer to goal-line than the ball *
 On-side
 Off-side

* Remember to consider only where players were when a team-mate last touched the ball to determine off-side status.

Answers	B C = Not off-side
	D = Off-side

Defense Strategy

Its possible to use the off-side law to force your opponents away from your goal area and back up the field towards their own half.



Two Grey defenders here, including the 2nd last defender, have moved up and made the two light players off-side. The light players now have to move up the field as well to stay on-side. (A light player could still *directly* receive a goal-kick, throw-in or a corner-kick as off-side doesn't apply to those things – so the Grey defenders have to stay alert for these things). Defenders also have to stay very alert for through-balls that can happen very fast and take them by surprise.

When the ball is deep in your opponents' half you don't usually need your defense players hanging around your own goal area. Remember that your 2nd last player is your opponent's off-side line. So the further your 2nd last player moves up the field the more your opponents are forced to move back up the field out of your half to stay on-side. In this way you can sweep all opponents out of

your half of the field. However your defense has to be very alert and ready to drop back very fast in a moment in case your opponents send a through-ball through or over your defense lines.

Defenders must take care to at least 'loose' cover opponents who may be in off-side positions though - because they're allowed to receive the ball **directly** from a goal-kick, throw-in or corner-kick without the off-side rules applying.

Things You Can't Do While In An Off-side Position

A player in an off-side position is not allowed to receive a forward pass from a team-mate, block an opponents' view of the ball, or hinder an opponent's movement, or even move in a way that might cause an opponent to be distracted, or even stand still in a spot that causes an opponent to feel they have to change what they do because they're there. They can not play a ball that rebounds off the goal posts or cross-bar, or rebounds off an opponent. They are not allowed to gain an advantage from having been in an off-side position.

Not being allowed to touch the ball or interfere with play or gain any kind of advantage for your team pretty well means you're not allowed to do anything useful at all as long as you're in an off-side position.

Except for goal-kicks, corner-kicks and throw-ins, it doesn't do a team any good for any of its players to be in off-side positions. Being off-side is almost like not even being on the field at all. If you notice you're in an off-side position move back into an on-side position as soon as you can.

Referee's Signals

The referee will blow their whistle to indicate the off-side infringement. They'll also raise, and keep raised, an arm to indicate an in-direct free kick is to take place.

(This arm is kept raised until the free-kick is taken and the ball played by someone other than the kicker or it goes out of play).

Assistant Referees raise their flag straight up to indicate the infringement, and then towards the field where the player was off-side - indicating a near-side, centre or far-side position by lowering or raising the flag.

(Off-side calls are only made when an off-side player actually plays at the ball or interferes in play or gains an advantage. If an off-side player does not interfere with play in any way then no off-side offence is called).

Infringements

For any off-side infringement an in-direct free kick is awarded to the opponent team from where the infringement occurred.

(If the offence occurs inside the opponents' goal-area then the kick is taken from anywhere inside the goal-area).

Other Stuff

Players in off-side positions aren't penalized **unless** they actually receive a pass, or interfere with game-play in any way, or gain an advantage for their team from being off-side. Its **NOT** an automatic infringement just to **BE** in an off-side position. Its only becomes an infringement if a player **DOES** certain things, like receiving a forward pass or a rebound off a goal post, while they're in an off-side position.

Because the off-side law is not only about where the players and the ball are at the moment, but can be about where everyone and the ball was a short time before, it can sometimes be very difficult for Referees to accurately make an off-side call. This is especially so when there's a number of players involved and several ball movements at the time. To correctly call off-sides they have to know where all the relevant players from both teams were and where the ball was a short time before. With no instant TV replays to watch Referees and Assistant Referees have to go by what they remember at the time and sometimes they'll make mistakes. Off-side calls can be the most difficult that Referees and Assistant Referees have to judge - and sometimes they'll get it wrong - and players just have to accept this in as good as spirit as they can.

While players have every right to play the off-side rule to its extreme limit they should perhaps bear in mind that the closer they get to being off-side the more likely it is they'll be caught off-side by their opponents' defenders moving up the field unexpectantly. And the closer you play around the off-side line the more likely you may be called off-side by mistake by a Referee or Assistant Referee.

1 Check the events where you can NOT be off-side.

- A** Directly from a kick-off. **D** Directly from a free-kick. **G** Directly from a throw-in
B Directly from a drop-ball. **E** Directly from a penalty-kick.
C Directly from a corner-kick. **F** Directly from a goal-kick.

2 You think an attacking opponent is or was off-side. What should you do?

- A** Keep playing normally and only stop if the Referee indicates to stop.
B Stop playing and assume the Referee will agree with you.
C Hold up an arm to appeal to have the off-side considered if you have time – but keep playing.

3 When is the important moment to decide if someone was off-side?

- A** Where players and ball were when the ball was received.
B Where players and ball were when a team-mate last touched the ball.

4 A team-mate dribbles the ball past all the opponents except the opponent goal-keeper. You run up beside them in case they need some support. What should you take care not to do?

- A** Not to run ahead of the ball, or you'll be off-side if you get involved in play in any way, and might spoil your team-mates' goal-scoring opportunity.
B Not to distract your team mate because they need to concentrate on their strike.

5 You have the ball. You see a team-mate who's in a great goal-scoring position but you see they're obviously off-side. What should you do?

- A** Pass the ball to your off-side team-mate anyway and hope the Referee doesn't notice.
B Ignore them, even if they call for the ball, and don't pass to them until they're on-side again. Maybe tell them they're off-side – but only if there's time for that.

6 Can you be off-side if you were exactly level (square) with the ball when a team-mate last touched it?

- A** Yes. You can't be level (square) with the ball – you must be behind it.
B No. You have to be nearer the goal-line than the ball. Being level (square) with it is ok. But its risky because the Referee might misjudge off-side when the distances are small.

7 You or a team-mate gets called off-side by mistake by the Referee. What should you do ?

- A** Say nothing, or at most politely indicate your disagreement once only, without insults or abuse, and leave it at that. You politely make your point without expressing descent.
B Argue or yell at the Referee to try to change their mind and/or loudly complain to your coach and/or team-mates and/or opponents.