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Why new golfers quit (and what brings them back)

The First 9 Journey Study #1 · By The First 9 Team · Data: 5,020 public posts and comments, Oct 2024–Oct 2026 · **Download the PDF report**

> **In short:** golfers close to quitting talk most about a swing that stopped working, scores that won't move and lessons that haven't helped yet. The urge to quit peaks at the plateau, and it isn't only a beginner thing. Golfers who stayed talk about friends, fun and short formats. If you're feeling it, that's common, and it usually passes when golf gets smaller and more social.

Key numbers

38% vs 21%

of posts from golfers on the edge of quitting describe ball-striking trouble (slices, shanks, topping, contact, yips), against 21% of other golf journey posts.

8.1%

of plateau-stage items (golfers stuck around 100+) talk about quitting, the highest of any stage. Early regulars: 2.2%.

19 of 35

quit-risk posts with a known stage came from committed, multi-year golfers. Median stated tenure: 36 months (n=20).

37%

of quit-risk posts mention lessons or a coach, against 27% of other posts. Lessons alone don’t seem to protect against the urge to quit.

41% vs 23%

golfers who stayed and progressed mention fun and social play almost twice as often as golfers on the edge of quitting.

22% vs 7%

short formats (par-3 courses, nine holes) appear three times as often in posts from golfers who stayed.

7% vs 18%

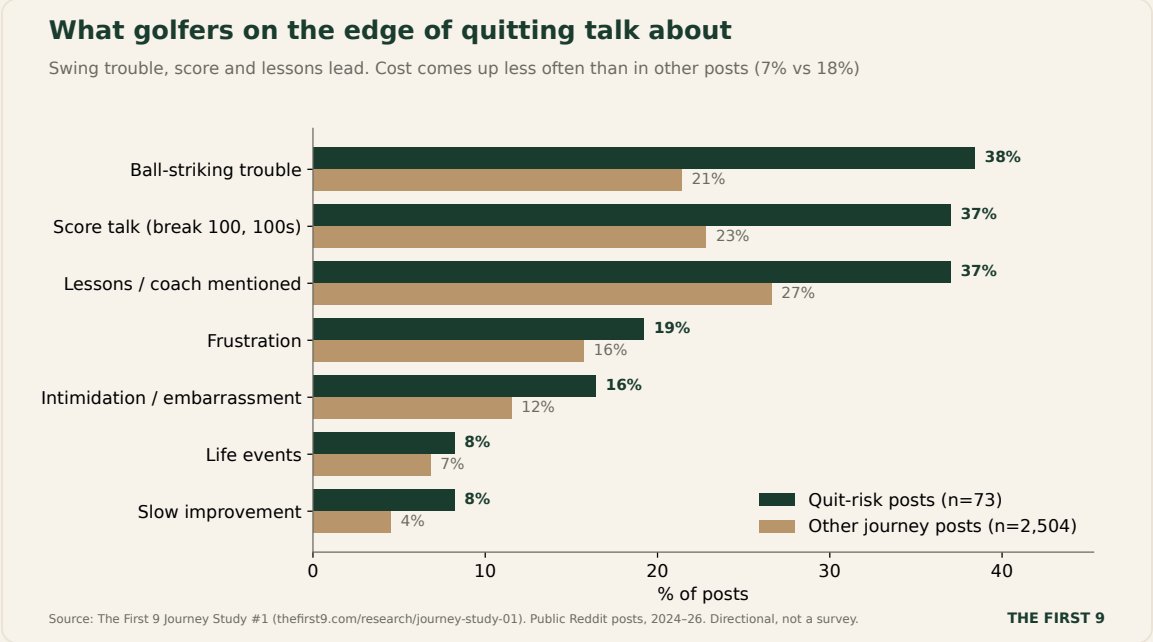
cost comes up less often in quit-risk posts than in other golf posts. Money is talked about a lot but rarely named as the reason to stop.

All figures come from public forum text, classified by rules we publish below. They’re directional signals, not population rates.

1. What golfers on the edge of quitting talk about

We flagged 73 posts where the writer talks about quitting golf in their own voice. Compared with 2,504 other first-person golf journey posts, they were more likely to describe ball-striking trouble (38% vs 21%), score frustration such as “can’t break 100” (37% vs 23%), and lessons or coaching (37% vs 27%). Frustration (19% vs 16%) and intimidation or embarrassment (16% vs 12%) were also a little higher.

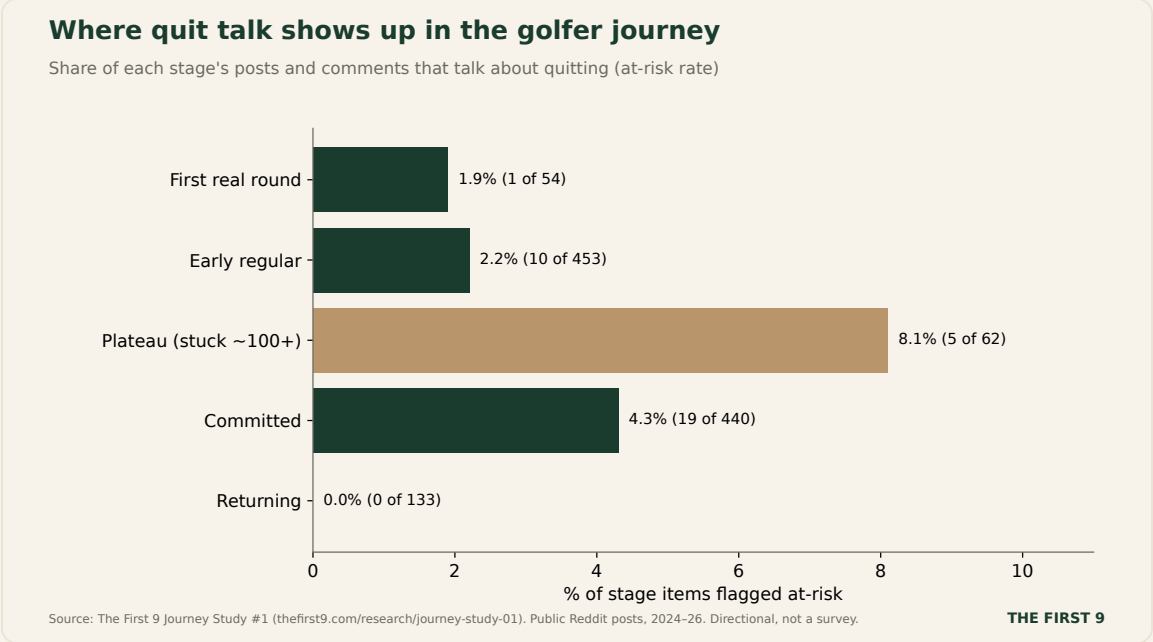
Two things were rarer than you might expect. Cost appeared in 7% of quit-risk posts, against 18% elsewhere. Time came up in almost none. People talk about money constantly, but the posts about stopping are mostly about not being able to hit the ball.



Themes in quit-risk posts (n=73) vs other journey posts (n=2,504). PNG · SVG

2. Where in the journey quit talk shows up

We sorted items into seven journey stages from self-reported tenure, handicap and phrasing. The plateau, being stuck around 100 or above, had the highest share of quit talk: 8.1% of items (5 of 62). Committed, multi-year golfers came next at 4.3% (19 of 440), then early regulars in roughly their first year at 2.2% (10 of 453). Of the 20 quit-risk posts that said how long the writer had played, the median was 36 months, and 11 had played more than two years.

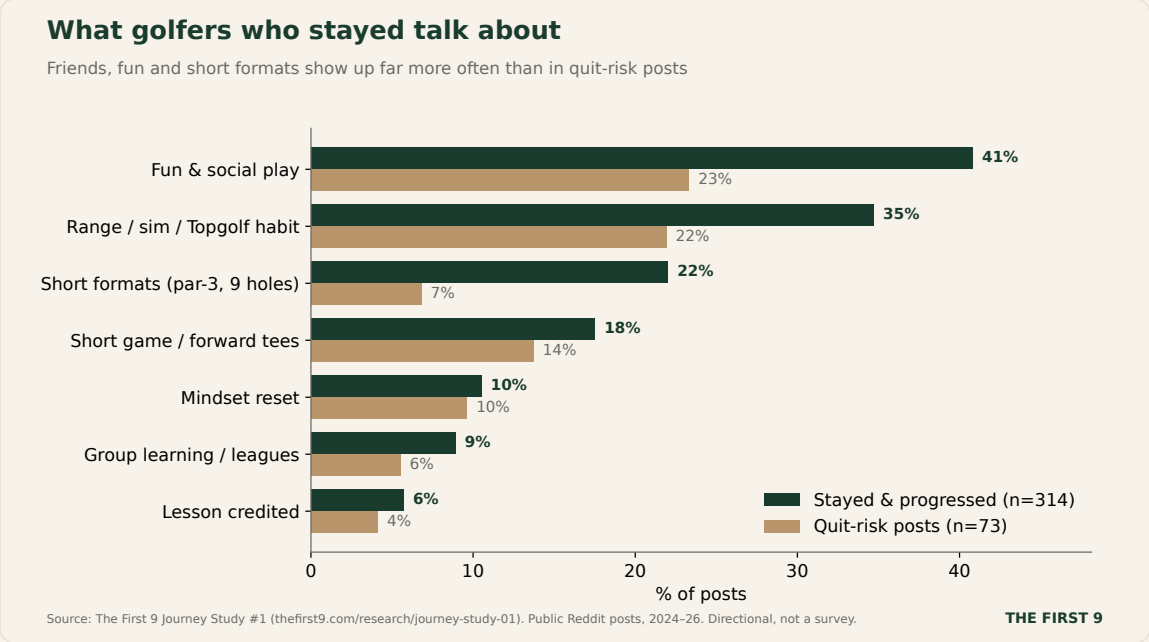


At-risk rate by stage. Curious and first-try golfers are too few on Reddit to measure (15 and 10 items). PNG · SVG

Stage	Items	Quit-risk posts	Rate
Curious	15	0	0.0%
First try	10	0	0.0%
First round	54	1	1.9%
Early regular	453	10	2.2%
Plateau	62	5	8.1%
Committed	440	19	4.3%
Returning	133	0	0.0%

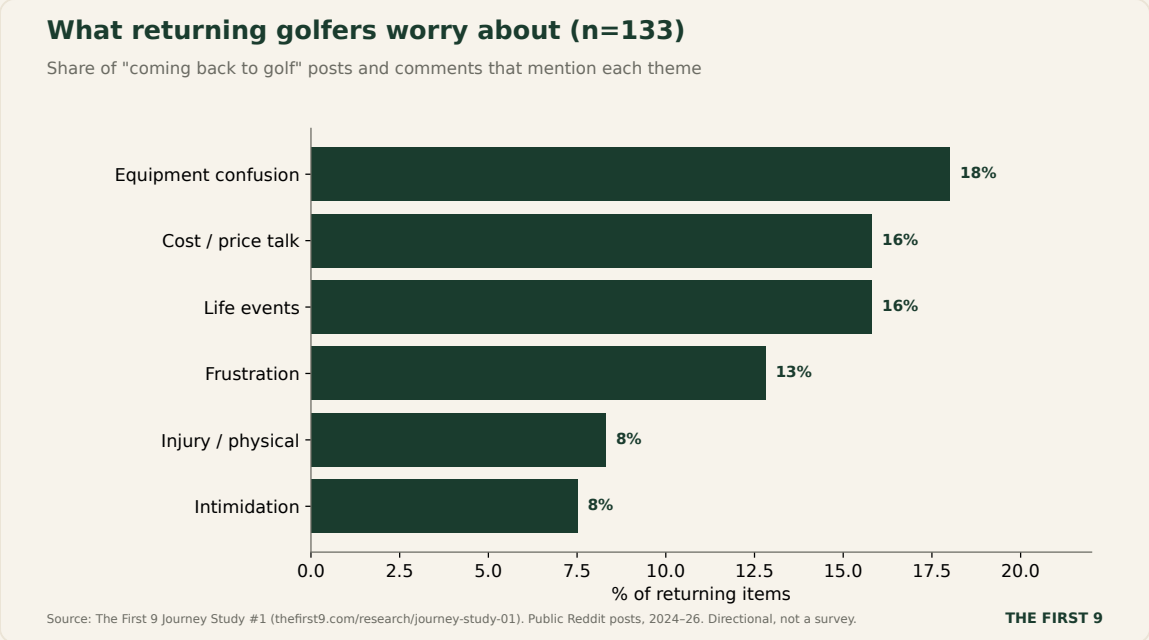
3. What keeps golfers playing, and what brings them back

We compared 314 “stayed and progressed” items (posts celebrating a breakthrough, plus “nearly quit but stayed” stories) with the 73 quit-risk posts. Fun and social play came up in 41% vs 23%. A range, simulator or Topgolf habit came up in 35% vs 22%. Short formats such as par-3 courses and nine holes came up in 22% vs 7%, and group learning or leagues in 9% vs 5%.



Drivers in “stayed and progressed” items (n=314) vs quit-risk posts (n=73). PNG · SVG

Golfers coming back after a break (133 items) mostly asked practical questions. Equipment came up in 18%, cost in 16% and life events (kids, work, moves) in 16%. A third (35%) mentioned easing back in at a range or simulator.



Themes among returning golfers (n=133). PNG · SVG

One more pattern: of 477 question-style post titles, 114 (24%) were about gear, such as clubs, sets, wedges or when to upgrade. Equipment is the most common thing newer golfers ask about.

What this means if you're thinking about quitting

You're in good company, and it isn't a sign you're bad at golf. The pattern in the data is that people tend to stay when golf gets smaller and more social: a par-3 or a short nine, someone you like playing with, and a break from keeping score. Our stuck or thinking about quitting hub covers each of these calmly.

- Should I quit golf?
- My swing fell apart, even after lessons
- Can't break 100
- Not getting better at golf
- How to find golf buddies as an adult
- Golf too expensive or time-consuming?
- Coming back to golf after years away
- What is a par-3 course?
- First-tee anxiety

Methodology

Data. 5,020 unique public Reddit posts and top-level comments (2,052 posts, 2,968 comments) from r/golf (3,215), r/GolfSwing (1,012), r/golftips (792) and r/golfforbeginners (1), dated October 1, 2024 to October 11, 2026. We collected them on October 11, 2026 from the Arctic Shift public archive, read-only, using 21 journey search queries (such as "quit golf," "break 100," "coming back to golf") and top-level comments from the most-discussed matching threads.

Privacy. No usernames were collected. Text was scrubbed of mentions, emails, phone numbers and links. We publish aggregate counts only, with no individual profiles.

Classification. A transparent rules-based classifier using a written code book: phrase lists for 7 journey stages, 20 barrier and driver themes, emotions and intents. No AI language model labeled the data.

2,577 items were first-person journey voices, and 1,167 had an identifiable stage. “Quit-risk” means a post (not a reply) where the writer talks about quitting in their own voice (73). “Stayed and progressed” means items celebrating a breakthrough or describing nearly quitting and staying (314). Ball-striking, score and lesson mentions use published text rules in our analysis script.

Validation. We hand-read a stratified random sample of 150 items. Relevance precision was 90%. Theme label precision was 82%, with an estimated recall of 92%. Stage precision was 52% out-of-sample with the first rules and 64% with the revised rules (in-sample, so optimistic). Quit-risk precision was about 60% on a separate 40-post sample.

Open data. Aggregate tables: quit_reasons.csv, quit_points_by_stage.csv, what_brings_them_back.csv, headline_findings.json. CC BY 4.0.

Limitations

- This is public forum text, not a survey. Reddit skews male, online and improvement-focused, and r/GolfSwing tilts the sample toward swing talk.
- People who quit quietly never post. We hear from golfers who are still deciding.
- The quit-risk group is small (73), and about 6 in 10 flagged posts were confirmed on hand review. Treat its percentages as having wide margins.
- Curious and first-try golfers are barely present (15 and 10 items), so we can’t measure those stages. 1,410 of 2,577 relevant items had no detectable stage.
- The “stayed” group is built mostly from celebration posts, which often mention par-3 and nine-hole scores. That probably inflates the short-format gap.
- “Cost” counts any price talk, not only complaints.

- An earlier version of this page (October 11) reported 74% for ball-striking and 42% for lessons, using broader text rules that weren't saved. We replaced them with the stricter, reproducible definitions above.

How to cite this study

The First 9 Team. (2026). Why New Golfers Quit (and What Brings Them Back): Journey Study #1. Analysis of 5,020 public Reddit posts and comments, Oct 2024–Oct 2026. https://thefirst9.com/research/journey-study-01

Short form: "according to The First 9 Journey Study #1, an analysis of 5,020 public golf forum posts." Please link to thefirst9.com/research/journey-study-01. Charts are free to reuse with attribution (CC BY 4.0). Media questions: hello@thefirst9.com.

Frequently asked questions

Why do new golfers quit?

In The First 9 Journey Study #1, posts from golfers close to quitting most often described ball-striking trouble (38%, vs 21% of other golf posts), score frustration (37%) and lessons that hadn't helped yet (37%). Cost came up less often in quit-risk posts than elsewhere (7% vs 18%). These are directional signals from public forum posts, not a survey.

At what stage are golfers most likely to talk about quitting?

The plateau stage, when a golfer is stuck around 100 or above. 8.1% of plateau items (5 of 62) talked about quitting, against 2.2% of early

regulars and 4.3% of committed golfers. Over half of the at-risk posts with a known stage (19 of 35) came from committed, multi-year golfers.

What keeps golfers playing?

Golfers who stayed and progressed mentioned fun and social play in 41% of posts, against 23% of quit-risk posts. Short formats such as par-3 courses and nine holes appeared in 22% vs 7%.

How many posts did the study analyze?

5,020 unique public Reddit posts and top-level comments dated October 1, 2024 to October 11, 2026. 2,577 were first-person golf journey voices.

How should I cite this study?

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About the authors. The First 9 Team is the editorial and research team behind The First 9, a plain-language guide for adults starting golf. Related industry research: NGF, “Rethinking the Retention Question.”