

# Key table tennis language and terminology

Author: **Paul Stimpson**

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With a wealth of acronyms and unusual words, the sport of table tennis appears to be spoken in a different language to the uninitiated, below is a list of the main key words and phrases that you might come across and an explanation of what they mean.

**American Grip** – See Seemiller Grip

**Antispin** – An inverted rubber sheet that is very slick so that spin does not take on it. It usually has a very dead sponge underneath. It is mostly used for defensive shots. Also known as “anti.”

**Backhand** – A shot done with the racket to the left of the elbow for a righthander, the reverse for a lefthander.

**Backspin** – A type of spin used mostly on defensive shots. When you chop the ball, you produce backspin. The bottom of the ball will move away from you.

**Blade** – The racket, usually without covering.

**Block** – A quick, off the bounce return of an aggressive drive done by just holding the racket in the ball's path.

**Blocker** – A style of play where blocking is the primary shot.

**Chop** – A defensive return of a drive with backspin, usually done from well away from the table. (See backspin.)

**Chop Block** – A block where racket is chopped down at contact to create backspin.

**Chopper** – A style of play where chopping is the primary shot.

**Closed Racket** – If the racket's hitting surface is aimed downward, with the top edge leaning away from you, it is closed.

**Counterdrive** – A drive made against a drive. Some players specialize in counter driving.

**Counterloop** – To loop a loop.

**Counter smash** – To smash a smash.

**Crosscourt** – A ball that is hit diagonally from corner to corner.

**Crossover** – A style of footwork that require you to cross your feet.

**Dead** – A ball with no spin.

**Deep** – A ball that will not bounce twice on the opponent's side of the table if given the chance.

**Default** – Being disqualified from a match for any reason.

**Double Bounce** – A ball that hits the same side of the table twice. The person on that side loses the point.

**Down-the-Line** – A ball that is hit along the side of the table, parallel to the sidelines, is hit down the line.

**Drop Shot** – Putting the ball so short that the opponent has trouble reaching the ball. Done when the opponent is away from the table.

**Flat** – A ball that has no spin, usually traveling with good pace. A shot where the ball hits the racket straight on, at a perpendicular angle.

**Flip** – An aggressive topspin return of a ball that lands near the net. (A short ball.)

**Forehand** – Any shot done with the racket to the right of the elbow for a righthander, to the left for a lefthander.

**Free Hand** – The hand not holding the racket.

**Handicap events** – An event in a tournament where points are spotted to make the match even. Can be singles or doubles.

**Hard Rubber** – A type of racket covering with pips out rubber but no sponge underneath. It was the most common covering for many years until the development of sponge rubber.

**High Toss Serve** – A serve where the ball is thrown high into the air. This increases both spin and deception.

**Hitter** – A style of play where hitting is the primary shot.

**Inverted Sponge** – The most common racket covering. It consists of a sheet of pips out rubber on top of a layer of sponge. The pips point inward, so the surface is smooth. This is the opposite of pips-out sponge, where the pips point outward.

**ITTF** – International Table Tennis Federation. The governing body for table tennis in the world.

**Kill shot** – See smash.

**Let** – If play is interrupted for any reason during a rally, a let is called and the point does not count.

**Loaded** – A ball with a great deal of spin.

**Lob** – A high defensive return of a smash. Usually done with topspin or sidespin.

**Long** – See deep.

**Long Pips** – A type of pips out rubber where the pips are long and thin and bend on contact with the ball. It returns the ball with whatever spin was on it at contact and is very difficult to play against if you are not used to it.

**Loop** – A heavy topspin shot usually considered the most important shot in the game. Many players either specialize in looping or in handling the loop.

**Looper** – A style of play where the primary shot is the loop.

**Match** – A two out of three or three out of five games contest.

**Open Racket** – If the hitting surface of the racket is aimed upwards, with the top edge leaning towards you, it is open.

**Penholder** – A type of grip used mostly by Asians. It gives the best possible forehand but the most awkward backhand of the conventional grips.

**Pips** – The small conical bits of rubber that cover a sheet of table tennis rubber.

**Pips-out** – A type of racket covering. It consists of a sheet of pips out rubber on top of a layer of sponge. The pips point outward, the opposite of inverted.

**Playing Surface** – The top of the table, including the edges.

**Push** – A backspin return of backspin. Usually defensive.

**Racket** – What you hit the ball with. The blade plus covering.

**Racket hand** – The hand that holds the racket.

**Rally** – The hitting of the ball back and forth, commencing with the serve and ending when a point is won.

**Rating** – A number that is assigned to all tournament players after their first tournament. The better the player the higher the rating should be. The range is from about 200 to about 2900.

**Rating Events** – An event in a tournament where to be eligible you must be rated under a specified amount.

**Receive** – The return of a serve.

**Rubber** – The racket covering. Sometimes refers only to the rubber on top of a sponge base.

**Rubber Cleaner** – Used to keep the surface of inverted rubber clean.

**Sandwich Rubber** – A sponge base covered by a sheet of rubber with pips, with the pips pointing either in or out. If pointed in, it is inverted sponge. If pointed out, it is pips out sponge.

**Seemiller Grip** – A grip that is often used in the United States. Named after five-times U.S. National Champion Danny Seemiller who first developed it. Many coaches consider it an inferior grip and outside the U.S. it is almost unheard of. Also known as the American Grip.

**Serve** – The first shot, done by the server. It must be thrown up from a flat palm a minimum of six inches into the air and the ball must be visible to the receiver at all times in the serving action.

**Shakehands Grip** – The most popular grip. It gives the best balance of forehand and backhand.

**Short** – A ball that would bounce twice on the opponent's side of the table if given the chance.

**Smash** – A putaway shot. Ball is hit with enough speed so opponent cannot make a return.

**Smother Kill** – To smash right off the bounce. Usually done against a lob.

**Spin** – The rotation of the ball.

**Sponge** – The bouncy rubber material used in sandwich covering. It is used under a sheet of rubber with pips. It revolutionized the game and ended the hard rubber age in the 1950's.

**Stroke** – Any shot used in the game, including the serve.

**Topspin** – A type of spin used on most aggressive shots, with an extreme amount being used in the loop shot. When you topspin the ball, the top of the ball moves away from you.

**Two-Step Footwork** – The most popular style of footwork.

**Underspin** – See backspin.

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