

# Basketball Dictionary

The Basketball Dictionary clarifies common names/terms used in and around the sport of basketball, thus giving coaches across the country the ability to communicate clearly with each other and with our players.

## A

**Assist** – A pass thrown to a player who immediately scores.

## B

**Back screen** – Screening the player who is usually your teammate (usually from the wing) so they can cut to the basket.

**Backcourt** – The half of the court a team is defending. The opposite of the frontcourt. Also used to describe parts of a team. Backcourt = all guards. Frontcourt = all forwards and centers.

**Backdoor cut** – Used when you are denied usually on the wing and you cut to the basket to get open. *Also known as “back cut.”*

**Ball reversal** – Passing the ball from one side of the court to the other.

**Ball side** – The half of the court (if the court is divided lengthwise) that the ball is on. The opposite of the help side. *Also known as “strong side.”*

**Bank shot** – A shot that hits the backboard before going through the net.

**Baseball pass** – A one-handed pass thrown like a baseball.

**Baseline** – The line that marks the playing boundary at each end of the court. *Also known as “end line.”*

**Baseline out-of-bounds play** – The play used to return the ball to the court from outside the baseline along the opponent’s basket.

**Basket line** – The imaginary line between the two baskets.

**Basketball stance** – The balanced position from which a player is ready to run, jump, slide, or pivot. A player’s knees are bent, hands are up and out, back being straight, and head is up. Mostly used to describe a position for defenders.

**Block** – (1) A violation in which a defender steps in front of a dribbler but is still moving when they collide. *Also known as a “blocking foul.”* (2) To tip or deflect a shooter’s shot, altering its flight so the shot misses. (3) The small painted square on the floor next to the basket just outside the lane.

**Bounce pass** – A pass that bounces once before reaching the receiver.

**Box out** – To make contact with an opposing player and establish rebounding position between the player and the ball.

**Box-and-one** – A combination defense in which four defenders play zone in a box formation, and the fifth defender guards one player man-to-man.

**Bump the cutter** – When a defender steps in the way of a cutter to prevent them from cutting to the ball.

## C

**Center** – (1) A position played usually by the tallest player and is positioned near the basket. (2) The player who plays that position.

**Charge** – (1) A violation when a player with the ball runs into a defender that is standing still. *Also known as a “charging foul.”* (2) To commit that violation.

**Chase** – When a defensive player follows his check around a screen, the screener, and his check or around two players on a screen. *Also known as “chasing” or “taking the gap.”*

**Check** – The person guarding you when you are on offense.

**Chest pass** – An air pass thrown from the passer’s chest to a teammate’s chest. Usually a two-handed pass.

**Chin the ball** – To hold the ball with both hands under the chin, with elbows out, to protect the ball.

**Clear-out play** – A set play designed to clear an area of the court of all offensive players without the ball so the player with the ball can play 1-on-1. *Also known as an “isolation play.”*

**Closing out** – When a defender sprints to guard a player or challenges a shot of a player who has just received a pass.

**Control dribble** – A dribble maneuver in which the player keeps their body between the defender’s body and the ball.

**Cross screen** – A movement in which a player cuts across the lane to screen for a teammate.

**Crossover dribble** – A dribble maneuver in which a player dribbles the ball in front of their body so they can change the ball from one hand to the other.

**Crossover step** – Using footwork to keep pivot foot down, as opposed to an open step.

**Curl** – A cut that takes the player around a screen toward the basket.

**Cut** – Running hard in one direction and changing direction to get open for a score/pass.

**Backdoor cut** – An offensive play in which a player on the perimeter steps away from the basket, drawing the defender with them, and suddenly cuts to the basket behind the defender for a pass. The opposite of an I-cut. *Also known as a “back cut.”*

**Banana cut** – A wide, curving cut, as opposed to a cut that is a straight line.

**Basket cut** – A cut toward the basket.

**Curl cut** – A cut that takes the player around a screen toward the basket.

**Fade cut** – A cut that takes the player away from the ball. *Also known as a “flare cut.”*

**Flash cut** – A cut that takes the player from the low post to the high post, or in the middle of the paint from behind the defence. Mostly used to describe a cut against a zone.

**Flex cut** – A cut from the weak side corner to the ball side low post, using a screen at the weak side low post.

**I-cut** – An offensive play in which a player on the perimeter steps toward the basket, drawing the defender with them, and suddenly cuts to the perimeter for a pass. The opposite of a backdoor cut.

**Popout cut** – A cut taken around a screen straight to the ball.

**Shallow cut** – A cut from the top of the key to the ball side corner.

**Shuffle cut** – A cut that takes a player around a screen on the high post to the basket.

**UCLA cut** – A cut that takes the player from the top of the key to the low post over a screen at the high post.

**V-cut** – When the player starts at the low post and cuts to the high post, initiates contact with the defender and then cuts to the wing. It can also be executed from the wing; in this case, the player cuts to the low post and comes back out. *Also known as a “L-cut” when 90° angle.*

## D

**Defensive transition** – When the team on offense suddenly gives up possession of the ball and has to convert from offense to defense.

**Denial defense** – A defense in which a defender tries to prevent their man from receiving a pass. The stance used to play denial defense involves keeping the body low, bending knees, and placing hand and foot in the passing lane.

**Diamond-and-one** – A combination defense in which four defenders play zone in a diamond formation and the fifth defender guards a specific offensive player man-to-man.

**Double down** – To drop from the perimeter, leaving your man or zone, to double-team a low post player.

**Double-teaming** – A defense in which two defenders guard the same offensive player at the same time.

**Dribble** – (1) To advance the ball by bouncing it on the floor. (2) The bounce of the ball caused by a player pushing the ball downward.

**Dribble penetration** – When a dribbler is able to drive in the lane, he “penetrates,” beating his check.

**Drive** – To attack the basket by dribbling hard at it.

**Drop step** – A low post move when an offensive player with their back to the basket swings one leg around the defender and uses it as a pivot foot to gain inside position.

## E

**Elbow** – The corner made by the intersection of the free throw line and the lane line.

**Entry** – The beginning of a play, can involve set and special plays. Most popular entries include: UCLA Cut, Power, Zipper Cut, Wing Exchange, Horns.

## F

**Face up** – To pivot so the shoulders and feet face the basket. *Also known as “square up.”*

**Fast break** – A play in which a team gains possession of the ball (through a defensive rebound, steal, or made shot) and then pushes the ball toward the other basket as fast as possible, hoping to catch the other team off guard and score an easy shot.

**Filling the lanes** – A fast break in which players from the offensive team run up the court in the right lane, the middle lane, and the left lane.

**Flagrant foul** – Excessive physical contact (punching, kicking, etc.)

**Floater** - A shot that the player shoots while running, without taking the time to set up the shot. *Also known as a “runner.”*

**Forward** – A position usually played by a tall, athletic player. A “small forward” or “3” plays on the wing, and a “power forward” or a “4” plays in the high or low post area.

**Foul** – A violation of the rules.

**Foul trouble** – (1) Player foul trouble occurs when a player accumulates three or four fouls and is in danger of fouling out. (2) Team foul trouble occurs when a team accumulates four or more team fouls in a quarter and is “in the bonus.”

**Free throw** – An uncontested shot taken from the free throw line as a result of a foul. A successful made free throw is worth 1 point. *Also known as a “foul shot.”*

**Free throw line** – The line a player stands behind to shoot a free throw. *Also known as the “foul line.”*

**Front** – To guard a player by standing directly in front of him and therefore between him and the ball.

**Frontcourt** – A team’s offensive half of the court. The opposite of the backcourt. Also used to describe parts of a team. Frontcourt = all forwards and centers. Backcourt = all guards.

**Full-court press** – A man-to-man or zone defense in which the players guard the other team in the frontcourt. *Also known as a “press.”*

## G

**Gap** - When a defensive player goes in between the screener and his check, or around two players on a screen. *Also known as “shooting the gap” or “taking the gap.”*

**Give-and-go** – An offensive play in which the player with the ball passes (gives) to a teammate and cuts (goes) to the basket to receive a return pass.

**Goaltending** – A violation in which a defender touches a shot as it nears the basket in a downward flight.

**Guard** – (1) A position on the perimeter. The “point guard” or “1” brings the ball up the court and begins the offense, and a “shooting guard” or “2” is usually the team’s best outside shooter. (2) To defend an offensive player closely.

**Guide hand** – The shooter’s non-shooting hand.

## H

**Half-court line** – The line at the center of the court parallel to the sidelines that divides the court in half. *Also known as the “midcourt line.”*

**Hand-check** – To make hand contact with a dribbler while guarding them.

**Hedge** – In a pick-and-roll, when the screen’s defender steps into the path of the dribbler so the dribbler has to hesitate, giving their defender time to get around the screen.

**Help and recover** – A defensive move in which a defender leaves their assigned player to guard a teammate’s assigned player and then goes back to guard their own player.

**Help side** – (1) The half of the court (if the court is divided lengthwise) that the ball is not on. The opposite of the ball side. *Also known as “weak side.”* (2) The stance used to guard a help-side offensive player.

**Hesitation dribble (Hesi)** – A dribble maneuver in which the dribbler hesitates, pretending to pick up their dribble, but suddenly continues to the basket. *Also known as a “stop-and-go dribble.”*

**High post** – The area around the free throw line.

**Hook pass** – A low, one-handed pass made by stepping around the defender’s leg and extending the throwing arm.

**Hook shot** – A one-handed shot taken with a sweeping, windmill motion.

## I

**Inbound** – To pass the ball to a teammate on the court from out-of-bounds.

**Inbounder** – The player who inbounds the ball.

**Influence to elbows** – When the defense forces the ball toward the middle.

**Inside-out dribble** – An advanced dribbling move; a fake crossover dribble.

**Intentional foul** – A foul that occurs when a player makes illegal contact with an opposing player without intending to get the ball.

**Isolation play** – An offensive play designed to have a specific player attack the basket 1-on-1. *Also known as an “iso play” and a “clear-out play.”*

## J

**Jab step** – A short (6 to 8 inches) out-and-back step by an offensive player to see how the defender reacts.

**Jump ball** – A procedure used to begin a game. The referee tosses up the ball in the center circle between two opposing players who jump up and try to tip it to a teammate. *Also known as the “opening tip.”*

**Jump hook** – A variation of the traditional hook shot in which the shooter takes the shot with both feet in the air.

**Jump shot** – A shot in which the shooter faces the basket and releases the ball after jumping into the air.

**Jump stop** – The action of coming to a complete stop, legs apart and knees bent, when dribbling or running; can be a one-foot or two-foot jump stop.

**Jump to the ball** – When a defender, after their man passes the ball, changes to a denial position so their man can't cut between them and the ball.

**Junk defense** – A defense that is part man-to-man and part zone.

## L

**Lane** – The rectangular painted area between the baseline, the lane lines, and the free throw line. *Also known as the “paint.”*

**Layup** – A shot taken next to the basket in which the shooter extends their arm, lifts their same-side knee, and aims the ball at the upper corner of the painted square on the backboard.

**Loose-ball foul** – A foul committed when neither team has possession of the ball.

**Low post** – The area on one side of the basket around the block.

## M

**Man-to-man defense** – A team defense in which each defender guards a specific player or man. *Also known as “player-to-player defense.”*

**Man-to-man offense** – A team offense used against man-to-man defense. *Also known as “man offense.”*

**Midcourt line** – The line at the center of the court parallel to the sidelines that divides the court in half. *Also known as the “half-court line.”*

**Mirror the ball** – To follow the movement of the ball with your hands when closely guarding a player who is pivoting.

**Moving pick** – A violation that happens when a screener leans or moves after setting a screen.

## N

**Non-shooting foul** – A foul committed against a player who is not in the act of shooting.

## O

**Off-ball screen** – Positioning your body in a planted position so your teammate can use you to get open.

**Offensive rebound** – A rebound at the basket a team is attacking by that team.

**Offensive transition** – When the team on defense suddenly gains possession of the ball and has to convert from defense to offense.

**On-ball defense** – Defense that occurs when a defender guards the player with the ball.

**On-ball screen** – A play where an offensive player sets a screen to free up the ball handler to dribble.

**Open stance** – The stance used to play help-side defense. Involves facing the ball, with feet apart, body balanced, knees bent, and arms out.

**Outlet** – (1) To pass the ball after a defensive rebound to start the fast break. (2) The player who stays in the backcourt to receive an outlet pass.

**Overhead pass** – A two-handed pass thrown from above the player's head.

**Overtime** – A 5-minute extra period played when the game is tied at the end of regulation play.

## P

**Pack line** – A tactic in which a defender leaves their man or zone and drops into the lane to help protect the basket.

**Palming** – Carrying the ball.

**Pass fake** – A sudden movement by the player with the ball intended to cause the defender to move in one direction, allowing the passer to pass in another direction.

**Passing lane** – An imaginary line from the player with the ball to a teammate. If a defender is in the way, the passing lane is closed.

**Personal foul** – A penalty assessed on a player who commits an illegal action.

**Pick** – A two-person play in which an offensive player sets an on-ball screen (pick) on the ball handler's defender and cuts (roll or pop).

**Pivot** – The action when the player with the ball spins on one foot and steps with their other foot to beat their check.

**Pivot foot** – The foot that the offensive player spins on while pivoting.

**Point guard** – (1) A position played by a team's primary ball handler, the player who brings the ball up the court and begins the offense. Also called the "1." (2) The player who plays that position.

**Post** – (1) A player who plays in and around the lane area. A center or forward. (2) An area of the court, as in the low post or the high post.

**Post moves** – Back-to-the-basket scoring moves made by players near the basket.

**Post-up** – An offensive move in which an offensive player positions himself close to the basket with their back toward the basket and the defender behind them so the offensive player can receive a pass.

**Power forward** – (1) A position played by the larger of the forwards on the floor, usually a good scorer and rebounder. Also called the "4." At higher levels, when a player can shoot with range at the position, they are called a "Stretch 4." (2) The player who plays that position.

**Power layup** – A two-footed layup.

**Press** – A full-court press with a 1-2-1-1 formation.

**Press break** – A team offense used against a press defense. *Also known as "press offense."*

**Press offense** – An aggressive offense used to score quickly against a pressing defense. *Also known as "press break."*

**Pressure man-to-man defense** – An aggressive defense where the defenders stay between their man and the ball.

**Primary break** – A fast break that involves only a few players from each team.

**Pump fake** – A movement in which the player with the ball acts if they are about to shoot. It is designed to trick the defender into straightening up, allowing the player with the ball to dribble past them. *Also known as a “shot fake.”*

**Push pass** – A one-handed pass on the dribble.

## R

**Rebound** – (1) A missed shot that comes off the backboard or rim. (2) To fight for and gain control of a missed shot that comes off the backboard or rim.

**Retreat step** – A step in which the defender’s back foot steps away from their check, and the lead foot slides in place.

**Rocker step** – A play in which the offensive player makes a jab step in one direction and then follows it by driving by the defender in that direction.

**Runner** – A shot that the player shoots while running, without taking the time to set up the shot. *Also known as a “floater.”*

## S

**Safety** – The offensive player at the top of the circle.

**Sagging man-to-man defense** – A conservative defense in which the defenders stay between their man and the basket.

**Screen** – A play off the ball in which an offensive player runs over and stands in a stationary position next to a teammate’s defender to free up the teammate to dribble or receive a pass.

**Back screen** – A screen in the back of the defender.

**Ball screen** – An on-ball screen on a defender who is defending the ball handler.

**Cross screen** – A screen from one low post to the opposite low post.

**Double screen** – A screen set by two players next to each other. *Also known as a “parallel screen.”*

**Down screen** – A screen from the wing to the low post.

**Flare screen** – A screen for a player moving towards the sideline away from the ball.

**Off-ball screen** – A screen set on a defender guarding an offensive player who doesn’t have the ball.

**Staggered screen** – Two screens next to each other, set simultaneously for the same cutter.

**UCLA screen** – A screen from the low post to the top of the key. *Also known as a “up screen.”*

**Up screen** – A screen from the low post to the top of the key. *Also known as a “UCLA screen.”*

**Screen away** – To pass in one direction and set a screen for a teammate in the opposite direction.

**Screener** – A player who sets a screen.

**Sealing the defender** – After setting a screen, the screener does a reverse pivot to “seal” the defender and put the defender on their back.

**Secondary break** – A semi-fast break that a team uses when the offensive transition is neutralized.

**Set play** – A sequence of player and ball movement that leads to a specific shot by a specific player.

**Shell drill** – Breakdown defensive drills designed to work on all aspects of defense.

**Shooting foul** – A violation that happens when a defender fouls the shooter in the act of shooting. In the case that the shot is misses, the shooter is awarded 2 or 3 free throws. In the case that the shot is made, the shooter is awarded either 2 or 3 points and a free throw.

**Shooting guard** – (1) A position played by a perimeter player who is usually the team's best outside shooter. Also called the "2." (2) The person playing this position.

**Shooting hand** – The hand used to shoot the ball.

**Shot clock** – The clock used to limit the time allowed for a team to attempt a shot. Used in pro and college games, in some high school games, but not in middle school and youth leagues.

**Shot clock violation** – A violation that occurs when the team with the ball doesn't get a shot off during the allotted time. Results in a change of possession.

**Shot fake** – A movement in which the player with the ball acts if they are about to shoot. It is designed to trick the defender into straightening up, allowing the player with the ball to dribble past them. *Also known as a "pump fake."*

**Sideline** – The line at each side of the court that marks the boundary of the playing surface.

**Sideline play** – A play used by the offensive team to put the ball back in play from the sideline. *Also known as a "SOB play."*

**Sideline-Baseline** – When the defense forces the ball toward the sideline on both sides of the floor.

**Sixth man** – The first substitute who comes off the bench to replace a starter.

**Skip pass** – An overhead pass from one side of the court to the other over the defense.

**Slide (Defensive)** – A quick "step-slide" movement a defender makes when closely guarding the dribbler.

**Slipping the screen** – When the screener, seeing their defender hedging, gets out of his screening stance and cuts to the basket for a pass.

**Special plays** – A play for a specific situation and/or specific player. *Also known as a "ATO (after timeout)."*

**Speed dribble** – A dribble maneuver in which the player pushes the ball ahead of them and bounces it at chest height.

**Spin dribble** – A dribble maneuver in which the player does a reverse pivot while bringing the ball around them so it ends up in their other hand.

**Stance (Defensive)** – The stance used to play defense. Involves bending knees, keeping feet wide and arms out, etc.

**Steal** – (1) To intercept a pass and gain possession of the ball. (2) The name for this action.

**Stop (Defensive)** – Gaining possession of the ball before the offensive team scores.

**Stop and pop** – An offensive move in which a player comes to a sudden stop, picks up their dribble, and shoots the ball.

**Stop-and-go dribble** - A dribble maneuver in which the dribbler hesitates, pretending to pick up their dribble, but suddenly continues to the basket. *Also known as a "hesitation dribble."*



**Strong side** – The half of the court where the ball is.

**Substitute** – A player who comes in the game to replace another player. *Also known as a “sub.”*

**Swing spot** – An imaginary line from the junction baseline and lane line to the same junction on the other half of the court. Used to describe a proper spacing in a four out offense.

**Swing step** – A defensive step in which a defender does a reverse pivot with one foot and stays in their on-ball stance.

**Switch** – A movement in which two defenders change the offensive player each is guarding.

## T

**Technical foul** – A violation that results in the other team getting free throws and possession of the ball. *Also known as a “T.”*

**Trailer** – An offensive player, usually a center or a power forward, who trails the first wave of players on the fast break.

**Transition** – A movement that occurs when a team changes from offense to defense (defensive transition) or from defense to offense (offensive transition).

**Trap** – A defensive move in which two defenders guard the player with the ball, forming a V with their bodies.

**Traveling** – A violation that occurs when the player with the ball takes too many steps without dribbling. This is a common occurrence with young players.

**Triangle-and-two** – A combination defense in which three defenders play zone in a triangle formation and two defenders guard specific players man-to-man.

**Triple threat position** – The bent knees stance that allows the player three options: dribble, pass, or shoot.

**Turnaround jump shot** – A shot by a player in the low post in which they catch the ball with their back to the basket, make a forward pivot so they face the basket, and shoot a jump shot.

**Turnover** – A loss of possession of the ball caused by a steal, an offensive foul, a held ball, or a poor pass.

**Two-guard front** – A team offense mostly used against zones with one-guard fronts (1-2-2 and 1-3-1).

## U

**Up-and-under move** – An advanced post move that starts out like a turnaround jump shot, but instead of shooting, the post player “pump fakes,” causing the defender to rise out of their defensive stance. The post player steps by the defender and finishes with a layup.

## V

**Vertical challenge** – Jumping straight up and down with arms straight up to challenge a shot without fouling.

## W

**Weak side** – The half of the court (if the court is divided lengthwise) that the ball is not on. The opposite of the ball side. *Also known as the “help side.”*

**Wing** – (1) The area on the court where the 3-point arc meets the free throw line extended. (2) The offensive player who plays in that area.

## **Z**

**Zone defense** – A team defense in which players are assigned to guard specific areas of the court, rather than players. Most popular zone alignments: 2-3, 3-2, 1-3-1, 1-1-3, 2-1-2.

**Zone offense** – A team offense used against a zone defense.

**Zone press defense** – Full-court zone defense, mostly used to trap the ball. Most popular zone press alignments: 1-3-1, 1-2-1-1, 1-2-2, 2-2-1.