

The Seven Steps to Calling Your First Penalty™

You won't see all the penalties. You won't call all the penalties you see. You might not call ANY penalties for the first 5+ times you ref at scrimmage. That's NORMAL. Here's how it works for a lot of beginners:

1. Knowing in theory what a penalty is, and knowing in theory what the correct verbal cues and hand signals are
2. Seeing part of something on the track and then wondering later and asking others if what you saw was a penalty. Did you see who initiated? Did you see what blocking zone they used? Did you see the target zone? Was the action actually illegal? Did you see the impact on the game?
3. Being in position and wondering in the moment if something you're currently seeing is a penalty
4. Successfully putting all the pieces together for recognizing an illegal initiation/target/impact that merits a penalty... and then standing there silent for 10 seconds staring at the location it happened while everyone else skates past you because your physical body is on pause due to your brain performing a reset and reboot to install new software. Congratulations! You're building new neurons and connections! Truly, go celebrate after practice. Tell them you really saw the penalty and knew what you were seeing. Get some high fives!
5. Confidently no-calling an action that you saw but that you now know didn't qualify all the requirements needed to meet the threshold of being a penalty. A no-call is a call. Good call, ref!
6. ATTEMPTING to call a penalty you see. You WILL fumble the call. You might forget to blow your whistle. You might forget the hand signal. You might forget the cue. You might call the wrong color and/or skater number. Totally normal. Putting all these together live and in the moment IS HARD. It takes practice, and no one will ever be perfect. (Here's a secret: it's common for even the most experienced officials to mess up things like hand signals, verbal cues, color, and number.)
7. You successfully call your first penalty with proper whistle, verbal cue, and hand signal. Go celebrate again!