

ORIENTEERING BASICS

Orienteering is about reading a map whilst walking or running through the countryside, and the most important thing is to be able to make constant comparison between the map and the terrain. To achieve this the most important technique to learn in Orienteering is how to read a map whilst moving along. The essentials of this are -

1. Fold the map to a size that can be held comfortably in one hand (usually the left). Best to be about postcard size.
2. Hold your map with your intended direction in front of you (i.e. pointing ahead), and use your thumb (or a pointer on your compass) to indicate your current position on the map.
3. Orient the map (BY ROTATING YOURSELF, and hence the map) so that north on the map corresponds to north on the compass. [On a blue or green course, without a compass, the same rotation can be achieved by lining up the handrails (tracks, fence, etc) so that the real one matches that on the map.]

Your running direction now lies in front of you. You can then compare what lies ahead of you on the map with what lies ahead in the terrain.

The first two steps are the most important because the most time lost reading the map is when you have to search on the map for your location. In difficult terrain you may only get a few seconds to glance at the map (before having to look at the ground again) and you can't waste a few seconds to locate where you last were. Having the map folded also makes it more stable in the hand, and less likely to be knocked from under your thumb by the vegetation.

As you move through the forest to a new location where you are sure where you are, you should then slide your thumb or pointer along your route to that location on the map. Some orienteers even draw a fine texta mark on their thumbnail to make their thumbing more accurate. Thumb compasses mostly have a pointer on them so that your location and an indication of direction are always at the same point on the map - so this can streamline the process (once you are used to using it).

Learning these three steps sounds easy, but in fact takes a lot of discipline and practice when doing courses so that they become automatic - and then, full concentration can be given to orienteering.

A useful training exercise can be to take a map and compass when you are out walking or jogging. Pretend you are orienteering through terrain in some exotic location: folding the map, thumbing the map, planning routes and moving the thumb or compass along the route from feature to feature as you would on a real course - even orienting the map (and hence yourself) to your required direction.