



# How to...

## DID YOU KNOW?

In 2003, more than 200,000 people in Switzerland took part in the world's largest orienteering event.



# Try orienteering

Gain navigation skills with this challenging outdoor activity.

**O**rienteering is a sporting event where participants race to compete in a marked course in a park. The meets are a little like scavenger hunts because you have to find checkpoints along the way. Here is some advice to help you get started.

### Gather what you need

The first thing you need to try orienteering is a compass, a hand-held device that has a needle that rotates around to point north, allowing you to tell which way is north, east, south, and west. Orienteering compasses typically have a flat, clear base plate that can be lined up with the directions on a map. You will also need a finger stick, which is a small electronic device that helps record your time, but you can often borrow one from a meet's organizers. You will also receive a topographical map before the event begins. This is a detailed map that also shows elevation (height above sea level) of an area. Consider checking out a topographical map from a library or viewing one on [topographic-map.com](http://topographic-map.com) so you're familiar with what they look like beforehand.

### Learn how it works

At a meet, you will use your compass and map to locate the checkpoints that have been placed in the park. A checkpoint looks like a fabric box with an electronic

reader on top. Once you find a checkpoint, you'll place your finger stick into the electronic reader. This records how long it took you to find the checkpoint. The person or group that gets to the finish line first after finding all the checkpoints is the winner. However, beginners are welcome to take it slow.

### Find an event

Ask an adult to help you search for races on the site [orienteeringusa.org](http://orienteeringusa.org). If it looks like there are no events in your town, don't be discouraged. Many clubs cover large regions and may host events closer to you than you realize. There may also be courses designed for beginners. When you arrive at the meet, let the check-in person know that you're new.

### Navigate the course

Beginners start on the white, or easiest, course at an orienteering meet. On the map, a triangle marks the start point, numbered circles indicate checkpoints, and a double circle is used for the finish line. Many players place their thumb on the map where they believe they are, then move their thumb as they go through the course. There should also be arrows on the top of the map that point north. Line your compass up with these arrows so you always know the direction you're going in. Keep going until you reach the end of the course.



Navigate to the north.

## 4 fun facts about using compasses

This navigation device has a long and interesting history.

### They're an ancient tool

One of the earliest versions of a compass was created in China more than 2,000 years ago. It had a metal spoon in the middle that turned to point north, instead of the needle that's used today.



### Stars were used before them

People likely first used compasses when they couldn't see the sun or stars to help them tell directions.



### They have a rose design

The face of a compass has a star-like design with lines that point to different directions. This is called the compass rose because the space between them resembles flower petals.



### Sailors found them helpful

Sailors were among the first to widely use compasses. But when boats started to be made out of metal instead of wood in the 1830s, the magnetism of the metal on the boats affected compass readings. The solution was to place soft iron bars near the compass to improve accuracy.

