

What to do

Before your first event

You will need outdoor clothes and trainers. Road-running shoes are unlikely to be suitable for rough ground, and you can expect to get quite wet and muddy. Choose your clothes according to whether you expect to walk, jog or run. Wear full leg cover.

If you have a compass and know how to use it – even at the most basic level – take it. You might want to attach an elastic or string loop so you can keep it comfortably on your wrist.

Take some food and drink with you – not all events offer refreshments, and you can expect to be hungry and thirsty when you finish.

If the event is using electronic punching, you will probably have to pay a small charge to hire a dibber or brikke. Eventually you might choose to buy your own.

If the event isn't using electronic punching, you should also take:

- 4 safety pins
- a small freezer bag or enough "transpaseal" to cover a large post-card
- a thick rubber band (as regularly discarded by postmen)

Use these to protect the control card that you will have to punch, and to attach it to your wrist or your clothing.

When are events held?

Most are on Sundays, usually with starts from 10:30 to 12:30, with Registration open from 10:00. Night events usually start as soon as it is dark, or about 7p.m. if they are mid-week.

Going to an event

Newcomers are always welcome at events, but you might feel a little wary of just going along on your own. If that's the case, contact your local club and arrange to go with someone. They will help you get started.

Whether you go with someone else or go along on your own, you will probably prefer to know in advance what to expect. The fine detail may well vary at different events, but the basics remain the same:

Parking – signs or a real live person will show you where to leave your car. There might be a charge for this. Parking might be on forest tracks, in a public car park, or in a field.

Alternative transport is not usually an option, unfortunately. Orienteering areas are rarely accessible by public transport, and only the most dedicated of cyclists or motorcyclists go to events on two wheels. Some clubs occasionally organise minibus transport to events.

Changing facilities – some events have indoor changing facilities. You will very quickly become expert at getting changed in your car. This is one of the reasons why not taking a car makes life difficult.

Most people get changed then put on an extra layer for the next bit.

Registration – usually a car or a tent, where you go to register for the event. The precise detail will vary at different events, but will usually be described on a board. There should also be a board describing the length and difficulty of the courses available. Choose your course carefully!

You might have to fill in a little form, and you might have to join a queue, and/or there might be different people handing entries for different courses. Somewhere along the line (unless you have entered in advance), you will have to pay your entry fee, supply your name and age group, tell the organisers which course you want to do, and collect a map and control descriptions. For events using electronic punching you will have to be given a numbered gizmo (Emit brikke or SI card – unless you've already got one). You might also be given a start time or a time block within which you should aim to start.

Make sure you know how long it is going to take you to get to the start – ask if necessary.

Check whether the event is using pre-printed maps or you have to copy down your course. If you have to copy it down – where? This might be at Registration, or at the Start. Ask. Before you copy down a course for the first time, ask for guidance from someone who knows. There will be plenty of people willing to share their wisdom.

If you have travelled alone, leave car keys with an official (ask at Registration), and make sure you put your car registration number on the slip you fill in.

Make sure you know what a control will look like and how you "punch" at each control. There should be a sample near Registration.

Go to the start. Leave your spare clothing in your car (occasionally there might be a place to leave spare clothing near the start, particularly in winter). Allow plenty of time to get there, and use it as a warm-up.

Remember to take with you:

- Map (and map bag)
- Control descriptions (preferably attached to map)
- Compass
- Emit brikke or SI card (or control card if pin punches are being used)

Ask officials at the start what you should do. Sometimes, particularly at smaller local events, the start is unmanned. Ask another participant what to do.

Do your course – visit each of the controls in the order specified, and punch at each. If you find you've missed one, go back to it, then continue in the correct order. So for instance if you do number 1, 2 then find yourself at 4, go back to 3 then 4 again, and on to 5 etc.. Even if you punched at 4 the first time you were there, you should punch again when you do it in the right order – otherwise you will be disqualified.

If you get seriously lost, you could ask another competitor where you are – strictly speaking you should be disqualified for that, but many beginners do it, and there's no point in getting disheartened. Don't come to rely on it though. Learn to navigate for yourself – get some coaching!

A few words about technique: orienteers continue to learn and improve their skills for many years – that's part of the fun of the sport. If there's just one thing that will stand you in good stead for your first attempts, it is this: **ALIGN YOUR MAP**. Turn your map so that it matches the landmarks. You can do this simply by matching the map to the ground features, or by lining the map's North lines with North as indicated by your compass. Keep it aligned by turning it each time you change direction. It's like turning the road atlas up-side-down when you drive from Inverness to Edinburgh. (This might also be referred to as **SETTING** or **ORIENTATING** the map.)

Finish – For events using electronic punching, you must punch at the finish. For pin-punching events someone will note the time you finish.

Whatever you do, you **MUST** go to the finish and/or the Download tent or car. This is where you record the fact that you have returned safely. You will be given a note or printout of your time. If you don't tell the organisers you're back safely, a lot of people can be put to a lot of trouble looking for you.

Two unwritten "rules" must be mentioned:

- Always help a child in distress – even if you're no expert, you can work things out together.
- Always help someone who is (or might be) injured. If you see someone fall, check that they are really OK before you continue. If necessary, abandon your run and fetch help.

Why join a club?

You don't have to be a member of a club to take part in an event. But there are many benefits to joining one as your interest grows. As well as the social aspects of club membership, you will immediately have contact with a lot of people keen to share their enthusiasm for the sport and give you encouragement and guidance so you will improve and gain more satisfaction from orienteering. Many clubs organise training and coaching sessions with varying degrees of formality.

For further information and particularly to find out about courses where you can learn more, contact the National Orienteering Centre: tel. 01479 861713 or e-mail nationalocentre@scottish-orienteering.org