

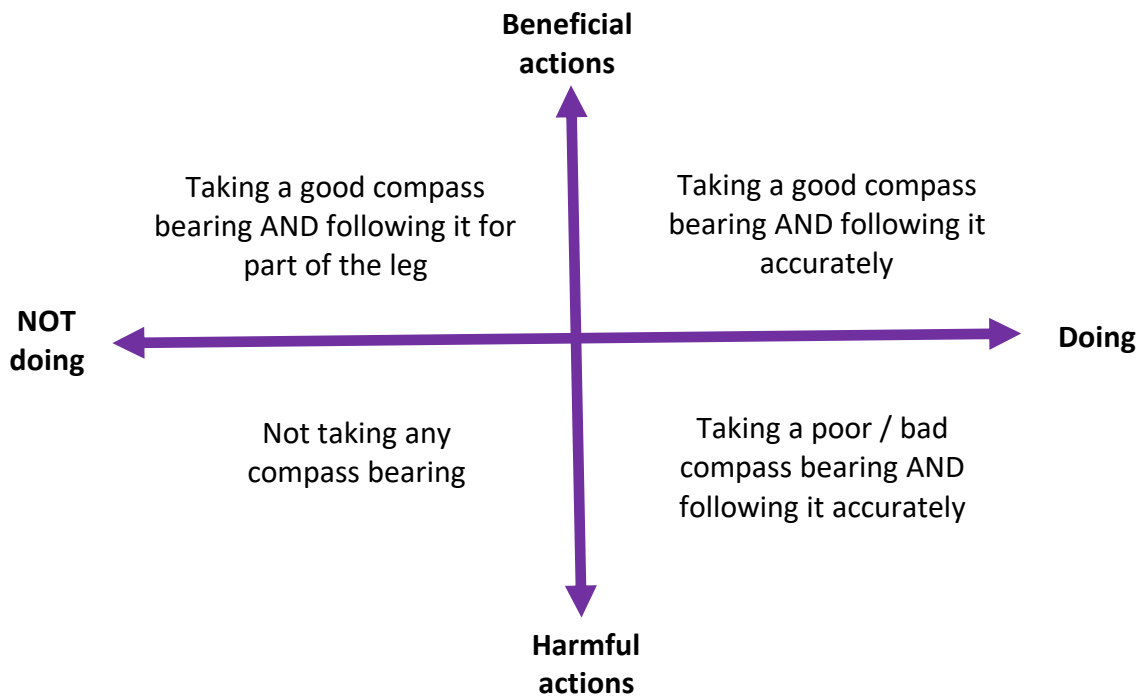
Direction

As orienteers, our essential tools to navigate round a course are a map and compass. We have to use these together as efficiently as possible.

- When did you last think about your compass and how you use it?
- Do you use it to best effect?
- Have you checked to find out if your compass still 'works'?
- How do you actually use your compass? How do you 'take a bearing'?

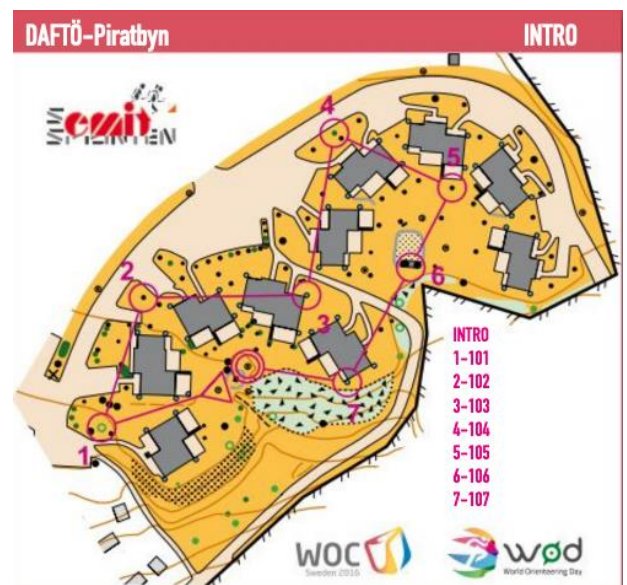


Understanding what we can do and what we do not do.

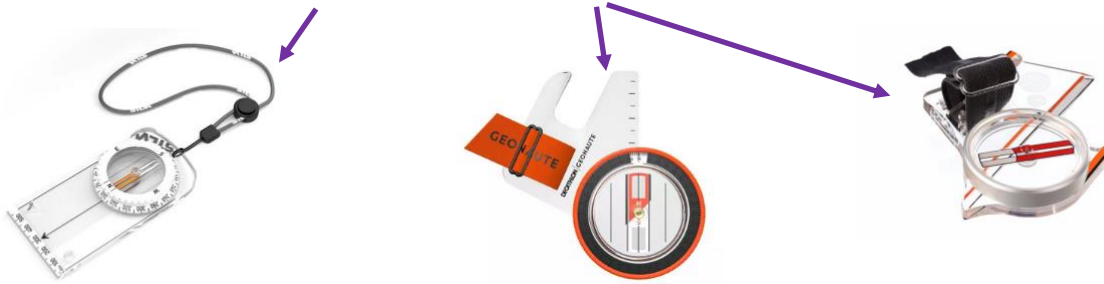


So where are you usually? Which is the ideal place to be – and how do you get there?

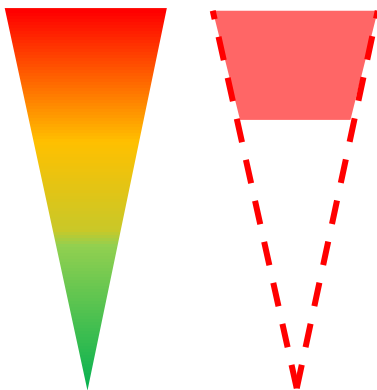
1. How do you hold your compass when using it? Whatever you are doing, remember to hold the compass **FLAT** so that the needle can swing freely.
2. Can you set the map using your compass? This means keeping North on the map to North on the compass. In Sweden, maps used for learning about orienteering have a **red** band at the top to emphasise where North on the map is – the orienteer then matches the **red** needle on the compass to **red** on the map. You should constantly check with your compass that your map is set. [This video](#) from the 'Think Fast, Run Hard, Go Orienteering' series reinforces this skill in action.



3. How do you use the compass for accurate direction – taking a good compass bearing? This is explained in [another video](#) from the series mentioned in #2. The athlete goes through using both a baseplate compass and a thumb compass.



4. After taking your accurate compass bearing, can you follow it reasonably accurately?



To follow a compass bearing, you need to look up and identify a feature in the distance which you can run to; make sure that this feature is unique – trees can all look the same!

In the diagram, you can see a 'Cone of accuracy'; at the start of following your bearing, you will only vary by a few metres from the straight line. This becomes further and further from the straight line the longer you are on this compass bearing so by the end you could have 'wandered' from the straight line by a long way!

We could take the time to follow the compass bearing very accurately – but we would never win the race this way.

It is important to understand what is meant by 'accurately'. The compass bearing is used along with 'Picture' – head up, look around at the terrain as you execute the leg. Whenever we follow a compass bearing, there is a degree of tolerance of error in our direction; this varies with each individual so we should know what our own tolerance is.

Ask yourself the question 'Does the terrain match what I expect to see from the map?'

- If the response is 'Yes' then continue;
- If the response is 'No' then STOP and ensure that you are where you expect to be. For instance you might not be as far along the leg as you thought you were and you just have to keep going for a bit longer; alternatively you might have made a 180° error (matching N on the compass with S on the map – we have all done this!!) and be in a totally different place.

SUMMARY

- The compass is a very useful tool to aid our navigation.
- As orienteers, we should constantly work on improving our compass skills, discovering the amount we 'wobble' by when following a bearing.
- Identifying a unique feature to run to on your bearing will help to keep a good direction.
- It should be used to constantly check direction.
- Using the compass should become second nature at all times during the orienteering course.



A basic 'Begin' compass, often carried by elite athletes in case their compass is broken during the event!

