

## Very basic course setting

*This is an updated extract of Chapter 7 of Carol McNeil's "Orienteering, the skills of the game"; ISBN 1-85223-990-5.*

Planning courses is fun for anyone who has access to an area with a map, some control markers to hang out and some friends to find them.

For the coach or teacher it is important to plan courses at the right standard which will lead to success and enjoyment by the participants. Planning courses for beginners is straightforward if the following guidelines are used.

The table of colour coded standards at the end of this article provides a useful guide for the planner as well as the competitor. Yellow standard courses are ideal for introducing orienteering to any age group. Even people with some map reading experience will appreciate a course where they can get used to the new symbols and large scale.

Choose a safe parkland area or woodland with plenty of paths and a clear boundary. The map can be any scale as long as the line features have been drawn clearly. Map scales of 1:5000 to 1:10,000 allow the untrained eye to pick out and identify these features more easily.

The start and finish should be placed next to each other for ease of organisation and timing. The start should be on a very distinct line feature, preferably a track or forest road which will lead to the first control.

Controls should be sited on those line features which can be seen and easily identified from a map, for example a monument, a pond or a group of trees standing together in a park.

The control site must be easily identifiable on the ground and be on a precise point on the map, for example - 'pond, north end', or 'group of trees, south side'.

Beginners need a lot of controls for reassurance. These should be linked by distinct line features or with only one obvious route choice. One or two right and left decisions are enough at this stage. Older beginners may appreciate a longer course. Keep it at Yellow standard and only make the legs longer than 300 meters if there is an obvious path or track to follow.

The control marker should be hung clearly, never hidden. Orienteering is not a treasure hunt. Control markers hung from a simple pole or cane are ideal for making sure they can be seen from all directions. They must be placed in precisely the position shown on the map.

The controls must correspond with the centre of a red circle about 5mm in diameter, drawn on the map. Marking the course on to the map can be simply done the old fashioned way using a red ball point pen but a consistently better effect can be achieved by using planning software such as the free "PurplePen" for PC's.

Setting the map correctly does not come naturally to most people. It is a skill which has to be taught and practised. The routes will appear extremely obvious and easy to you as a planner but competitive youngsters will enjoy the sport more if they can run without too much difficult decision making.

The next stage in course planning is to offer a route choice as found on Orange standard courses. The theory behind a good route choice is that there are two or more route options which look roughly equal on the map and will take about the same time to run. The straight line option, if there is one, should give the advantage to those orienteers who can navigate well through the terrain. Good map reading should be tested more than compass work, precise distance judgement or fitness.

Avoid "Bingo" controls where finding the control is more a matter of luck than good navigation, for example a pit in an area of low visibility. A good orienteer may be within a few metres yet not see the control. Another orienteer may happen, by luck, to see someone else at the control and not waste any time at all. This is why controls should not be put in areas of impassible "fight" or where the map is not clear or accurate.

Avoid 'dog legs' where the best route for some competitors is to go into a control the same way as competitors will come out of it. This gives an advantage to those who happen to see someone coming away as they approach the control. These are unfair and should not be used.

A description list for each course planned, tied to the control number codes, is part of fair competition. Use the standard IOF control descriptions. Purple Pen can be used to create the description lists.

**Summary**

Make it fair.

Follow the recommended guidelines.

Aim for success and enjoyment for the participant.

Never hide controls

Avoid dog legs.

Give beginners pre marked maps.

<b>Colour coded standards for Planners</b>						
<b>Colour</b>	<b>Length</b>	<b>Control sites</b>	<b>Type of leg</b>	<b>Technical level</b>	<b>Time for most finishers</b>	<b>Age</b>
String	0.5-1.5km	On the line		1 (Very easy)	10-15 mins	3-10
White	1-1.5km	Major line features and junctions	Line features. No route choice.	1 (Easy)	15-40 mins	6-12
Yellow	1-2.5km	Line features and very easy adjacent features.	Line features, minimal route choice, no compass.	2 (Easy)	20-45 mins	Beginners older than 7 years.
Orange	2-3.5km	Minor line and easy point features	Route choices. Catching features near controls	3 (Medium)	35-55 mins	10 plus
Red	4.5-6km	As Orange	As Orange	As Orange	50-80 mins	Youth/ adult
Light Green	2.5-3.5 km	Easy point features	Good attack points	4 (Medium/hard)	35-60 mins	Youth/ adult
Green	3.5-5 km	Small point features and contour features	Fine compass work and contours. More physical	5 (Hard)	35-55 mins	Youth/ adult
Blue	5.5-7.5 km	As Green	As Green	5 (Hard)	50-75 mins	Self selecting
Brown	7.5-10 km	As Green	As Green	5 (Hard)	60-85 mins	Self selecting
Black	10-14km	As Green	As Green	5 (Hard)	70-120 mins	Self selecting

Further reading:

BOF planning guides;

<https://www.britishorienteering.org.uk/page/planners>

SOA Planners Guide;

[https://www.scottish-orienteering.org/wpfd\\_file/course-planning-guide/](https://www.scottish-orienteering.org/wpfd_file/course-planning-guide/)

