

# COMPASS NAVIGATION EXERCISES

Source: [www.eurekacamping.com/blog/article/3-great-compass-navigation-exercises](http://www.eurekacamping.com/blog/article/3-great-compass-navigation-exercises)

The ability to accurately navigate with a compass can mean the difference between life and death in a wilderness emergency. Taking a course at a university or outdoor outfitter, or even learning compass skills on your own from a book are all great ways to get started. As with any skill, though, compass navigation requires diligent practice in order to achieve and maintain proficiency. In the case of a real-life emergency there's often precious little room for mistakes, so taking the time to practice and hone your compass skills in a controlled setting is always recommended for anyone who ventures into the wilderness. So if you've learned the basics of compass navigation, but you need a way to keep your skills sharp when you aren't out in the backcountry, you're in luck.

## COMPASS NAVIGATION EXERCISE 1: HOW TO USE A COMPASS

A compass is one of the most basic navigation tools any hiker can own. It needs no batteries, works with any map, and even works without a map! While entire books have been written about navigating with a compass, every new compass user needs to know the basic concepts.

In this exercise, students will:

- Learn the parts of the compass
- Learn how to go north
- Learn how to go south
- Learn how to go any direction between 0 and 360 degrees
- Learn how to find the direction to any object of interest

## **COMPASS NAVIGATION EXERCISE 2: THREE-LEG COMPASS WALK**

One of the simplest exercises for improving the speed and accuracy of your compass navigation is the Three-leg Compass Walk. This exercise is appropriate for virtually any age group and requires only a compass, a small place marker like a pencil or twig, and enough space to move about 50 paces in any direction.

To get started, mark your location with the pencil, twig, or whatever you've chosen as a place marker. Next, set a bearing for  $0^{\circ}/360^{\circ}$  (due North) and find a landmark that falls along it, just as you might in the field. Follow this bearing for exactly 50 paces and stop. Now, set a bearing of  $120^{\circ}$  on your compass and find another landmark that falls along it. Travel along this  $120^{\circ}$  bearing for another 50 paces, and stop. Finally, set a bearing of  $240^{\circ}$  on your compass, sight a landmark, and follow this bearing for 50 paces.

If you've done everything correctly, you should have returned to approximately where you started. The closer you are to your marker, the more accurate your navigation. As you become more and more proficient, you can use greater distances, making the accuracy of your bearings even more crucial. If you're consistently reaching the exact location where you began, increase the challenge of this exercise by timing yourself to see how quickly you can complete the triangle.

## **COMPASS NAVIGATION EXERCISE 3: STRAIGHT AHEAD**

Walking in a straight line seems simple enough, right? According to a study published in the journal *Current Biology*, it's not as easy as you may think. According to the study, people instructed to walk in a straight line in wilderness conditions consistently walked in circles when faced with conditions that obscured the sun or moon. This exercise is designed to demonstrate the tendency to spiral when attempting to walk a straight line and -- with consistent practice -- can even help to correct it. For this exercise, you'll need a compass, blindfold, and an outdoor area with two prominent landmarks at least 100 yards from one another. Because you'll be using a blindfold, we recommend always performing this exercise with at least one other person present as a spotter.

Begin by standing next to one of the landmarks, facing toward the other. Take a bearing to determine the direction from the first landmark to the second, and have your spotter make a note of it. Put on the blindfold and attempt to travel in the direction of the second landmark. While you're doing this your spotter should follow closely, remaining silent unless you're about to run into something. After you've traveled approximately 100 yards, take the blindfold off and notice where you've ended up. Turn around and take a bearing on the landmark from which you started to see how far and in which direction you veered. The difference between your initial bearing and this one should be exactly  $180^\circ$  if you've walked in a straight line.

Whether you're new to compass navigation, or a seasoned veteran who still likes to keep his skills sharp, these exercises can help you to improve your compass navigation skills. In a pinch, they could even save your life.