

Event Guideline I: String Courses

This Guideline is only intended to provide advice to Organisers and Planners. No compulsion is intended, and it is accepted that the particular circumstances of an event may make it sensible not to take up all of the suggestions made.

1. General Information

1.1 Nature of Event

String orienteering is designed for children who are too young to undertake a basic orienteering course on their own. The objective is to introduce the feel of orienteering to youngsters and to make going to events fun for all the family.

Controls on distinctive features are joined by a continuous string. The child is given a large scale map pre-marked with control circles and the route of the string. Very young children who do not want to look at the map can still be successful!

A string course should be made available at any event where there could be a demand. They are not usually designed for push-chairs.

1.2 Venue

In consultation with the Organiser and Controller, select an area close to and easily accessible from the car park or assembly area, which is unlikely to be frequented by competitors in the main competition. Ideally it should be interesting and easy walking woodland with a variety (but not an overdose) of features and vegetation changes. It should be large enough for a course of approximately 600 metres.

1.3 Planning

Controls, 8 – 12 in number, should be on as wide a variety of features as possible. The first should be within sight of the start. Plan the route to go through the nicest possible terrain – include small streams to be jumped over, some easy scrambling up rocks or crawls through holes in thickets – be creative and make it fun! Check for hidden dangers like barbed wire, and, if necessary, clear the ground to enable a three year old to run round. As the string does not have arrows on it, the route away from a control should be different from the route in.

1.4 Map

Having planned the course, make a simplified large scale black and white map of the area to be used – no contours! Do not clutter the map, but include all 'on-string' features and also any prominent feature that will be visible from the string. There should be a legend (words in lower case) and a prominent N arrow at the side (but no N lines on the map itself).

1.5 Marking out the Course

The colour of the string should be distinctive. Orange binder twine in some woods in autumn is not a good idea – neither is white if snow is forecast! The route needs to be precisely known before the string is laid out. The string needs to be trapped along the ground every so often.

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Although banners do not need to be full sized kites, but they should be of uniform type. If numeric codes are used, they should correspond to the control number. The marking device should hang low enough for use at a height of half a metre. Children prefer a proper pin-punch (provided it is not too stiff), but some adults feel wax crayons are safer.

Alternatively, electronic punching could be used in order to make the experience as realistic as possible.

Themes can be carried right through the course with control descriptions such as "Pooh Corner (track bend)" with Pooh there at the control. If electronic punching is not being used, pictorial codes – cartoon characters or any other pictorial design – can be printed on the control card and matched up with a large version at the control. e.g. Rupert Bear, Mickey Mouse, etc. Any decorative equipment should be cheap, expendable, easily carried and placed, rainproof and inedible.

1.6 Organisation

Keep the main event Organiser and the Controller informed about the progress of the string course, and be ready to show them what you have done. Last minute clashes of interest must be avoided!

It is appropriate for there to be no registration fee, and for both Start and Finish to be at the Registration tent. The Registration Sheet should have columns for: name, age, e-card Number (if used), start time, finish time, time taken. Have a demonstration control.

If electronic punching is not being used, it is strongly recommended that the Organiser provides each child with a single item – a map unit comprising map, control descriptions and control card sealed in a map case – which, at the finish, may be given back to the child in its entirety.

The emphasis is on completion of the course, not speed, so if prizes (balloons, badges, certificates, sweets) are to be given, they should be for all finishers. The published results (name, age, time taken) should be given in either registration or alphabetical order.

Second runs (to improve on their time or do it on their own) are to be encouraged. Each run should appear in the results.

1.7 Equipment

At the present time no commercial string machines are available in Britain. The ones being used have either come from Finland or have been DIY.

1.8 Variations for older children

Off-string courses are sometimes provided as a further step in the progression towards a White Course. The controls are no longer on the string, but are visible from it. However, beware of creating confusion for children following *the* string course. A separate area with its own string may be more appropriate.