

# OACT Guidelines for Event Management – Doc 15

## COURSE PLANNING FOR SPRINT AND SHORT COURSE EVENTS

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*The following guidelines have been prepared particularly for application to sprint or short course events held as part of the regular Orienteering ACT program.*

There are many significant differences between classical sprint orienteering and longer forms of bush orienteering:

- The courses are much shorter and running speeds are generally faster, so that even small time losses can be critical.
- Most sprint events are held in urban situations such as university or school campuses where uncrossable obstacles play a big part in determining route choice and hence in course planning.
- At a moderate pace, the level of navigational difficulty, even on elite courses, is not high, as routes generally follow well defined roads, paths and building edges. To compensate for this and to force competitors to concentrate on the map reading, it is necessary to plan routes with a large number of decision points.
- Avoiding dog legs tends to be less important than in bush orienteering, but it is still necessary to consider competitor safety if people are running in opposite directions through narrow passages or steps.
- Maps are at a large scale, typically 1:4000 or 1:5000, with much more detail than is shown on typical bush maps. This includes representing some features in effectively a third dimension (e.g. open corridors through buildings, overpasses).
- Control sites are often more clearly defined than in traditional bush orienteering and the challenge is not so much in interpreting the map but in interpreting the fine detail **quickly**, i.e. the brain needs to keep pace with the feet.
- Reading control descriptions can often be vital to good navigation and route choice planning, particularly where a control is placed on one side of an uncrossable obstacle (e.g. high wall or fence). Control features in urban events include some which are not normally encountered in bush events.
- Forbidden areas can play a big part in route choice, even if they appear crossable on the ground (e.g. garden beds).
- Some locations used as control sites may have a paved surface which cannot be penetrated by a control stand and no convenient feature on which to hang a control flag, requiring a different arrangement to support the flag and SI unit/punch.

An event held in a parkland or campus area over a relatively short distance is not necessarily a 'sprint' event in the original sense of the term, but may sometimes be better described as a 'short course' event. While a short course event may involve fast running, short legs and frequent changes of direction, it does not offer the same intricate route choice options, fine level of detail and constant attention to accurate map reading as a classical sprint event. This distinction is important at the highest level of competition (i.e. Red courses), but not for basic Blue or Green courses.

Many of the areas used for the shorter forms of orienteering in Canberra are large urban parks where the most difficult courses that can be set are of relatively easy Orange standard, and are best described as 'short course'. More challenging sprint courses can be set at some of the university or school campuses. Sprint or short course orienteering need not be confined to urban areas, but can also be organised in non-urban/ bush areas if the terrain and map are suitable (see below).

The advice provided in **Document 2, Successful course planning** is broadly applicable to sprint or short course orienteering. The following additional points should be considered in relation to specific types of courses:

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## Blue courses

- Simple legs with minimal navigation and little or no route choice.
- There is usually no shortage of linear features on sprint maps. Sometimes there are too many, and complex path networks etc. should be avoided.
- It may not be practicable to have a control at every decision point, so focus on the more important ones.
- Don't set legs which may entice competitors to cross accessible forbidden areas (e.g. garden beds).

## Green courses

- Two similar route choice legs, easy to identify.
- Legs which offer competitors the choice of going around one or other side of a building or other obstacle are ideal. Also legs which offer the choice of navigating directly across an accessible area of grass or trees or following a path around the perimeter.
- One major decision on route choice per leg is usually sufficient.
- Direct route choices should not entice competitors to cross accessible forbidden areas (e.g. garden beds).

## Orange courses

- Several possible route choices, some not immediately obvious, with some technical challenge, or alternatively one longer route which is complex to execute and requires careful thinking.
- In many areas, particularly urban parks, an Orange course can be as hard as you can make it, provided that it is fair.
- In very complex areas, for example, where there are changes in vertical level or impassable walls or fences that may be difficult to pick, remember that Orange courses are designed for people who are still developing their orienteering skills, so do not make the controls too difficult. It is better to concentrate on offering interesting route choices which can readily be followed on the map.

## Red courses

- Complex route choices requiring constant detailed navigation and many decision points.
- Make red courses as difficult as you can, check that they are fair and that the map is accurate and not ambiguous in complex areas.
- Plan legs with complex route choices, many decision points and mandatory direction changes within building complexes etc.
- Artificial boundaries/ out-of-bounds areas may be introduced to make a simple area more complex.

## Forbidden Areas

Forbidden areas are often uncrossable but otherwise courses should be planned in a way that does not encourage inexperienced competitors to deliberately or inadvertently cross these areas. This applies particularly to garden beds which are shown in olive green, which colour-blind orienteers sometimes have difficulty distinguishing from yellow (fast open).

As many participants in ACT sprint events may not be used to the restrictions of forbidden areas or how they are represented on the map, it is recommended that an explanation with map symbols be displayed prominently in the assembly area and at the start.

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## **Course Lengths**

The OA Competition Rules (16.3) require course lengths to be calculated taking account of deviations around impassable obstructions. That rule was originally intended to apply to forest events, but is also potentially relevant to sprint events where buildings and high walls or fences can significantly influence the running distance. Except for World Ranking Events where the anticipated running distance must be stated, the general practice for sprint events in Australia has been to base stated course lengths on straight line distances between controls. This is much simpler to calculate from the course planning software.

In quoting course lengths for sprint events in areas with significant levels of obstruction, it should be stated whether these are straight line distances or shortest practicable route. It is important for the course planner to consider the shortest practicable route in calculating expected winning times.

## **Maps and Control Descriptions**

The maps used for sprint and short course events are at a large scale and use some symbols which are different from those on traditional bush orienteering maps. For events involving less experienced orienteers, it may be worth displaying a list of uncommon control description symbols in the assembly area.

In sprint orienteering, it is important to describe control locations fully and accurately, particularly, for example, if a control is on one or other side of a high fence or wall. It is often important in such situations for competitors to check the precise location of a control flag before making their route choice to the control, and course planners can use this to advantage in testing the forward planning ability of the competitors.

It is important from the competitors' viewpoint for loose control description lists to be provided so that they do not lose time or concentration in turning over the map to check control details.

## **Map Printing**

Because the courses are short with relatively easy navigation, many people participating in a sprint or short course event will enter a higher class than they usually do in a conventional bush event. This should be taken into account in estimating how many pre-marked maps should be printed for the event.

## **Safety Considerations**

In sprint events based around buildings, competitors are often running very fast and are focused on their maps, and may not see other competitors approaching, particularly on blind corners. It is desirable to reduce the risk of collisions and possible injury by not having large numbers of competitors running in opposite directions in such situations. Non-orienteers may also be moving through the area during the event, so try to avoid having large numbers of orienteers on busy pedestrian thoroughfares.

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## Spectator Controls

Spectator controls are an integral part of elite sprint events and can also add interest to other courses. It may be acceptable for spectators to move throughout the course if they are not competing on a subsequent course themselves.

## Footwear

Competition areas with paving and particularly passable indoor precincts are unsuitable for spiked footwear. If such situations are encountered on the course, it is important to warn competitors beforehand that such footwear is not permitted.

## Bush Sprints

While most sprint events are held in urban parks or campuses, they can also be held in bush areas if the terrain and map are suitable. In bush areas, the main limitation to genuine sprint events, as opposed to just short bush courses, is the difficulty of avoiding the straight line as the optimum route choice between controls.

Features of bush areas which may lend themselves to sprint orienteering legs include:

- a complex network of tracks, particularly where following tracks tends to be faster than going directly;
- numerous small thickets, or larger thickets with passages through them;
- complex rock features, particularly if they are large and the ground between them lends itself to fast running;
- complex goldmining or erosion gully systems, particularly if they contain uncrossable slopes, thickets etc. which preclude straight running; and
- complex vegetation patterns with numerous small clearings, marshes etc.

As with other sprint events, the map should be a large scale (1:4000 or 1:5000). This may permit additional map detail to be added, provided that it remains legible.

## Evaluation of Sprint and Short Courses

A method for evaluating the quality of sprint courses leg by leg is given in Attachment A, *Just how good was that Sprint (or Urban) race?* A course which does not rate highly according to this method is better described as a 'short course' rather than a 'sprint'. This should be the case for courses planned at Blue or Green level. The fact that other courses do not rate highly, however, does not negate their value as short courses, as many competitors, particularly those with limited experience, may still enjoy running them (as is the case with street orienteering). They provide diversity in an event series aimed at attracting new and developing orienteers, but should be promoted as 'short course' rather than 'sprint'.

## For Further Reading

*Sprint O or Short Course?* Ross Barr. *The Australian Orienteer*, June 2017, p.22.  
*Sprint Orienteering – "It's easy (if you're walking)".* Ross Barr. *The Australian Orienteer*, December 2017, p.9.