

North by North...Best! →

Gain your bearings—and a smart survival skill—when you learn how to use a compass.

- Direction-of-travel arrow
- Compass housing
- Orienting arrow
- Magnetic needle
- Cardinal points
- Degree readings (or bearings)
- Baseplate



With a compass, you can find your way anywhere in the world. Even though these days, you might use your cell phone, an app, or the GPS system in your car to get directions, you can accomplish the same thing with a compass. This handheld instrument indicates 360 different directional degrees, or bearings, in which you can travel. When you're outdoors hiking or camping, if you know how to read a compass, you've mastered a smart survival skill that can take you down a nature trail, through a park, a forest—or even your own backyard!

You'll need a compass to get started—and don't forget to ask a parent, Girl Scout volunteer, troop leader, or trusted adult to help as you learn how to orient yourself, which means figuring out your location on Planet Earth!

The most important thing is to learn the four basic directions found on a compass. Look at your compass and you'll see these letters arranged around the edge of the compass housing in a circle:

N stands for North.

E stands for East.

S stands for South.

W stands for West.



These directions are known as the cardinal points of a compass.

If you can read a clock, you can read a compass, and the directions, or cardinal points, are arranged on a compass the same way as the numbers on a clock, so here's another way to remember them:

North (N) is at 12 o'clock

East (E) is at 3 o'clock

South (S) is at 6 o'clock

West (W) is at 9 o'clock

Tip: Remember these directions by thinking: "Never Eat Slimy Worms."

Tip: To orient a compass to north, hold it level in front of your body and turn the compass housing until the N on the compass lines up with the red tip of the compass needle.

Tip: When using a compass, be careful not to hold it too close to anything that might have magnetic properties or the needle will point toward the object and not toward the north.

Tip: If you stand on your head, your compass needle will still point north. Hold the compass in your hand and practice turning your body so you're standing in different directions.



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