

## Coaching Tip - Precision Compass

At a recent local meet, a JROTC instructor approached me with a clue sheet, "There are no azimuths on this!" Ohmigosh! I knew I had my work cut out for me doing beginner instruction for his group.

"Shooting an Azimuth" is the term for setting a compass to a specific numerical bearing and following it, nose to compass, to the control marker. Many military-trained folks and boy scouts to this day think that orienteering involves shooting azimuths. But, as I explained to the JROTC instructor's students when I gave them beginner instruction, we're trying not to shoot any more of them. In fact, there have been so many azimuths shot over the years, they are an endangered species.

The orienteering skills involving compass use are all for one reason - to keep a map oriented so you can do map to terrain comparison, usually called "map to terrain ID," to get you where you want to go on the orienteering course. We are not playing compass games, we are navigating.

We break compass use down into 2 basic orienteering skills, Rough Compass and Precision Compass. I explained rough compass in a previous tip, so today we're going to go over the orienteering skill of precision compass.

Precision compass is used when you need to be super careful to follow your travel direction from one place to another, such as from your attack point to your control site. And it's not necessary to shoot any endangered azimuths to do it. Hold your compass on your map, both in the same hand, with a straight edge from the compass' baseplate along the direction you want to precisely navigate. Then rotate your body to align the map's north with the compass' north-pointing needle. You are now facing your precise direction. That's it, that's all you have to do. You've still got to read the map and do map to terrain comparison along that precise direction, while keeping a careful eye on the alignment of map north to compass needle. But there's no need to stop navigating and try to remember the 3 steps to take a bearing, because that results in shooting an endangered azimuth. And shooting endangered species plays havoc with the concentration you need to navigate.

In addition to using precision compass from your attack point to your control, you'll want to use it whenever you are crossing an area where map to terrain comparison gets iffy - like a large flat area with few features or if you are night orienteering or otherwise can't see the terrain very well. Just remember, the compass is supplementary to the map information, not the other way around.

Precision compass should be used sparingly but carefully in competition. It slows you down, but it also helps prevent mistakes. So it's a big balancing act. The question of whether to use precision compass comes down to what we call compass drift. How much would it hurt you, in that particular place, to be less precise? If rough compass

will work, use it. But be honest with yourself, rough compass and luck don't equal the skill of precision compass. When you need to be precise to not make a mistake, use precision compass.

Get out the map you used for the rough compass exercise, the ones with the "R's" for when you figured out you needed to use rough compass. Now go thru the course and put a "P" where you used, or should have, precision compass. Do all the attack point-to-control legs have a P beside them? They should! Where else did you need to be careful? Maybe where you made a mistake? Why there? Asking yourself these question will help you determine how you need to use your compass to improve your navigation. As usual, there's no right or wrong answer, just what works best for YOU.

One last note. It's nearly impossible to do precision compass if your compass needle is jumping around. If you don't already own an orienteering compass, or even if you do, be sure that your compass needle is in a liquid-filled housing and there's some sort of straight edge attached to put along your intended route of travel on the map. Slap that compass down on the map, put the straight edge on your travel route, rotate as needed, and do precision compass the easy way. We really, really don't want any more azimuths to die....

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