

Compasses and directions

Using a compass

A compass is an important tool for map readers. It tells us which way is north and where to find east, south, and west. Together, these are known as the four cardinal points of the compass.

Ordnance Survey maps are always printed with north facing the top.

Helpful phrases

To help you remember where the points of the compass are, you could try learning a phrase like:

- Nobody Ever Swallows Whales or
- Naughty Elephants Squirt Water.

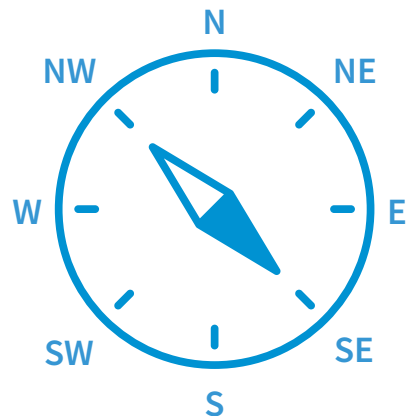
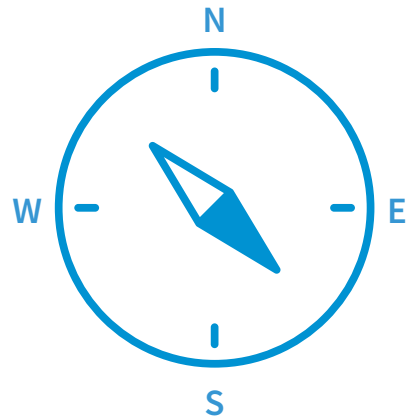
The eight-point compass

You can make your compass more accurate by adding more points to it. By drawing a line in between each of the cardinal points, you can create an eight-point compass that shows the directions for north-east (NE), south-east (SE), south-west (SW) and north-west (NW).

The 16-point compass

For even more accurate readings, some compasses add eight more points to make a total of 16.

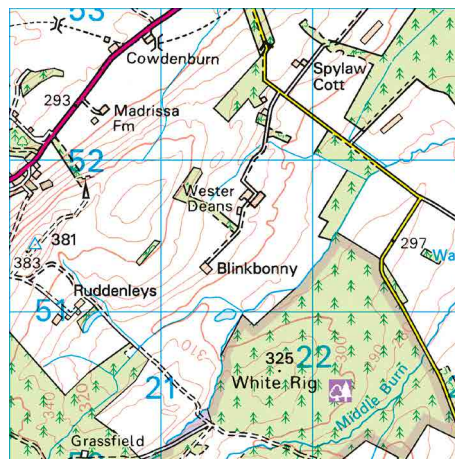
Each of these points also has a direction. West-south-west (WSW) points to a direction west of south-west. Similarly, north-north-east (NNE) points north of north-east.



Using a map and compass

Take a look at this section from a map and see if you can use the eight-point compass to write down the direction of travel:

- From Wester Deans to Spylaw Cottage
- From Madrissa Farm to Wester Deans
- From Wester Deans to Ruddenleys



What is north?

There are three common definitions of north that we use with maps:

Magnetic north — The direction in which any magnetic compass will point.

Grid north — The direction of a vertical (north-south) grid line on an OS map.

True north — The direction to the Earth's geographic North Pole.

A magnetic compass will always point to magnetic north, but depending on where you are in the country and the date of your journey, there will be a difference between magnetic north and grid north as it is marked on your OS map key.

