

Planning Saturday Series Events A Beginner's Guide

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Version History

DEC17	First issue	Mark Thompson
DEC17	Review and editing	Roger Baker
JAN18	Foreword, courses, summary	Nat Skidmore
NOV22	Added info on SI and Helper's Spreadsheet. Made some changes to reflect that registration is now only online. Added need for Red course. Added Chris Poole as SI mentor. Added suggestions from Mark Thompson and Alun Jones	John Dalton

Acknowledgements

Extracts from Canadian Orienteering Federation Officials' Training Program,
100 Level Manual material which have been modified for TVOC terrain.

Version 8 dated 21NOV22

Foreword

The Saturday series exists primarily for introducing newcomers to the sport, then helping them improve their orienteering skills over time. Through completing events and enjoying a welcoming atmosphere, we hope to attract new members to the club and encourage them to enter bigger events and into volunteering roles.

Putting on a program of events for newcomers requires many volunteers from the club, both planning and running the events. To keep an enthusiastic supply of experienced volunteers, we must also consider how we attract them to plan and help at events. We do this by keeping the events simple to organise, informal, as well as providing courses at the event to provide some training or informal competition appealing to experienced orienteers.

This guide is to provide a timeframe and guidance to new Saturday Series planner/organisers. It also acts as an up-to-date reminder to anyone else putting a Saturday Series event.

Whilst it might initially seem to be quite a lot of tasks to achieve, there is a lot of help and support within the club to provide advice and take some of these tasks on. One option is to focus on planning, and allocate someone else to take on the organisational aspects of the event.

Courses

The Saturday Series involves a limited set of colour code courses (usually **White** (TD1 - if the area allows), **Yellow** (TD2), **Orange** (TD3), **Red** (TD3, to give runners a longer run), **Light Green** (TD4) and **Green** (TD5)), where TD stands for technical difficulty as described in the BOF Rules (1 Jan 2020 version, pages 50 and 51, britishorienteering.org.uk/page/rules). The course options, including suggested lengths are shown below based on Appendix B of the aforementioned rules page 62.

In deciding what courses to offer for the Saturday series, we need to consider the **difficulty** of the terrain and **size** of the area. As we are catering for beginners, it is really important that they can **successfully** complete the event and **enjoy** the experience - **consistency** between events is key.

A common issue to be aware of is our mixed program of landscaped parkland and forest events. A family may have found the longest course quite easy to complete in an urban park, but if progressing to their first forest event would want to start with something easier. For this reason, we avoid describing courses as harder than TD3 (Orange, Red (Long Orange)) in our parks unless they genuinely are. So suggested courses for the series are as follows – agree these with the series coordinator early on:

Colour	TD	Min-max Length Km	Sat Series (Level D)			Regional Level C
			Landscaped parks	Rural parkland	Forest	
White	1	1.0-1.9	Y	Y	Y	Y
Yellow	2	2.0-2.9	Y	Y	Y	Y
Orange	3	2.5-3.5	Y	Y	Y	Y
Light Green	4	3.0-4.0		Y	Y	Y
Long Light Green	4	4.0 – 5.0		Y		
Short Green	5	3.0-4.0				Y
Red	3	Approx. 5.0	Y	Y	Y	Y
Green	5	3.5-5.0			Y	Y
Blue	5	5.5-7.5				Y
Brown	5	8.5-12.0				Y
Typical location examples			Cuttleslowe, Uni Parks, Brookes	W'ham Clumps, Brill, Waddesdon, Wycombe Abbey	Bradenham, Shotover, Wendover	Many

For easy areas (*both physically and technically*) the course lengths will be towards the top end of the range. For difficult or more physical areas the course lengths will be towards the bottom end of the range.

Useful documentation

There is some excellent advice on how to plan each of the various courses in the **Planning** section of the resource library on the BOF website. These articles, written by Barry Elkington, are reprinted from Compass Sport articles. It is very strongly suggested you read these before you start to plan the courses.

https://www.britishorienteering.org.uk/organiser_library

The material is listed under planning and is about half way down.

In addition, another useful guide for planning is provided by Hilary Quick (SOA) based on a previous work by Graham Nilsen. This provides the basics of planning and introduces commonly used terms.

Roles of Saturday Series officials

The **series co-ordinator** for the Series (at presently Neville Baker) is responsible for putting together the fixture list; for putting events on the BOF website; for the Risk Assessment (joint with the planner); and for keeping the accounts (includes paying the map bills, land access and BOF levies). We suggest you contact him in the first instance to discuss who organises what.

There is no traditional controller, but Mark Thompson tends to act as **armchair controller** ensuring the technical difficulty, lengths and safety aspects of each course.

The **planner** designs the courses and is responsible for the production of the competition maps; for the correct placing of the controls prior to the event, and for their collection afterwards. In addition the planner is expected to obtain permission for land access. The planner also needs to ensure that there is sufficient help on the day of the event. The planner must also be familiar with the basics of operating the club's SPORTident (SI) timing equipment. See below for further information.

But help is available with all of these from experienced members.

TVOC uses a well-established team structure, and for the Saturday Series there are usually people to run registration, front of house (providing guidance for beginners), download and club coaches. The series co-ordinator ensures there are sufficient people to run the event.

Top tip: If you are a first time planner it is best to ask the club to appoint a **mentor** to help you through the process and provide advice when required, e.g. a controller or experienced planner. And consider seeking a co-organiser to take on some of the organisational tasks.

SPORTident (SI) equipment

It is very important to understand enough about how the SI equipment works to ensure that the event operates smoothly on the day.

The TVOC Planner's Checklist (available from the "Members" area on the TVOC web site, from the "Organizing and Planning" area) contains some useful information on SI:

<https://tvoc.org.uk/organising-and-planning-events/>

From the Planners Checklist at this location are also links to two other useful documents:

- TVOC's SI Station User Guide
- SI Advice for Event Advisers and Controllers

These documents discuss key steps for the correct use of SI kit at an event. These include the need to:

- Synchronise SI control units (at least the Clear, Check, Start, Finish and Safety units) before the event. It is strongly suggested you ask for help here.
- Consider how the SI units at the Start will be laid out correctly, in the following order: Clear, Check, Air-on Check, Start
- Consider how the Finish will be laid out correctly
- Place a Safety Check control at least 10m after the Finish. Ensure that the Safety Check control is manned to make sure that every single competitor dibs the Safety unit
- Turn on (or wake up) all SI units as you put them out on the morning of the event
- Turn off all SI units after they have been collected back after the event

Note that at all TVOC events, SIAC (“SI Active Card”, sometimes referred to as “SI Air”) is enabled as follows. Those with SIAC cards:

- Must dib at the Clear station, Check and Start controls
- Can use contactless, air dibbing at all the course’s controls
- Can use contactless, air dibbing at the Finish
- Must dib at the Safety Check control

For more help on using the SI equipment, do talk to Neville Baker or Chris Poole.

3 months before the event

The map: Get the latest OCAD map from John Farren, who maintains our map library. Establish with John which mapper is responsible for updating the map.

Permissions and access: Contact the series co-ordinator to establish who is responsible for access permissions and determine the access procedures (if any). Are there any restrictions? If there are areas that are out of bounds, these should be marked as such on the base map.

Car park and Assembly location: Contact officials from any previous event on the area, and enquire whether they have strong recommendations or reservations for any particular locations. White and Yellow courses - which require a reasonable path network - will influence your location of start and finish, and so possibly the assembly area as well.

The area: Review the area during a visit(s) to establish the likely areas of the map you are going to use. It is a common mistake that the planner is expected to use the whole map. Try to use the best bits only. Your customers, the competitors, will not thank you if you run them through thick brambles for instance. For the longer courses you may have to go around the area twice which will require using back to back maps.

Armchair planning: This involves planning draft courses at home prior to a site visit to inspect individual sites on the ground. TVOC uses a program called Purple Pen to plan its courses. The program is free and the latest version can be downloaded at:

<http://purplepen.golde.org/>

The program uses the orienteering base map as a background map and overprints the courses on top of it. It is simple and intuitive to use. An excellent guide by Neil Crickmore can be found at:

http://www.lifesci.sussex.ac.uk/home/Neil_Crickmore/SARC/UsingPurplePenV2.pdf

Planning strategy

The goal for a planner is to provide courses that are enjoyable, challenging, and fair for all participants. It is not the course planner's job to trick or fool participants. Nor is course planning an opportunity to torture one’s comrades by sending them into unpleasant terrain or to control sites which are physically demanding but require little or no navigation. The planner's job is to set puzzles, usually involving picking the optimum route, which can be solved with skill and technique.

Control sites should be chosen based on the possible routes they allow rather than for their specific features. Controls must be placed on clearly defined features that are accurately represented by the map and are distinguishable from similar features in the terrain that may/may not be mapped. Planners should avoid areas of dense vegetation or bland areas that increase the possibility of bingo controls (ones that are found by luck rather than skill, e.g. a point feature in featureless terrain with low visibility), as well as out-of-bounds and dangerous areas. Control flags should be visible and not be hidden by bushes or trees.

Planning should avoid doglegs and reverse legs. A dogleg occurs when the best route forces the participant to travel back over terrain just covered. Reverse legs are where 2 courses use the same controls but run in opposite directions. Both are undesirable because they may lead to the location of a control being given away unfairly, by competitors running out of the control.

Planners should avoid setting legs in which an advantage would be gained by participants disobeying the rules, e.g. crossing out-of-bounds areas or line features mapped as not to be crossed. Legs parallel to an out-of-bounds road should be avoided.

Check that for each course the terrain is both suitable and safe for the participants expected. For example older competitors cannot cross steep sided ditches which others jump or scramble across with ease. The junior courses White, yellow and Orange should avoid any dangerous obstacles for example deep water features.

Top Tips:

- Plan the easiest courses first. Note that the start should not involve a decision point for the easiest courses.
- Start planning other courses by looking for a few long, interesting, and route choice legs and plan the technical courses around them. Consider a series of short legs with changes in direction at the end of the long legs.
- Devise a one-way system to help avoid reverse legs.
- Don't worry about crossovers – this is not a problem with electronic punching.
- Aim to use around 30 controls.
- Make each control count! Each control should have a purpose. Look for controls that could be eliminated and improve the course. You might use a simple control to set up a well-balanced route choice leg.
- Allocate control numbers from the start. TVOC uses SPORTident (SI) kit and has control numbers 101 to 163 available, with 164 and 165 reserved for Safety Check units. Check with the Series Co-ordinator for any problem or missing units.
- The finish should be located on an obvious feature, usually a path, as no description is possible for it.

2 months before the event

Control site tagging: Once you are happy with the armchair planned courses, it is time to visit the area to check the individual control sites. Consider the likely directions from which competitors might approach. You should walk selective legs. Consider the map in relation to the ground. Is the site fair? Is the feature visible from say 20m? Are there sufficient relocation features around it to guide competitors in case they miss the control on their first attempt?

It is likely that you will reject a number of sites and have to search for replacements nearby. The draft courses will have to be amended accordingly.

Control sites should be **tagged** using tape that is highly visible, once you are happy with the site. Use red or blue insulating tape (don't use green or green/yellow stripe) and place in a visible location so that you, or anyone helping you, will be able to find it many weeks later when the vegetation may have changed. Each tag should have the number of the SI control unit. This is to help you place the correct control unit in the right place on the morning of the event.

If you are not confident that all the tags are correctly positioned you could ask someone to check them before the event, for example your mentor if you have one.

Any suggestions for map corrections should be fed back to the mapper - who **may** need time to revisit the area.

Control descriptions: Compile the control descriptions on Purple Pen as you go. Be as accurate as possible. If there are similar features in the circle then a geographic locator is required in box C. The location of the flag within the feature is included in box G.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	A	Control number
2	225	↘	⊙	⊞	8x4	◀	⤴	B	Control code
								C	Which of any similar feature
								D	Control feature
								E	Appearance
								F	Dimensions / Combinations / Bend
								G	Location of the control flag
								H	Other information

Taken from International Specification for Control Descriptions, IOF 2017. This can be found in

<https://orienteering.sport/iof/rules/control-descriptions/>

Purple Pen provides a check on the control descriptions with a text description at the bottom left side when individual controls are selected.

White and Yellow must have text descriptions. If there's room then selected courses (Orange, Light Green and red) should have both text and pictorial descriptions.

Ensure Pre-entries are set up for the event: Post Covid, TVOC have continued to accept entries to Saturday Series events online only. There is currently no EOD Registration or Map Collection set up at Saturday Series event. Online registration is, however, kept open as late as possible, and can (4G signal permitted) be left open throughout the morning of the event itself.

TVOC now use SIEntries as their online entry system. This needs to be set up sufficiently in advance of the event. The best way to organise this is to ask the person responsible for Entries, Registration and Timing, Alun Jones, on registration@tvoc.org.uk and ask him to set online entries up.

Ensure that a Helpers Discount code is provided when the event is set up in SIEntries. This needs to be communicated to club members through the Saturday Series Helpers spreadsheet mentioned above.

1 month before the event

Share the courses with the armchair controller: The armchair controller will check the courses for fairness, technical difficulty, lengths, control descriptions and safety aspects. There may be a number of discussions before the courses are finalised.

Arrange to pick up the SI kit: You will need to pick up the kit, usually from the previous club event before your event. It will be useful to offer to help collect controls at this previous event so you can familiarise yourself with the SI controls and how the flags are hung off them.

Set up and publicise the Helpers Spreadsheet for the event: A centrally-stored Saturday Series Helpers spreadsheet is stored in Google Docs. The spreadsheet is used to ensure that there are sufficient helpers on the day of the event. Club members should be pointed towards this spreadsheet to record that they are volunteering to help, and for what role.

The location of the spreadsheet is here:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/10sh5L7AcX3KZmp3S28KsnOs-iBoAA1HM4bHQQttothw/edit#gid=1471599829>

You will need to set up a new sheet for your event. You can copy the sheet from a previous event. Edit the new sheet for your event, removing the names of all people who volunteered for that previous event.

This spreadsheet needs to be publicised by setting it up as a link at the bottom of the web page publicising the event, in the section "Helping".

Remember to include the Helper Discount Code in this spreadsheet to enable helpers to get a discounted entry.

Purple Pen text to include: The map should include, prominently:

- A mobile number for emergencies labelled ICE (your mobile). This is usually your mobile number.
- Course Closure Time (usually 13.00) must also be included for e.g. 'Courses close at 13.00'.

2 weeks before the event

TVOC use BML Print Ltd and they can be contacted on nigel@bmlprint.co.uk. Nigel Benham is an orienteer and can quality check the colours. TVOC uses maps printed on 120gsm waterproof paper. You should send the Purple Pen file and the OCAD base map to Nigel/Jack (jack@bmlprint.co.uk) and they will provide back PDF's which should be representative of the final printed versions. You can always request pre-prints by post, but usually the PDFs will suffice. Check the PDFs/pre-prints when you get them back for errors.

Formulate a control hanging plan: Create a control hanging plan from the finalised Purple Pen file. Copy the course file and then delete the courses but be careful that you don't delete any controls. You can then create a hanging plan by creating a set of new courses (e.g. loop 1) the numbers giving the order in which you intend to put out the controls. You may have to create dummy starts and finishes from obvious locations where you can park the car. The recommended maximum number of controls per loop is about 12 as they are quite cumbersome. Ensure that every control is used in the plan and don't forget to put out the actual start and finish.

You may decide to put out some of the technical controls the day before and you should plan accordingly. All vulnerable controls should be put out on the day of the event. In practice this will probably be all of White and Yellow and perhaps most of the Orange controls. You may require help to put out the controls on the day - hence the need for those numbered tags.

Check you have enough helpers: Check the Saturday Series Helpers sheet (mentioned above) to determine whether there are enough helpers for the event. If not, you may need to chivvy members on to help. You can do this by putting a note in TVOC's eNews that goes out each Friday. Send your note to news@tvoc.org.uk for it to be published in the next newsletter.

1 week before the event

Order the prints: Series Coordinator, currently Neville Baker, will advise on the numbers of maps for each course. Don't forget to order 6 all control maps for use for control collection after the event. In addition, we print 3 copies of all course maps as part of the emergency response should a competitor get lost. TVOC does not generally provide loose control descriptions for Saturday Series events, unless it's an urban or park area with a high control density.

Send the xml file to the download team leader: An xml file is easily created in Purple Pen under the file menu. An xml file lists the control order of each of the courses so that when a competitor downloads their [SI dibber](#) they can be matched to see that all controls have been visited in order for their respective course. Alun Jones or John Dalton are the usual contacts.

Confirm that you have enough helpers: Check the Saturday Series Helpers spreadsheet again

2 days before the event

Print out the maps for control hanging: Ensure you include the control descriptions on the map.

Sort out the SI kit in preparation for control hanging: Each control site consists of an SI unit that clips into a holder mounted on top of a plastic stake. A control flag is attached to the stake.

Top tip: Included in the kit (usually in the stake bags) is a rope with a knot at one end. Thread each control unit (using the large hole at the end of the plate) onto the rope in reverse order that they go out so that the control unit at the top is the first to go out.

The day before the event

Consider putting some control stakes and flags out the afternoon/evening before the event. It is usually no problem putting some control stakes and flags out the day before (without SI units) if they will not be easily found by the public. On the day of the event, you will simply need to mount and start the SI units on those controls. This can save time and worry.

The day of the event

Put out the controls in a timely manner allow an hour for say 8 wide spread technical controls or 12 closely spaced easy controls. Get help on the day if required.

Ensure that the SI Units at the Start, Finish and Safety Check control are all set up as required for effective use

Ensure that the course maps are delivered to the Start: All maps are now issued at the Start.

Ensure that a large “**Courses Close at 13.00**” sign is visible to all entrants.

Ensure the emergency response maps (3 copies of each course) and the All Controls maps are delivered to the Download tent.

Demonstration control: Deliver a demo control complete with flag to be set up by the Download tent.

Taped routes: the planner is responsible for taping the routes to and from the start and finish or for putting up signs if applicable. Signs can be collected from the series coordinator on the day.

Once the event has started it is suggested that you stay near the start. This is very low key with only a start banner and a start unit and flag. You have a detailed knowledge of the courses, and should include any safety concerns or advice.

Missing controls: Be prepared to replace a control that has gone missing. Have a complete spare control readily available plus tape and permanent felt tip pen so that the replacement SI unit can be given the same number as the missing control. If a control is lost and you replace with another control you will need to inform Download of both the missing control number, and the number on the replacement SI unit so that appropriate action can be taken to prevent incorrect disqualifications.

After the event: You are responsible for collecting in the SI kit from the control sites. Determine how many control collectors are available, use the all control maps to divide the controls into easily collected clusters (it is advisable to keep a map showing the clusters and who is picking them up). Collect the controls. Assemble them in order so you can determine if any are missing.

Agree beforehand with the Equipment Officer, Neville Baker, whether anyone will collect the kit after the event. If not being collected, agree what will happen to the kit.

You have now fulfilled the planner's role! Discuss with other TVOC members what went well and what could be done better next time.

Finally do enjoy the après event! Your work will have been appreciated by a lot of people. Look for feedback both positive and negative. Don't worry if you may have made a mistake - apologise for any inconvenience and learn from it. Unfortunately, there's often someone with a moan commonly blaming the map or the planner for their own mistake. Don't let them put you off!

TVOC is a great club and there's usually someone there who will offer help. You only have to ask!

Good luck!

Mark Thompson 16.12.17

Saturday Series Planner's Checklist

	KEY TASKS	KEY CONTACTS
3+ MONTHS BEFORE	Agree location and date	Coordinator
	Seek access permission Agree map updates (if reqd)	Coordinator Coordinator/John Farren
	Identify parking, assembly & approx. course areas (large maps)	Coordinator, series controller, mentor
	Agree courses offered Armchair plan	Coordinator Controller, mentor
2+ MONTHS	Control site tagging	Controller, mentor
	Control description check Ensure online entries are set up	Controller, mentor
1+ MONTH	Share courses with controller	Controller, mentor
	Collect the kit	
	Check you have enough helpers	