

Event Guideline D: Sprint Distance Races

Sprint orienteering is a fast, visible, easy-to-understand format, allowing orienteering to be staged within areas of significant population. [IOF Competition Rules]

This Guideline provides advice on how to organise and plan Sprint Distance races at all levels of competition, from Levels 1 to 3. It can be read on its own or, where the competition is at Level 1, should be read in conjunction with the relevant Competition Rules (i.e. C for British Sprint Championships, or F for JK Sprint Championships).

1. Terrain

Sprint races are normally staged in very runnable park or urban (streets/buildings) terrain. Occasionally, some fast runnable forest may be included.

One key aspect of the philosophy of Sprint orienteering is that it must be clearly different in nature from the Middle and Long disciplines. Thus it must not merely be a very short version of them, so terrain which is largely forested may not be used for Sprint competitions.

Suitable terrain is often provided by University campuses, ornamental public parks, old town/city centres, modern high density housing estates, etc.

The area need not be particularly large and terrains occupying as little as 0.33 km² have been successfully used for major Sprint races.

In addition, the terrain shall not be so steep that it prevents very high speed running.

Areas so complex that it is doubtful whether a competitor can interpret the map at high speed should be avoided (e.g. when there are complex three-dimensional structures).

2. Technical Difficulty

The nature of the terrain usually limits the maximum technical difficulty to TD3 since control sites are rarely far from line features. However, the perceived technical difficulty is often higher than this because of the high decision making rate needed to execute a Sprint course satisfactorily. This also means that provision of courses which are perceived to be TD1 may be impossible

3. Planning Considerations

*The Sprint profile is **high speed**. It tests the athletes' ability to read and translate the map in complex environments, and to plan and carry out route choices running at high speed. The course must be planned so that the element of speed is maintained throughout the race. The course may require climbing but steepness forcing the competitors to walk should be avoided.*

Finding the controls should not be the challenge; rather the ability to choose and complete the best route to them. For example, the most obvious way out from a control should not necessarily be the most favourable one. The course should be set to require the athletes' full concentration throughout the race. An environment that cannot provide this challenge is not appropriate for the Sprint. [IOF Competition Rules]

In order to achieve the aims set out above:

- Average leg lengths must be short, 120m to 180m being typical.
- Have frequent changes of direction (small crossover loops are good).

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- Long legs may be set, as long as their execution involves a high rate of decision making along the way.
- Dog legs can provide good challenges too; but avoid the possibility that they may cause clashes between incoming and outgoing runners if space is restricted.
- Aim to make every leg pose a route choice challenge, especially in urban terrain. Control sites will often have to be positioned with great care in order to achieve this.

The higher density of controls sites needed for a Sprint race sometimes means that controls are closer together than they are in Middle/Long races. The minimum separation of controls is correspondingly less than for Middle/Long races and is 15m (or 30m if the control sites are on similar features). These separations are measured around impassable objects rather than being straight line distances.

4. Practical Planning Considerations

Depending on the status and location of the race, the following may need to be implemented:

- Controls may need to be manned, especially if the terrain is public and/or spectators are allowed on the course.
- It may also be necessary to have guards at critical passages alerting spectators of approaching competitors and making sure that competitors are not hindered.
- Be sure you know which doors/gates etc will be open on the day of the competition.
- The course must be planned to avoid tempting competitors to take shortcuts through private property and other out-of-bound areas.
- Where there are impassable walls/fences/hedges, competitors will inevitably cross them! The provision of warning tape should minimise this. Marshalls may be needed too.
- Consider requiring competitors to wear numbered bibs as a way of aiding identification by Marshalls in the competition area. Having bibs on the back as well as the front makes this much easier.
- Having the Start and Finish in the same arena makes for a good atmosphere.

5. The Map

The ISSOM specification shall be followed. The map scale is 1:4000 or 1:5000. It is crucial that the map is correct and possible to interpret at high speed, and that the mapping of features that affect route choice and speed are accurate. In non-urban areas, the correct mapping of conditions reducing running speed, both to degree and extent, is important. In urban areas, barriers hindering the passage must be correctly represented and drawn to size. [IOF Competition Rules]

Many orienteers are not yet as familiar with ISSOM (International Specification for Sprint Orienteering Maps – available for download from the IOF website) symbols as they are for the more usual ISOM ones. In particular, it is crucial that runners are familiar with the symbols used for **impassable** walls, fences and vegetation. This could be achieved by printing these in any pre-event details.

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In addition, it has become traditional at the largest events to give older competitors a map at a larger scale and with enlarged symbols sizes too. Although not an IOF standard, maps at 1:3000 have been used with success.

Planners and controllers should note that it is conventional to join control circles with straight lines on the course overprint, even where the lines go through buildings or across lakes, etc. This avoids having a confusing spaghetti of otherwise bent lines covering the map. The exception is where there are mandatory crossing points where the usual rules apply, and lines will be broken or bent to go through them.

It is also more important than usual to break control circles on the overprint where they obscure important details. For example, the best way into a control may be via a narrow passageway, but if its existence is obscured by the overprinted circle, then many will not see the route.

6. Winning Time and Start Interval

The winning time for Sprint races is between 12 and 15 minutes and this is one of the defining characteristics of the Sprint Distance. Where an age class competition is held, the winning time for each age class shall be 12 – 15 minutes also. This can be achieved by designing a set of courses of differing lengths such that groups of age classes of similar ability run the same courses. Their lengths can be estimated by using the table of age class running speeds given in Appendix B. NB the ratios in this table will be the same as the ratios of the course lengths since the winning time for each course is always 12 to 15 minutes.

The start interval is 1 minute.

7. Safety

Urban terrain brings more potential risks to the event and it is essential that a proper risk assessment is carried out before the event is sanctioned. The BOF “Risk Assessment for Events with some or all legs on public streets” shall be completed and used for this purpose.

Where the event takes place in a park or is otherwise traffic free, the standard BOF Risk Assessment form is appropriate.

8. Urban Races

Many “Sprint” races are planned to have winning times of two to three times the standard 12 – 15 minutes of the true Sprint race. They are similar to Sprint races in that they use similar terrain (e.g. streets, parks) and also that ISSOM standard maps are used. However, in order to avoid confusion, these races should not be labelled as “Sprint” events and should be described as e.g. “Urban” races instead.

See separate Guideline E on Urban races for more details.