

Overview of How to Mark a Course for a Trail Race

Marking a course for a trail race seems straightforward, but some topics require special attention. Overlooking some of the suggestions below can lead to runners getting lost and or hurt.

THIS INSTRUCTION WILL DESCRIBE:

- [Why and when to mark a trail for a race](#)
- [The type of markers to use for marking a trail race](#)
- [The placing of markers](#)

TERMS:

Mark The act of bringing attention to the difference between one item or area and another.

Marker Item used to mark a trail or course. The marker can be a flag, a ribbon, or paint.

Blaze A paint blot, stripe, or a colored placard identifying the trail, usually placed on a tree, pole, or rock along the trail.

Trail Most often an unobstructed dirt, grass, or gravel surface with some rocks and or roots. When the term describes a longer continuous path or in conjunction with the word “bike,” the trail may also contain paved portions.

Why and when to mark a trail for a race?

Not all trail races require marking. Many organizations have placed blazes on trails, making it easy to identify the way. However, not all trails have blazes. If your race trail does not have blazes and or includes a series of different trails, marking will be required.

A trail should be marked the day before the race. Most races are held on public trails. Having the markers up too long allows humans and critters to fiddle with them. Marking the race day is discouraged due to time constraints and other obligations.

The type of markers to use for marking a trail race

The best markers are easily recognizable, consistent in size and color, and highly visible. Suggested markers are:

- **Ribbons tied to clips or clothespins.** Ribbons should be brightly colored, and if at night, should have reflective tape on their ends. The clips and clothespins allow the markers to be attached to objects on the trail before the race and easily removed afterward.
- **Signs with arrows, reflective tape, and clear directions.** Trails often intersect, requiring clear indications of whether the racer should go left, right, or straight. Signs that say, “Wrong Way,” are especially helpful when a path splits in two directions.

The placing of markers

Markers should be placed at or just above eye level. Sometimes the surrounding flora makes it challenging to attach a ribbon, and signs will be more appropriate.

All markers should be placed within sight of another marker.

At intersections, markers should be placed closer together, making it clear as one approaches and leaves the intersection, which is the correct way to go.

Important note: At least one racer will likely get lost regardless of the amount of marking done. To limit how lost the racer(s) become, provide a map, a downloadable course, and your phone number so they can call for guidance.

A well-marked trail race makes for fewer wrong turns and extra mileage. Racers will be unhappy if they have extra mileage. It’s best to plan for happy racers with a well-marked course.