How to How to Use the Compass on Google Maps: A Complete

Travel · about 20 minutes · 2026-11-09

Find the compass icon, calibrate the blue dot's beam, and navigate with confidence — 28 illustrated steps for Android, iPhone, and desktop.

Find and Read the Compass

1. **Update Google Maps Before You Start**
   Open the App Store on iPhone or the Play Store on Android, search for Google Maps, and tap Update if one is offered.
2. **Turn On Location Services and Precise Location**
   The compass is useless if Maps cannot place you.
3. **Open Google Maps and Center on the Blue Dot**
   Launch Google Maps and tap the Your location button — the small target icon at the bottom right of the map.
4. **Read the Blue Dot's Direction Beam**
   Look closely at the blue dot: a flashlight-like beam shines out of it in the direction Maps thinks you are facing.
5. **Rotate the Map with Two Fingers to Reveal the Compass**
   By default the map sits north-up and no compass icon is shown.
6. **Tap the Compass Icon to Snap Back to North**
   Once the map is rotated, one tap on the compass icon spins the map back to north-up, and the icon fades away because there is nothing left to correct.
7. **Know the Difference: Recenter vs. Reorient**
   Two buttons are easy to confuse.

Calibrate for an Accurate Heading

8. **Check the Beam Before You Trust It**
   Stand still in an open spot and compare the blue dot's beam with the street you are actually facing.
9. **Do the Figure-8 Calibration**
   Hold the phone in front of you and move it through a large figure-8 in the air — sweep it out to one side, loop it around, cross back, and loop the other way.
10. **Use the In-App Calibrate Option**
    If the figure-8 alone does not narrow the beam, tap the blue dot itself.
11. **Calibrate with the Camera Using Live View**
    In cities with good Street View coverage, Maps can calibrate visually.
12. **Turn On Wi-Fi and Bluetooth Scanning**
    Your phone positions itself with more than GPS: nearby Wi-Fi networks and Bluetooth beacons sharpen the fix, especially between tall buildings.
13. **Move Away from Magnetic Interference**
    The magnetometer reads the Earth's magnetic field, and plenty of everyday objects drown it out:

magnetic phone cases, magnetic car mounts, laptop speakers, steel railings, and car bodies.

14. Verify the Heading Against a Landmark

Finish every calibration with a reality check.

Navigate with the Compass

15. Start Walking Navigation in Heading-Up Mode

Search a destination, tap Directions, choose the walking icon, and press Start.

16. Toggle North-Up and Heading-Up with One Tap

During navigation, tap the compass icon to switch between heading-up and north-up.

17. Use North-Up for Overview, Heading-Up for Turns

Each orientation has a job.

18. Follow Live View AR Arrows When You Are Turned Around

When the 2D map still leaves you guessing, switch to Live View: in walking navigation, tap the Live View button and hold the phone up.

19. Practice Live View Safety

Google's own safety guidance is blunt: use camera-based walking navigation only when necessary — at the start of the journey, at a turn, and near arrival — and put the phone down in between.

20. Use the Compass in Driving Navigation

Mount the phone at eye level before you move, start driving navigation, and use the compass icon to choose north-up or heading-up — most drivers prefer heading-up because the map then reads like the road ahead.

21. Preview Tricky Turns in Street View

Before you reach a confusing junction, preview it.

Advanced Skills and Troubleshooting

22. Understand True North vs. Magnetic North

The map grid points to true north — the geographic pole — while your phone's magnetometer senses magnetic north, which sits hundreds of kilometers away and wanders yearly.

23. Use the Compass on Desktop Google Maps

Desktop computers have no magnetometer, but the web app still has orientation tools.

24. Pair the Compass with Offline Maps

The compass needs no internet: the magnetometer and GPS chip work in airplane mode.

25. Keep GPS Reliable on Long Trips

Two settings quietly ruin headings on long days.

26. Fix a Compass That Will Not Appear

No compass icon anywhere?

27. Fix a Beam That Spins or Points Backwards

A spinning or reversed beam is almost always magnetic, not software.

28. Build a Five-Minute Pre-Trip Orientation Routine

Turn everything above into a ritual.

Sources

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