

Circuit Flying

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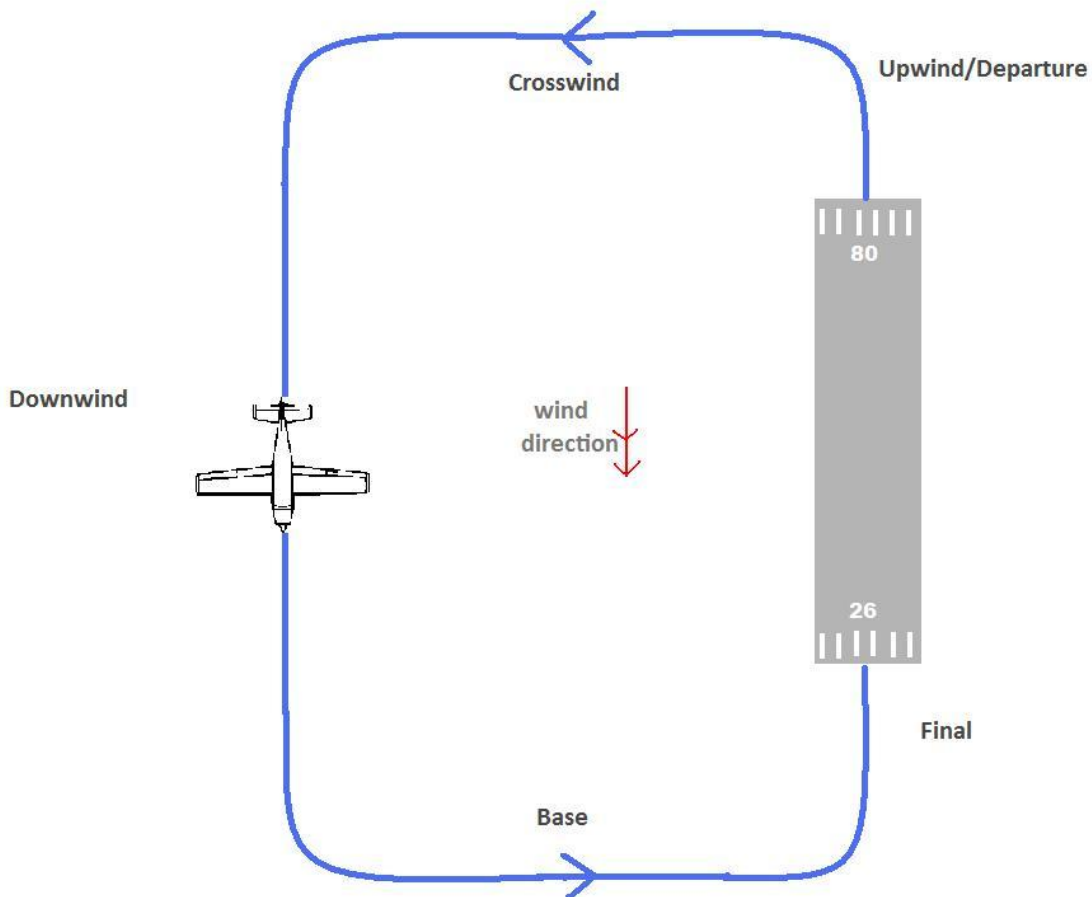
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The Circuit

The circuit ensures an orderly flow of traffic to and from an aerodrome. Without it, there would be no set procedures for aircraft wishing to land or take-off leading to potentially dangerous situations.

The circuit is generally rectangular in shape, either to the left or right of the runway and has a defined height above the airfield. Aircraft are to join the circuit and follow it around to the runway for a landing. Taking off and landing is always into wind where possible; hence aircraft arriving and departing are always following the circuit in the same direction.

A standard left hand circuit. Note the names of the different legs.



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Some things to note about circuits:-

- Circuits are always left hand unless stated otherwise. This means all of the turns are to the left. This ensures that the runway is always in the pilot's view (flying from the left seat).
- A green flag on the signal mast means right hand circuits are in force. A red and yellow striped arrow pointing clockwise in the signal area means the same thing. You should always contact your destination prior to departure for information on circuit and joining procedures.
- The Downwind leg is always parallel to the runway despite the wind direction.
- The side of the runway where the circuit is flown is called the "live side". The opposite side is called the "dead side".
- Circuit heights vary between airfields, but generally are between 750ft -1,250ft agl (above ground level). The circuit height for Eshott Aerodrome is currently 800ft agl.
- A descent from this height is usually made on the Base leg in order to land safely.
- For each leg, a radio call should be made to advise of your position, i.e. "G-ES downwind 26".
- Circuits are often modified to avoid overflying local residents for noise abatement. It is advisable to check with the destination aerodrome prior to flying. This information is also available in flight guides such as the Pooley's Flight Guide.

General Circuit Rules:-

- An aircraft joining an aerodrome must conform to the circuit pattern already established by other aircraft landing there.
- This means that if you approach an airfield where aircraft are using a left hand circuit, you must follow the same circuit and use the same runway (unless ATC advise you otherwise). If you are unable to do so for whatever reason, then you should stay well clear of the airspace where the circuit is being flown.
- You should not overtake other aircraft in the circuit. Any aircraft ahead of you should remain ahead of you.
- An aircraft landing or on final approach always has right of way over others in flight or on the ground.
- Where two or more aircraft of similar category are approaching to land, the lower aircraft has right of way. The lower aircraft must not be cutting in or overtaking at the time.
- Always give way to any aircraft which has declared an emergency.
- Always exercise good airmanship. A good lookout before each turn in the circuit is essential.
- **NEVER** land on a runway which is occupied by another aircraft, even if the aircraft is about to depart the runway. Ensure that the runway is completely clear before landing.
- On occasion, Air Traffic Control may permit you to land before another aircraft has exited the runway. This is normally communicated with the command "Land after..."

Details about flying in the circuit at Eshott Aerodrome are published [here](#).

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Joining the Circuit

Whilst some airfields have different arrival procedures, most airfields expect you to either join overhead or on the downwind leg.

Standard Overhead Join

Review the supplement called “The Standard overhead Join” (see purpleaviation.co.uk/students).

The purpose of the standard overhead join is to create an orderly flow of traffic into the circuit. It should be flown as follows:

1. You should approach and overfly the airfield at 2,000ft agl. You should have already checked the airfield elevation and/or contacted ATC for an accurate altimeter pressure setting (QFE). Some airfields may specify that you join overhead at a different height. For Eshott Aerodrome, you should fly overhead at 1,500ft agl.
2. Once you are overhead, assess the wind. It helps to be directly over the windsock in order to estimate the direction. You should then make a decision about which runway you will use. Remember, if there are aircraft in the circuit, you should use the same runway as them.
3. Fly to the dead side. This is the area on the opposite side of the runway to where the circuit is flown.
4. Descend to circuit height on the dead side. You should use descending turns in the same direction of the circuit – i.e. left hand turns if the circuit is left hand.
5. Once you have reached circuit height, join the crosswind leg and follow the circuit around for a landing. Keep an eye out for other aircraft taking off and in the circuit.

At Eshott Aerodrome, we expect overhead joins to be flown by all traffic when the circuit is busy. However, if there are no other aircraft in the circuit you may join on the downwind leg or even on the final leg. Ensure you are at circuit height before joining the circuit and make radio calls clearly stating your intentions.



Example Radio Calls

“Eshott Radio, Golf Tango Sierra Kilo Sierra inbound to land. Currently five miles West at 1500ft. Intend overhead join”

“Eshott Radio, Golf Kilo Sierra overhead, joining dead side 26”

“Eshott Radio Golf Kilo Sierra crosswind/downwind/left base/final 26”

“Eshott Radio, Golf Kilo Sierra runway 26 vacated”

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