

Hand Signals

Pre-establishing hand signals with your back-up partner will be an important factor in your success to back-up the trailer without incident. The diagrams below depict commonly used signals for backing up a trailer. It doesn't matter what signals you use -- the important point is that you pre-establish what signals you will use for going left, right, straight back and for stopping.

Back up to the left



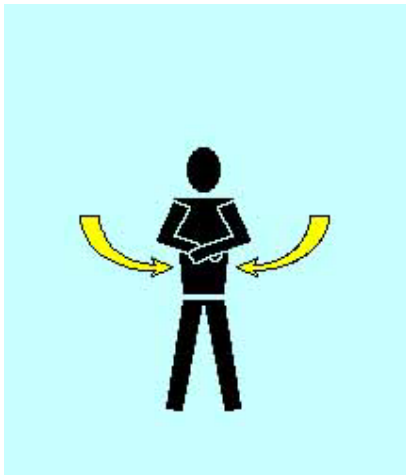
Back up to the right



Straight back



Stop



Trailer Backing Up Seminar Presented by the New England Unit

Backing Up is Hard to Do!



An Informal Trailer Backing Up Seminar Presented by the New England Unit of WBCCI

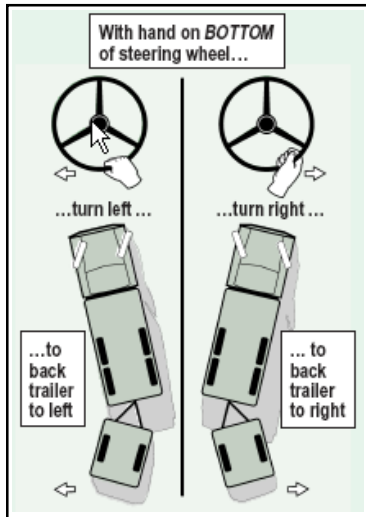
Backing an Airstream trailer is really hard to do—until you've practiced enough. Even practiced drivers try to avoid backing. Most of them will go around the block or use pull-through sites to avoid it. But you still have to learn how, and you're asking for big trouble if you put off learning until you get a hurry-up mission.

For practice, you need a big space, someplace where nothing's in your way and where you won't be in someone else's way.

The most important help you need is a ground guide, someone to tell you what's going on behind you as you back up. Another important help is to pre-establish hand signals with your ground guide as this will be the means they will communicate with you as you back-up the trailer.

Heading Back

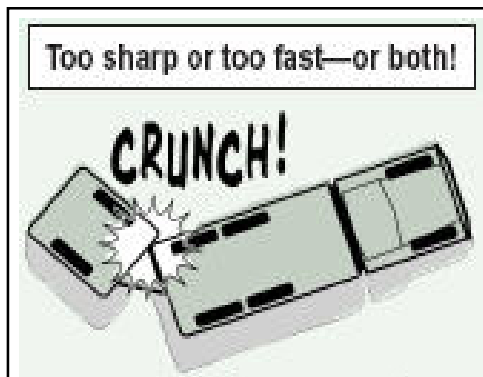
Before backing, get out of the vehicle and check the area to the sides, rear, underneath and overhead for obstructions. With one hand, hold the steering wheel at the bottom. Keep in mind, if you want the trailer to go left, you move your hand to the left; if you want the trailer to go right, you move your hand to the right.



Now back slowly, turning the steering wheel clockwise to move the trailer to the left and turning the wheel counterclockwise to move the trailer to the right. Remember, the trailer turns in the opposite direction from the truck. Also, keep in mind, if you can't see your back-up partner in your side view mirrors then they can't communicate with you. Stop the vehicle and wait until you can see your back-up partner in your mirror.

A good learning technique is to repeatedly turn the steering wheel in the proper direction and then straighten it as the trailer responds to the action of the vehicle.

Two errors to avoid are turning the steering wheel too much and holding it in the turned position too long. Turning the wheel too much causes the trailer to turn more than necessary—which then requires greater correction, and often a botched job. Holding the wheel too long can cause the trailer and vehicle to jackknife.



Whenever you back into a position where a turn is required, try to back so that the trailer turns toward the left (driver's) side of your vehicle, so you can look over your left shoulder. This is much easier than backing from the opposite direction, where the trailer turns toward the right side (blind side) of your truck.

Where possible, go around the block or come in from the opposite direction. Some people can back a trailer almost perfectly by using outside mirrors. Others find that mirrors do not show the action of the trailer. You may find it useful to stick your head out the window to see.

Following the Trailer

Get the knack of following the trailer. You'll need this skill when you're backing into a camping spot. When you start the turn, your truck's going one way and your trailer's going the other. As you get well into the turn, start turning the steering wheel back in the opposite direction to bring the truck and trailer into line. Take it easy, though. If you turn the steering wheel too far, your trailer will turn in the opposite direction.

Try backing this way: With practice, you'll be able to back your combo around a corner and then follow the trailer in a straight line. When you're backing into a turn, make it toward your left side when possible. There's less chance of hitting something behind you and it will make it easier on the next driver if you're among several parking in a line. Park so others can back alongside on their "good" left side, saving damage to both your vehicles.

