

Thermalling etiquette (how to not get shouted at!)

This first appeared in Nova back in 94 but after recent incidents reported at Westbury I thought maybe a few of us could do with a refresher course ☺. Keep in mind the “Rules of the Air” as highlighted in August 97 Skywings. The “Rules of the Air” are paramount, but there is more to flying happily with others than blindly following a few rules.

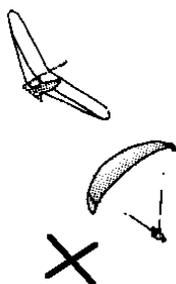
We've all shouted at someone, or been shouted at whilst thermalling, haven't we! This article is intended as a short guide for those new to the wonders of flying in circles. Hopefully it will help them to avoid being shouted at.

There are a number of unwritten commandments that should be obeyed when thermal flying or ridge soaring if we are all to fly happily together, here are a few to them.

Keep a constant look-out

Always look before you turn, don't assume the sky is as clear as the last time you looked! Don't just keep a look-out before you turn, keep a constant vigil. Build up a mental map of what other pilots are doing and keep it updated. Let other pilots know you have seen them by letting them see you looking straight at them. This will help to give other pilots confidence in your competence as a pilot. The “scared rabbit” flyer, always on the verge of an accident, seem to have their gaze fixed rigidly ahead. Don't be one of them.

Thou shalt all circle in the same direction



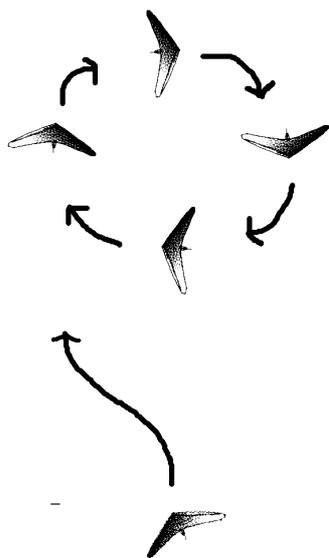
Everyone knows this one, but it is surprising how often it is ignored. This is a big problem for pilots who like to turn in one direction only. All pilots should be as adept in turning to the left as to the right. Turn the same direction as the first pilot who entered the thermal. If you **have** to enter a thermal by turning in the wrong direction (for whatever reason), change direction as soon as you have established your climb.



Once in a thermal with other pilots, thou shalt continue to circle

This one is aimed at those pilots that like to wander about a bit. This is fine on your own, but you've got to be aware of the other pilots in the thermal with you. Don't suddenly straighten up and slow down if you have another glider on your tail - out climb them first! This is a big problem for hang glider pilots when thermalling with paragliders. Paraglider pilots should resist the temptation to straighten up and pull on the breaks if they know that there is a hang-glider close behind them. If you don't you'll probably get loads of verbal abuse from the hang-glider pilot, who will have to perform a violent turn to avoid you. One day they'll hit you!

Thou shalt not fly directly at a glider in a thermal, the thermalling pilot should have right of way!



Angle your approach to a thermal

The “Rules of the Air” always take precedence here, but like any rules think before you apply them blindly. If at all possible don’t interfere with pilots who are thermalling. There is nothing worse than finding some plonker directly behind you, stopping you from 360’ing, when you’ve just entered a thermal. This can be especially annoying when searching for thermals in ridge lift! If you see a pilot in front of you going up in a thermal, anticipate the way they are likely to turn, and angle your approach so that you can join them after they start to turn. Don’t get in their way by flying straight at them even if the “Rules” say you have right of way. If they are not turning as you approach, be prepared to turn to get in behind (or possible ahead of) them as soon as they start to turn. Remember to give way to the glider on your right - first turn right and then back left to get in behind them or slow down and let them through before turning in behind them. **Don't get in their way.**

The same thing applies when you are entering an established group of thermalling gliders. Don't dive in towards the centre, angle your path to join the outside of the circle. Give way to pilots who are thermalling. If you don't want to join them, let them pass.

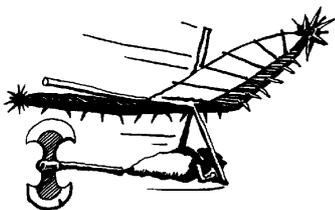
Thou shalt not follow another glider around the sky

For some reason the odd pilot will always follow others around the sky. It is annoying for the same reason as stated previously. If you are a follower because you think the other pilot will find lift, then just keep an eye on them and be prepared to join them if they find it, don't follow. Two gliders spread out stand a better chance of finding lift than two gliders in line astern.

This kind of thing is prevalent amongst pilots when they first start to ridge soar. It is just as annoying to have another glider close behind you on a ridge, as it is when thermalling. Give others space to fly.

Thou shall not fly straight through thermalling gliders

This sounds obvious, but the number of pilots who fly straight through the middle of thermals when **they** are ridge



soaring and **others** are thermalling are legion. If you see pilots obviously thermalling in your path, either join them or avoid them.

The lower pilot has right of way If somebody is out thermalling you, move over by widening your turns to let them by, and then resume your circling. **Don't get in their way.**

Pilots not following the unwritten laws shall be castigated

Give your vocal chords a workout if you come across a pilot flying in an unsafe manner, it's the only way they are going to find out they are behaving out of line. Be nice, be kind, be fare, ask *Reasonable Ray Bass* for a few tips. Most importantly fly safe. Don't make a point of having a near miss because another pilot is flying like a plonker. If you have to, change direction to circle in their direction, even if you were in the thermal first. Store things up for a telling-off later. Write an article for Nova about it.

There will always be shouters

Some pilots like to shout a lot, maybe because they think they own the sky or maybe because they are nervous of flying close to others. There are rare, but you are bound to encounter them sooner or later. If you do, check to see if you are being a plonker. If you are, stop it at once! If you are not, let the shouter go by. If you get the chance, discuss it with other pilots later. In this way you'll get to know who the shouters are. But don't discount the possibility that you may be the plonker!

There shall always be plonkers

Yep, sad as it is, no matter how many people read this article, no matter how many pilots have things explained to them on the hill, there will always be plonkers. Learn to fly defensively, the other guy/gal will always do something stupid. Watch yourself and fly safely.

Chris Jones (*sometimes plonker*)