

Z Method for Backing a 5th Wheel

You have been traveling all day and now comes the hardest part of your day – backing a fifth wheel trailer into a camping spot can be a challenge. Fifth wheel trailers are different than travel trailers in many ways. When backing a travel trailer, the response of the trailer to the movement of the tow vehicle is quicker and more dramatic, **fifth wheels respond slower, and respond in a different manner.**

There are a few of things you should always do when backing a fifth wheel.

#1 – Do everything possible to insure that you will be turning on the driver side. Even if it means driving around the campground and up/down a few roads to get yourself turned around. **The passenger's side is your blind side and should be last resort.**

#2 – You have to learn how long the reaction time is for your trailer to react. Go to a parking lot and practice. **Always use your trailer's rear axle as the reference point. In between the trailer axles is it's pivot point. Make your turning angle adjustments mainly off of the trailers axle position, not the trailers rear. However keeping a close watch on rear overhang of trailer and how far it hangs out & swings while turning is certainly very important.** The reaction time is the time it takes from the time you turn the tow vehicle

steering wheel until the time the trailer starts turning.

#3 – There are three terms you need to know. Neutral, Jack, and Chase.

Neutral position is when the tow vehicle steering wheel is at the position where the truck is going in a straight line.

When you **Jack** the trailer you are causing it to turn the opposite direction than the truck is turning. Such as in jack-knife.

Chase is when you are trying to straighten out the truck and trailer, thus the term chasing the trailer.

#4 – Get out and survey the parking area (with your spotter) for obstructions. Determine where you want the trailer to end up and pick a reference point, which will act as the “edge of the parking area”.

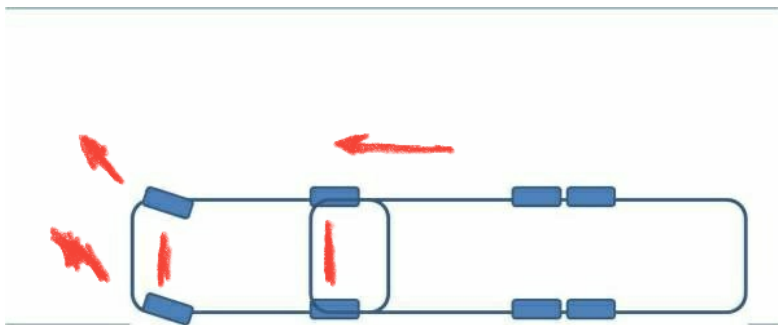
#5 – Your spouse is normally the one who will guide you into your site. Having the same person assisting you allows the two of you to have a better understanding of each others information needs and directions. **Your guide should never say “turn left or right.” It is better to say “driver’s side” or “passenger’s side.”**

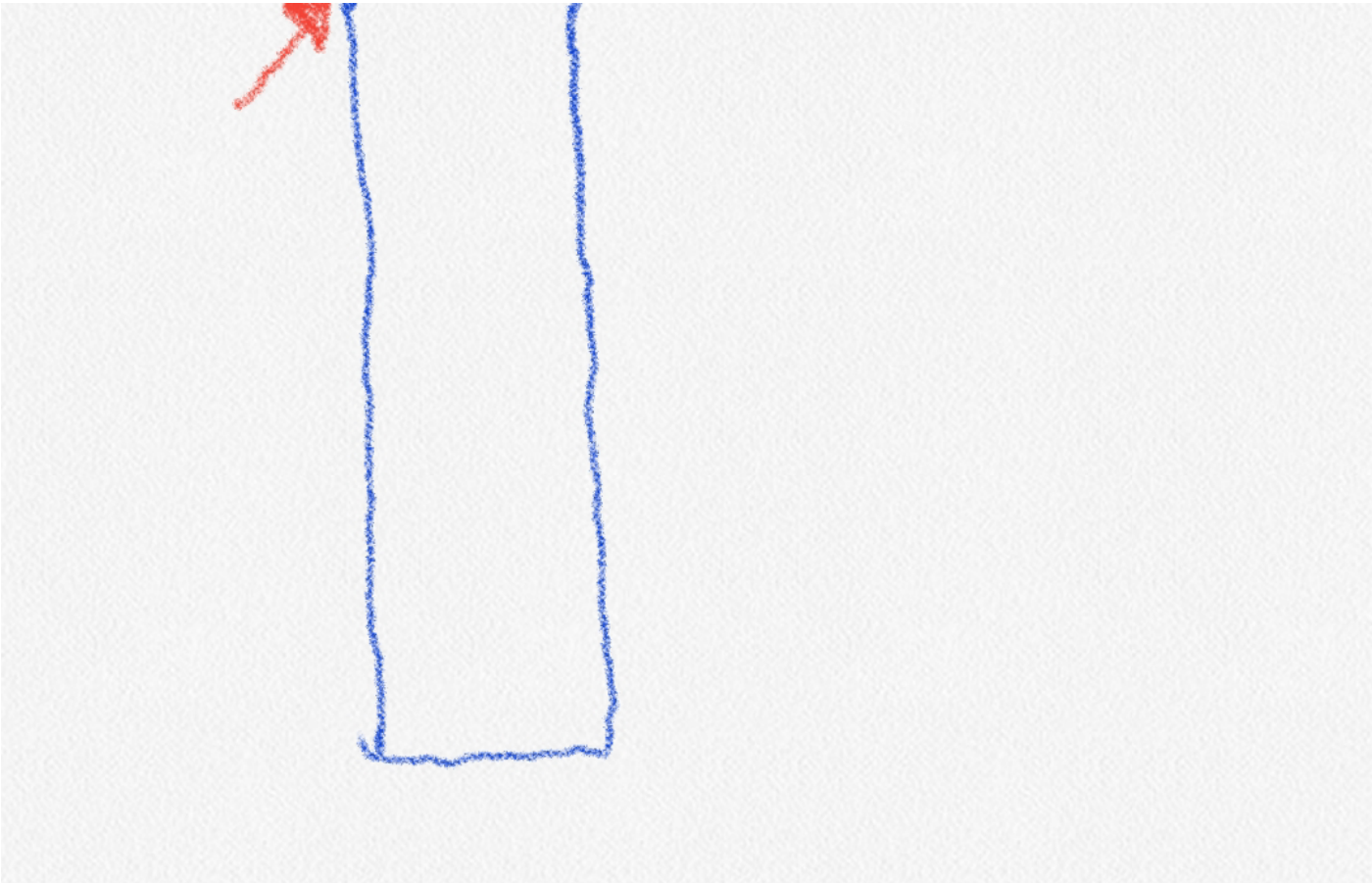
#6 – Your guide should tell you which way the rear of the trailer needs to go. You decide what you need

what you need to do with the truck to move the rear of the trailer in the proper direction. Place your hand on the bottom of the steering wheel. If you want the rear of the trailer to go to the left, move your hand to the left.

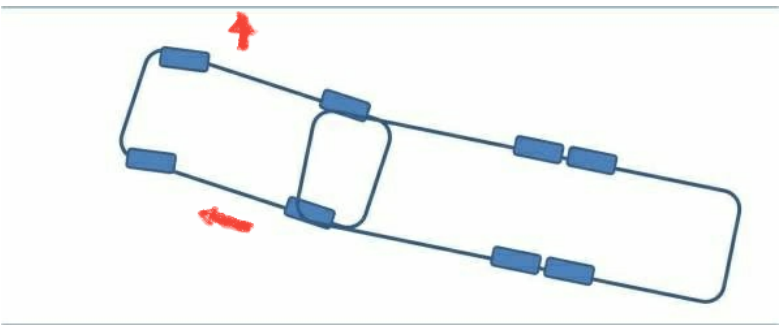
The Z Method –

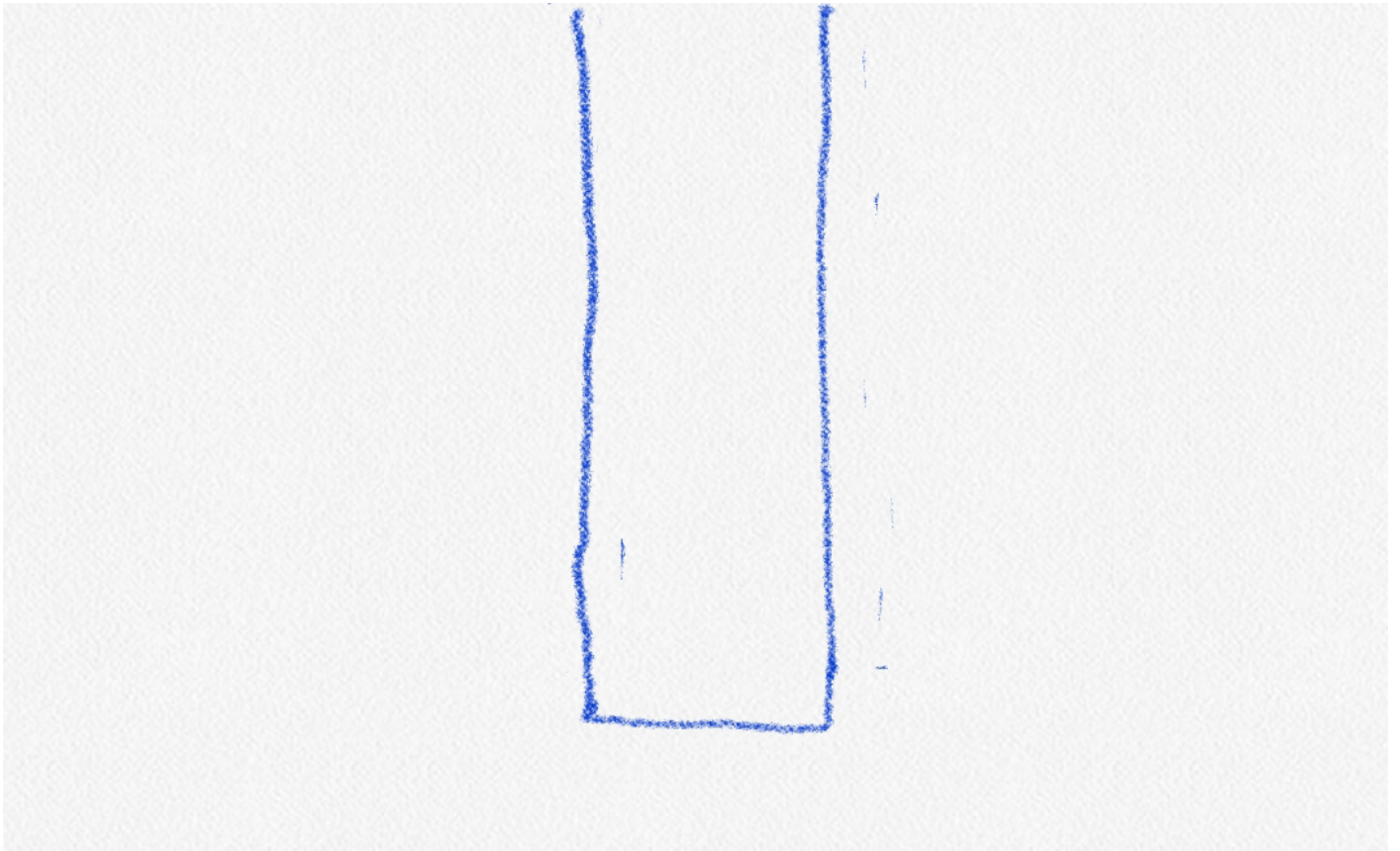
It's a way to set up the turn before backing in. If backing to the left, pull up (and stop) on left side of the road, with the rear wheels of the tow vehicle lined up with the left side of the campsite.



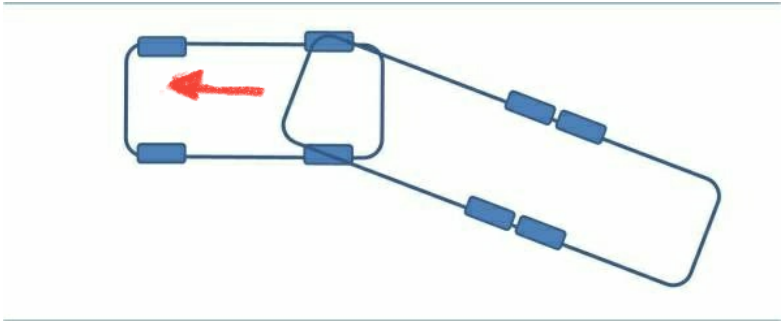


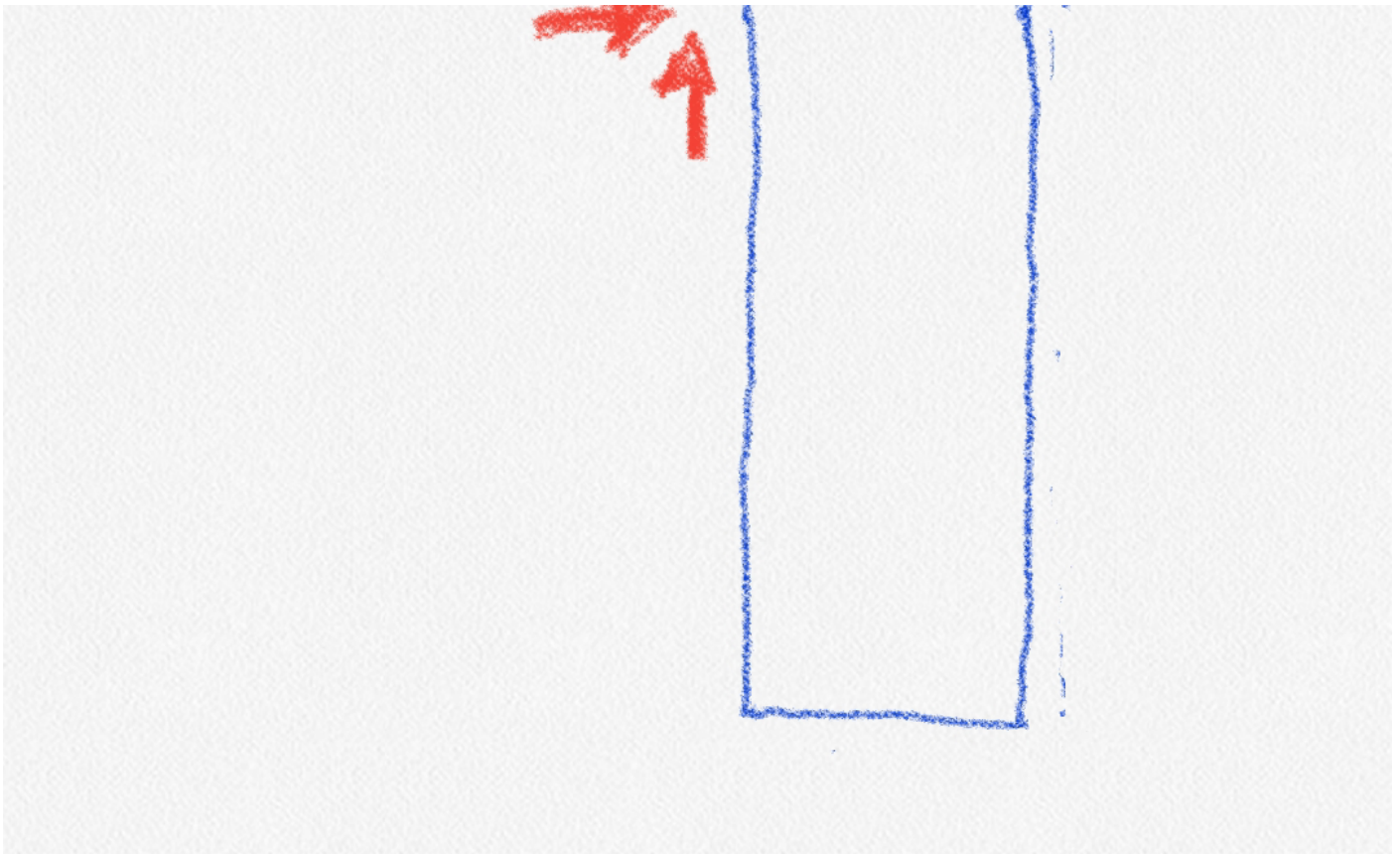
Then turn hard right, and pull forward. Go as far as possible to the right of the road.



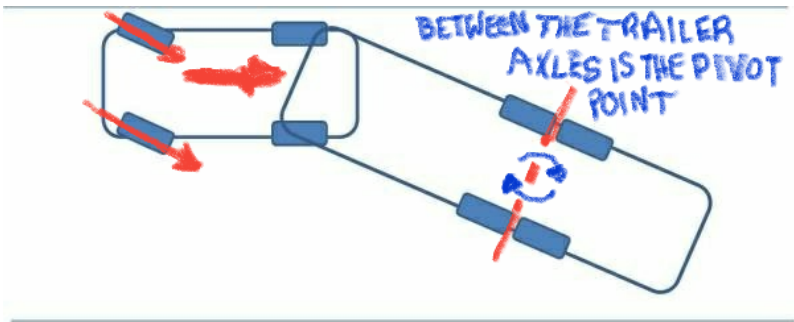


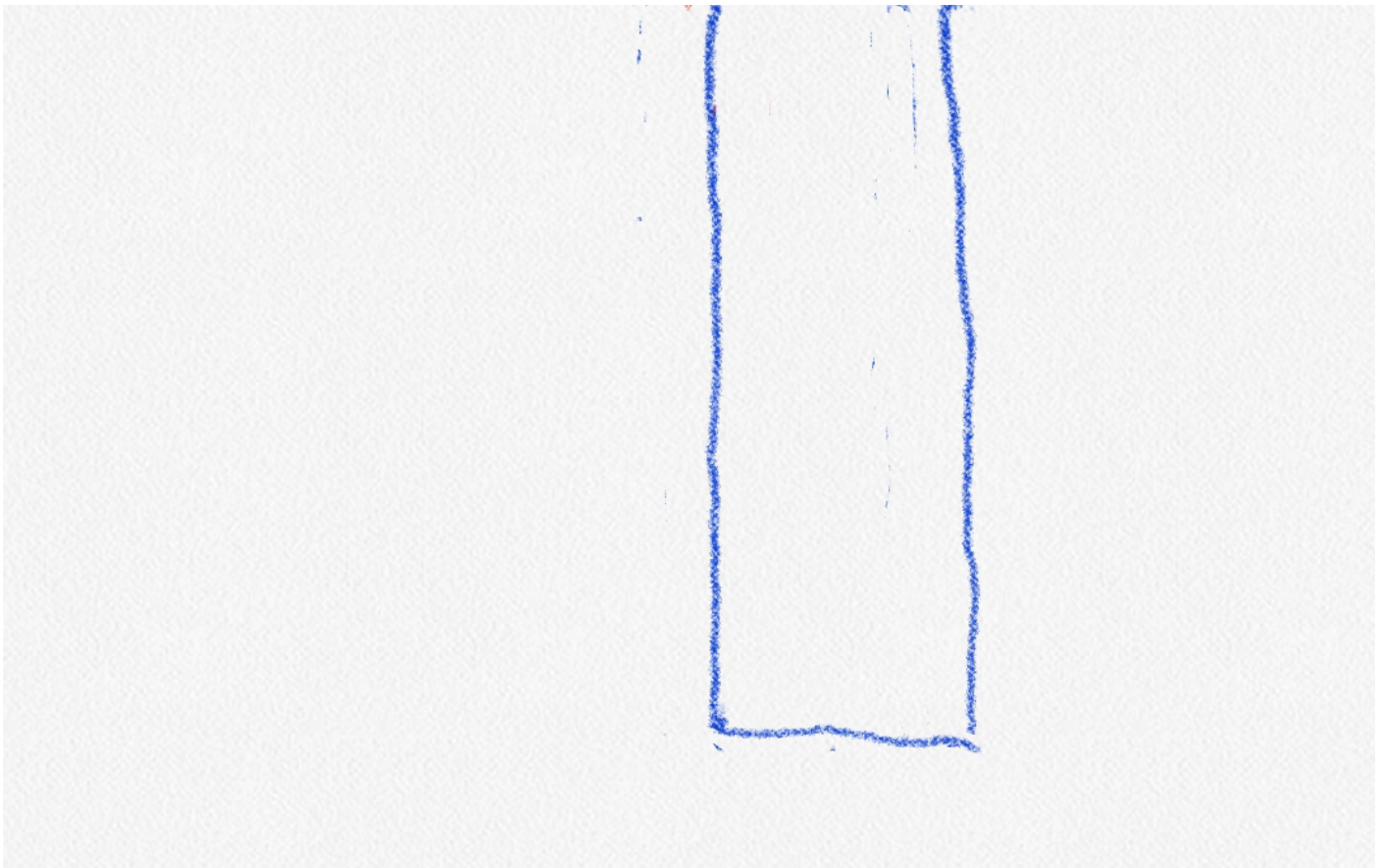
Continue pulling forward. Then turn hard left, until the trailer rear is pointed at the entrance of the camp site.



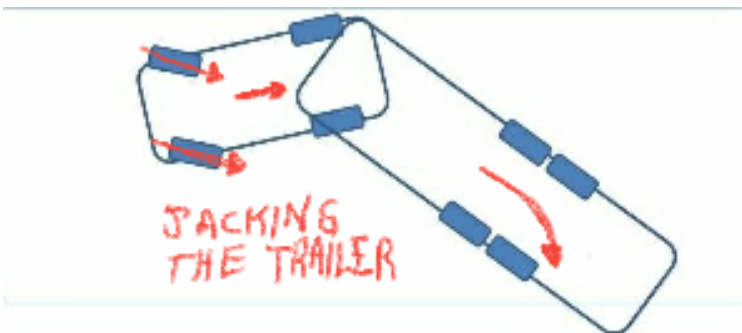


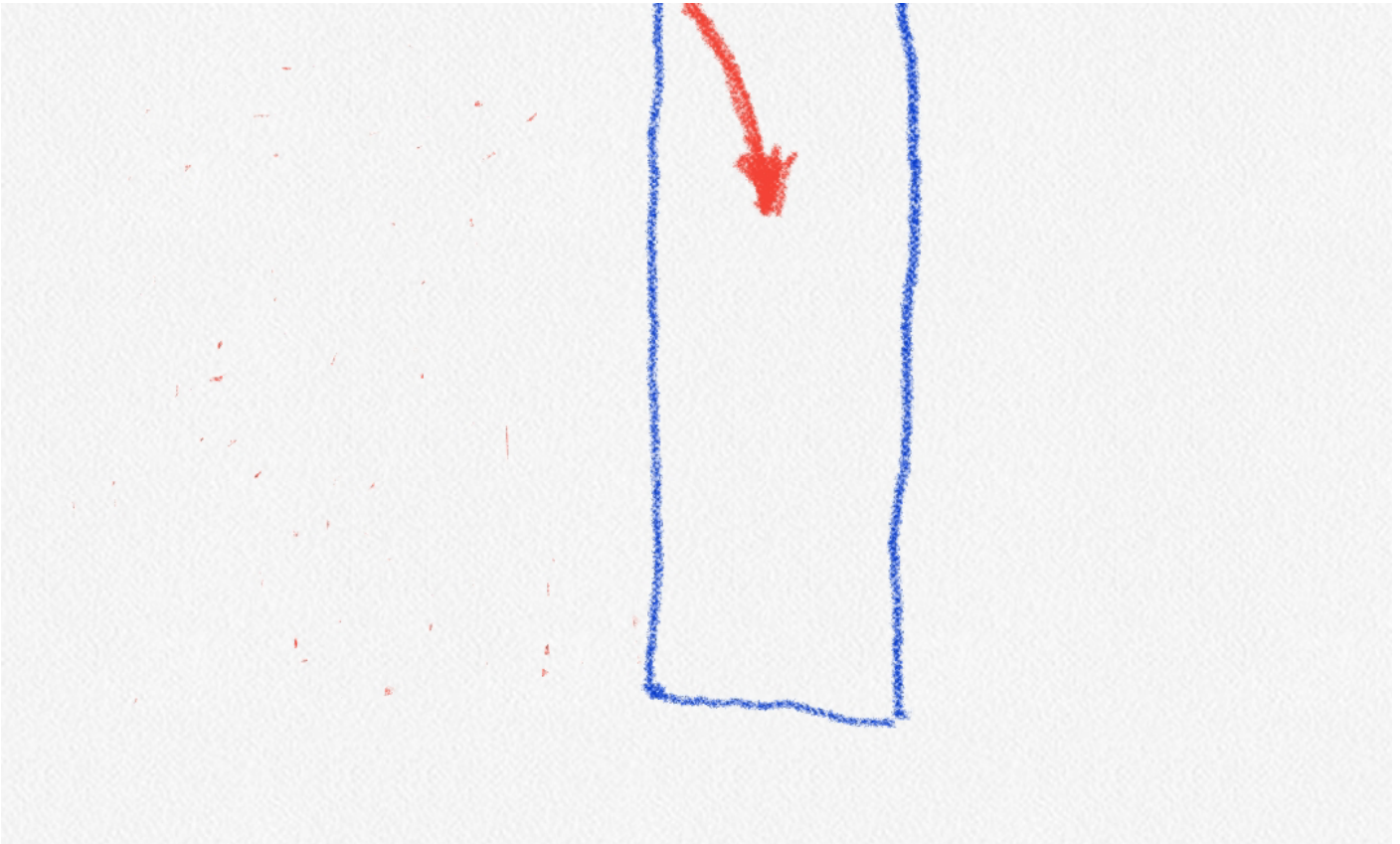
Stop and turn the steering wheel to the right, to begin backing in.





This maneuver gets the rear of the trailer pointed in the right direction before starting to back in. And it gives the front end of your truck room on the left side to swing the front end around.





Continue Jacking the trailer until it gets to about a 15°-20° degree angle of the space you are going to park it then start chasing it.

If you're running out of space to get the truck & trailer running straight, don't be afraid to pull forward to help straighten it out.

If you need to back in on the blind side, just do the opposite as above. many drivers try to never back in from the blind side. Even if it means going down the wrong way of a C/G access road. But get permission first, from C/G owners. And get someone to help control traffic, if needed.

We learned early on to use two way radios or cell phones rather than hand signals. **If you are going to**

use hand signals make sure that whoever is backing the trailer doesn't move it unless they can spot the guide in the rearview mirror. In addition to being able to see the signals, it prevents accidents, like backing over your guide.

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE, and never backup without a spotter.

Last modified: Mar 21, 2018