

The Real Campers Series

Pocket Cards

Five reference cards for real campers.

The exact departure sequence.

The exact arrival sequence.

The exact teardown sequence.

The backing signals every spotter should know.

The brake controller settings that actually stop the trailer.

Print. Fold. Laminate. Keep them in the truck.

MADRONA BLUFF PRESS

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Distilled from *Towing and Camp Setup for Real Campers* by Randall Friday.

Get the full book for the reasoning behind every step:

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CARD 1 • PRE-TRIP

Departure

The pre-trip checklist, in the order things get done. If you skip a step, note it and go back.

The night before

- ☐ Weather checked for route and destination
- ☐ Fuel at three-quarters or better
- ☐ Trailer batteries charged
- ☐ Propane tanks at appropriate level
- ☐ Fresh water tank filled to trip need
- ☐ Gray and black tanks empty
- ☐ Route printed or downloaded offline
- ☐ Reservations confirmed

Interior — secure for travel

- ☐ All loose items stowed in cabinets or bins
- ☐ Every cabinet and drawer latched (check every one)
- ☐ Refrigerator contents secured, door latched
- ☐ TV and electronics stowed
- ☐ Bathroom items in caddy or drawer, shower door latched
- ☐ All roof vents closed
- ☐ All windows closed and latched
- ☐ Water heater off (propane and electric)
- ☐ Water pump off, fridge set for travel
- ☐ Entry step retracted

Exterior walk-around (clockwise from door)

- ☐ Awning fully retracted, arms secured
- ☐ All slides fully retracted, seals flush
- ☐ All stabilizers fully up
- ☐ All compartment doors closed and latched
- ☐ Antenna down, roof vents closed (verify from ground)
- ☐ Nothing left under trailer (blocks, pads, chocks)
- ☐ Tires at correct cold pressure, lugs visually seated
- ☐ Trailer lights working — running, brakes, turn signals

Hitching — final checks

- ☐ Coupler seated fully on ball, latch closed and pinned
- ☐ Weight distribution bars tensioned (if equipped)
- ☐ Safety chains crossed under coupler
- ☐ Breakaway cable attached to solid point (not chain hook)
- ☐ 7-way plugged in, cable routed to clear turns
- ☐ Wheel chocks removed and stowed (last)
- ☐ Tongue jack / landing gear fully raised
- ☐ Tug test passed

Site final walk

- ☐ Nothing left behind — check picnic table, fire ring, bushes
- ☐ Fire ring dead cold if you had one
- ☐ Photo of empty site taken

First mile

- ☐ Pull over at first quiet stretch
- ☐ Walk around rig; feel each wheel hub for heat (bare hand)
- ☐ Verify no compartment doors popped, slides shifted
- ☐ Verify trailer is tracking straight

If everything checks: continue. If anything reads wrong: fix it before the highway.

CARD 2 · ARRIVAL

Arrival and Setup

The step-by-step site setup, in the order that keeps you from unwinding your own work.

Site inspection — before you commit

- [] Site is level enough to work with (or has blocks/dirt to use)
- [] Utilities on driver's side (matches trailer's utility side)
- [] Pedestal shows no burn marks or damage
- [] Sewer inlet and water spigot within hose reach
- [] Backing lane clear of obstacles
- [] No low-hanging branches over slide or awning path

Setup sequence — the order

- [] 1. Stop, set tow vehicle parking brake
- [] 2. Level side-to-side (still hitched, blocks under low tire)
- [] 3. Chock wheels firmly (both sides of one axle)
- [] 4. Unhitch
- [] 5. Level front-to-back (tongue jack or landing gear)
- [] 6. Lower stabilizers (they stabilize, they do not level)
- [] 7. Extend slides — look up before each one
- [] 8. Deploy awning — check wind, angle down for rain runoff
- [] 9. Hookups: power, water, sewer

Hookups: power (first)

- [] Pedestal breaker OFF
- [] EMS / surge protector plugged into pedestal
- [] Breaker ON — wait for EMS diagnostic (~2 minutes)
- [] EMS reads clean: voltage, polarity, ground
- [] Breaker OFF · trailer shore cord plugged into EMS · Breaker ON
- [] Inside: outlets tested, converter running, fridge on shore power

Hookups: water (second)

- [] Spigot briefly opened to blow out debris
- [] Pressure regulator on spigot, filter after
- [] Drinking-water hose to filter, then to city water inlet
- [] Spigot opened slowly
- [] Interior faucet opened until air purges from lines
- [] All connections checked for drips
- [] Water pump OFF (city water in use)

Hookups: sewer (third — gloves on)

- [] Bayonet fitting on trailer outlet, twist-lock secure
- [] 90-degree elbow seated in campground inlet
- [] Hose supports deployed, continuous downhill slope confirmed
- [] Tank valves closed until dump day

Interior activation

- [] Entry step extended (first — you need it for everything else)
- [] Refrigerator switched to shore power or auto
- [] Water heater on (propane, electric, or both)
- [] Roof vents opened if weather allows

Final walk

- [] Pedestal: cord seated, EMS green, no heat
- [] Water: no drips at spigot, regulator, filter, or inlet
- [] Sewer: hose slope maintained, no puddles or smells
- [] Trailer: sitting level, stabilizers firm, slides fully out
- [] Awning: extended clean and taut, angle set for weather

Then sit down.

CARD 3 · DEPARTURE DAY

Teardown

The morning-of teardown, in exact reverse order of arrival.

The night before

- ☐ Weather checked for departure day
- ☐ Fridge contents planned (home vs. tossed)
- ☐ Last shower taken, water heater turned off after
- ☐ Items pre-packed into tow vehicle
- ☐ Alarm set

Interior — secure for travel

- ☐ Personal items packed
- ☐ All loose items in cabinets or bins, every latch closed
- ☐ Fridge contents secured, door latched
- ☐ TV / electronics stowed, bathroom secured
- ☐ All roof vents closed, windows closed, blinds down
- ☐ Water heater off, water pump off, fridge set for travel
- ☐ Entry step retracted

Exterior teardown — the order

- ☐ 1. Outdoor gear packed (chairs, rugs, mats, table, grill, lights)
- ☐ 2. Awning retracted (if wet, note for drying at home)
- ☐ 3. Slides retracted — verify each closes fully, no gap
- ☐ 4. Stabilizers fully up
- ☐ 5. Rehitch (full departure sequence)
- ☐ 6. Roll off leveling blocks, collect them
- ☐ 7. Wheel chocks out and stowed (last)

Hookup breakdown: sewer (first — gloves on)

- ☐ Final dump: black tank first, drain complete, close
- ☐ Then gray tank, drain complete, close
- ☐ Black tank flush if equipped (dedicated hose, not drinking water)
- ☐ Tank treatment added down toilet + a few gallons fresh water
- ☐ Hose disconnected at trailer first, lifted to drain
- ☐ Disconnected at campground end, rinsed, stowed
- ☐ Trailer sewer outlet capped

Hookup breakdown: water (second)

- ☐ Campground spigot off
- ☐ Drinking-water hose disconnected at trailer end first
- ☐ Disconnected at spigot end · filter and regulator stowed
- ☐ Fresh tank drained if freezing before next trip

Hookup breakdown: power (last)

- ☐ Pedestal breaker OFF
- ☐ Trailer shore cord unplugged from EMS
- ☐ EMS unplugged from pedestal
- ☐ Shore cord and EMS coiled and stowed, pedestal cover closed

Site final walk

- ☐ Picnic table (phones, hats, cups)
- ☐ Fire ring dead cold
- ☐ Under trailer (blocks, chocks, pads, tools)
- ☐ Pedestal area (dogbone, cover, small items)
- ☐ Bushes and shrubs (sunglasses, toys)
- ☐ Trash picked up — including trash that wasn't yours
- ☐ Photo of empty site taken

Rig walk-around from Card 1 applies. First-mile test at first quiet stretch.

CARD 4 • BACKING

Backing Hand Signals

Two people, one language. Post this in the trailer where the spotter can see it.

The rules

- 1. Driver has final control.** The spotter directs; the driver decides. If the driver can't see the spotter or is unsure, the driver stops.
- 2. Spotter stays visible in the driver's-side mirror at all times.** If the spotter has to move, they stop the rig first.
- 3. STOP is always an emergency.** The driver stops immediately, no questions.
- 4. Distances are in feet.** Not "about a car length." Actual feet.
- 5. No shouting.** Hand signals are the language. Voice is for emergencies only.

The signals

COME BACK Continue backing	Both arms extended forward at chest height, palms facing the driver, hands making a "come toward me" motion. Pace of motion communicates speed.
STOP Emergency — obey immediately	Both hands raised flat, palms toward the driver, arms fully extended above the shoulders. Held still.
TURN LEFT Trailer swings driver's side	Left arm extended straight out to the spotter's left, held steady. Right hand can indicate degree of turn.
TURN RIGHT Trailer swings passenger's side	Right arm extended straight out to the spotter's right, held steady. Same degree-of-turn logic.
STRAIGHTEN Trailer needs to return to center	Both hands raised, palms facing each other, moved together to indicate "bring it back to straight."
DISTANCE Actual feet remaining	Hands held apart showing the gap. Ten feet is a spread-arm width. Three feet is shoulder-width. One foot is fist-width. Six inches is a finger-spread.
PULL FORWARD Reset the approach	Both hands waved forward, palms facing away, in a "come forward" pattern. Use after a bad angle.
STOP AND LOOK Something needs checking	One hand held up, palm to driver. Other hand points toward the concern. Driver stops. Spotter walks to check and returns.

The spoken confirmations

"I have you." Spotter can see the driver in the mirror. · **"Clear on both sides."** No obstacles on either side. · **"Clear behind."** No obstacles at the back. · **"Reset."** Driver pulls forward, spotter reassesses.

G.O.A.L. — Get Out And Look. Every time. Costs thirty seconds. Saves a body shop bill.

CARD 5 • BRAKES

Brake Controller Setup

Read this once when the controller is new. Reference it whenever loading changes.

What the settings do

Gain (or Output): how hard the trailer brakes squeeze when activated. Sets maximum aggressiveness.

Sensitivity (or Boost): how quickly the brakes engage relative to the tow vehicle's brake pedal.

Both need re-checking whenever the trailer weight changes significantly.

Initial setup — new trailer or new tow vehicle

Do this on a flat, empty road or parking lot. About 100 feet of clear space is enough.

- ☐ Trailer loaded to typical trip weight (or at least half-loaded)
- ☐ All tires at correct pressure
- ☐ All connections seated: 7-way, breakaway, safety chains
- ☐ Weather dry, road dry

Gain adjustment procedure

1. Start at Gain of 5 on a 0-to-10 controller (or mid-point of your scale).
2. Accelerate to 25 mph in a straight line on level pavement.
3. Apply *only* the trailer brake — use the manual override lever, not the brake pedal.
4. Observe:
 - **Barely slows:** Gain too low. Increase.
 - **Wheels lock up and skid:** Gain too high. Decrease.
 - **Decelerates firmly and slightly leads the tow vehicle:** correct.
5. Adjust in half-point increments until the trailer decelerates firmly without locking.
6. Re-test at 45 mph. Some controllers behave differently at higher speeds.

Sensitivity

Higher: heavy loads, downhill grades, drivers who tap the brake pedal.

Lower: empty or lightly loaded trailer, smoother flat-country driving.

Default to the middle of the range and adjust based on how the rig feels on your typical drive.

Re-check gain when...

- ☐ Trailer weight changes significantly (empty vs. loaded for long trip)
- ☐ Trailer brake magnets or shoes are serviced or replaced
- ☐ New tires on the trailer
- ☐ Different tow vehicle
- ☐ Beginning of every camping season, before the first trip
- ☐ Any time the trailer feels "off" during a stop

Warning signs

Display shows an error or dashes: connection problem, usually at the 7-way. Unplug, inspect, reseal.

Manual override does nothing: breakaway pin pulled, fuse blown, or 7-way loose.

Brakes feel weaker over time: magnets or shoes wearing out. See Book 1, Ch. 12.

Grabs or locks unpredictably: Gain too high, or an assembly is failing on one wheel.

Trailer pushes tow vehicle on downgrades: brakes under-adjusted, missing, or failing.

Pre-trip brake check — every trip

- ☐ Brake controller display active and reading correctly
- ☐ Manual override applies trailer brakes firmly at 10 mph
- ☐ Brake lights functioning (helper verifies)
- ☐ 7-way plug seated firmly and clean

A controller that "feels fine" but hasn't been tested in six months is a controller you don't actually know the state of.