

[**Author's Special Note...** I wrote this article to accompany the video on the home page at aboutrving.com. Click here to watch that video or go ahead and read this article—it doesn't matter which one you do first. You should note, however, this article contains some details not found in the video. It is best to go through both.

This article was also written for those individuals who are unable to watch the video due to slow download speeds.]

## Hand Signals for Backing Your RV

Consider this scenario...

You've registered, found your campsite, and are ready to back in. The co-pilot grabs the 2-way radio, gets out, looks around while you have already started backing the coach. Then, waving one arm, two arms, one hand, both hands, or just one or two fingers, the co-pilot invents (on the spot) some type of hand gesture and attempts to signal and safely guide you in. Between gestures, they may talk to you on the radio or yell through the side of the coach in an attempt to be heard. If they try to talk on the radio and gesture simultaneously, one or the other won't work.

Somehow—who knows how—you get it parked okay. Thankfully, you always have. Hopefully, you always will. After all, if you scratch or dent your RV, it's only money.

You've watched this scene played many times and have likely been a player. So, anything that makes backing easier and safer ought to be worth a try. You don't want to scratch your RV!

## A Few Ground Rules from the Co-Pilot

To start, let's agree on a few things—think of them as “common sense” from the co-pilot's perspective...

- It's difficult for the driver to see the co-pilot. The RV driver is trying to see your signal (gesture) at typically 50–60–70 feet away while looking in a 6-inch-wide mirror. Therefore, your hand signals must be unique, discrete, and highly visible.
- When I'm outside, regardless of where I want you to drive to, if I point the front of the RV to go that way, go that way. If I point the rear of the RV to go this way, go this way. I don't care which way you turn the steering wheel to get it done! I'll point (gesture) and you drive.
- If I disappear from view, stop! Don't move. It will really bug me that you stopped even though I keep gesturing but I will finally catch on to the fact that you cannot see me.
- If I want to discuss something, I will use the 2-way radio. After I stop you with a correct hand signal, I could say, for example, “Let me take a look at this limb hanging down.” I'll look, you wait. I'll come back and only when you see me signal will we continue parking.
- If I don't have a radio and you (driver) want to talk—just stop. I will come forward to talk after I catch on that you are not moving. Don't yell out the driver's window. I am standing 60-feet away by my loud, running diesel engine. I can't hear you.

## A Few Ground Rules from the Driver

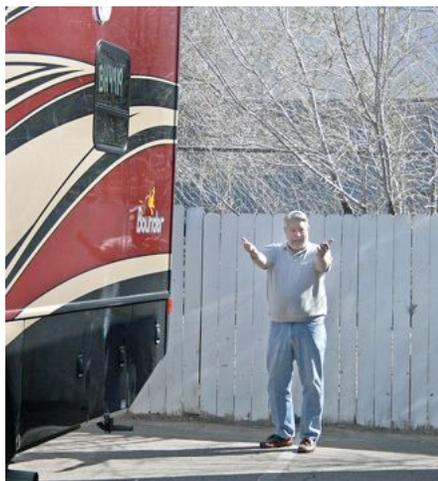
To start, let's agree on a few things—think of them as “common sense” from the driver's perspective...

- I can't steer the vehicle to keep you in my mirror. You have to move to stay in my vision.
- You must watch for the tall hazards like limbs. My mirrors are tilted down so I can see the bottom, rear corner of the coach. I can't see the top.

## The Four Required Hand Signals

There are only four signals you use to direct an RV into virtually any parking situation. They are unique, discrete, highly visible, and easy to learn and use. Always make it easy for the driver to see your signals. You do this first by keeping your elbows away from your body. That is, don't hold your arms close to your body while gesturing. Stretch them out. Make your hands and arms easy for the driver to see because we are a long way from each other.

**Come Straight Back...** Hold your arms straight out front, palms up, and gesture by bending your arms only at the elbow. This gesture is ongoing with the arms/hands **slowly but constantly moving**—not just an occasional single "wave." It's a process I call “pumping.”



**Go Right and Go Left...** Hold your arms straight out at shoulder height to one side. Bend them at the elbow so the start position is with the fingers pointed up. Turn one palm in and one out depending on which signal you use—e.g., Go Right = right palm facing forward (pointing toward the driver so it looks like your taking the oath of office).

Signal by bending your arms at the elbow to point in the direction you want the rear of the coach to go. One gesture signals to **start a gradual turn**. Continuing gestures mean continue to turn the steering wheel—i.e., creating a sharper or tighter turn.

So, how much do you turn? The co-pilot needs to indicate to the driver how much to turn. There is a significant difference between starting a gradual turn and a maximum turning radius—both of which may be used/needed to park the RV. Pointing both arms to one side signals the driver to **START** the turn and keeping the arms pointing but **no longer** moving indicates that that gradual turning radius is correct and should be continued.



To signal that the driver needs to continue turning the steering wheel (continually approaching the maximum turning radius), the co-pilot must **continually move their forearms up and down** (at the elbow).

To indicate the driver should stop turning the steering wheel but continue that specific turning radius, stop moving your forearms/hands up and down—but keep pointing sideways. Think of this as “Continue the existing turning radius.”

To indicate I want you to straighten up from a turn, use the “*Come Straight Back*” signal.

**This Far To Go...** This is the only signal where the co-pilot **cannot** look at the driver while giving this signal but is required to watch the actual remaining “distance to go” between the RV and the closest obstruction in the rear. Face the driver, put your arms straight up over the head in a big “V” gesture (like you are calling for a touchdown). Slowly close the distance (bringing your hands together) to match the actual “distance to go.”



I will use this to get you as far back as possible without bumping that shore-power pole/boulder/tree/concrete picnic table/whatever in the rear of the site. As shown here, you can get pretty close to a fixed object with the use of hand signals only.



**STOP**... Crossed wrists indicate **STOP**. Face the driver, put your arms straight up over the head—it's too easy for the driver to “lose” this signal in front of co-pilot’s chest.

You will use **STOP** often to temporarily check on something before signaling the driver to move the coach again.

When I signal **STOP**, then **STOP!** Instantly! No rolling! **STOP!** Get on that brake! If you do this, I can signal you to within a few inches of any obstruction.



## Slow Down and Shut Down

Some people use a "shut down" signal by moving the open hand across the throat. "Shut down" may be useless as manufacturers have different requirements for setting up the coach. Some require that the engine is running to move slides or levelers and some require that the engine is shut off to do the same tasks.

A signal to slow down is not really needed as the driver's sole responsibility is to move the RV as slowly as possible when backing. Backing at **less than idle speed** is accomplished by tapping the brake pedal. Tapping air brakes is not recommended while highway driving downhill (you will lose too much air). It's fine when backing into a campsite. One could argue the driver may need some speed guidance here. However, if the driver has chosen to disregard standard, proven, safe driving techniques (such as going the slowest possible speed while backing), additional signals may not help.

## Some Random Thoughts

Practice and use these signals—they are easy to learn and use. They work. The good news is that if you often park after dark, purchase two of those flashlight extensions (that look like the orange traffic cones stuck on the end of the flashlight). Use the same signals, they work perfectly after dark while using the flashlight.

When you do this, you will impress the other campers with your professional signaling techniques while eliminating some of the entertainment factor (head-shaking and snickering) commonly associated with watching two people reinvent RV parking every time they pull into a campsite.