

## How to Navigate Chicago's Grid System

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6POoc5BSrVM>  
Transcript: <https://dontveter.com/ec/chicagogrid.pdf>

The city grid of Chicago is famous for being one of the most organized and intuitive street systems in the entire world, however the sheer number of streets, some confusing names and Chicago's massive size, can make it difficult for tourists and new residents to remember which way to turn.

Today I'm going to be explaining the grid system of Chicago and discussing useful ways that you can remember how to get around the Windy City.

The most important thing to remember above anything else is that State and Madison streets are the center of Chicago's grid and the grid functions like a coordinate plane.

State runs north and south and Madison runs east and west.

The address at this intersection is zero north-south and zero east-west.

Every street that runs north-south and is north of Madison has a prefix of North but the same goes for north-south streets that are South of Madison, they have a prefix of South.

And of course this means that every east/west street that lies west of state has the West prefix and east-west streets east of state get East.

Now that we've established the base of the grid let's talk about addresses.

Every city block in Chicago is 1/8 of a mile so if you walk eight blocks that's one mile, four blocks is half a mile, sixteen blocks two miles and so on. Pretty simple!

Every street has its own coordinate based on how many blocks north or south it is of the center or how many blocks east or west it is of the center.

Some examples: Chicago Avenue, an east/west Street which is eight blocks north of State and Madison has the coordinate of 800 North.

Ashland Avenue, a north-south Street which is 16 blocks west of State and Madison has the coordinates of 1600 West.

It's quite intuitive once you get the hang of it.

The one major exception to this rule however can be found on the south side.

Roosevelt Road is exactly one mile south of Madison Street which should make its coordinate 800 South however it's coordinate is 1200 South.

Cermak Road which is two miles south of Madison should have 1600 South but it's got 2200 South instead and last, 31<sup>st</sup> Street is three miles south of Madison but it's coordinate is 3100 South.

All addresses in Chicago are numbered based on how many blocks away from the center they are.

There are typically around 60 or so addresses on a given Street [block] so an address about halfway between two blocks should end in something close to 30.

Streets that are located halfway between two blocks are usually given coordinates in the same way ending with something close to 30.

A very important fact about addresses is that addresses found on the west side of a north-south street or the north side of an east-west street will end in an even number and of course this means that addresses on the east side of a north-south street or the south side of an east-west street will end in an odd number.

Another useful tip is that major streets are typically found every four blocks from the center and going north you get streets like Irving Park and Peterson.

Going West [there are] streets like Western, Cicero and Harlem [Going] East [there are] streets like King, Cottage Grove and Stony Island.

[Going] south you'll see Roosevelt, Cermak and Garfield.

Of course there are plenty of major streets that don't follow this pattern such as the diagonal streets of the city but generally the four block pattern holds true.

Memorizing the major streets can be quite easy thanks to this pattern.

Something else that's useful to know is that on the south side and most streets that run east-west and just have numbers for names like 31st or 78th and of course their number refers to how many blocks south of the center they are.

They all have the category of street except for some that have the category of "place".

These such places are streets located on a half-block coordinate and are the next roads directly south of their identically numbered street counterparts.

Another quirk of Chicago streets can be found on the west side of the city especially in the Northwest and Southwest between Pulaski and Cumberland.

The north-south side streets have names beginning with the letters K, L, M, O and P, in that order, for intervals of about one mile each.

This is a really distinctive characteristic of this part of the city and it's pretty hard to get lost out there knowing this fact.

And those are the basics of the grid.

With everything I've mentioned, and some memorization of Chicago's major streets, we could now figure out where just about every address in the city is located.

Let's take a random address like 2718 North Troy.

We see that the address has a prefix of north meaning that the street it's on, Troy, is a north-south street found north of Madison.

The number 2718 means that it is specifically between 27 and 28 blocks north of Madison.

The fact that it ends in an even number and that it's found on a north-south street means that it is on the west side of the street.

Using our multiple of four rule for major streets and some simple memorization, we know that the east-west street that's 28 blocks north of Madison is called Diversey, so we've got our north-south position figured out.

Now how do we know our east-west coordinate?

This becomes a little bit tricky because nothing in the address explicitly gives that information without having prior knowledge.

The memorization of streets comes into play here again and it's a little bit more tricky working with the unknown coordinate, especially if a street isn't [a] major [street].

Being from Chicago, and being from the north side, I know that Troy is the last street before the major street, Kedzie Avenue, which is 32 blocks west of State Street, so that gives us a coordinate of about thirty one and a half blocks west of State.

So those rules are basically all it takes to navigate the grid even without knowing any of the major streets.

Just knowing the address and what it means in terms of blocks and directions from the center you can get just about anywhere in the great city of Chicago.

I hope you all enjoyed this video and thanks for watching as always.