

Cycling – Level 1

The Basics

GETTING THE RIGHT BIKE

First, determine what kind of cycling you are primarily going to do. Will you be riding on the road on weekends for fitness and enjoyment? Will you be going “off road” on trails? Will you be using your bike primarily for cycling to and from work?

The most important aspect of getting the right bike is getting a bike that fits you. This simple step is the most important to get the most out of the efficiency, comfort and the pleasure you’ll get from riding. Shopping at an established bike shop is the best guarantee that you will get the cycle that is suited best for you.

Road

This is the cycle that is seen in the famous cycle races---lightweight, skinny tires, fast with “drop” handlebars. Road bikes are ideal for covering long distances on paved surfaces. Road bikes are also a great way to get in shape, and get close to and enjoy the country side.

Mountain

A mountain bike is the bike you want for exploring off road. Mountain bikes usually have a wider range of gearing to cover a wide range of terrain, and sit you much more upright than a road bike. Mountain bikes have wider, “knobby” type tires to give better balance and traction on rough trails, and have straighter handle bars that allow you to sit more upright and see the ahead more clearly than road bikes. Because mountain bikes are used for exploring off road in varying terrain they need to be more durable, which makes them weigh more than road bikes. However, they can be much more comfortable because of their shock-absorbing front forks (available on some models) as well as shock absorbing systems for the rear of the bike as well (available on more expensive models).

Hybrid/Commuter

The hybrid cycle offers benefits of both mountain and road bikes. Hybrid’s may look like a mountain bike, but they have slightly narrower, smoother tires for easy riding on pavement, and gearing that allows you to go a little faster. They also have straight handlebars and a design that allows you to sit upright---a key attribute if you are planning to ride to and from work!

Equipment

Cycling, more than many other sports, is equipment-centric. I am of the minimalist school, you don't need a host of fancy gear to get started. Add those later.

What's the minimum gear needed? Here's the list:

- **Helmet.** Don't ever ride without one. It can mean the difference between a bad headache and being a vegetable. Make sure it fits well (see [this guide for tips](#) on that, along with other equipment needed to get started).
- **Water bottle.** Get one with a cage that attaches to your bike. Regular bottles don't fit in this cage, btw. An alternative is a hydration backpack. You really only need hydration tools once you start cycling beyond an hour, but it's good to have just in case.
- **Pump.** A portable pump that you attach to the bike is necessary, in case you get a flat or a slow leak. You don't want to be walking your bike back home. A floor pump is good to have at home, too, for easier pumping, but isn't absolutely necessary.
- **Repair kit.** A simple repair kit would include a patch kit, a spare inner tube, 2 tire levers, a multi-tool for bikes, all in a small bag that attaches to the bike.

Additional things you will need but could put off purchasing in the beginning:

- **Gloves.** You could consider them essential. They absorb shock from the handles (cycling gloves are padded), but more importantly, if you crash, your palms are protected.
- **Bike computer.** This attaches to the bike and tells you how far you've gone, how fast you're going, your RPMs, and all other kinds of good info. Very useful, but not absolutely necessary.
- **Gel-padded seat.** For beginners, riding on a hard cycling seat can be very uncomfortable. This gel padding has saved a bit of pain. Experienced riders tell me that you get used to it after a while.
- **Glasses.** To some, these are a must. I haven't gotten them yet, but they block bugs and other debris from hitting you in the eyes.
- **Shoes/pedals.** The most efficient way of peddling is if you are using your up-stroke as well, not just your down-stroke (pulling the pedals up and pushing them down). To do this, of course, you either need cage pedals to put your shoes in, or the kind of pedals that lock into your cycling shoes.
- **Lights.** These are a must if you ride when it begins to get dark.
- **Racks.** Important if you want to transport anything. There are all kinds of racks and panniers (cycling bags). Awesome for touring or commuting.

There are, of course, a ton of other equipment out there. But you don't need them in the beginning.

The Clothing

We've all seen the tight and bright clothing. If you begin to get serious about cycling, you should consider some good clothing. Good cycling clothing is thin, so you don't get too hot, flexible for comfort, with special material that "wicks away" sweat (basically, it doesn't soak it up and chafe

your skin like cotton does). It's also tight, so the wind doesn't flap your clothing all around and irritate you. And the bright colors serve a purpose as well: they make you visible to drivers!

By employing some basic cycling tips and skills, you'll not only earn a greater appreciation for your bike but also improve your riding experience and get a better workout in the process. Take advantage of the following tips next time you hit the road.

1. Know your gears. Your front gears (located near your right pedal) are used to make the biggest shifts; for example, when you approach a hill and need to get into an easy gear fast. You may have two or three chain rings to choose from, with the smallest ring providing the easiest turnover. These gears are controlled by the shift mechanism on the left-hand side of your handlebars.

Your back gears (located on a cogset near the rear wheel) are the "fine-tuners." Use these when you need to get into a slightly different gear to increase pace or make pedaling a little easier. These gears are controlled by the shift mechanism on the right-hand side of your handlebars.

2. When shifting, plan ahead. Watch the terrain and plan what gear you'll need to be in if the terrain changes. When you get to a hill, shift to the gear you need just before you get there. Waiting too long causes you to lose momentum and puts pressure on the chain, making it harder for the bike to shift appropriately.

The best way to familiarize yourself with your gears is to hit an open stretch of road and practice shifting both front and back gears to see what they can do for you.

3. Learn to brake. The No. 1 rule of braking is to use both brakes evenly, particularly if you need to stop suddenly. The front brake (located on the left) provides more stopping power, which is why you want to avoid using it too abruptly. Slamming the front brake is a sure way to catapult over the bars.

To brake safely, add pressure gradually to both brakes until you slow to a desired speed or come to a full stop. Over-gripping the rear brake will give you less stopping power and cause your back tire to skid. As with gearing, watch ahead and moderate your speed in advance.

4. Look through turns. When heading into a turn, always look through the turn to where you want to go, rather than into the middle of it. Your bike will go where you're looking, so if you look at the curb you're trying to avoid, you'll likely run right into it. If you need to slow down going into the corner, brake before the turn rather than in the middle of your turn.

5. Lean your bike, not your body. As you head into the turn, push the handlebar that is closest to the inside of the turn slightly so that your arm straightens a bit. This will automatically lean your bike into the turn. At the same time, keep your body upright; don't lean into the turn with your body.

Make sure your outside foot is pushing down hard into the pedal at the 6 o'clock position (your inside foot is at the 12 o'clock position). This will ensure that you don't scrape your inside pedal or lean the bike too far.

6. Position yourself for the downhill. Keep your weight over your saddle on downhills. If the descent is particularly steep, scoot your butt toward the back of the saddle to keep traction on your rear wheel.

Keep your focus ahead of you rather than right in front of your wheel so you can plan ahead for changes in direction or obstacles in the road. And, of course, control your speed by "feathering" your brakes evenly rather than hitting them hard at the last minute.

7. Be smooth on the pedals. Think about turning circles with your pedals rather than pushing down on them. Imagine you're gracefully wiping mud off the bottom of your foot each time you come to the bottom of your pedal stroke. This will help you apply force throughout the stroke and make your pedaling more efficient.

Hills

Climbing

It's easy to keep up with a group on the straightaways, especially if you ride in the middle of the pack and draft off of the more experienced riders. The hills are what separate the seasoned cyclists from the newbies. Ascending a long steady climb without dropping to the back of the pack, or worse, off the back of the pack, takes endurance and skill.

Practice these tips on your next climb.

1. Keep your eyes on the road ahead. As you approach a climb, shift down a couple of gears.
2. Try to keep your cadence (the rate at which you are pedaling) high.
3. Remain seated for as long as possible
4. Make complete circles when you pedal — pulling up on the back part of the stroke in addition to pushing down on the front side.
5. Put your arms on the top of your handlebars, keep your elbows relaxed (not completely straight), and use your core muscles to help power your pedal strokes.

Descending

You've crested the hill, so it's time to sit back and enjoy the ride, right? Wrong. Going down should be just as methodical and controlled as going up. Although descending is rewarding and fun, it requires just as much, if not more, attention to the road as the climb.

Here are the basics of descending safely:

1. As you crest the climb, shift into a higher gear so that when you need to pedal you'll be ready.
2. Set yourself up for optimal control of the bike: Put your hands in the hoods with your finger resting over the brakes. If you're comfortable, you can move your hands into the drops to reduce drag. Shift your butt back a little in the seat and, when you aren't pedaling, keep your feet parallel to one another.
3. Focus your eyes about 15 feet ahead of you to watch for turns or obstructions in the road.

Cycling Level 1 Requirements

- 1 – What are the three different types of bikes?
- 2 – What are the 4 major requirements for bike equipment?
- 3 – What are 5 of the additional items you may need for cycling?
- 4 – How do you go up a hill?
- 5 – How do you go down a hill?
- 6 – Why should you wear bright clothes?