

New Rider Skills

Mounting the Bike Safely

Practicing in an empty parking lot is best before you move out on the road:

1. Straddle the bike and stand over the top tube. Place both hands on the tops of the brake hoods
2. Engage your foot in one pedal. Secure the toe strap. With clipless pedals, make sure the cleat is properly engaged by lightly lifting straight up on your foot
3. Place the engaged foot just forward of top dead center
4. Push forward with the foot on the ground while pushing down on the pedal. Raise yourself up on the saddle, and use your body weight to move forward
5. If your speed is slow, get in a couple of pedal strokes to stabilize yourself before engaging the other foot in its pedal. If the speed is adequate, engage the other foot as soon as possible. With practice you should be able to do this without looking down at the pedal

Dismounting Safely

Again practicing in an empty parking lot is best before you move out on the road:

1. Begin slowing down using both brakes
2. As walking speed is approached, one pedal is placed at the bottom of its arc, and your weight is transferred to the bottom pedal
3. If you have toe straps, you must reach down and loosen the strap on the upper pedal
4. Slide forward and lift off the saddle, disengage the pedal at the top of the stroke
5. The loose foot is placed on the ground as you stop. Do not skid your foot as you stop
6. Cyclist tend to favor one foot or the other when starting and stopping. This is natural, but it is encouraged you practice using both feet

Riding Straight and Steady

Practice by yourself first before riding in a group. If possible pick an area free on traffic. A cyclist must have the ability to ride steadily no matter the condition of the road, the wind, the weather, the traffic stress, or his/her fatigue level:

1. Ride with both hands on the brake hoods or just above the hoods, keeping the fingers off the brake levers
2. Make sure your arms and upper body are relaxed. A tense and rigid body will not allow smooth steering.
3. Follow a white line while looking straight ahead and not down at the line.

Looking Back While Riding

This skill is needed to check for oncoming traffic or to see other riders:

1. If looking over the left shoulder place opposite hand near the stem on top of the handlebars
2. Lightly lift left hand from handlebar and look back to your left. Practice both sides
3. In tight situations, it is possible to look under one armpit to see whether anyone is directly to one's side.

Signaling to Motorist and Cyclists

Riding safely on the road means communicating with both cyclist and motorist. Using hand signals to show intended direction is an important part of that communication:

1. A cyclist planning to change direction must look behind and ahead to check the flow of traffic. Using hand signals does not mean that the cyclist may cut off other traffic
2. The basic hand signals are simple. To indicate a left turn, extend the left arm straight out. To indicate a right turn, extend the right arm straight out.
3. After checking the traffic flow, the cyclist should signal her or his intended action. The faster the speed, the earlier the cyclist will need to signal.
4. When the cyclist has initiated the turn, it is usually safest to get both hands back on the handlebars.

Control of Speed

A cyclist needs to match the speed of the group, which requires subtle control. A new cyclist is used to quickly accelerating and braking as necessary. This type of riding will lead to accidents and near-accidents when practiced in group riding:

1. When riding in a group, speed control may be as simple as easing up on the pedals for a moment, rather than hitting the brakes.
2. Depending upon the pace line, a cyclist may pull out into the wind to reduce speed.

Shifting Gears

The gears on the bike are used to efficiently transmit leg power into speed:

1. Shifting gears is a skill like any other, and should be practiced
2. Each brand and model of gear system has its own peculiarities. Some gear systems require more pressure applied to the lever and for a longer time. Riders will come to learn the correct amount of pressure, but only with practice
3. The timing of the shift will need practice. A rider who waits too long to shift to a lower gear ratio may lose leg speed. Hesitating to shift to a higher gear may open a gap in a pace-line
4. Practice using the gears with every ride

Sudden Stopping

This skill is used to slow the cyclist and bike in as short a distance as possible. This is typically done only in emergency situations, such as when a car pulls out in front of you, and there is no place to swerve to avoid a collision

1. Stopping and slowing quickly relies upon use of the front brake, which has approximately three times the power of the rear brake
2. Correct body posture is an important aspect of bike control. The feet should be level; the lead foot can even be slightly higher than the rear foot. The hands should be on the drops and the arms braced. The rider should be slid back in the saddle and looking up. This weights the rear wheel helping to prevent a flip.
3. Both brakes should be applied simultaneously. More pressure should be given to the front brake. If the rear wheel begins to skid, the rider should let up a little on the front brake. This seems unnatural to some riders. When the rear wheel begins to skid in a sudden stop, it indicates that the weight is being transferred forward.

Cornering Safely

Cornering skills are needed both for training and group riding.

1. The hands should be on the brake hoods, and the arms relaxed
2. The design of the corner and the speed of the cyclist typically determine how much the cyclist should lean into the corner. Once past the apex and back to vertical, the cyclist should resume pedaling.
3. Because the bike will be leaned toward the apex, the inside pedal must be placed at the 12 o'clock position, perpendicular to the ground. If the inside pedal is down, it is likely to strike the ground. This lifts the rear wheel upward, and because the bike is leaning over, may cause a crash
4. The cyclist must look ahead while cornering, anticipating the "line" through the corner and looking for road hazards. Loose dirt in corners is common, as are holes and even parked cars. The cyclist should avoid looking down into the corner, look where you want to go not where you are now
5. Sliding forward on the saddle, more weight is transferred forward, weighting the front end and keeping the back more stable
6. It is a good idea for new cyclist to follow a more experienced rider through a corner. They can imitate the body posture and follow the experienced cyclist line through the corner

Descending Safely

If we climb, we need to descend. Speeds on descents can be quite high, and decisions must be made in fractions of a second. The concepts learned in cornering apply here as well

1. New cyclist should be spread out for the descent. Allow at least five bike lengths between each rider. The group can re-form after the descent.
2. Most cyclists prefer to descend on the drops. This shifts weight forward to the front, keeping it stable. The drops also act as a good brace when braking.
3. It is critical that the rider feel confident with his or her ability. As in cornering the cyclist must look ahead and not down.
4. The brakes should be used lightly. Riders need to learn to brake before the corner rather than in the corner. Braking in a corner tends to straighten the bike.
5. The brake pads and rim surface may begin to heat up if the brakes are used a lot. This may cause "brake fade". Learn to brake in spurts rather than applying pressure all the time.

Drinking and Eating on the Bike

Long training ride mean consuming water, sports drink, energy bars, and even solid food. A cyclist will need to reach for a bottle, get a drink, and return the bottle without losing pace or swerving. Eating on the bike is more difficult than drinking.

1. Proper selection and preparation of food makes eating safer and easier on the road. Cut up fruit beforehand instead of peeling it on the bike. Bag food so it is easy to get out. Never throw bags or trash on the road.
2. Practice getting out bottles and drinking using either hand.
3. Schedule drinking and eating for less intense efforts. For example, drink before a difficult climb rather than during the climb itself.