

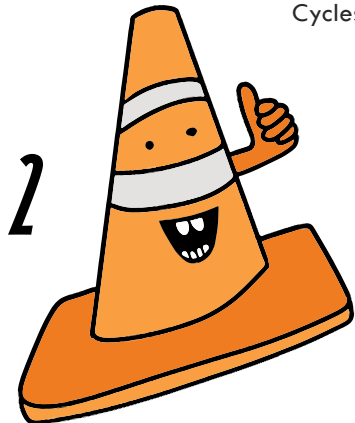


bikeMN  
BICYCLE ALLIANCE OF MINNESOTA

LEARN  
TO RIDE  
TEACHING GUIDE

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This is a guide for teaching people how to ride a bike, developed by The Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota and based on a curriculum created by Cycles for Change and Todas en Bici.

It is meant as a 4-part series in a big open space like a parking lot or tennis courts.

## LOGISTICS/PLANNING

### FINDING A SPACE

When looking for a space, parking lots at schools, community centers, churches, etc, are a good choice. Here are a few things to consider:

**Surface:** Paved, smooth surface is recommended rather than grass. A slight slope can be helpful for gaining momentum.

**Dimensions:** The bigger the space available, the better. Participants learn faster when they have a long stretch of parking lot at their disposal.

**Safety:** Ensure that the parking lot is empty of cars and cone it off.

### REGISTRATION AND CLASS SIZE

A manageable class size is 15 participants with 2 instructors. Participant numbers are dependent on staff capacity, number of bikes, and volunteers. As part of the registration process, consider asking for heights of participants and including a liability waiver. (See "Support and Resources" on page 24.)

Send a message to participants ahead of time explaining what to expect from class. Suggest comfortable clothes, closed-toed shoes, and bringing a water bottle.

### VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are a great support for running Learn to Ride classes. Consider holding a volunteer orientation. See below for examples of volunteer roles.

#### Check in

- Greeting
- Sign-in/registration
- Fitting helmets
- Fitting bikes

#### During class

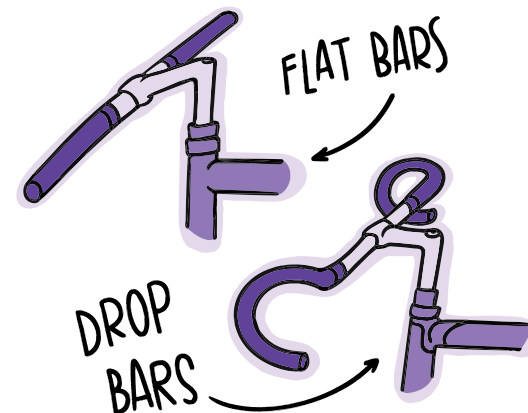
- Pedal/seat installation
- Assisting individuals
- Bike maintenance
- Childcare if needed

# BIKES!

Many participants may not have a bike yet or have an easy way to get a bike to class. Providing a fleet of bikes for learning during class is essential, and giving away bikes to participants is a bonus! Listed below are some ideas for sourcing bikes and other bike-related logistics to consider.

## TYPES OF BIKES & SIZES

Bikes should have upright flat bars rather than drop bars, especially for beginners.



It is important to have the right range of sizes for participants; registration forms can include height. Beginning cyclists generally feel comfortable practicing on bikes that are a smaller size than what they might be riding on when more experienced.

Learn about the ABC quick check in *The Minnesota Bicycling Handbook*. (See "Support or Resources" on page 24.)

## ACCESSORIES

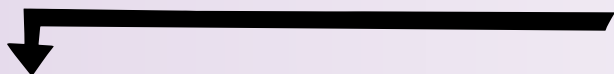
If you have funding, consider giving away helmets, locks, and sets of lights.

[HelmetsRUS.com](http://HelmetsRUS.com) sells affordable bike helmets.

You may be able to partner with a local bike shop to source these items at a discount.



## A LIST OF OPTIONS FOR SOURCING BIKES



### LOCAL BIKE SHOP

A partnership with a local bike shop could lead to borrowing or buying lower-cost bikes for a fleet; in addition, gift cards or vouchers from a bike shop could be given to participants to buy their own bikes at the end of class if funding is available.

### LOCAL SCHOOL

Sometimes schools have their own bike fleets and may be willing to lend them out.

### BIKE RENTAL

There may be community bike shares or rentals available.

### BIKE GIVEAWAY ORGANIZATIONS

Search for a local group that fixes and gives away used bikes as their mission.

### BIKE DONATIONS

Put out a call for used bike donations and volunteer bike mechanics.

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# LESSON PLAN FOR LEARN TO RIDE

This lesson plan is intended to take place over 4 class sessions of 1.5 hours each, usually meeting on a weekly interval. It is not explicitly broken down by day because participants learn at different paces and come with varying skill sets. Depending on the group and the number of instructors, participants can be divided into different skill-level groups to focus on level-appropriate activities.

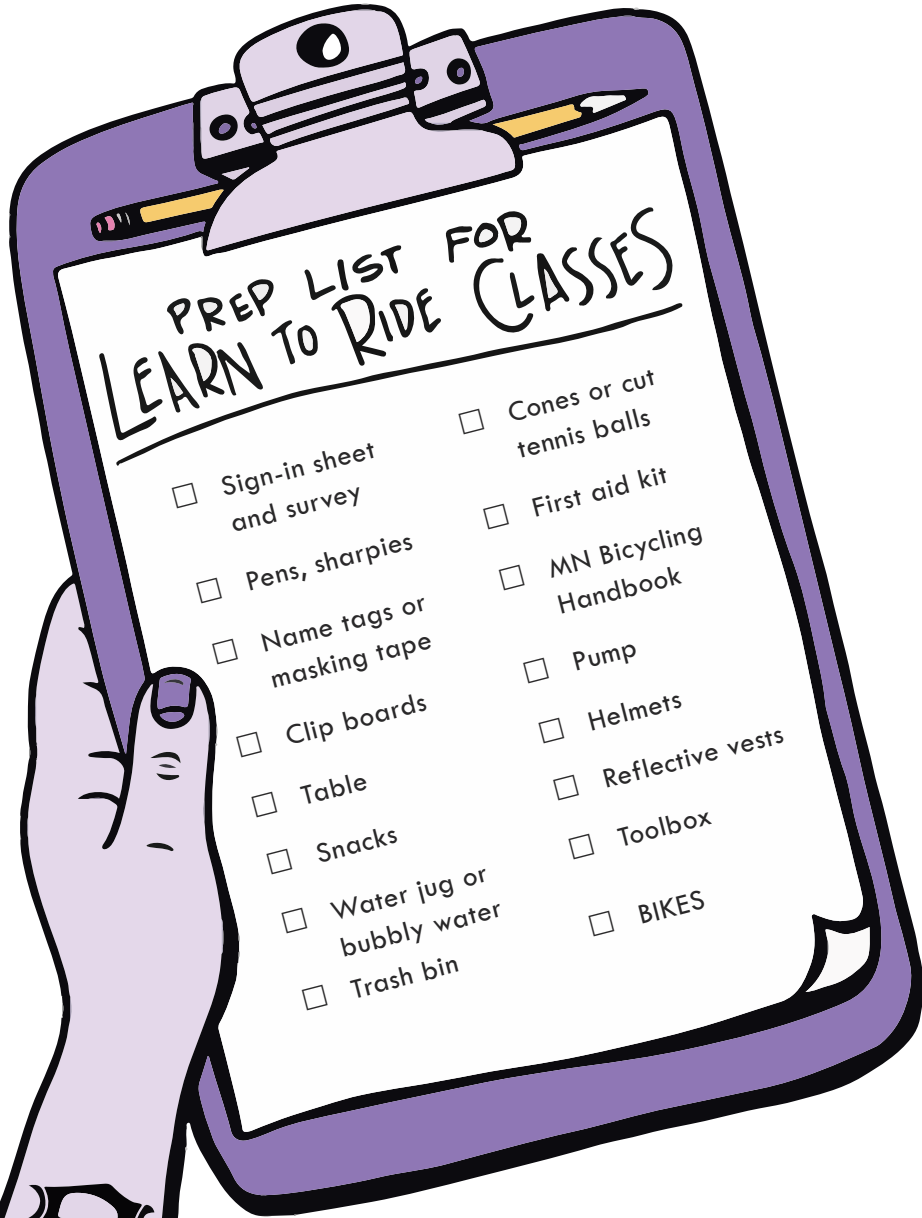
**Below is a general overview of how a 4-class series might look:**



## *Instructor Guidelines:*

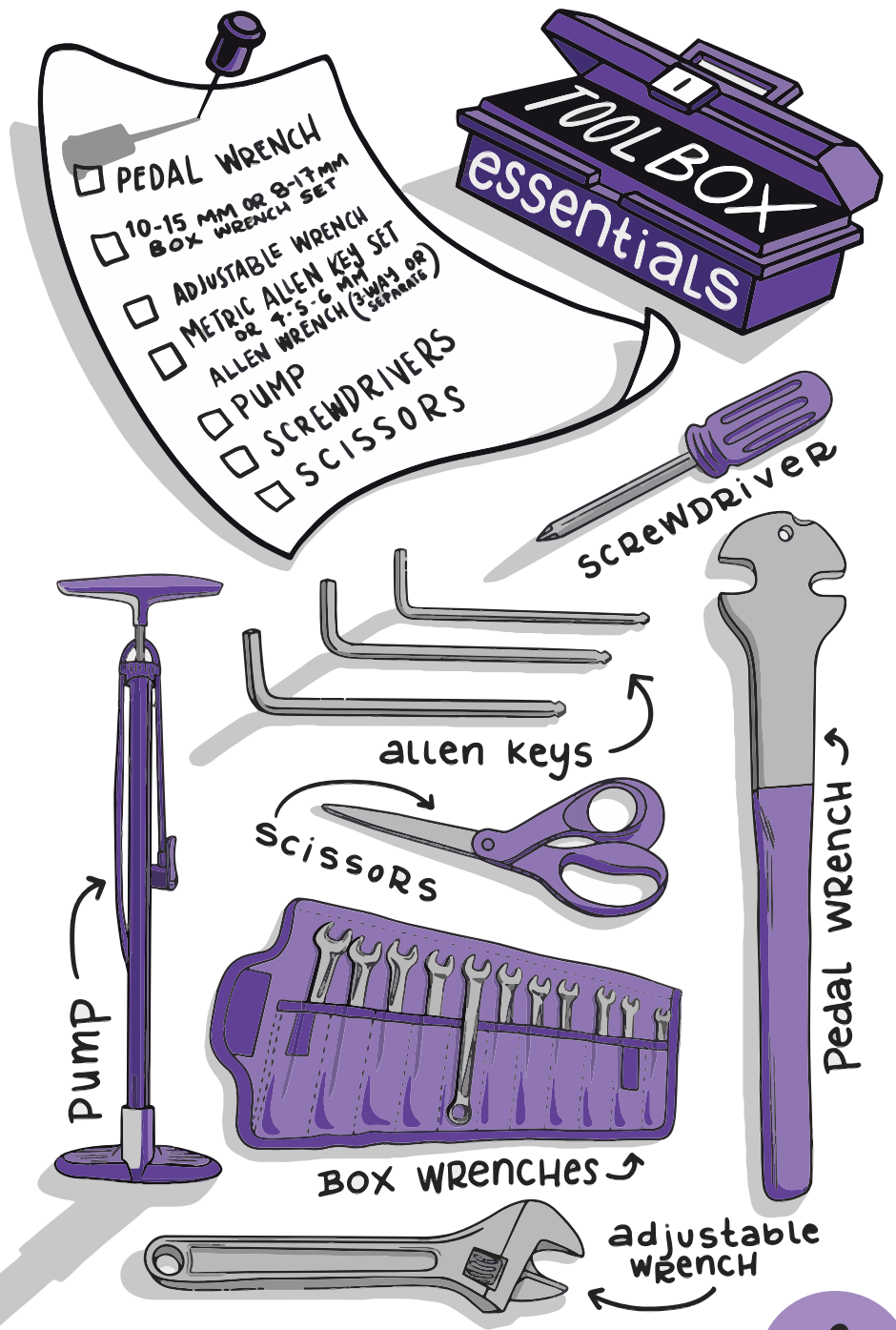
- Be welcoming and check in with people often to see how they are doing.
- Always ask for consent before touching a person or their bike.
- Avoid physically supporting someone's balance when they are in motion, or pushing their bike. This generally doesn't help people learn and they may fall.
- Whenever possible, demonstrate in addition to explaining with words.
- People learn at different paces, and will need 1:1 support and guidance. Everyone may be working on different skills/activities.
- Encourage people to keep practicing, and also to take breaks.
- Try to make the class fun, because biking should be!

SESSION	GOALS
First Class	Orientation, 1. Get to know your bike, 2. Balance
Second Class	2. Balance, 3. Pedaling
Third class	4. Shifting, 5. Braking, 6. Turning/Signaling
Fourth class	7. Bike safety. 8. Group Ride

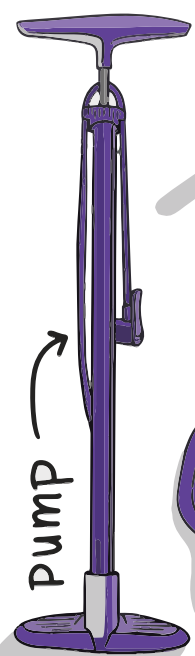


# PREP LIST FOR LEARN TO RIDE CLASSES

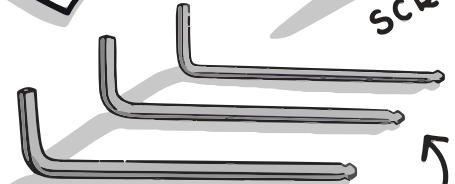
- Sign-in sheet and survey
- Pens, sharpies
- Name tags or masking tape
- Clip boards
- Table
- Snacks
- Water jug or bubbly water
- Trash bin
- Cones or cut tennis balls
- First aid kit
- MN Bicycling Handbook
- Pump
- Helmets
- Reflective vests
- Toolbox
- BIKES



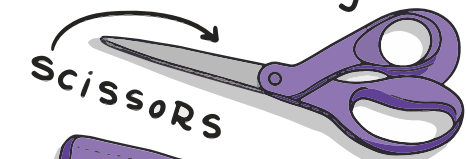
- PEDAL WRENCH
- 10-15 MM OR 8-17 MM BOX WRENCH SET
- ADJUSTABLE WRENCH
- METRIC ALLEN KEY SET OR 4-5-6 MM ALLEN WRENCH (3-WAY OR SEPARATE)
- PUMP
- SCREWDRIVERS
- SCISSORS



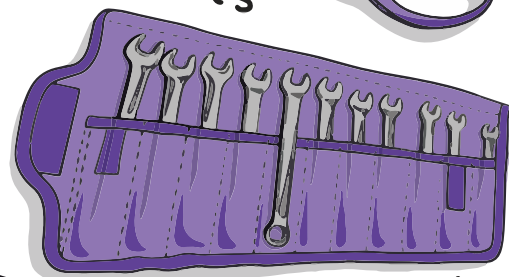
Pump



allen keys



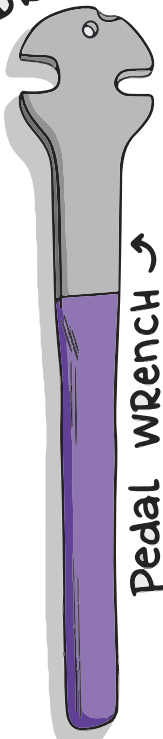
Scissors



BOX WRENCHES



SCREWDRIVER



Pedal wrench



adjustable wrench



# BEGINNING OF CLASS:

## Set up before class

- Arrive at least 30 minutes before class to prepare.
- Unload bikes and helmets and sort by size.
- Adjust seats to lowest position.
- Perform an ABC Quick Check on all bikes, including pumping up tires.
- Use cones to block off parking lot and set up activities.
- Set up a check in table.
- Assign class roles to volunteers.



## As Participants Arrive

- **Check in:** Welcome participants and direct them to sign up sheet and nametags.
- **Bike fit:** Assist in finding appropriate bikes for participants. They should be able to sit on the seat with feet flat on the ground and a comfortable reach to the handlebars. Once they are pedaling, they may find it helpful to have the seat raised or to switch to a larger bike. Many people feel safer on a smaller bike when learning balance.
- **Helmet fit:** Assist in finding a helmet that is the right size and adjust using the eyes-ears-mouth guidelines.
  - **Eyes:** Brim sits two fingers above eyebrows
  - **Ears:** Y-straps meet under the ears
  - **Mouth:** Chinstrap is tight when opening mouth wide



## Opening Circle

### INTRODUCTIONS

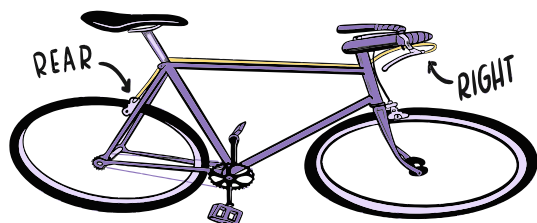
- Go around and share names, pronouns if desired, answer a check-in question from the list below, and lead us in a stretch that your body needs right now.
- Why are you interested in learning to ride a bike?
- What is your goal for today?
- What support do you need today?
- Where do you want to ride your bike?
- Share the plan for the class time.
- Emphasize that everyone learns at their own pace and that's totally OK and expected.
- Remind participants to take breaks and drink water.
- Identify the closest bathroom.



# GOAL 1: GET TO KNOW YOUR BIKE

## ACTIVITY 1: WALKING AND BRAKING

Before getting on the bikes, teach students about the brakes. Usually the left brake is the front, and the right brake is the rear (**remember right=rear**).



*\*Stress the importance of using both brakes.*

Demonstrate and then have students walk alongside their bike and try braking in the following ways:

- **Front brake only:**

The rear wheel can come off the ground and the rider could flip over the handlebars.



- **Rear brake only:** The bike stops slowly or skids.



- **Both brakes:** The bike can brake quickly, which is why it's best to use both brakes.

- **Modulating brakes:** Most braking is not hard braking, but slowing down or slowing to a stop, just like when driving a car.

## ACTIVITY 2: GETTING ON AND OFF THE BIKE

Getting on and off the bike can be difficult because it requires lifting a leg over the bike. Some may prefer a step-through bike for this reason. For step-over bikes, it can be helpful to lean the bike toward you to make the frame lower before getting on. Some participants may prefer to lay the bike all the way down (**chain-side up to protect the bike**) before stepping over it. Demonstrate getting on and off the bike.



Step-through



Step-over

- **Getting on**— Stand next to the bike, lean the bike toward you, swing your leg over the back, and step to the side to bring the bike to an upright position.
- **Getting off**— Do the same in reverse— Step to the side to lean the bike, and swing a leg over the back of the bike.

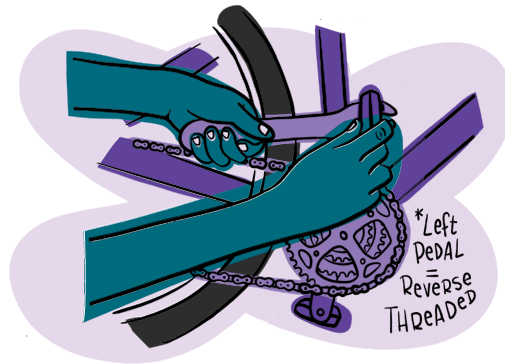


## GOAL 2: BALANCE

This is the hardest part of learning to ride a bike and may take several sessions to master. Take off pedals either before class or as needed if they are bothering a student.

To remove pedals, use a pedal wrench or adjustable wrench. Note that the right pedal unscrews normally (“lefty loosey”) and the left pedal is reverse-threaded (“lefty tighty”).

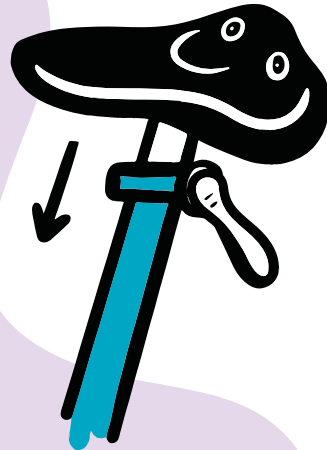
**Pedals are not interchangeable** and will be labeled L and R.



The seat should be lowered so that feet are flat on the ground. Once a student can balance while coasting for at least five seconds, they can move on to pedaling.

### Tips:

1. **Look forward**, not at your feet.
2. **Speed** is your friend—it is easier to stay balanced when you have more momentum.
3. Try going **down** a slight incline to help gain speed.
4. Keep **two fingers on each brake** so you're ready to slow down or stop.
5. Don't be afraid to **lift both feet**—remember that you can always put your feet back down to catch yourself. It is rare for students to fall at this step.



## ACTIVITY 1: STRIDING

Have participants use their bike as a scooting machine to go back and forth across the course without using the pedals. One option is to push off with one foot at a time, like walking in slow motion or on the moon.



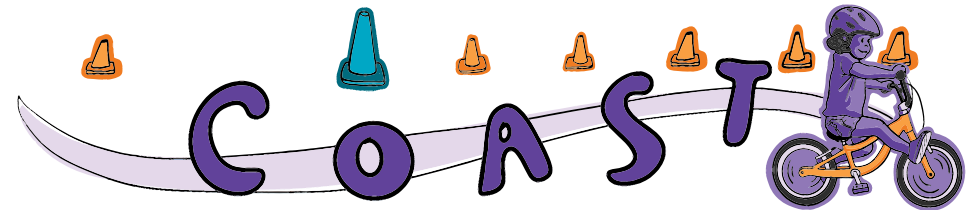
Encourage them to lift both feet off the ground between steps as they become more comfortable. Another option is scooting with both feet at once, which will require them to take both feet off the ground at the same time. Let them familiarize themselves with the feeling of being on the bike.

## ACTIVITY 2: TURNING THE BARS FOR BALANCE

Explain that if you are tipping left, you can turn your handlebars left to correct yourself instead of putting your foot down (and vice versa). You can demonstrate this by applying your brakes and trying to balance on your bike while it's stationary, by turning your handlebars. Challenge everyone to a stationary balance contest!

## ACTIVITY 3: SPEED AND BALANCE

Put a cone down 30 feet from the start of the course, then cones 2 feet apart.



Have students stride to pick up speed until the first cone, and then lift up both feet for as long as they can. Count how many cones they can balance for, and try to go longer each time. This activity encourages students to gain speed before trying to coast.



# GOAL 3: PEDALING

Once a student is able to balance for 5 seconds, they can move on to pedaling. Seats can be raised so heels are off the ground, if students are comfortable with it. Raising the seat will make it easier to lift a foot onto the top pedal, and make pedaling feel easier. Make sure the bike is in a middle gear so that starting to pedal is not too hard but still gives them some forward momentum.

## Tips:

- To maintain balance **look forward**, not at your feet. Feel for the pedals without looking.
- Pedal with the balls of the feet to get the most power.
- Make sure you are pedaling forward—when your foot is at the top, push forward/down.

*\*Using an exercise bike or trainer is a great way to practice the pedaling motion.*

## ACTIVITY 1: ONE PEDAL SCOOT METHOD

Have students put the ball of their foot on the lower pedal and push off with the other foot, like using a scooter.

Once students have their balance with a foot on one pedal, find the other pedal without looking downward and start pedaling.



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## ACTIVITY 2: POWER PEDAL METHOD

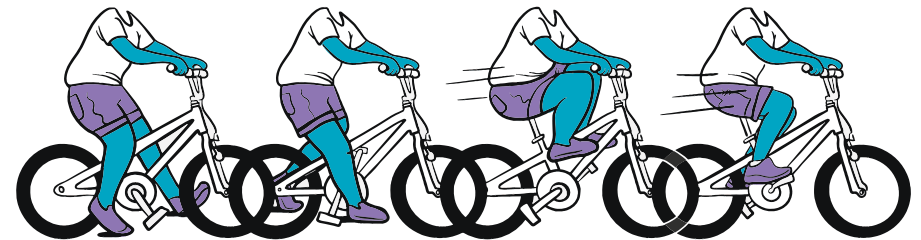
Another way to start pedaling is to position the pedals so one of them is at the top and slightly forward in its rotation. This is called "power pedal position."

Push down hard on that pedal to get momentum, pushing off the ground with the other foot. Then, find the other pedal and keep pedaling.



## ACTIVITY 3: STRIDE TO PEDAL METHOD

One final way to start pedaling is to stride along until balanced, and then put both feet on the pedals at once and begin pedaling.

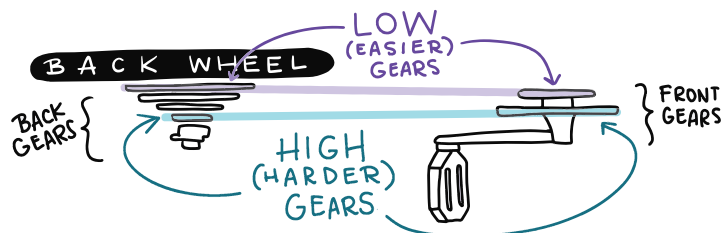


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# GOAL 4: SHIFTING

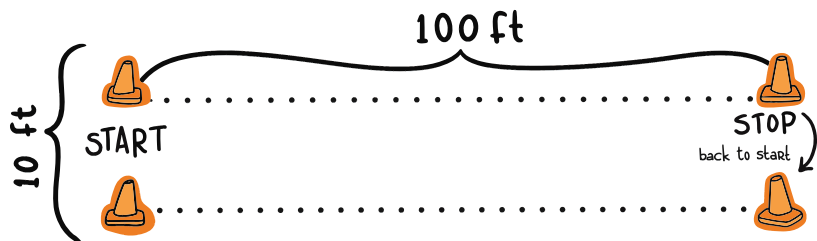
## ACTIVITY 1: EXPLORING SHIFTING

When shifting, **lower** gears numbers are **easier** and **higher** numbers are **harder**.



Ask students when they would use lower or higher gears. Lower gears are used for going uphill or into the wind. Higher gears are used for going downhill or *with* the wind. Show students how to use their shifters. Only shift while pedaling because the chain needs to be moving to change gears. The right shifter makes smaller changes and is used most of the time. The left shifter makes bigger changes. Have students ride around and shift gears to get a feel for it.

For many of the next activities, you can use the same Basic Course. Make it longer or shorter depending on your space. You can set up this course using cones, half tennis balls, or chalk.



## ACTIVITY 2: DOWNSHIFT AND STOP

It is helpful to shift into a low gear before stopping, so that it is easy to begin pedaling again. Have students try beginning to pedal from a hard gear, and then a low gear.

They will notice that it is much easier in a low gear.

Using the Basic Course, have students ride the course starting in a low gear, then shift up into an appropriate gear for riding. Before coming to the end of the course, they should shift back into a low gear before stopping at the end. They will then ride back to the beginning of the course and try again.

# GOAL 5: BRAKING FAST AND SLOW

The following braking activities build on the earlier braking exercise from Goal 1: Get to Know your Bike. Review which brake lever is the front and rear. Remember “**Right=Rear.**” Use both brakes together.



## ACTIVITY 1: SLOW BRAKING GAME

Shift into a low gear for this activity, as it will make starting easier. Practice slow braking by applying both brakes slowly and evenly. Using the Basic Course, place a cone at the halfway point and at the end of the course. Tell students to try to slow to a complete stop at each cone without putting their feet down, and then starting pedaling again to pick up speed. Many falls happen when stopping, starting, or biking slowly so it's important to practice balance at low speeds.

## ACTIVITY 2: QUICK BRAKING GAME

Stand at the end of the Basic Course and have students bike toward you. Call out “BRAKE!” and “GO!” Each time you call “BRAKE!”, the last person to come to a stop is eliminated. The first person to reach the finish line wins.



## GOAL 6: TURNING AND SIGNALING



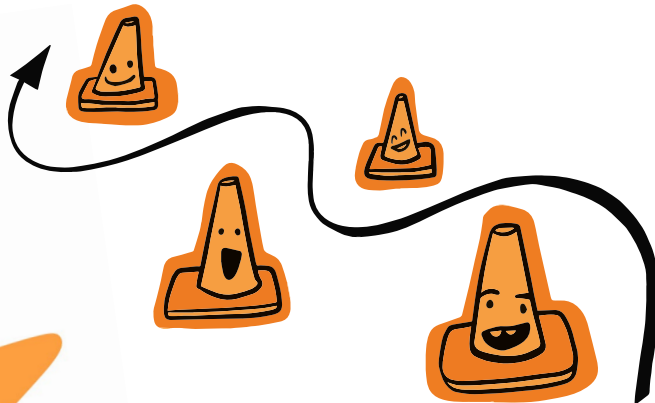
Start by demonstrating how to scan behind and signal. Have students stand over their bike and practice these motions.

To scan behind, students can either keep both hands on the bars and turn their head, or take one hand off the bars and turn their shoulders. It is important to master steering straight while looking behind.

To signal left, point to the left. To signal right, point to the right. Another way to signal right is to put your left arm out with forearm up, but we recommend just pointing.

### ACTIVITY 1: LEAN AND WEAVE

Place cones every 20 ft in a zigzag pattern 5 ft wide. Have students practice weaving around the outside of the cones, trying not to use their brakes. Practice leaning in the direction of the turn, over the cone. Make the zig zag wider for more of a challenge.



### ACTIVITY 2: RIDING ONE HANDED

Have students start riding with both hands on the bars, and then try taking one hand off, hovering it over the bars. Once they are comfortable with this, they can try waving or signaling. Always brake with both hands on the bars.

### ACTIVITY 3: SCAN AND TURN

Divide the Basic Course into two lanes using cones. Stand at the beginning of the course and have students form two lines. Once they are 1/3 of the way through the course, raise up 0, 1, or 2 arms and call out "LOOK!" In the left lane, students should look over their left shoulder and call out the number of raised arms they see, then look forward, signal, and return both hands to handlebars to complete the turn at the end of the course. Students in the right lane should look, signal, and turn right.

## GOAL 7: BIKE SAFETY LESSON

Be familiar with "The Minnesota Bicycling Handbook." You can download a PDF or order copies for free. (See "Support and Resources" on page 24.) This is a 30-minute segment to do before the group ride. Below are key talking points with page number references from the handbook. Pass out handbooks so everyone can follow along. Making this section as interactive as you can will help participants stay engaged. This is a great time to pass out bike lights and locks if they are available.

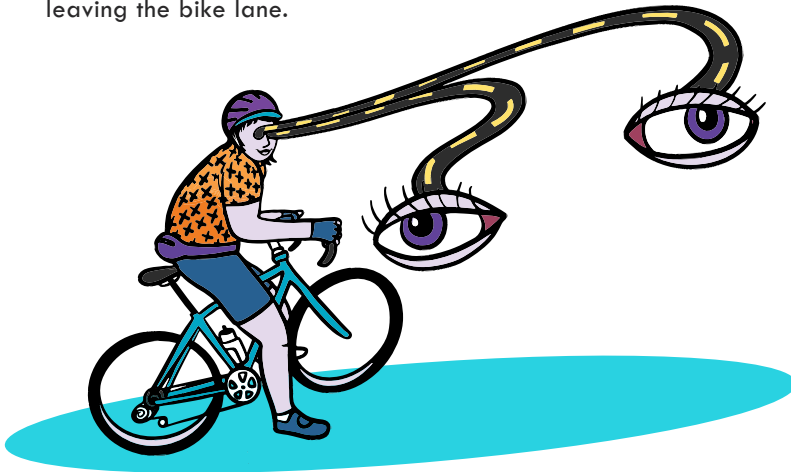
- **ABC Quick Check:** Page 3 - Demonstrate and have participants pair up and check their bikes. Help a participant pump up a tire in front of the group.
- **Hand signals & bicyclists' rights and responsibilities:** Page 4
- **Rules of the Road:** Pages 5-9 - These could be demonstrated using visual aids such as a diagram of a street or role playing cars/bikes.
- **Night Riding:** Page 14 - Demonstrate bike light installation and have participants find the reflectors on their bike.
- **How to lock your bike:** Page 17 - Demonstrate locking a bike incorrectly and "stealing" the bike.

## GOAL 8: GROUP RIDE

Some participants will be ready to go on a group ride by the final day of class; others may choose to continue practicing in the parking lot. Plan out a beginner route that is less than 2 miles long. It is helpful to use the bike layer on Google Maps (<https://www.google.com/maps>) for an initial route and then use Map My Ride (<https://www.mapmyride.com/us/>) to get a clear print out for class. The route should stay on low traffic streets and trails—this is likely the first time students have ridden on the road. Make sure to ride the route ahead of time. There should be at least two instructors on the group ride: one in the front and one in the back.

### LEAD FROM THE BACK

- The person in the back has eyes on the whole group, and can make sure no one is left behind, struggling, or making unsafe choices.
- They are the first bicyclist that overtaking cars see and can position themselves further into the street to encourage cars to go around, especially at left turns or when leaving the bike lane.



### PACE FROM THE FRONT

- The person in the front keeps a pace that everyone can manage.
- They can call out turns, stops, and hazards, and model safe riding behavior.



Before the ride, remind participants of five points that will make them Group Ride...



### STARS!

- **Signal**— Communicate with other riders verbally and/or with hand signals (left and right turns, stops, hazards, and passing on left).
- **Think for yourself**— Don't just follow the leader, especially when crossing streets, driveways, or intersections. For example, if a traffic light turns yellow and half of the group rides through, you should stop and the group will wait. Everyone is responsible for making a choice that is safe for them.
- **Ask for assistance**— Ask if you need a break, have a bike issue, or need other assistance.
- **Ride on the right**— Ride on the right side of the road, a safe distance from the curb or parked cars.
- **Space out single file**— Leave at least one bike length between you and the next rider. Bunch up at stop lights and stop signs.

### END OF CLASS!

At the end of each class session, participants could gather for the last five minutes to wrap up the lesson.

- **Reflect:** How are you feeling at the end of class today? (Short answer or thumbs up/down)
- **Celebrate:** share any victories from the class
- **Look ahead:** What to expect for the next class.

Once all sessions have been completed, instructors can email out a list of local biking resources and ride opportunities as a way to provide support and encouragement for their future riding. A feedback form will give insight into improving the class experience.

# SUPPORT & RESOURCES

If you have questions about hosting Adult Learn to Ride classes, feel free to reach out to The Bicycle Alliance of Minnesota at [info@bikemn.org](mailto:info@bikemn.org)

The following resources may be helpful and can be accessed at: [bikemn.org/LTRresources](http://bikemn.org/LTRresources)

- [Minnesota Bicycling Handbook](#) - Download a PDF to print free copies.
- The [Walk! Bike! Fun! Curriculum](#), although designed for schools, has many useful activities and ideas.
- [The League of American Bicyclists](#) has a free bike safety class, which is separated into short videos and includes quizzes so you can test yourself. You must create a free account to access the videos.
- [Park Tool bike maintenance videos](#)
- [BikeRide](#) bike maintenance videos and guides
- Example [waiver](#) for participants and volunteers



**Minneapolis**  
Health Department

**ship**  
statewide health  
improvement partnership  
MINNEAPOLIS

This project is supported by the Minneapolis Health Department with Statewide Health Improvement Partnership funding