



## Other Road Riding Tips

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This information from the Pennsylvania Bicycle Driver's Manual is from the Rodale Press publication "Street Smarts", by John S. Allen, with illustrations by George Retseck and project management by Pat Brown. Project management at the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation was by David Bachman.

## Road Riding

### WHERE TO RIDE ON THE ROAD

We've all seen bicyclists who wander from left side to right, who go from the sidewalk to the street and who weave in and out between parked cars. From moment to moment, nobody can tell what these bicyclists are about to do. Pedestrians jump back, and car brakes squeal as such bicyclists approach.

On the other hand, we've seen bicyclists who seem to blend into the traffic flow smoothly and effortlessly. You always know where they are headed and what to do around them, whether you're on a bicycle, in a car or on foot. They make bicycling look easy -- but aren't they taking a risk? Isn't it safer to avoid the traffic as much as possible?

### PART OF THE TRAFFIC PATTERN

With very few exceptions, the safest way to ride is as part of the traffic, going with the flow of the normal traffic pattern. Bicyclists who ride this way get where they're going faster and, according to scientific crash studies, have about five times fewer crashes than bicyclists who make up their own rules (J. Forester; Effective Cycling. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1985).

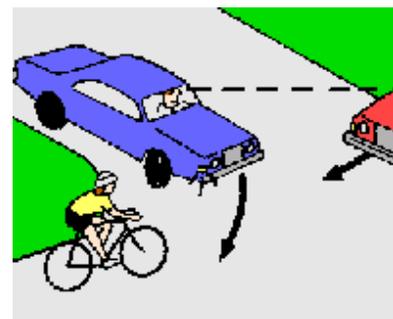
Generally, the more you follow the normal traffic pattern, the safer and more predictable you become. The rules of the road set up a pattern for every situation, telling which driver has to wait. Sometimes you have to wait for other drivers -- for example, at a stop sign -- but sometimes they have to wait for you.

In this way, the rules of the road protect you by making it clear what you're going to do next.

Riding right begins with riding on the right. Some bicyclists think they're safer on the left, where they can see cars coming, but riding on the left is actually one of the biggest causes of car-bike crashes.

If you ride in violation of the traffic laws, you greatly increase your risk of a crash. You also may give up all of your rights. If you get into a crash, the courts will almost always find that it was your fault!

If you ride on the left, both you and oncoming driver must come to a complete stop to avoid head-on collisions. When you ride on the right, drivers behind you only have to slow to your speed -- and they have three times as long to react. Also, drivers and pedestrians about to pull out from side streets and crosswalks will be looking toward you -- in the direction traffic normally comes from.



Intersection collisions are the most common type caused by wrong-way riding. The motorist in the side street is looking left, where the traffic normally comes from.

### WHERE IS THE ROAD EDGE?

Normally, slower traffic keeps to the right, and faster traffic passes on the left. Since your bicycle is usually slower than other traffic, you usually ride near the right edge of the road. But

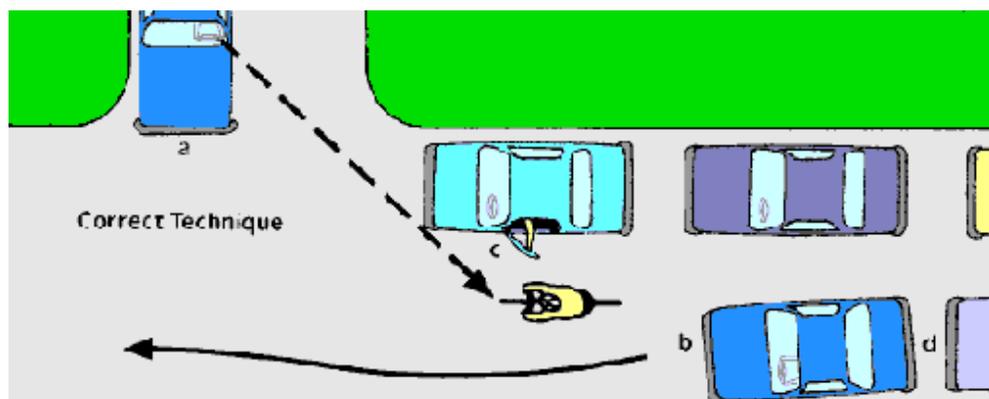
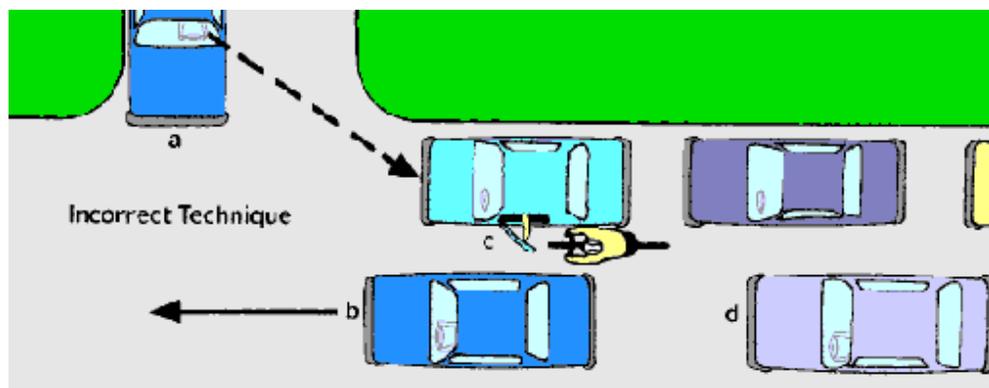
how far to the right?

Generally, the usable width of the road begins where you can ride without increased danger of falls, jolts or blowouts. A road may have a gravel shoulder, its edge may be covered with sand or trash or the pavement may be broken. Don't ride there. Closer to the center, there's better pavement, which is swept clean of sand and debris by the passing cars. The right side of the road begins here.

Most bicycle crashes are simple falls or are caused by hazards in front of you. Train your eyes to scan the scene ahead, and look for blindspots. Keep your eyes moving -- you have to look up at the traffic and also down at the road for potholes and cracks.

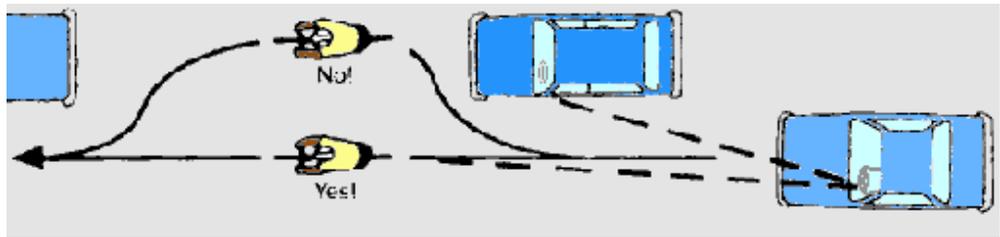
Ride far enough into the lane to avoid the risk from blindspots. If you ride too close to parked cars on your right you can't see around them into side streets and driveways. A pedestrian, car or bike could come out from between the parked cars. Drivers in side streets might pull their cars out into your street to look right and left. And the door of a parked car could open in front of you.

Where there are parked cars, the usable width of the street begins about 3 feet out from them -- or from a wall, hedge or other obstruction. As you approach a blind intersection or driveway, you should be even farther from the edge of the road -- imagine a car hood poking out. Don't ride in the danger zone!



By riding a safe distance from roadside hazard, you increase your safety. At a), the motorist in the driveway sees you; at b), the motorist overtaking you will not take the easy way out and skim by your elbow; at c), the car door is no threat; and at d), the motorist behind can see you.

Don't weave in and out between parked cars. If you weave to the right after passing a parked car, it will hide you from drivers approaching from behind you. Then you have to pop back out when you reach the next parked car. Put yourself in the place of a driver a couple of hundred feet behind you. Could this driver see you?



Don't weave between parked cars, where you become invisible to overtaking drivers.

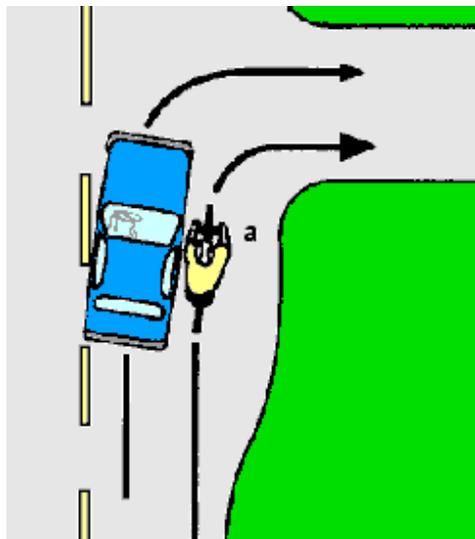
Sure, many people -- even some bicycling "experts" -- will tell you, "Always keep as far to the right as possible," and, "Look out for opening car doors." But at speeds above 5 miles per hour, you can't stop in time to avoid a car door. Your only choice is to swerve out into the street -- maybe into the path of a passing car.

It's much safer to ride in a predictable, straight line, where everyone can see you. Motorists don't mind slowing down for a predictable, visible bicyclist nearly as much as they mind a bicyclist who swerves out in front of them.

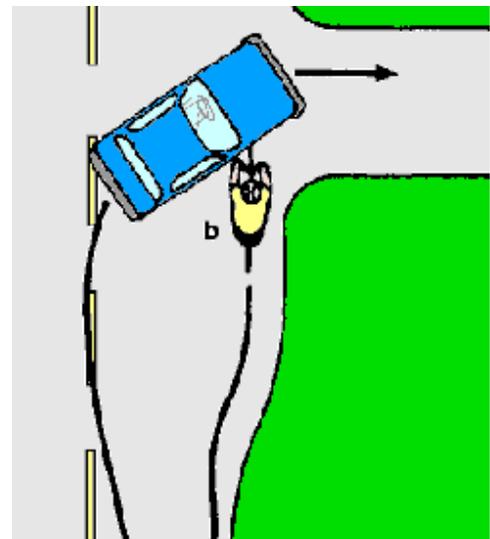
### EXTRA-WIDE LANES

If the road has a paved shoulder or an extra-wide right lane, don't ride all the way over at the right edge. Instead, keep riding in a straight line 2 or 4 feet to the right of the cars. Stay at a steady distance from the left side of the right lane.

If you stay all the way over at the right edge of the shoulder, you're much more likely to be cut off by a right-turning car -- and when this happens, it's harder for you to avoid a crash. By the time you see the car, it will be blocking your path. If you're closer to the car, you can turn with it and avoid a crash.



In a wide lane, you are safer if you stay just to the right of the cars. As shown in a), you can turn to avoid a crash.



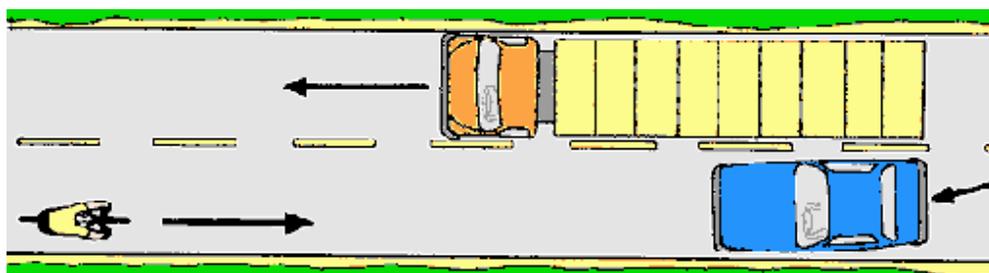
In b), the car is across your path before you see it.

There's only one important exception to this rule: In several states, it's legal for bicyclists to ride on high-speed limited-access highways. Here, you can ride at the right side of the shoulder, avoiding the wind blast from big trucks. Except at the rare on- and off-ramps, limited-access highways have no cross traffic, so there's no problem with turning cars or

pedestrians.

### RIDING IN A NARROW LANE

In a wide lane, there's room for cars to pass you. But in a narrow lane, cars have to move part way into the next lane to pass you. Narrow lanes are common on city streets and on back roads in the country. On a narrow two-lane, two-way road stay alert to strings of cars from the front, in case one pulls into your lane to pass. You can ride near the edge of this type of road if cars are coming from only one direction at a time. Then cars from the rear can pass you without having to move as far into the other lane.

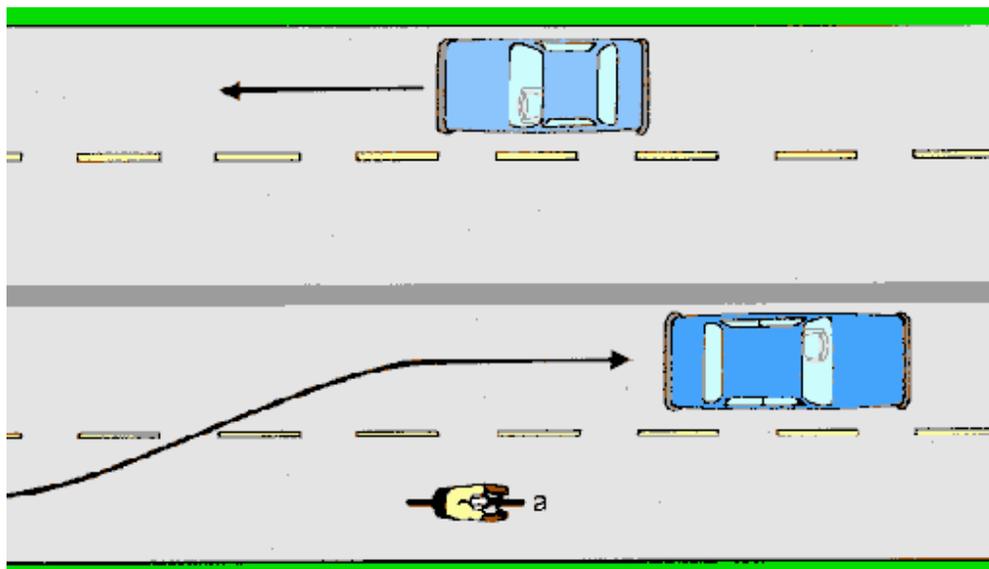


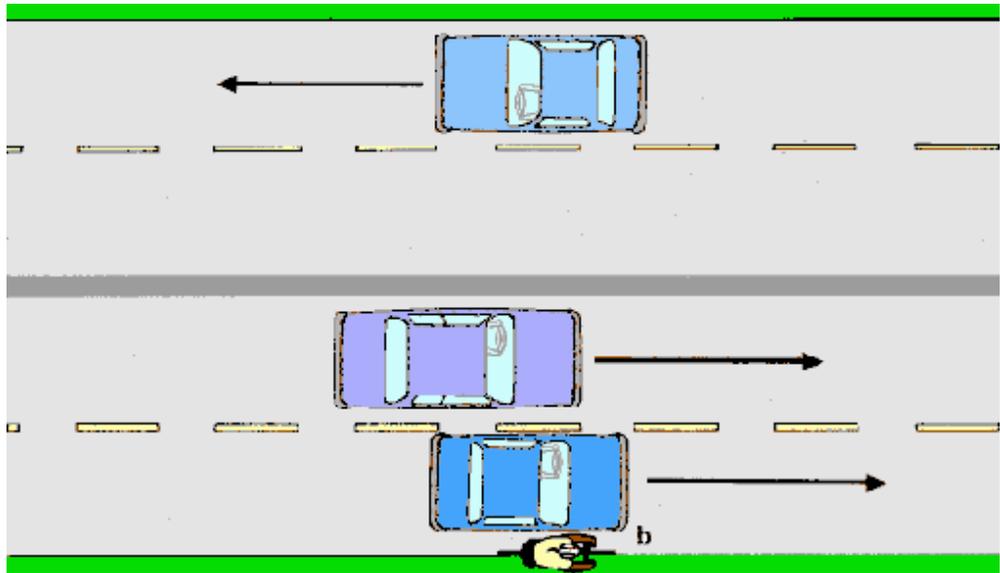
On a two-lane highway, be alert to drivers ahead of you pulling out to pass, especially if the lanes are narrow.

But if cars are coming from both directions, you have to take control of the situation. You can't take chances that the drivers behind you will try to pass you in oncoming traffic.

Glance behind you, and if there's traffic there too, take the first opportunity to merge safely to the middle of the right lane. Also merge to the middle of the right lane at a blind curve where there might be oncoming traffic. On a right curve in a narrow lane, this technique makes you visible earlier to the drivers behind you.

The driver behind you will have to slow and follow you. It helps to make a "slow" signal (left arm extended downward) to indicate that you're aware of the car behind you and that it's unsafe to pass. Don't let an impatient driver cause a crash.





On a multilane road with narrow lane, a), ride in the middle of the right lane. You are likely to get squeezed out, b), if you hug the edge.

Understand that the law is on your side. The law gives you the right to use the road, the same as a motorist, and to make other traffic slow down for you sometimes. Since you don't have eyes in the back of your head, you can't be expected to keep track of the traffic behind you at all times. The driver approaching from the rear is always required to slow and follow if it's not possible to pass safely.

It may seem dangerous to make a motorist slow for you, but it's not. The usual reason that bicyclists feel unsafe on narrow roads is that they do not take control of the situation. Remember, the drivers behind you don't have room to pass you safely anyway. If you ride all the way over at the right, you're inviting them to pass you where the road is too narrow and, too often, you will get squeezed off the road. If you show clearly that it's not safe for drivers to pass you, they're unlikely to try.

In any case, narrow roads aren't usually places where motorists drive very fast. It's dangerous to drive fast on narrow roads because there's so little room for error. Motorists expect to have to slow down for all sorts of reasons.

But be courteous. When it becomes safe for the car behind you to pass you, give the driver a wave-by signal. If you block traffic for more than a short time, the law requires you to pull to the side and let the traffic by.

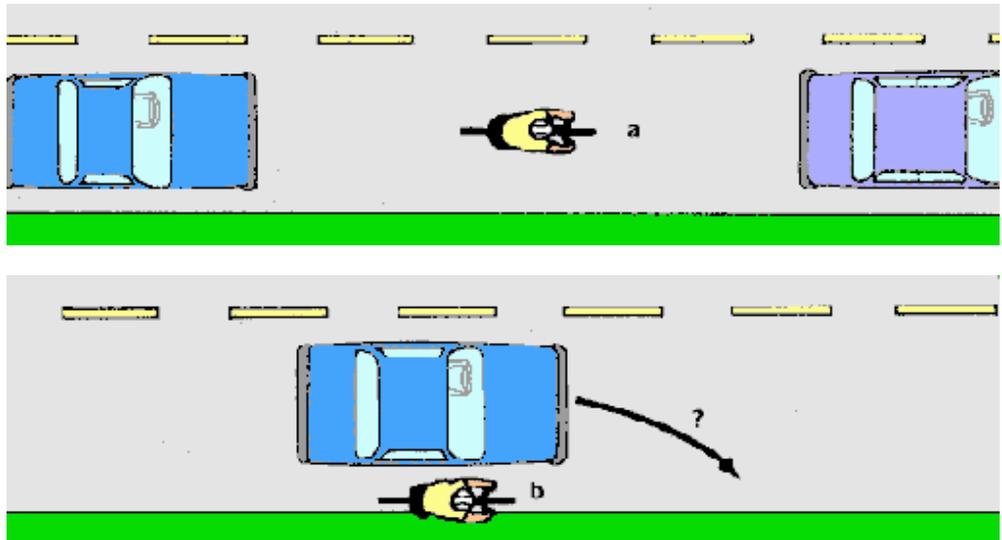
On a road with two or more narrow lanes in your direction -- like many city streets -- you should ride in the middle of the right lane at all times. You need to send the message to drivers to move to the passing lane to pass you. If you ride all the way to the right, two cars may pass you at the same time, side by side, and squeeze you off the road.

### WHEN YOU GO FASTER THAN CARS

Usually, cars travel faster than bicycles. But not always. A row of cars may have slowed in a traffic jam. Or you may be riding down a hill where you can keep up with the cars.

If you're going as fast as the cars, pull into line with them. When riding down a hill at high speed, you need more room to steer and brake. Besides, it's dangerous to ride along next to the right side of a car. The driver could turn right or edge closer to the curb without ever seeing you.

As long as you keep up with the car in front of you, stay in line with it. If you begin to fall behind, pull to the right. But if you're catching up with the car, pass on the left, just as if you were driving a car yourself.



When going as fast as the cars, you're much safer if you ride in the middle of the traffic lane. In a), the driver behind you can see you. In b), the driver next to you has not seen you and could turn right.

The safest position in traffic doesn't depend on whether you're riding a bicycle or driving a car. It depends on how fast you're going and where you're headed. Drivers expect to be passed on the left, so they look back to the left before they pull out.

Before you pass, look back for traffic to make sure that you can pull safely into the passing lane. Keep your distance from the side of the car you're passing. Don't sneak along next to it. Put yourself where the driver will look for you. If you're passing a big truck or bus, give it even more clearance -- 5 or 6 feet -- since it could move farther before you could get out of its way. When you're finished, move back into the right lane.

Sometimes the car, bus or truck you're passing will pick up speed while you're still next to it. Then just keep the same position in the lane, and brake lightly if necessary to fall back. When you've fallen behind, look back to the right for traffic, then merge back to your normal position in the right lane.

On a street with multiple right-turn lanes or heavy, slow traffic, you may move left more than one lane to pass slower traffic.

Your correct position on the road follows a sensible set of rules, the same as for a car driver: Keep to the right if you're going slowly, but pull to the left to pass. The way you carry out these rules is just a little different -- as explained here -- since your bicycle is narrow and usually slow. An understanding of road positioning makes the difference between the rider who weaves and wanders and the one who blends smoothly and safely into the traffic flow.

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