

6: LANE POSITIONS, TURNING, & PASSING

BASIC LANE POSITIONS

Traffic law says that slower vehicles should stay to the right. But where exactly should bicycles ride? Here are some basics.

Never Ride Against Traffic: If you *feel* safer riding against traffic because you can see cars coming, you are *wrong*: **Twenty percent of all car-bike collisions result from cyclists going the wrong way.** Drivers moving down a street—and drivers turning onto the street—don’t look for vehicles coming at them in their lane. And if they hit you, it’ll be much harder head-on than from behind.

When to Stay Right: Stay right if you’re moving slow compared to traffic, but remember: the farther from the curb you ride, the better motorists can see you—whether they’re in your lane, oncoming, or on cross streets. **5** Riding closer to traffic keeps cars from passing you on the left and then turning right immediately in front of you.

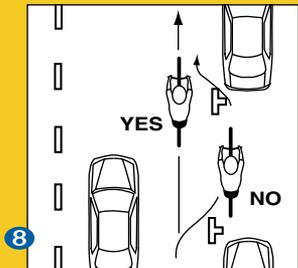
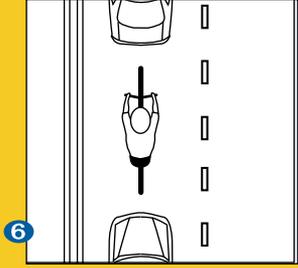
When to Ride in the Middle: **6** It’s safest to ride in the middle of the lane when: (a) You’re moving at the speed of traffic; (b) the lane’s too small for cars to pass you safely; (c) you’re avoiding potholes or the doors of parked cars. If you’re riding in the middle and traffic starts to move faster than you can, move toward the curb if there’s room. Some special cases:

► **Dangerous Areas:** If you come to a dangerous area—like a bend in the road that you can’t see beyond—ride in the middle of the lane to be more visible.

► **El Tracks:** Ride in the middle on streets underneath elevated CTA train tracks, **7** where the metal track supports make it hard to avoid opening car doors and crossing pedestrians. Under the el tracks, ride on the inside of the supports, not on the curb side. Motorists behind you might get impatient, so communicate with them by using the “slow” arm signal (see page 13).

► **Bus Lanes:** The law prohibits biking in bus lanes. But if you must use a bus lane, ride in the middle so buses don’t squeeze you into the curb. If you block buses for too long, you should use another lane.

Parked Cars: Don’t weave in and out of parked cars, because you’ll confuse drivers; ride in a straight line. **8** Ride at least four feet away so you

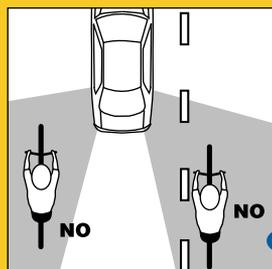




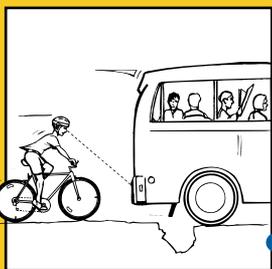
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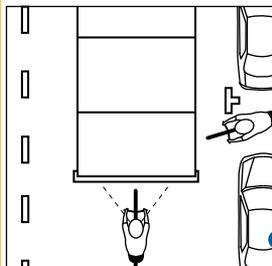
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don't get hit if someone opens their door. And if a car door starts to open into you, yell and brake; swerve out of the way only if you have enough room.

Bikeways: Chicago has two kinds of on-street bikeways: ① Striped bike lanes, and unstriped bike routes marked with a sign ②. Where **bike lanes** appear beside parked cars, ride on the left side of the bike lane—so you don't get hit by opening doors. If you find a parked vehicle in the bike lane: Check back behind you for traffic, signal if you can, then pass the vehicle on its left. Pass far enough away so you don't get hit by an opening door. Report motorists parking or driving in bike lanes to police by calling 311. In **bike routes**, ride just to the right of car traffic as described in "When to Stay Right" on page 15.

Riding with Others:

- ▶ Illinois law says that in traffic no more than two cyclists may ride side-by-side. If you ride next to someone, don't block cars or bikes that want to pass you.
- ▶ When another cyclist turns or changes lanes, don't assume it's safe for you to do the same. Always look behind you before you make a move.
- ▶ When you're with a group stopped at a light, line up single file so you don't block or slow other vehicles.

Blind Spots: To be safe, know where a driver's blind spots are—and stay out of them! ③

Don't follow a vehicle so closely that you can't see potholes or other pavement problems until you're on top of them. ④

If you're following a large vehicle—like a van, truck, or bus—don't follow so closely that it blocks your field of vision. ⑤





Big vehicles coming at you can hide other cars. Slow down or don't proceed until they get out of your line of sight. **6**

INTERSECTIONS AND TURNS

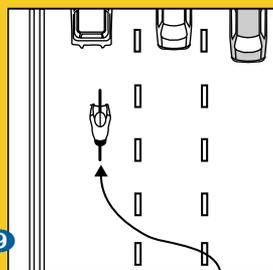
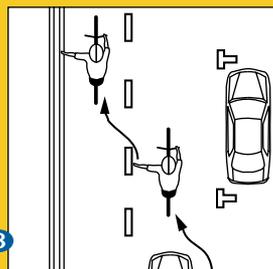
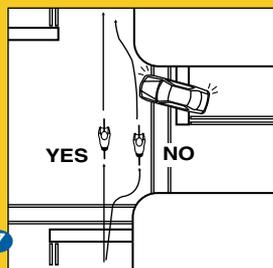
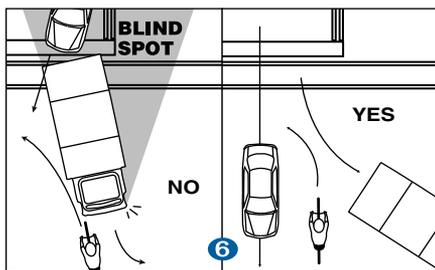
Almost half of car-bike collisions in the city happen at intersections. This section tells you the safest places to put yourself when you reach an intersection, whether you're turning or going straight.

Things to Remember at Intersections:

- ▶ When you're about to cross an intersection, don't veer to the left or right. Try to move in the straightest possible line to where you'll ride on the other side. **7**
- ▶ Don't block crosswalks. It's dangerous to make pedestrians cross farther into the intersection.

Changing Lanes Before a Turn:

- ▶ When you're turning left on a multi-lane street where traffic isn't much faster than you, merge left one lane at a time. **8**
- ▶ Where traffic moves much faster, drivers won't have time to react to you—so it's safest to wait for a gap in traffic and move across all the lanes at once. **9**





Turning Left from a Left-turn Lane:

Follow these steps for making left turns just like cars do.

- ▶ From the right side of the street, look behind you for a gap in traffic. **1** Start looking a half-block or more before the intersection.
- ▶ When traffic allows, signal left and change lanes. **2** If you can't find a gap and you're sure of your skills, get a driver to let you in by making eye contact and pointing. Don't change lanes until you're sure the driver will yield!
- ▶ Go to the middle of the left-turn lane. **3** If there's more than one turn lane, use the one farthest to the right—unless you're making another left turn immediately.
- ▶ If there's a car already waiting to turn left, get behind it. **4** (Never put yourself next to a car in the same turn lane!) Don't be afraid of oncoming cars that are stopped facing you, waiting to turn left.
- ▶ Turn just like a car does. **5** After the turn, move into the right lane—unless another vehicle is there or you're making another left turn immediately.



Turning Left with No Left-turn Lane:

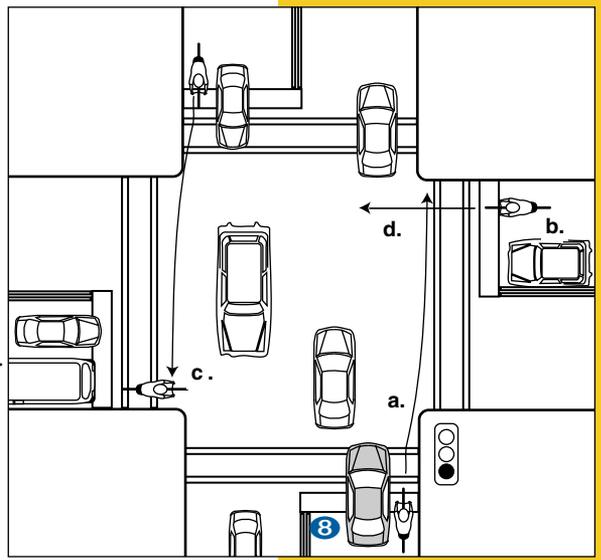
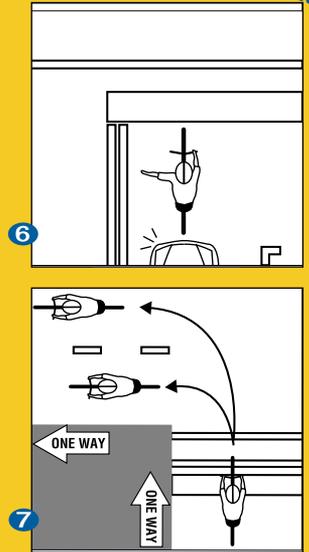
Lane: If there's no turn lane, ride about four feet from the center stripe—far enough out so a left-turning car behind you can't pass until you've finished the turn. **6**

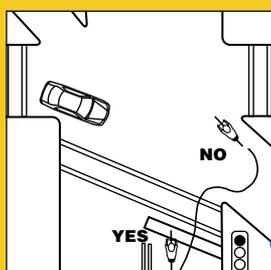
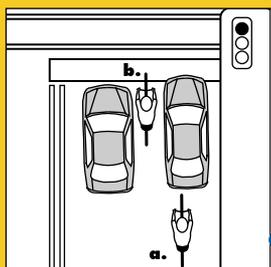
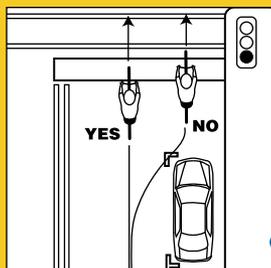
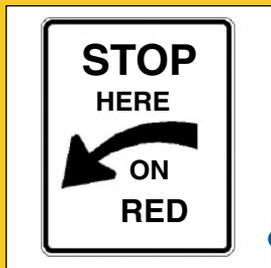
If a car's stopped at the intersection and you can't tell whether it's going to turn left, don't try to pass it on the left. Stay behind it until it gets through the intersection.

When turning left from one one-way street to another, you can turn into the left or right side of the street. **7** In this case, Chicago law allows "left turn on red": you can make a left turn after stopping at a red light and yielding to vehicles on the cross street.

The Box Left Turn: Use the box left turn if you can't merge left before you reach the intersection. **8** Here's how:

- a.** Stay in the right lane and ride across the intersection on the left side of (not in) the crosswalk.
- b.** Just before the opposite corner, check whether there's room for you in the traffic lane to the right of the crosswalk, behind the stop line. If there is, go there and align yourself with traffic.
- c.** If there's no room behind the stop line, stop on the intersection side of the crosswalk and align yourself with traffic.
- d.** When the traffic light changes, move with traffic.





Stop Signs and Turns on Red: At a stop sign or right turn on red, the law says you must stop—not just slow down. **1** Remember to behave as a vehicle operator as follows.

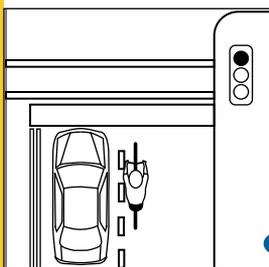
- ▶ If you're at a stop sign and a vehicle on the cross street got there first, let it go through first.
- ▶ If you're turning on red, yield to any vehicles coming at you in your lane.

Don't Veer to the Curb: Don't veer into the right-turn lane as you go through the intersection. **2** You're easier to see if you stay away from the curb. And you won't have to move back over when you get across the intersection.

Cars Stopped in Both Lanes: **3**

- a. When cars are stopped in the left and right lanes, it's safest to stop in the middle of the right lane.
- b. But if the right-lane car is turning right and you're sure of your traffic skills, stop on the left side of the right lane. Stop where drivers on both sides can see you.

Right on Red Allowed: At a red light where right turn on red is allowed, stop on the left side of the right lane—leaving enough room for other right-turning cars. **4** If a car's stopped in the left lane, stop where drivers in both lanes can see you.



Three-way Intersection: At a red light in a three-way intersection, stop on the street you're traveling on. **5** Don't cross the diagonal street to wait on the next corner, because you'll confuse drivers about which way you're really going.

PASSING

In most cases you should pass cars in your lane as you would if driving a car: look behind you, signal left, get into the left lane, and pass. Here are some things to remember about passing:

Pass Left: Pass moving cars on the left when you can. That's where motorists expect you to pass, so that's where they look.

Don't Pass on Turn Side: If a vehicle is about to turn, don't pass it on the side it's turning toward.

Opening Doors: When you pass a stopped car, watch out for the driver or a passenger opening their door. Pass three feet from the car, or pass on the side with no passengers.





Cars Speeding Up: If you're passing a car and it speeds up, stay in your lane and slow down. After the car passes you, look back, signal, then merge back behind the car.

Squeezing between Cars: 6 Say you're in a traffic jam with cars backed up for at least a block. It's safest (and most legal) to get into line with the cars and wait it out. But if you do squeeze between the cars to get through, here's what to watch out for:

- ▶ A car door can open in front of you, on the left or right, at any time. Look inside cars for passengers who might get out. Keep your hands on your brake levers.
- ▶ When pedestrians cross the street in the middle of a traffic jam, the last thing they expect is you zooming down on them between the cars. Watch out for pedestrians, especially when passing trucks or buses that you can't see in front of.
- ▶ If a space opens up in the traffic jam—and you're near a driveway or cross street—watch for a car from the opposite direction turning into your path.

Passing CTA Buses:

Here are a few tips for passing buses at intersections or bus stops:

- ▶ When you come to a bus that's nearing or stopped at a bus stop, don't pass on the right. 7 You might get squeezed into the curb or hit a passenger.
- ▶ When you pass on the left of a bus with its rear stuck out in traffic, look around carefully. And pass the front of the bus with plenty of room in case it pulls out suddenly.
- ▶ Don't pass a bus to turn right immediately in front of it. Buses sometimes speed up suddenly or start moving before the traffic light turns green.

Highway Ramps: When an exit ramp merges from the right, first look over your right shoulder to see what's coming. If a lot of cars are merging, stay straight so they pass before you on the right. 8 As you move farther, they'll pass behind you on the left. 9 If there's a break in the merging traffic, move over to the right as soon as you can. 10

Passing Cyclists: Cyclists can swerve faster than cars—so when you pass a bicycle, pass at least three feet away on the bicycle's left (not the right). Always shout "on your left!" before you pass so nobody's surprised.

