

## MOUNTAIN BIKE 101

### Mountain Bike Basics

-**Body Position** - bent elbows, soft hands, more upright body, saddle not too high, balls of feet on pedals, cleat set-up (toes in or out – ride around and change positioning when first trying cleats).

-**Shift** before you have to. Practice shifting the gears on your bike and get comfortable with it. Shifting to a lower gear makes it easier to pedal.

-Always **look** where you want to go and never look at what you don't want to hit! Looking ahead on the trail is critical, especially with cornering and obstacles.

-**Standing position coasting** - coast while standing on pedals without sitting on the seat. Keep your arms bent and don't lock your knees, put your pedals at the 3 and 9 o'clock positions. Experiment with shifting your body towards the rear of the bike. You will want to be in this rear shifted standing position when you coast over obstacles or when the trail gets rough. You should be standing on your pedals with your knees bent and your seat should be between your legs.

-**Standing position pedaling** - pedal while standing on your bike. Lift yourself off the seat, stand on your pedals and crank them around. Try this in higher gears on the flat and in lower gears on the hills.

### Braking

-**The more weight a tire carries, the more braking power it has** and thus when going downhill, your front wheel carries more weight than the rear.

-The **front brake helps keep you in control without going into a skid** (don't overdo it and accidentally toss yourself over the bars!) Disc vs. traditional brakes.

-When **descending, shift your weight back over the rear wheel**, thus increasing your rear braking power. This balances the power of both brakes and gives you maximum control.

-When **traveling at a high rate of speed, feather brakes** gradually and equally using both the front and rear brakes together.

-If you need to **slow down suddenly** to avoid something: Shift your body weight as far back as possible, lower your body as low as you can, and squeeze front and rear brakes evenly. Avoid hitting the brake hard if your body is not properly aligned with your bike or if you are making a turn.

## Hill Climbing

**-Shift down before you begin to climb** - ease up on your pedaling to decrease pressure on the chain. Find the gear best for you that matches the terrain and steepness of each climb. It is difficult to shift to a smaller ring in the front in the middle of a hill so downshift before the hill. Shifting in the middle of a steep hill will also result in lost momentum. Shift down on the rear cog as needed, but take a softer pedal stroke as you shift down.

**-Typically stay seated** as long as you can. Standing out of the saddle helps when climbing steep hills with a road bike, but on dirt, standing can cause your rear tire to lose its grip and spin out. Climbing requires traction, especially in loose terrain.

Bend your elbows and shift your weight front or back to maintain traction. You want to lower your center of gravity and distribute your weight evenly. If the rear tire starts to slip, slide back on the saddle. If the front wheel starts to lift off the ground, slide forward on your saddle and lower your body toward the bike. Keep even pressure on your handlebars.

-If you do **stand out of the saddle**, make sure to use mostly your lower body and not bounce with your upper body as you'll lose momentum and possibly traction if you have a front fork or full suspension.

**-Keep pedaling** to keep the pressure on, and don't let up on those pedals. The slower you go through rough trail sections, the harder you will work.

**-Look as far ahead as possible.** Fix your eyes on your chosen path and maintain your momentum. Typically it is better to power your way over small obstacles on your chosen path, than to suddenly change direction. This breaks momentum and upsets your balance which could result in a walk up the hill or possibly a fall.

## Descending

- **Shift into the big chainring** before a bumpy descent to keep the chain from bouncing off the bike.

- **Relax** and stay loose on the bike - bend elbows and don't clench your grip. Your elbows need to absorb the shock, while your hands should have a firm but controlled grip on the bars to keep things steady.

**-Rise above the saddle** when riding down bumpy, technical descents. Stand on the pedals and straddle the seat with your weight slightly back, allowing your legs and knees to absorb the trail instead of your bum. Typically I grip the saddle with the inside of my thighs so as not to get bounced around. The steeper the terrain, the farther back

your weight should be on the bike. For super steep, technical descents or downhill some people drop their saddles a bit as it lowers your center of gravity.

**-Keep your pedals parallel to the ground.** The front pedal should be slightly higher so that it doesn't catch on small rocks or logs.

**- Feather your brakes** on a fast descent. Too much front brake can send you over the handlebars and too much rear brake can cause the rear wheel to slide out. If your weight is back, your rear wheel will have more traction.

**-Don't oversteer or lose control.** Mountain biking is much like downhill skiing, since you must shift your weight from side-to-side down narrow, bumpy descents. Your bike will have the tendency to track in the direction you look and follow the slight shifts and leans of your body, so allow your shoulders to guide you through each turn and around each obstacle. Think about the direction in which you wish to go, not steering.

**-Stay focused.** Many descents require your utmost concentration and focus just to reach the bottom.

## Cornering

**-Brake gradually to a safe speed before entering the turn** then accelerate as you come out of the turn. Don't begin braking when already into a turn.

**-Higher speeds = more leaning** of bike and weight on the outside pedal.

**-Slow speeds = more steering** of bike with the upper body and actual turning of handlebars.

**-Always look where you want to go!**

## Obstacles

-Riding over, or "cleaning", an obstacle such as a log takes practice. **Anticipation is important** and start small. Slow down and determine whether you will have to ride around it, over it, or even dismount and walk around it. Riding over it will take some quick weight shifts while staying centered (side-to-side balance).

**-Speed up to gain momentum and lower your body slightly.**

-Just before you reach the log have your **pedals level, quickly shift your weight back, push down towards the handlebars** to get some spring from the front tire, and lift up on the handlebars to get the front wheel over.

-As the rear wheel makes contact **quickly shift your weight forward to help the rear wheel over and lighten your weight on the pedals** if you can.

-While doing this maneuver **don't grab the front brakes, keep centered and maintain momentum** with a final push on the pedals.

- **Absorb any bump with your legs** and continue on forward.

-**Practice on curbs** - stand and coast straight off the curb from the upper level to the lower level at a moderate speed. Stay in position and absorb the drop with your arms and legs. Then approach straight at a curb in your primary standing position from the lower level at a slow to moderate speed. Practice the skills listed above.

Have fun on the trails and safe riding!