

Join the Pack

You'll become a better cyclist when you start riding with a group. Here's how to make your first experience great.—*Christine Bucher* (www.bicycling.com) (May 2014)

Observe

Every ride has different customs. Watch how the regulars conduct themselves in the pack and follow suit. If everyone signals turns by sticking out an arm and pointing, for instance, do the same.

Hold Your Line

The group's safety depends on predictable behavior, so [maintain as straight a path](#) as you can, no swerving. You obviously don't want to be hit by a car—but running into your new friends isn't any fun either.

Avoid Wheel Overlap

Don't creep up on the rider in front of you. It's called "[half wheeling](#)," and an unexpected move by you or the cyclist up ahead can result in a crash. It can also be perceived as a challenge to those behind you.

Pass on the Left

No one will expect you on the right. Besides, the shoulder may be covered in broken glass, gravel, or other debris that can [give you a flat](#), and riding on it is unpredictable and potentially dangerous.

Resist the Urge to Surge

You're here to be social, gain the benefits of [group training](#), and most of all, have fun. If you're always 100 feet in front of the others, none of that will happen. You might need to find a faster group.

Sit In

If you're struggling to keep up, move a little to the left (if traffic allows) and let yourself float to the rear. It's perfectly fine to stay there. If you need to drop off or turn back, be sure to tell someone.

Off-Bike Etiquette

Introduce Yourself

When everyone is milling around before heading out, make casual conversation and let people know [you're new to the group](#) experience. Ask about the route so you know what to expect regarding distance and terrain. And meet the ride leader. This person controls the pace and will want to know you're there.

Hang Out

After you thank the group, stick around for postride camaraderie. Acknowledge personally anyone who gave you special assistance. If you borrowed a tube or CO cartridge, replace it or reimburse the owner.

Pay it Forward

When the day comes that you're the group-ride veteran, remember to take a new rider under your wing.

It's OK To...

1 Feel Apprehensive. You're in a new situation with new people. Remember: each of them was new once.

2 Yell out if you have a mechanical. Most groups will stop and help.

3 [Practice skills](#) beforehand. For example, if you can't look behind you without veering into traffic, work on that before joining a ride.