



Common Language

Safety is one of the most important issues we face as cyclists. Many people know the laws related to cycling and have taken the time to add reflective materials, lights, bells and other safety devices to their equipment. We also spend a lot of time picking out helmets, clothes, bikes, and other gear to keep us safe. However, many cyclists spend precious little time learning how to communicate with others when riding.

Whether you are alone or in a group, ensuring that other roadway users know what you are going to do is essential and, it may mean the difference between life and death. Every time you act unpredictably or don't take the time to communicate what you are going to do you risk getting hit by a car or taking out other riders you are with on a group ride. Often this could be avoided through proper communication. The key is to take the time to adopt and utilize a common set of verbal and non-verbal signals. This way, nobody is confused by the intent of a rider and avoiding incidents becomes very predictable. Below is a list of verbal and non-verbal signals you can use to ride safe.

Verbal Signals

- Car Back - A car is behind the group, traveling in the same direction.
- Car Up - A car is approaching the group, traveling in the opposite direction.
- Passing - A car is passing the group, traveling in the same direction.
- Slowing - A rider is slowing down.
- Stopping – A rider is coming to a full stop such as for a stop sign or stoplight.
- Rough Road- The road surface is rough (i.e. uneven and cracked pavement, but not holes).
- Gravel - The road surface is loose or there is sand, dirt or other similar debris that could be hazardous as you ride over it.
- Hole - There is a hole in the road that should be avoided.
- Dog - A dog is ahead. Riders need to be prepared to take evasive action.
- On Your Left - You are on the person's left hand side. Use this anytime you are alongside another rider, even if it is just a few inches.
- On Your Right - You are on the person's right hand side. Use this anytime you are alongside another rider, even if it is just a few inches.
- Hold Your Line - Means you should not move left or right as you are riding but rather keep riding along the same line that you are currently on.
- Runner/Walker/Bikes up - Means one of these entities is ahead of you in the road and that you will need to move over in order to pass them.
- Pulling Off or Off - You are pulling off the front of a paceline.
- Look - When going through intersections be sure to let others know that they need to look and be sure it is safe to proceed. Use this rather than saying "clear."



Visual Signals

- Stopping - Use your left hand and put it down behind you with your palm facing backward.
- Obstacles - On the side that there is an obstacle, point to it as you approach and use the appropriate verbal command such as hole or rough road.
- Left Turn - Use your left hand and extend it out straight, pointing to the left where you are turning.
- Right Turn - Use your right hand and extend it out straight, pointing to the right where you are turning.
- Passing Riders or Moving out to Avoid something in the Road - Any time you need to move either left or right to avoid an obstacle, pass slower riders, or make a movement that is not a turn, use your left or right hand, extend it down and behind you, and move your hand from one side to the other in a waving motion to let people know the direction they need to move to get away from the oncoming obstacle.
- Pulling Off the Front of a Paceline - There are several hand/body signals that all work in this situation. You can use your hand with a waving motion from back to front; you can flick your fingers, extending them out from the handlebars; or you can use your elbow by moving it from back to front in a waving type motion. Whatever signal you use, be sure that others in the group understand what you are doing.
- Pointing - Using your hand, point to the location on the road where you want to go. It is most often used in group rides when you want to move into a spot in a pace-line. First point as if asking a question and then wait until given the ok to move before moving to the new spot. It can also be used to let others know of obstacles in the road, but should also be accompanied by a verbal signal coupled with pointing at the obstacle. Finally point to a location on the road where you are seeking to go so car drivers know what you want to do. Again, be sure to point first, make sure it is clear, and then initiate your move.

The bottom line is that communication is one of the most important safety measure you can take. Whether it is another cyclist, a pedestrian or a motorist, those around you need to know what you are doing. By ensuring that your actions are completely understood and nobody is surprised, you can stay safer on the road every day.

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