Rules of The Road

Obey Traffic Signs and Signals
In order to be taken seriously, bicyclists must obey traffic laws and be courteous to other road users. Every time a bicyclist runs through a red light, ride in a pack, impede traffic or ride the wrong way, they interfere with the notion that bicyclists do not belong on the road. Always ride in the same direction as traffic, never against it. Follow the rules of the road.

Use Hand Signals
Hand signals tell motorists what you intend to do on the road. Signaling is required at least 100 feet before a turn or stop unless you need both hands to control the bicycle. If you have an available hand, let drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists know where you’re going. Signal as a matter of law, courtesy and safety/negotiation.

Ride Consistently
Ride as close as practical to the right. Exceptions to this rule include: when traveling at the normal speed of traffic, when avoiding hazardous conditions, when preparing to make a left turn, or when using a one-way street.

Use Lights at Night
Use a strong headlight and rear light and/or red reflector at night and only visibility is poor. Wear light-colored clothing with reflective tape for extra protection. If you ride in an area with few streetlights, a solid beam front light or flashing LED light will help illuminate the way.

Ride Single File
Be safe and ride single file. Bicyclists can ride side-by-side when they don’t impede the normal movement of traffic.

On-Street Markings

Using Bike Lanes
Bike Lanes give bicyclists and motorists their own, assigned and separate spaces on the road. A Bike lane is a portion of the roadway that has been designated by striping and pavement markings for use by bicyclists. Bike lane markings include a solid line and a symbol of a person on a bike with an arrow above to indicate the proper direction for travel. Bicyclists should always ride in the direction indicated by the arrow painted on the street.

Sharrow
A “Sharrow” is a pavement marking that includes a bike stencil with two arrows above it. These markings are painted on streets that are good for bike traffic, but are too narrow for separate bike lanes. Sharrows mark the edge of bike lanes and indicate to motorists and bicyclists that they must use the same space on the street as they travel. Sharrows are also used in locations where a bike lane ends and bicyclists must merge with other traffic.

Safety Tips for Bicyclists

Avoid Road Hazards
Watch out for sewer grates, oil, pavement, slippery manhole covers, gravel and ice. Cross railroad tracks at right angles because those tracks can be slippery when wet. Slowing down in tricky areas decreases your stopping/braking distance, which gives you more time to react to the unexpected.

Choose the Best Way to Turn Left
There are two ways to make a left turn:
1) Like a motorist: look back over your shoulder, signal, move into left lane and turn,
2) Like a pedestrian: ride straight to the median crossover, then walk your bike across the intersection.

Carry Identification
If you get into car accident or if stopped for a traffic infraction. 

Dress Appropriately
Wear a hard-shell helmet whenever you ride. Wear light-colored clothes at night to make yourself as visible as possible. Also, layers can be key to staying comfortable when riding in wet or cold weather. Leg bands are a cheap and easy way to keep your pants free of chain grease.

Don’t Pass On the Right
Drivers may not look for or see a bicyclist passing on the right. You could be seriously injured if a motorist did not see you. When stopping in traffic, it’s safer and more courteous to hold your place in the line of traffic.

Go Slow On Sidewalks and Multi-Use Paths
Pedestrians have the right of way on sidewalks. You must give an audible signal when you pass, using either a bell or your voice. Cross driveways and intersections at a walker’s pace and seek carefully for traffic. Bicyclists are not allowed to ride on sidewalks in downtown Columbia.

For more information on bicycling in Columbia, contact: www.getaboutcolumbia.com