

Shifting and Hills

Caveat - It's much easier to discuss this while on the bike where you get immediate feedback on how your bike shifts and it's a lot easier to describe on the bike or with a bike to point to.

Not knowing what you do and don't know, I'm starting with basics and then will get into some finer points

Basic info:

Pedaling speed – you put much less strain on your knees if you “spin” (pedal at least 80 rpm). It also is a lot easier to maintain speed and endurance. The pedals should feel relatively easy to push. If it feels relatively hard to pedal and you're pedaling slowly, that is not very efficient and you'll get tired a lot faster. Try shifting into an easier gear and pedaling faster.

You don't really want to have the chain at too much of an angle - bikes don't shift as well and it puts more strain on the chain and parts. In general you don't want to be in the smallest ring in the front and the smallest cog in the back. There should be another gear that would be the same as that without as much angle to the chain (such as maybe middle front ring, middle rear cog). You also don't want to be in the largest ring in the front and largest cog in the back. There also should be another combination that would give you the same gearing in the middle ring.

When you shift here's some rules of thumb:

For easier pedaling = shift so the chain moves closer to the bike

For harder pedaling = shift so the chain moves farther from the bike

Large changes = left shifter (front chainrings)

Small changes = right shifter (rear cogs)

Front - going from large rings to small rings makes it easier to pedal (moves chain closer to the bike)

Rear - going from large cogs to small cogs makes it harder to pedal (moves the chain farther from the bike)

If you shift in the wrong direction (i.e. you wanted it to be easier and it got harder), just shift back. It's not a big deal. It's how we learn.

To be proficient at hills, you first need to be comfortable in how your bike shifts. Practice shifting on flat roads first.

The general concept in shifting when climbing a hill is to shift before you have to. You want to shift so your cadence (pedaling speed) remains steady. As you climb the hill, shift so the pedaling remains fairly steady and so you can maintain your momentum. Shift too late and it puts a lot of strain on the chain and shifters and sometimes won't shift. Shift too early and you'll lose your momentum.

Every hill is different:

Some hills are long and gradual - in this case you can do several small change shifts (rear) before you make large change shifts (front). You will want to shift the front before you get to the last three (larger) cogs; you may have to shift the rear back up (to smaller cogs in the rear) when you make the large shift in the front (to smaller ring in the front). That way you still will have some opportunity to make small adjustments and not be in your lowest gear and won't lose too much momentum.

Some hills are short and steep - in this case you may need to make large change shifts first (front) and then shift the back.

I generally coast down hills. In my opinion, in hilly terrain you expend a lot of energy climbing and need the breaks to recover. Plus that's the payoff for climbing the hill. But there are some hills that are roller coasters and you'll want to keep some of the momentum on the downhills so that you can get as least part way up the hill before you have to start working hard. In this case you'll definitely need to shift up as you're descending the hill so that when you do start pedaling you can carry some of your downhill momentum up the hill. Like I said every hill is different.

Once you crest a hill, you'll need to get the bike gearing readjusted for the downhill otherwise once you start pedalling you'll be spinning like a hamster. The easiest way is to move the chain to a larger front ring and then make small adjustments to the rear.

Hopefully this is helpful info. Feel free to contact me at 777-9630 if you'd like more info or want some additional tips or if you'd like to try to schedule an evening ride.

Connie