

LEARN TO SKATE USA

The First Day of Skating

We're going to let you in on a little secret. The first time you skate—you're going to fall. We all fall. Olympic medalists have fallen hundreds of times. Thousands even. The best part, everyone gets right back up better than ever.

Anything is possible on your first day, but you can be ready for it. Prepare yourself with this guide for whatever expected and unexpected happens. You'll feel comfortable. You'll have safety in mind. And you'll have more fun knowing you're comfortable and safe.

Your first day will then be a fantastic day. Just like the hundreds coming after it.

ARRIVE EARLY

Show up a good 20 minutes before class kicks off. Check in at the registration desk and then pick up skates at the rental counter (if needed).

WEAR THE RIGHT SKATING ATTIRE

Safety Helmets

All beginning skaters should wear them. The Consumer Products Safety Commission offers guidelines regarding different activities. Skaters should use one of these recommended helmets: ASTM F1447; Snell B-90A, B-95, N-94. Check the fine print for certifications.

Do

- Make sure the helmet fits comfortably and snug.
- Wear the helmet low in front to protect the forehead.
- Keep it level and immobile. Avoid tilting back or pulling low.
- Secure chinstrap buckle. Check the adjustment often for protection, in case of a fall or collision.
- Replace your helmet immediately if signs or damage are visible.
- Clean the helmet with mild soap and water only.
- Store the helmet in a cool, dry place.
- Have the skater present during helmet purchase to test and ensure a good fit.

Don't

- Wear anything under the helmet.
- Attach anything to the helmet.
- Wear a helmet that does not fit or cannot be adjusted properly.
- Leave a helmet in direct sunlight or in a car on a sunny day.

Clothing

Comfort and the ability to move about freely is an absolute must for new skaters. Plenty of layers along with a jacket should be worn. While it's easy to assume it's warmer indoors, arenas do keep thermostats set at a brisk 50 degrees. Sweatpants or warm-up pants are better than bulkier snow pants. Skaters should discard layers as they get warmer.

Gloves and mittens

They're not to keep your hands warm; they protect hands as skaters learn to fall and stand back up. Lost and found boxes sometimes hide a few extra pairs skaters could borrow, if they forgot to bring some.

Socks

As for feet, one pair of lightweight socks or thinner tights work best. Bulky, thick socks limit support and create uncomfortable bumps inside your boots.

Fitting skates

Try on skates until the most comfortable pair is found. The rule of thumb: The closer the fit, the more control. Boots should be snug, giving toes just enough wiggle room without pinching. Feet should be immobile with the heel far back in the boot. Solid support is also necessary because staying upright takes a considerable amount of strength.

Note: Be aware that rental skates are designed to fit everyone. Shoe size also does not necessarily match skate size.

Lacing skates

First tap the heel way back into the boot. Gently pull the tongue up and secure it straight up and down before tucking it beside the foot. Pull the second or third sets of laces from the bottom tightly to close the boot well over the front of the foot.

Laces should be snug through the ankle area and bottom two sets of hooks. The top two hooks can be looser to keep the ankle flexible. Cross extra laces over hooks neatly. Avoid winding it around the skates as loose flying bows often lead to accidents.

Now test it. Stick a finger between the back of the boot and leg to show skates were well laced. If the skate hurts or feels uncomfortable, relace and adjust. Practice walking in skates before entering the ice.

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MAKE THE MOST OUT OF EVERY GROUP LESSON.

Express preferred learning styles

- Ask instructors to break down skills to a few steps that apply to the skater's most comfortable style of learning.
- Visual learners need to see the skill demonstrated.
- Auditory learners need to hear the skill described.
- Tactile learners need to perform the skill to properly execute it.

Be patient

Group classes are great for building a solid foundation for developing skills. There are no shortcuts or fast tracks. If skaters do not feel comfortable with a particular skill, they need to speak up and tell the instructor to go at a slower, safer pace.

Be polite

Think about the safety of other student skaters in the class. Stay in control and within boundaries of the class to avoid interfering with others.

Skaters should:

- Maintain a smart, safe distance from other skaters.
- Stay close to the wall to wait for help and instructions.
- Maintain a safe speed.
- Stay with the class and instructor in their designated 'classroom' area.

Recognize class and session expectations

Parents can observe classes of all levels, skills and ages from the stands or designated areas. You should avoid standing in doorways or near the players' benches.

For beginners, marching across the ice is the first skill taught. Some skaters push and glide with ease. Others will play the cautious card by taking baby steps, and that's good. Learning to fall and stand right back up will also take precedence. Instructors will spend several minutes on day one perfecting this skill.

After session one, all beginning skaters should gain confidence and demonstrate the ability to skate reasonably well on their own, get up from falling, attempting to stop while moving slowly, and navigate a public session well.

Repeating a class is not unusual for skaters. All skills need to ladder up to one another in order to move skaters up the next level, so mastering skills first is necessary. Instructors should provide written feedback on skater's progress. This should include accomplishments, opportunities to improve, and recommendations on which class to register for next. These evaluations should be given on one of the final classes of the session.

Makeup policy

Ask the director about the program's makeup policy, should the skater miss a lesson. Many group programs offer a makeup session if a similar class is offered on a day shortly after. Special accommodations may be permissible.

Set up supplemental private or semi-private lessons

For those seeking more attention, you may hire a coach for a private or semi-private lesson. A booster lesson may be a good thing if assistance is needed to master a specific skill. If interested, inquire about private lessons with the skating director.

Set up extra practice time

Practicing is the road to improving. After each lesson, skaters should practice the skills taught at least once.

Use public skating sessions or ask if there are club-sponsored or skating sessions open. Obtain a list of things to practice from the instructor, or bring a record book to write down what needs improvement.

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