

Bike Buying Guide

What kind of bike do I need?

The first thing you should decide is what you intend to use the bike for. If you plan to use the bike for commuting, consider the length of your commute in miles and the terrain you will be on. Road bikes are the fastest and generally best for commuting via roads. However, they will not be suitable for bumpy sidewalks or extended sections of gravel. Remember – this bike will help you keep healthy and active and will actually improve your self-esteem and success in school. Or so you should tell yourself :)

Bike	Tire thickness	Weight	Speed	Suitable for gravel	Suitable for road
Mountain	Thick	Heavy	Medium-Slow	Yes	Yes
Hybrid	Medium	Medium	Medium	Yes	Yes
Road	Thin	Light	Fast	No	Yes

How much do I need to spend?

Again, consider what you intend to use the bike for. The better quality bike you purchase, the more you will enjoy riding it.

- <\$150: Spending less than this threshold will get you where you need to go, but may have components that break down easily. If your commute is short and you don't plan to use your bike very much, this will be okay.
- \$150-300: Generally the range you can expect to spend for good commuting bikes. If your bike will be your primary mode of transportation, you should definitely plan to spend closer to \$300 or more.
- \$300-500: If you are interested in going for bike rides on the trails on the weekends or otherwise using your bike as a hobby, a used road bike in this range will be well worth your money. A bike accurately priced in this range will be suitable for rides of 20+ miles.

Used or new?

- For those on a budget, generally a used bike will be your better option.
- If you aren't comfortable evaluating the condition of a used bike and want to ensure you get quality care, you might want to purchase a new bike so you can ensure you will get a good quality bike and the appropriate warranty and protections.

What size bike?

- Generally, bikes come in sizes – the frame is measured in inches for mountain and hybrid bikes, or centimeters for road bikes.

- Check out this website for help determining your size:
http://bicycling.about.com/od/howtoride/a/bike_sizing.htm

Where to shop?

- Rice Bikes – Rice Bikes has eclectic bikes for sale in a wide range of qualities. They also offer a bike rental program on a semester/year basis.
- Daniel Boone Cycles – this bike shop in the Museum District has a lot of nice used bikes.
- Craigslist -- Great deals and some gems CAN be found with the right searching. Be careful of scams. Generally with Craigslist, you need to have cash ready and be able to look at bikes on short notice because the good bikes sell quickly. Your best bet is to ask an experienced cyclist for help with this!
- Houston ReCycle facebook page - has listings of used bikes (high to med cost range)
- Facebook Marketplace - simply search for “bike”. You can narrow down by distance, and get notifications when there is a good deal.
- Rice Students Selling Stuff Facebook group - good deals offered by Rice students may pop up near the end or the beginning of the semesters.

Road bike considerations:

If you have decided to purchase a road bike, here are some additional considerations to keep in mind when you are shopping.

- **Components:** Think of components on a bike as the engine to a car – better components means a more efficient, faster bike but also is more expensive. Shimano is a common brand for bike components. The hierarchy of Shimano components, from lowest-quality to highest quality, is:
 - Shimano Claris
 - Shimano Sora
 - Shimano Tiagra
 - Shimano 105
 - Shimano Ultegra
 - Shimano Dura Ace

For regular commuting, Shimano Claris will be more than sufficient. For recreational use as well, there’s no need to have nicer components than Sora or Tiagra unless you really plan on racing with this bike, in which case you should be talking to the cycling team for more details.

Helpful tip: If buying used, check components (not frame) with a magnet. Think rims, brakes, hubs, etc. Steel components are generally lower quality compared to aluminium. Good quality frames, on the other hand, can be made of steel. Source: [ParkTool youtube](#) page.

- **Frame material:** Bike frames are generally made out of steel, aluminum, or carbon. New bikes are not made with steel anymore, so if you see a bike with a steel frame, you can assume it is over 15 years old. Steel is the heaviest material. Aluminum is the next lightest, and is more than suitable for any purpose from commuting to racing in Beer Bike. Carbon is the lightest material, and comes on higher end bikes with a hefty price tag. Again, if you’re considering carbon, head to the cycling team. And don’t leave your bike locked up outside!
- **Terminology:**

- **Downtube shifters:** Downtube shifters are located on the frame rather than the handlebars. These are found on older bikes. They can make shifting a little difficult.
- **Single speed:** A single speed bike is one that has only one gear. Typically a single-speed bike is more than fine for any commute in Houston because of our flat roads. A benefit of single-speed bikes is they are lighter (because they lack gears) and need less maintenance (because there are fewer things that can break).
- **Fixie:** A fixie has only one speed and also has the brakes connected to the gears. Instead of braking with your hands on the handlebars, you brake by pushing backwards on the pedals. This also means that you can't coast when riding a fixie; you always have to be pedaling.

Men's vs. Women's bikes:

Some bikes come in men's and women's versions, with the geometry different based on body types, but the differences are typically very minor. It's perfectly fine to get either one as long as it fits your height. In some instances, the only difference between the men's and women's version is the paint scheme.

Other things you will need:

- **Helmet: \$30+**
 - All helmets meet the same safety standards. The more you pay, the lighter/more breathable a helmet will be.
 - Wearing a helmet is not required by law for those over age 18 in Houston, but it is strongly recommended for your own safety.
- **Bike lights: \$15-40+ each**
 - In the state of Texas you are required to have a white light on the front of your bike, and a red rear reflector or light on the rear of your bike when riding at dawn, dusk, or night.
 - It is best to invest in quality lights that are rechargeable via USB. Many good options are available on Amazon. Front lights should be at least 300 lumens to ensure the road in front of you will be lit up.
 - Some helmets come with the option of purchasing an attachable light to add to the back and make you more visible on the road. Consider this as an extra safety feature. (ex: [helmet](#) with [magnetic light](#))
 - Remember to remove your lights when you leave your bike locked up, as they can be easily removed and stolen.
 - Example of good [front](#) light and [rear](#) light
- **Floor Pump: \$25-50**
 - This is not a necessity if you can make it to a bike-maintenance stand frequently, but is very useful to have at home.
 - Ensure you know what kind of valves the inner tubes inside your tires have: Presta or Schrader, and that the floor pump matches this.
 - When you purchase your bike, be sure to ask what pressure the tires should be filled up to. Sometimes text on the tires will tell you this as well. Keeping your tires filled with air will make your ride more comfortable and reduce your chances of getting a flat tire.
 - [Example](#) of good floor pump

- Bike lock: \$15-25
 - Get a U-lock, not a cable lock. Cable locks can be easily cut and bike thefts on the Rice campus usually occur to bikes locked up with cable locks. U-locks are much more secure. RUPD sells U-locks for ~\$10 (until supplies last)
 - Consider getting a U-lock + cable ([example](#)) for extra security and versatility with different types of bike racks.
 - Always lock *both* your bike's front wheel and the frame to the bike rack. If you don't lock the front wheel, the front wheel can be stolen. If you only lock the front wheel, the rest of your bike can be stolen.