

POSITIONS

Center

Rule set: Written to NHL rules. Where IIHF, USA Hockey or typical rec-league rules differ in a way that changes how you play, it is flagged inline. **Playing in Britain? The IIHF flags are yours** — every level of UK hockey runs the IIHF book, amended locally; see [UK and England Rules](#).

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Overview

- Key** You are the engine of your line — connect the wingers, support the defence and direct play from end to end
- Position** All three zones and the full width of the rink — you work more of the ice than any other position
- Priority** Be a two-way player — contribute offensively and be the most defensively responsible forward on the ice
- Key** You are your team's primary faceoff taker
- Convention** "The centre skates the furthest" is coaching craft, never measured — no study separates centres from wingers on distance
- Key** Measured, it goes the other way — defencemen cover 29% more skating in total and are on the ice 47% longer (Lignell et al. 2018)

You are the engine of your line. The center works **more of the ice** than any other position — the full width of the rink and all three zones, connecting the wingers, supporting the defence, and directing play from end to end. You are a two-way player — expected to contribute offensively and be the most defensively responsible forward on the ice. You are also your team's primary faceoff taker, which is a defining responsibility of the position (see "Other Situations" at the end). Your awareness, communication, and decision-making are what make your line work.

⚠️ Say "more of the ice", not "more ice" — the familiar version of this claim is **measured, and it is wrong**. "The centre covers more ice than any other position" is repeated everywhere in coaching talk. Two things are true about it:

- **No study separates centres from wingers on skating distance at all.** The external-load literature splits players only into forwards and defence, so the centre-versus-winger half of the claim is **coaching craft** — plausible, widely believed, never measured.
- **The forwards-versus-defence half has been measured, and it goes the other way.** Lignell and colleagues tracked 36 NHL players through a game and found that "*defensemen (D) covered **29% more** ($p \leq 0.05$) skating in total than forwards (F) and were on the ice **47% longer**. However, F performed **54% more** ($p \leq 0.05$) high-intensity skating per minute than defensemen.*" The figures used elsewhere in this guide agree on the workload direction: defencemen average **24.0 shifts a game against 19.4 for forwards** (2024-25, skaters with 41+ games — Conditioning and Recovery owns that computation) and slightly longer shifts, **49.3 s against 47.6 s** (2025-26, all skaters — Defender owns that one). The two figures come from different seasons and different samples, so read them as two separate computations pointing the same way, not as one dataset.

So what survives is a claim about **territory, not mileage**: the centre's job spans all three zones and the full width of the rink, which no other position's does. What does not survive is "the centre skates the furthest" — a defenceman almost certainly does.

(You will also hear that the one genuinely centre-specific **measured** workload difference is *shorthanded ice time*. **There is no published measurement behind that either** — it is plausible, since penalty-kill units are usually built around two centres, but nothing measures it. Treat it as coaching craft like the rest of the centre-versus-winger comparison.)

A Note on Language

- Key** High means toward the blue line you're facing, low means toward the goal line
- Action** "Swing low" means get below the hash marks, not merely below the puck
- Key** Strong-side is the puck's side — your defensive-zone job is the only one that switches sides every time the puck does
- Key** The high slot, between the dots and the top of the circles, is your patch; the goalmouth belongs to the weak-side defenceman
- Never** Drift onto the half-wall — that is your wingers' ice, and it collapses your line's spacing
- Key** F1/F2/F3 are forecheck roles defined by order of arrival — not positions, and not people

Every line, zone and named area of the ice is defined in Rink Map and Glossary, which is the dictionary for this guide. Read it once and everything below gets easier. Listed here are only the terms a centre uses in a particular sense, or leans on so heavily that they need saying again.

- **High / low.** High means toward the blue line you're facing, low means toward the goal line. You will be told to "swing low" more than any other player: it means get **below the hash marks**, not merely below the puck.
- **Strong-side / weak-side.** Strong-side is the side the puck is on; weak-side is the other. These matter more to you than to anyone else, because your defensive-zone job is the only one that switches sides every time the puck does.
- **The slot, the high slot, the goalmouth.** The slot is the area between the two faceoff circles in front of the net. The **high slot** is its upper layer — between the dots and the top of the circles — and it is *your* patch in your own zone. The **goalmouth** is the immediate net front, and that belongs to the weak-side defenceman. Keeping these two apart is most of defensive-zone centre play.
- **Half-wall.** The boards roughly level with the faceoff dot. This is *not* your ice — it is where your wingers live, and drifting onto it is the commonest way a centre collapses his own line's spacing.
- **Forecheck.** Pressuring the opposition in their own end, trying to win the puck back rather than retreat. **F1 / F2 / F3** are **roles on a forecheck defined by order of arrival — not positions, and not people**. F1 is whoever reaches the puck first, F2 the second support, F3 the highest and the safety. F1 is *often* the centre and this document describes that common case, but if a winger gets there first then the winger is F1 and you are F2 — immediately, without swapping back. See Forechecking Systems.

A note on the headings below. Each zone is broken into the same four situations. The fourth — *Without the Puck* — means what you do when the puck is not on your stick **and** you are not the player pressuring whoever has it. That is a genuinely different job in each zone, so each of those headings is named for the job it actually describes rather than left generic.

Defensive Zone

The center has the most demanding defensive role among the forwards. You support the defenders and protect the most dangerous part of the ice — the slot, where most goals are scored from.

Carrying the Puck — Free Space

Position	Low in the defensive zone, below the hash marks, swinging toward the puck
Action	Receive the puck from your defenceman and immediately look to exit the zone
Options	Carry up the middle if the lane is clearly open, or distribute to a winger on the boards
Goal	Be the reliable outlet that starts the breakout and gets the puck out of the zone
Key	Your low positioning is what gives the defencemen a safe pass — if you don't swing low, they are stuck with the puck under pressure

Where to be: Low in the defensive zone, below the hash marks, swinging toward the puck. (Hash marks are the small alignment marks on the sides of the faceoff circles, roughly level with the faceoff dot. "Below" means in the area between them and the goal line.)

What to do: Receive the puck from your defenseman and immediately look to exit the zone. Carry up the middle if the lane is clearly open, or distribute to a winger on the boards. Your movement low in the zone is what makes the breakout (your team's controlled exit from the defensive zone) work.

Goal: Be the reliable outlet that starts the breakout and carries or passes the puck out of the zone.

Key considerations: Your low positioning is what gives the defensemen a safe pass. If you don't swing low, they are stuck with the puck under pressure. Your movement creates the option.

Carrying the Puck — Under Pressure

Position	Low in the defensive zone near the boards or behind the net
Never	Carry through traffic in your own zone — the middle is the worst place on the ice to lose the puck
Action	Get to a safe position first, then move the puck to a winger or rim it around the boards
Options	Rim it onward around the boards, or reverse it back against the flow to a defenceman arriving behind you
Read	A reverse beats pressure that has over-committed; a rim beats pressure that is sealing you in
Priority	Getting the puck out of danger beats making a great play

Where to be: Low in the defensive zone near the boards or behind the net.

What to do: Don't try to carry through traffic in your own zone. Get to a safe position and quickly move the puck to a winger or rim it around the boards (a hard shot along the boards that follows the curve of the rink around to a teammate further along — typically from one corner, around behind the net, to the far corner). The priority is getting the puck out of danger, not making a great play.

A **rim** and a **reverse** are different plays and worth keeping straight: a rim sends the puck *onward* around the boards in the direction you're facing; a reverse sends it *back the way it came*, against the flow of the forecheck, usually to your defence partner or a defenceman arriving behind you. A reverse beats pressure that has over-committed; a rim beats pressure that is sealing you in.

Goal: Relieve pressure and safely move the puck toward an exit.

Key considerations: The middle of the ice in your defensive zone is the worst place to lose the puck. If you are under pressure in the middle, move to the boards or behind the net first, then distribute.

Pressuring an Opponent with the Puck

Position	Low in the zone, supporting the strong-side defender
Read	Puck in the corner or behind the net — join the strong-side defender; two of you on the puck almost always wins it
Read	Puck at the net or in the slot — cover the high slot and mark any opposing forward set up there
Never	Take the goalmouth — that belongs to the weak-side defender, and your job is the layer one further out
Goal	Help the defenders clear the zone — by winning the corner, or by denying the slot
Convention	Low zone collapse (zone) coverage is a coaching choice, not a rule — under man-on-man the wingers follow their check into the corner, so find out which your team plays
Action	When you leave the slot for the corner, the weak-side winger collapses to cover it — call the rotation early so the slot is never empty

Where to be: Low in the zone, supporting the strong-side defender. When the puck is in the corner or behind the net, go in and help win it. When the puck is at the net front or in the slot, cover the **high slot** — the layer between the faceoff dots and the top of the circles. The goalmouth itself belongs to the weak-side defender, not to you.

What to do: Read where the puck is and provide the right support:

- **Puck in the corner or behind the net:** Join the strong-side defender. Two of you on the puck almost always wins it.
- **Puck at the net or in the slot:** Cover the high slot — the area between the faceoff dots and the top of the circles. Mark any opposing forward set up there. The weak-side defender stays glued to the player directly at the net (the goalmouth); your job is the player one layer further out.

The wingers stay high covering the points (the areas near the blue line where the opposing defensemen normally stand), and the weak-side defender holds the net front. You are the flexible low support that links the corner battle and the slot.

This describes a low zone collapse (zone) coverage system — the most common, and the one assumed throughout these documents. It is a coaching choice, not a rule of hockey. Under **man-on-man**, every player tracks an assigned opponent and the wingers *do* follow their check

into the corner; under a **hybrid**, it's man-on-man below the dots and zone above. Your job changes materially between them. Find out which one your team plays before your first shift — see Defensive Zone Coverage.

Goal: Help the defenders clear the zone — either by winning the puck in the corner, or by denying the slot to opposing forwards.

Key considerations: Your responsibility shifts with the puck. Watch the play and move with it. The wingers are not coming down to help in the corner unless they're following their own man — that role belongs to you. If you stay high in the slot when the puck is in the corner, the strong-side defender is alone against the puck carrier and is likely to lose the battle. When you leave the slot to help in the corner, the **weak-side winger** should collapse from the point to cover the high slot in your absence. Anyone with a clear view can call the rotation (you, the weak-side defender, or the winger themselves) — speak up early so the slot is never empty.

Exception — strong-side winger has walked down with their man: If the opposing strong-side defenseman has come down off the point and the strong-side winger has followed them, you have extra help low. Read the situation: if your defender and the winger have the puck battle covered, hold the slot rather than committing all the way to the corner.

Exception — weak-side winger is already low: If the weak-side opposing defenseman has come down off the point and the weak-side winger is following them, the high-slot collapse isn't available to you when you commit to the corner. Weigh whether the corner needs your help more than the slot needs coverage — and call clearly so the defenders know what to expect.

Without the Puck — Getting Open for the Breakout

Position	Swinging low — inside the faceoff dots and below the hash marks, in your strong-side faceoff circle
Never	Drift out onto the boards — that is the winger's ice, and one opponent can then cover you both
Action	Keep moving, stay open and communicate so the defencemen always have an option
Goal	Be the first and most reliable outlet for the defencemen when they gain possession
Convention	Low support belongs to the conventional swing breakout — a coaching choice; under a centre fly you leave early and the weak-side winger drops in instead
Action	Find out which breakout your team plays — a centre flying while the wingers hold high leaves nobody underneath the puck
Key	If you are too high when your defenceman gets the puck, they have no safe outlet and come under pressure immediately

This is the situation where your team is about to have the puck: your defencemen are winning it or have won it, and you are getting open to receive. It is not defensive coverage — that is the section above.

Where to be: Swinging low in the defensive zone — **inside the faceoff dots and below the hash marks**, which in practice means in your strong-side faceoff circle rather than out on the boards. The boards are the strong-side winger's ice; if you drift out there, one opposing player can cover the two of you and the defenceman loses the middle-lane option entirely. Move toward where the puck is going. Full detail in Breakouts, which is the authority for breakout positioning.

Low support is a coaching choice, and the authority says so. The five-role structure described here belongs to the **conventional swing breakout**, the version taught by most development programmes and assumed throughout this guide. The two alternatives you will actually meet: under a **centre fly** (also "centre high") you deliberately leave the zone early up the middle to stretch the ice, and the **weak-side winger drops in** to take the low support job instead; under a **flat or spread breakout** both wingers hold higher near the blue line and the exit is made with longer passes. **Find out which one your team plays** — the failure that produces most weekend breakdowns is a centre flying in a system where the wingers are holding high, leaving nobody underneath the puck at all. See Breakouts.

What to do: Keep moving. Your constant movement low in the zone creates passing options for the defensemen. Stay open and communicate. When your team wins the puck, be in position to receive the first pass and start the breakout.

Goal: Be the first and most reliable outlet for the defensemen when they gain possession.

Key considerations: If you are too high when your defenseman gets the puck, they have no safe outlet and will come under pressure immediately. Swing low, stay open, and make their job easy.

Neutral Zone

The transition zone is where the center connects defence and attack. You are the link between all five players.

Carrying the Puck — Free Space

Position	Through the middle of the ice, leading or driving the rush
Action	Carry with pace through the centre of the ice and distribute to the best option
Read	If a winger is open, pass and let them enter in stride; if you have space, carry through yourself
Goal	Lead or direct a controlled transition through the neutral zone and into the offensive zone
Key	The centre of the ice is the best place to decide from — you can see both wingers and both defencemen
Never	Carry for its own sake — if a teammate is in a better position, move the puck

Where to be: Through the middle of the ice, leading or driving the rush.

What to do: Carry with pace through the center of the ice. Read the play — if a winger is open, pass and let them enter in stride. If you have space, carry through yourself. Distribute to the best option and keep the play moving at speed.

Goal: Lead or direct a controlled transition through the neutral zone and into the offensive zone.

Key considerations: The center of the ice is the best place to make decisions from — you can see both wingers and both defensemen. Use that view. Don't carry for its own sake; if a teammate is in a better position, move the puck.

Carrying the Puck — Under Pressure

Position	Through the middle, or shifting to the boards if the middle is congested
Action	Move the puck to a winger or chip it off the boards
Never	Carry through heavy traffic in the middle — a neutral-zone turnover is one of the most dangerous plays in hockey
Risk	A turnover in the middle leads directly to an odd-man rush against your team
Priority	Quick decision-making is worth more than individual skill here — keep it simple and get the puck to the outside
Goal	Maintain possession through the neutral zone or safely advance the puck

Where to be: Through the middle, or shifting to the boards if the middle is congested.

What to do: If pressured in the middle of the neutral zone, move the puck to a winger or chip it off the boards. Don't try to carry through heavy traffic in the middle — a turnover in the neutral zone is one of the most dangerous plays in hockey. Quick decision-making is more valuable than individual skill here.

Goal: Maintain possession through the neutral zone or safely advance the puck.

Key considerations: The middle of the ice is where turnovers lead directly to odd-man rushes (where the attackers outnumber the defenders coming back, e.g. 2-on-1 or 3-on-2 — a high-danger scoring chance) against your team. Keep it simple under pressure. Get the puck to the outside.

Pressuring an Opponent with the Puck

Position	In the middle of the neutral zone — the closest forward initiates pressure, and that is usually you
Action	Drive at the puck carrier to disrupt their advance, or cut off the centre lane to force them wide
Read	Step up to challenge when the opportunity is clear; otherwise deny the middle and force the play to the boards
Goal	Deny a clean entry, or force a turnover before they reach your blue line
Convention	How hard you press is your team's neutral-zone system, not a law — containment under a 1-2-2, 1-2-2 trap or 1-3-1; two forwards hunting the puck under an aggressive press
Action	Find out which your team plays and what the call is for switching — most teams run more than one
Key	If you don't initiate pressure, the opponent gets a free run at your defencemen

Where to be: In the middle of the neutral zone. You are the primary forechecker here — the closest forward to the puck initiates pressure, and that is usually you.

What to do: Drive at the puck carrier to disrupt their advance, or cut off the center lane to force them wide. The wingers support by blocking passing lanes on their sides, and the defensemen maintain their gap at the blue line. Step up to challenge when the opportunity is clear; otherwise, deny the middle and force the play to the boards.

How hard you press, and whether your wingers hold their lanes at all, is your team's neutral-zone system — a coaching choice, not a law of hockey. What is described here is the **containment** job: under a **1-2-2**, a **1-2-2 trap** or a **1-3-1**, you are the lone forward taking the middle away and steering the carrier to a side, the wingers hold their lanes, and getting the turnover is a bonus rather than the objective. The realistic alternative is an **aggressive neutral-zone press** — the middle-third shape behind a 2-1-2 forecheck — where two forwards are gone hunting the puck, the wingers *do* leave their lanes to pressure, and the point is to take the puck back rather than wait for a mistake. Your job changes materially between them. **Find out which your team plays and what the call is for switching**, because most teams run more than one depending on the score and the shift. Neutral Zone Systems is the authority.

Goal: Deny the opposing team a clean entry through the neutral zone, or force a turnover before they reach your blue line.

Key considerations: You are the line's first wave of defence in transition. If you don't initiate pressure, the opponent gets a free run at your defensemen. Controlling the middle of the neutral zone limits what the opposing team can do — if the center lane is blocked, they are forced wide, where the wingers can support.

Without the Puck — Supporting the Rush Through the Middle

Position	Through the centre of the neutral zone, level with or slightly behind the puck
Action	Be a moving target — keep pace with the play and stay connected to both wingers
Key	You set the line's pace into the zone — time your stride so the puck crosses first and arrive at full speed
Never	Coast to stay onside — a line that enters slowly gets stood up at the blue line every time
Rule	You are offside only when both skates have completely crossed the blue line before the puck has; a trailing skate on the line keeps you onside (NHL)
Rule	A trail skate held in the air is onside under NHL and IIHF rules but offside under USA Hockey Rule 630(a), which requires skate contact
Rule	USA Hockey Rule 630(d) grants delayed offside and tag-up only at Youth 15-Only and above, Girls 16U and above, High School and Adult — below those the whistle is immediate
Rule	Tag-up is a five-man act — the offside is nullified only when all players of the offending team clear the zone (NHL Rule 83.3(i)), so count your linemates out

Where to be: Moving through the center of the neutral zone, level with or slightly behind the puck.

What to do: Be a moving target in the middle of the ice. Keep pace with the play so you are available to receive a pass and carry through. Stay connected to both wingers.

Goal: Be the primary target for outlet passes and keep the rush moving at pace.

Key considerations: Stay onside — but the centre is the player who most often gives up speed to do it, and that costs the line more than a whistle would. You are offside only when **both** skates have completely crossed the blue line before the puck has; a trailing skate on the line keeps you onside, and one held in the air over the neutral zone does too **under NHL and IIHF rules — but not under USA Hockey, whose Rule 630(a) requires skate contact, so keep the blade**

down if that is your book. A delayed offside is recoverable by tagging up — **in the books that have one.** Under **USA Hockey Rule 630(d)**, delayed offside and tag-up exist only "*(For all Youth 15-Only levels and above, all Girls 16U levels and above, High School and Adult classifications only)*"; below those levels there is no raised arm and no second chance, and the whistle goes immediately. If you play or coach minor hockey under USA Hockey, everything in this paragraph about recovering is unavailable to you — the entry has to be right first time. **Where tag-up does exist, it is a five-man act:** Rule 83.3(i) nullifies the offside only when "*all players* of the offending team clear the zone at the same instant (skate contact with the blue line)". One foot on the line is enough for each individual, but the arm stays up until the last teammate has tagged — so as the centre, count your linemates out before you turn and go back in. The full rule — tagging up, what turns a delayed offside into a whistle, and the rule-set differences — is in Rules Primer.

The centre-specific version: **you set the line's pace into the zone.** You are attacking through the middle, the widest and most-watched lane, so it is tempting to slow down and be safe. Instead, time your stride so the puck crosses first and arrive at full speed. If you coast, both wingers arrive with you, and a line that enters slowly gets stood up at the blue line every time.

Offensive Zone

The center operates in the most dangerous part of the offensive zone — the slot — and directs the attack.

Carrying the Puck — Free Space

Position	In the slot — between the two faceoff circles, from the top of the circles down to the front of the net
Action	Look to shoot from the slot; it is the highest-percentage scoring area
Options	If defenders close in, find a winger on the half-wall or in the circle, or a defenceman at the point
Goal	Create a shot on net, either directly or by finding a teammate in a better position
Key	With the puck in the slot and space in front of you, shoot — don't overthink it
Action	Keep moving and keep the puck moving

Where to be: In the slot — the high-danger area between the two faceoff circles, stretching from the top of the circles down to the front of the net.

What to do: Look to shoot from the slot — it's the highest-percentage scoring area. If defenders close in, distribute to a winger on the half-wall (the boards area roughly level with the faceoff dot — between the corner and the point) or in the circle, or to a defenseman at the point for a shot. Keep moving and keep the puck moving.

Goal: Create a shot on net, either directly or by finding a teammate in a better position.

Key considerations: The slot is where the most goals are scored. If you have the puck there with space, shoot. Don't overthink it. If you're covered, quick passing creates the next opportunity.

Carrying the Puck — Under Pressure

Position	In the slot, behind the net, or along the boards near the circles
Technique	Use your body to protect the puck
Options	A quick outlet to a winger on the half-wall, or to the defenceman at the point
Action	Use the back of the net as a pivot — come out the other side or find a late-arriving teammate
Goal	Maintain possession under pressure and keep the offensive play alive
Key	Behind the net you can see the whole ice and decide without risking a direct shot or a dangerous turnover

Where to be: In the slot, behind the net, or along the boards near the circles.

What to do: Use your body to protect the puck. Look for a quick outlet to a winger on the half-wall or the defenseman at the point. If you go behind the net, use it as a pivot point — come out the other side or find a late-arriving teammate.

Goal: Maintain possession under pressure and keep the offensive play alive.

Key considerations: Behind the net is a useful safe area. From there you can see the whole ice and make a decision without being at immediate risk of a direct shot or a dangerous turnover.

Pressuring an Opponent with the Puck

Action	Be first in as F1 — forecheck through the middle at the opposing defenceman, or wherever the puck has gone
Technique	Drive straight at the carrier and take a deliberate angle, pushing them to one side so your F2 knows where to support
Goal	Force a turnover or a bad outlet pass, and keep the opposing defence under constant pressure
Key	F1/F2/F3 are roles, not people — if a winger beats you to the puck they are F1 and you take the support role, immediately
Convention	The 2-1-2 with F3 on the weak side is one system among several, not a law — the stacked variant shades F3 to the puck side and concedes the far-side breakout
Rule	Under NHL and IIHF rules the opposing goalie may play the puck behind the goal line only inside the trapezoid — most rec, beer-league and youth associations have none
Rule	The restricted area is IIHF Rule 27.7, not the NHL's 27.8; England Ice Hockey's Rules & Regulations 22.3 say it is "not currently enforced" in England and Wales — so plan as though their goalie may come for a dumped puck
Action	Aim your dump-ins away from the trapezoid, so a defenceman has to retrieve the puck with you arriving on them

Where to be: Forechecking through the middle — directly at the opposing defenseman or wherever the puck has gone in the opposition's defensive zone.

What to do: Be first on the forecheck (F1). Drive straight at the puck carrier, cutting off their options and forcing a quick decision. Take a deliberate angle — push them toward one side (typically the strong-side boards) so your F2 winger knows where to support.

Goal: Force a turnover or a bad outlet pass. Keep the opposing defence under constant pressure.

Key considerations: Forechecks are named by counting players from the goal line outwards — always three groups, always adding to five — so the common **2-1-2** is two forwards in on the puck, one in the middle, two defencemen high at the line. It is one system among several, not the only way. See Forechecking Systems for the alternatives (1-2-2, 1-3-1, 1-4) and when each is chosen.

In a 2-1-2:

- **F1 (usually you, as the center):** First in. Pressure the puck, take a deliberate angle.

- **F2 (the strong-side winger):** Second support on the strong side, sealing the puck wherever you've pushed it — usually the boards (corner) or behind the net.
- **F3 (the weak-side winger):** Stays higher to cover the breakout pass and any opposing forward leaking up the middle. **Which side F3 sits on is a genuine coaching split, not a law of hockey.** The weak-side default described here is the common one; in the **strong-side (stacked) variant** F3 shades to the puck side instead, so all three forwards overload one corner and the far-side breakout is conceded deliberately. Find out which your team runs — Forechecking Systems sets out both.

The defensemen hold the blue line at the points. Remember that these are **roles, not people** (see "A Note on Language") — if a winger beats you to the puck they are F1 and you take the support role, immediately. Communicate clearly so the line moves as a unit and no one is left guessing.

The trapezoid works in your favour here. Under NHL and IIHF rules the opposing goalie may only play the puck behind their goal line inside the marked trapezoid, so they cannot come out to the corner and calmly move a dumped puck — a defenceman has to, with you arriving on them. That is exactly why dump-and-chase works, so aim your dump-ins away from the trapezoid.

Check whether your league has one: most rec, beer-league and youth associations do not, and against a goalie who can play the corner the whole dump-and-chase is worth much less. Rule detail in Rules Primer. 🇬🇧 **In England and Wales, treat this as unsettled.** The IIHF book carries the rule (Rule 27.7, not the NHL's 27.8), but England Ice Hockey's *Rules & Regulations* 22.3 say the restricted area is "*not currently enforced*" and the 2025-26 In-House Rules do not mention it — though their Introduction says "*unless otherwise stated, all rules will be enforced in line with the IIHF Rule Book*", which points the other way, so the published documents do not settle it. For you as the attacking team the safe assumption runs the other way: plan as though their goalie **may** retrieve the puck, ask your league, and look behind the net to see whether the lines are painted at all. Treat an unmarked sheet as a hint rather than a ruling: IIHF 27.7 turns on "*the position of the puck*", not on the markings.

Without the Puck — Getting Open in the Slot

Position	In the slot between the two faceoff dots, just outside the crease — close enough to tip shots and pounce on rebounds
Technique	Live at the edge of the blue paint, screen hard, keep your stick free for tips and keep your body out of the crease
Action	Screen the goaltender when your defenceman is about to shoot
Rule	Screening from outside the crease without contact is legal, but positioning alone can void a goal if it stops the goalie moving freely or defending the net (NHL Rule 69.1)
Never	Take your body inside the blue paint — in there, assume any contact costs you the goal
Goal	Be the primary scoring threat in the high-danger area and create chances for yourself and teammates
Key	Keep moving — a stationary centre in the slot is easy to cover

Where to be: In the slot, between the two faceoff dots, just outside the crease (the painted area directly in front of the goalie). Stay close enough to tip shots and pounce on rebounds.

The crease is the one line you don't cross. You are in the goalie's kitchen more than anyone except a net-front winger, and playing too timidly here costs you goals. The practical version: **live at the edge of the blue paint, screen hard, keep your stick free for tips, and keep your body out of the crease.** Screening from *outside* the crease without contact is legal and one of the most valuable things you do — but positioning alone can void a goal if it stops the goalie moving freely or defending the net (Rule 69.1), so don't crowd them so tightly they cannot move. Inside the blue paint, assume any contact costs you the goal. The full rule, including what happens when a defender shoves you in, is in Rules Primer; the same situation from the goalie's side of it is in Goaltender.

What to do: Get open in the slot. Look to position yourself for a shot, a tip-in, or a rebound. Screen the goaltender when your defenseman is about to shoot. Keep moving — a stationary center in the slot is easier to cover.

Goal: Be the primary scoring threat in the high-danger area and create chances for yourself and teammates.

Key considerations: The slot is the most difficult area of the ice to defend, and the most effective place to score from. Make the opposing center and defensemen work hard to keep you out of it. Movement and timing are your tools.

Other Situations

Faceoffs — a defining responsibility of the center

Priority	Ten to fifteen draws a game matter enormously — your own end, special teams, the last minute, and after an icing
Read	Defensive zone — win it back to your defenders, ideally the boards-side defender for a quick rim out
Read	Offensive zone — win it to a defender for a one-timer, or back to a winger in the circle for a quick chance
Action	If you can't win it clean, tie up your opponent's stick so your wingers can pounce on the loose puck
Action	Warn your wingers that their encroachment ejects you, not them — the single most avoidable way a centre loses a draw
Never	Close your hand over the puck or smother it with your body — that is a minor penalty, not a faceoff violation
Rule	At eight of the nine spots the defending centre places his blade down first (NHL Rule 76.4); USA Hockey Rule 613(a) reverses it and the attacking player goes first
Rule	After an icing the first faceoff violation by either team does not remove the centre — the linesperson warns that team instead (NHL Rule 76.4)

You are the primary faceoff taker. An average NHL game has **roughly 56 faceoffs** — 56.6 per game in 2024-25 and 56.0 in 2025-26, **computed from the NHL's official statistics** and owned by Faceoffs — and **most of them barely matter**. Also computed from the same source and owned by that document: team faceoff win percentage accounts for only about **6% of the variation** in a team's points percentage across eleven NHL seasons ($r = +0.25$), and in 2016-17 the relationship was actually *negative*. So faceoffs do not win games, and a centre who believes they do spends his attention in the wrong place. **Ten to fifteen draws a game matter enormously** — in your own end, on special teams, in the last minute, and after an icing. Those are the ones to prepare for. Key principles by location:

- **Defensive zone:** Win the puck back to your defenders — ideally to the boards-side defender (positioned near the boards-side hash marks supporting your outer winger) for a quick rim out. If you can't win clean, tie up your opponent's stick so your wingers can pounce

on the loose puck. A clean loss in your defensive zone is one of the most dangerous mistakes you can make.

- **Offensive zone:** Win to a defender for a one-timer, or back to a winger in the circle for a quick chance. Read your linemates' positioning before the puck drops.
- **Neutral zone:** Win possession cleanly if you can; otherwise, a tie-up your wingers can chase down is fine too.

General: Study your opponent's tendencies (most centers favour one hand or one technique). Vary your own approach. **Technique, grip, the five-player alignments and set plays are all in Faceoffs**, which is the authority; the procedure and the violations as written are in Rules Primer.

If you have just been moved here from the wing, this is the skill you have never taken seriously — Switching Positions sets out what a new centre should work on first, and in what order.

Staying in the dot — the part that is uniquely your problem. A faceoff violation removes *the centre* from the draw, whoever committed it. Your team then takes the draw with its second-best option, and a second violation on the same draw is a bench minor — **under USA Hockey Rule 613(d) it is instead a minor on the player who committed the second violation**, and under IIHF rules there is no ejection at all, only a warning to the team. That is the *first* violation (IIHF Rule 76.6); a **second** by the same team on the same draw is a **bench minor** for delay of game (IIHF Rule 76.7), so it is not free. Know which book you are in before you plan around it.

The exception is on the draw you care most about — after an icing. NHL Rule 76.4: "*When an icing infraction occurs, the first face-off violation by either team will not result in the center being removed.*" The linesperson warns the offending team instead, and any subsequent violation by that team is a bench minor. It is the **first** violation only, and the warning is per team — so you get one free attempt to cheat the timing on a post-icing draw, and so does the other side. Full detail in Faceoffs.

So:

- **Whether you place your stick first depends on whether you are defending, not on where you are.** At eight of the nine spots — both end zones and all four neutral-zone dots — **the defending centre puts his blade down first**, followed immediately by the attacking centre. Only at centre ice does the **visiting** player go first, regardless of anything else (NHL Rule 76.4). So you place first when you are defending that end, and second when you are attacking it. Knowing which you are stops you being rushed or being late. ⚠ **USA Hockey reverses it, and most North American amateurs play under USA Hockey.**

Rule 613(a): *"The attacking player shall be the first to place their stick on the ice, except for a center ice face-off where the visiting team player shall be first to place their stick on the ice."* So the advantage of seeing the other blade first belongs to the **attacking** centre in the NHL and to the **defending** centre under USA Hockey. Find out which book you are in before you build a habit on it — Faceoffs owns this.

- **Your wingers can get you thrown out and never know it.** If a linemate creeps inside the circle or over the hash marks before the drop, **you** are the one ejected. Tell them. This is the single most avoidable way a centre loses a draw.
- **Tie up the stick, not the puck.** Closing a hand over the puck to conceal it, or smothering it with your body, is a **minor penalty** — a different offence from a faceoff violation, with a much worse consequence.

When you get tossed: a winger steps in. Agree in advance which winger takes it and what your team is trying to do on that draw — usually just a safe tie-up rather than anything clever.

Power Play (your team has the man advantage)

Position	In the 1-3-1 you most often play the bumper — the middle of the three across the slot, between the point man and the net front
Action	Be a passing target for both half-walls, take quick shots from the slot, screen the goalie and tip point shots
Key	A box has nobody assigned to the middle, which is exactly why a kill switches to a diamond against you
Position	In an umbrella or an overload you will usually be low or on the strong-side wall — there is no bumper in a true umbrella
Action	Drop back to receive the breakout pass and carry through the neutral zone, then transition into the bumper or slot
Never	Carry straight into the opposing defence or dump into traffic — controlled entries by passing are far more effective

The formations themselves — 1-3-1, umbrella, overload, spread, 2-3 — are set out in Special Teams. What matters here is where they put you.

In the **1-3-1**, the modern default, the centre most often plays the **bumper**: the middle of the three across the slot, sitting in the soft spot between the single point man and the net-front player. Your job is to be a passing target for both half-walls, take quick shots from the slot, screen the goalie, and tip point shots. The bumper is the hardest player for a penalty kill to cover, because a

box has nobody assigned to the middle — which is exactly why a kill switches to a **diamond** against you.

In an **umbrella** or an **overload** you will usually be low or on the strong-side wall instead. There is no bumper in a true umbrella, so don't go looking for the spot you're used to.

On zone entries: You often drop back to receive the breakout pass and become the puck carrier through the neutral zone (using drop passes or swing-entries with the wingers). Once in the offensive zone, you transition into the bumper or slot position. Avoid carrying straight into the opposing defence or dumping the puck into traffic — controlled entries via passing are far more effective on the power play.

Penalty Kill (your team is short-handed)

Position	In a box you are one of the two high players, each responsible for one point — there is no single "top" to drift into
Position	In a diamond you are usually the single apex, pressuring the point; in wedge+1 you are frequently the puck-chasing "+1"
Action	Stay disciplined, block shooting lanes and clear the puck whenever you get it
Never	Get pulled out of position chasing the puck around the perimeter
Rule	A shorthanded team may send the puck down the ice without being called for icing — USA Hockey Rule 624(b)(1) grants that only from Youth 15-Only, Girls 16U, High School and Adult up
Rule	NHL Rule 81.6 withdraws that exemption from a team shorthanded by a major that has left nobody on the penalty bench
Key	Know which shape you are running before the puck drops — a box and a diamond ask very different things of you

A kill is four skaters, normally two forwards and two defencemen. **The shapes are described in Special Teams;** your job inside each one:

- **Box** — the standard. You are **one of the two high players**, alongside a winger, each responsible for one point. There is no single "top" of a box, so don't drift into the middle looking for one.
- **Diamond** — used against a 1-3-1. Here there *is* a single apex and it is usually you: pressure the point while the middle two take the half-walls and someone accounts for the bumper.
- **Wedge+1** — you are frequently the "+1", the single puck-chaser outside the triangle.

Whichever shape you're in: stay disciplined, don't get pulled out of position chasing the puck around the perimeter, block shooting lanes, and clear the puck whenever you get it — you may ice it freely while shorthanded, **but check your rule set before you build the kill on it.** USA Hockey grants the exemption only "*For all Youth 15-Only and above, Girls 16U and above, High School and Adult classifications only*" (Rule 624(b)(1)); below those levels a shorthanded team is called for icing like anyone else. NHL Rule 81.6 also withdraws it from a team shorthanded by a *major* that has left nobody on the penalty bench to come out. Special Teams owns this rule. Know which shape you're running *before* the puck drops; a box and a diamond ask very different things of you.

Icing

Risk	Your icing risk is the neutral-zone dump nobody is chasing, not the defensive-zone clear
Technique	Carry the extra stride so the puck is on your stick as it touches the red line — that alone makes the dump legal
Options	Or make the dump soft enough and short enough that a winger would clearly reach the puck first
Rule	The linesperson judges which player would first touch the puck, not who first reaches the dot (NHL Rule 81.1)
Rule	After your own icing your line cannot change and your team cannot take a time-out under NHL and IIHF rules — USA Hockey imposes neither
Action	If your legs are gone, put the puck off the glass and out rather than down the ice
Key	When they ice it you get an offensive-zone draw against five players who cannot change — know it's coming and have a set play ready

The rule itself — hybrid icing, the full wave-off list, "gaining the line", and how USA Hockey and rec leagues differ — is in Rules Primer. What is specific to you is *which* icings are yours and what they cost you.

Your risk is the neutral-zone dump, not the defensive-zone clear. Your defencemen make most of the clears; what a centre throws away is a dump from behind the centre red line that nobody is chasing. Two fixes, both cheap: carry the extra stride so the **puck is on your stick** as it touches the red line — that alone makes the dump legal, however far it goes — or make the dump soft enough and short enough that a winger would clearly reach the puck first — that, not who reaches the dot first, is what the linesperson is judging (Rule 81.1).

The penalty is aimed at you personally. After your own icing the draw is in your defensive zone, and **under NHL and IIHF rules** your line **cannot change** and your team cannot take a timeout. So the consequence of a lazy dump is a tired centre taking a defensive-zone faceoff he badly needs to win. ⚠️ **One book is lighter:** IIHF Rules 81.4 and 87.1 carry both restrictions in the NHL's own words, so British and European league hockey punishes you just as hard — but **USA Hockey imposes neither**, because Rule 624 restricts no substitution, Rule 204 permits a change at any stoppage, and Rule 636(f) sets no icing condition on time-outs, so a tired line gets off. Rules Primer owns this. If your legs are gone, the puck goes off the glass and out, not down the ice.

When the other team ices it, that's one of your best draws of the night — they cannot change, so you are taking an offensive-zone draw against five players who are stuck out there and probably tired. Know it's coming and have a set play ready. Remember too that on any draw following an icing the **first** faceoff violation by either team does not eject a centre (Rule 76.4, above) — so expect their centre to use his free one, and use yours.

One point on the matchup, because it is often misquoted: the bar falls only on the team that iced the puck. Rule 82.1 removes the home team's "any desired substitution" right "*in cases following an icing, which does not result in the delay of the game*", and the rule's later paragraph — echoed by Rule 81.4 — identifies that exception as the bar on the team in violation of Rule 81. So the fresh-legs advantage is yours home or away when *they* ice it, and forfeited home or away when you do. See Faceoffs.

Backchecking — the middle lane is usually yours

Convention	The centre takes the middle lane and the wingers the outside — the most common assignment and the default here, but a coaching choice, not a law
Read	Other teams give the middle to the first man back, or pick up man-on-man from the puck outward — find out which yours plays
Action	Take the middle-lane driver — the forward arriving late and unmarked into the slot is usually more dangerous than the puck carrier
Position	Come back on the defensive side of your man, between them and your own net — not chasing behind their shoulder
Action	Skate first, then look, and don't chase the carrier — your defencemen have him, and swinging wide abandons the ice they are protecting
Priority	Last forward back with your defence outnumbered — take away the pass, don't go for the hit
Action	Once you're set, become the centre again — cover the high slot and support the corner

When your team loses the puck going the other way, the centre normally has the single most important backcheck assignment in hockey: **the middle lane**.

Which backchecker owns which lane is a coaching choice, not a law. The positional version described here — centre in the middle, wingers outside — is the most common and is the default assumed throughout this guide. Other teams use **first man back takes the middle**, whoever that is, which is common when the centre is the one caught deep and common in rec hockey. Others pick up **man-on-man from the puck outward**. Find out which your team plays. Defending the Rush is the authority and sets out all three; under every one of them, somebody owns the middle and nobody assumes it is somebody else.

- **Take the middle-lane driver.** The most dangerous attacker on a rush is usually not the puck carrier — it's the forward filling the middle of the ice behind them, arriving late and unmarked into the slot. Under the positional assignment that player is yours, the wingers have the outside lanes, and nobody else is going to pick this up. Under the other two variants you may end up on an outside man instead — but then somebody has called that they have the middle, and if nobody has, take it.
- **Get to the inside.** Come back on the defensive side of your man — between them and your own net — not chasing behind their shoulder. If you're trailing them, you can't defend

anything.

- **Skate first, then look, and don't chase the carrier.** Your defencemen have the puck carrier; if you swing wide to help them, you have abandoned the exact area they are trying to protect.
- **Once you're set, become the centre again.** Transition into your normal defensive-zone role — cover the high slot, support the corner.

If you are the last forward back and your defence is outnumbered, the priority is taking away the pass, not making a hit.

Line Changes

Action	You go first — call the change and the wingers follow you off
Convention	A line that changes as a group changes on the centre's legs, because the centre fades first — coaching craft rather than a measured finding
Never	Change into an offensive-zone faceoff you are needed to take
Rule	After your own team's icing you cannot change at all under NHL and IIHF rules, so don't start drifting toward the bench — USA Hockey imposes neither restriction
Key	Shift length, the safe and unsafe windows to change, and why a bad change concedes goals are all in Game Management

You go first. The centre's route covers more of the ice than either winger's and the centre fades first — **coaching craft rather than a measured finding** (see the note in the Overview) — so a line that changes as a group should be changing on *your* legs — call it and go, and the wingers follow you off. Two cautions that are specifically a centre's: don't change into an offensive-zone faceoff you are needed to take, and remember that after your own team's icing you cannot change at all, so don't start drifting toward the bench.

Shift length, the safe and unsafe windows to change, and why a bad change concedes goals are all in Game Management.

Common Mistakes

- **Staying high in the slot when the puck is in the corner — under a low zone collapse.** That is the coverage assumed here, and in it your strong-side defenceman is left

alone in a battle they will probably lose. **Under man-on-man the job changes**

materially: you stay with your assigned check, and holding the slot may be exactly right. Know which one you play before you decide this is a mistake.

- **Carrying the puck through the middle of your own zone.** The worst turnover location on the ice.
- **Coasting through the neutral zone to avoid going offside.** You can keep a trail skate on the line — arrive with speed instead. Keep it **touching**: a raised trail skate is onside in the NHL and IIHF but offside under USA Hockey (Rule 630(a)).
- **Puck-watching on the backcheck** and losing the middle-lane driver.
- **Getting thrown out of the faceoff dot** for something avoidable — including a winger's encroachment you failed to warn them about.
- **Taking long shifts.** The centre is generally reckoned to skate the most of the three forwards and to fade first — coaching craft, not a measured comparison; see the Overview note. The measured range for a shift is **roughly 30 to 80 seconds** — measured by **Lignell et al. (2018), Brocherie et al. (2018) and Bracko et al. (1998)**, and collected in Vigh-Larsen and Mohr's 2024 physiology review, which states the band in its introduction as a summary of those three rather than as anything it measured itself. A well-managed shift is nearer **30-45 seconds**, which is coaching craft and not a measured band. Conditioning and Recovery owns both figures. The top of that range is where the wheels come off, and as the centre you get there before your wingers do.
- **Treating the slot as a place to stand.** A stationary centre in the slot is easy to cover.

Key Takeaways

1. You are the link between all five skaters — in every zone, your job is to be the connection that makes the other four work.
2. Under low zone collapse — the coverage assumed here, and a coaching choice rather than a rule — your defensive-zone responsibility **moves with the puck**: corner support when the puck is low and strong-side, high-slot coverage when it isn't. Under man-on-man you track an assigned opponent instead, so find out which your team plays.
3. Swing low in your own zone. If you're high, your defencemen have no safe outlet.
4. Own the middle of the ice in the neutral zone — going both ways.
5. On the backcheck, the middle lane is yours under the standard positional assignment — the house default throughout, but a coaching choice, not a law. Some teams give the middle to the first man back instead. Whichever you play, make sure somebody has it and never assume it is somebody else.

6. Faceoffs are your defining skill. Roughly 56 a game — 56.6 in 2024-25, 56.0 in 2025-26, computed from NHL official statistics and carried by Faceoffs — and the defensive-zone ones matter most.
 7. Under pressure anywhere, get the puck to the outside. Simple beats clever.
-

POSITIONS

Winger

Rule set: Written to NHL rules. Where IIHF, USA Hockey or typical rec-league rules differ in a way that changes how you play, it is flagged inline. **Playing in Britain? The IIHF flags are yours** — every level of UK hockey runs the IIHF book, amended locally; see [UK and England Rules](#).

RELATED

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Overview

Position An attacking forward with responsibility on both sides of the puck

Action In attack, create width, pressure opponents in the corners and provide scoring chances

Action In defence, cover the opposing defenceman on your side and help your team exit the defensive zone

Key Your lane is your responsibility — stay in it, own it, and use it

Key There are two wingers per line, left and right, and the principles apply equally to both

You are an attacking forward with responsibility on both sides of the puck. In attack, you create width, pressure opponents in the corners, and provide scoring chances. In defence, you cover the opposing defenseman on your side and help your team exit the defensive zone. Your lane is your responsibility — stay in it, own it, and use it.

There are two wingers per line: left wing and right wing. The principles below apply equally to both. Where specific side is mentioned, apply it to your own side.

A Note on Language

Position	Your lane is the outside third of the ice on your side, running the length of the rink
Key	"Stay in your lane" is a spacing instruction — three forwards in one lane can be covered by two defenders
Position	"Stay high" means level with the opposing point man, not halfway to the corner, and it applies only while the other team has the puck
Key	Strong-side takes the puck up the wall; weak-side collapses to cover the slot
Position	The half-wall — the boards level with the faceoff dot — is your home base in the offensive zone and on the power play
Goal	Covering the point, denying the opposing defenceman time and space to shoot or walk in, is your defensive-zone job description
Never	Treat rim and reverse as interchangeable — a rim goes onward with the flow, a reverse back against it

Every line, zone and named area of the ice is defined in Rink Map and Glossary, which is the dictionary for this guide. Listed here are only the terms a winger uses in a particular sense, or leans on so heavily they need saying again.

- **Your lane.** This document uses the phrase constantly, so be clear what it means: the outside third of the ice on your side, running the length of the rink. The centre owns the middle third; the other winger owns the far third. "Stay in your lane" is not a personality instruction, it is a spacing one — three forwards in three lanes stretch a defence across the whole width of the rink, and three forwards in one lane can be covered by two defenders.
- **High / low.** High means toward the blue line you're facing, low means toward the goal line. In your own zone, "stay high" is the single most repeated instruction a winger gets, and it means level with the opposing point man — not halfway to the corner. **It applies while the other team has the puck.** The moment your team wins it, "stay high" expires and you come down the wall as the breakout outlet — see *Without the Puck — Ready to Break Out* below, and Breakouts.
- **Strong-side / weak-side.** Strong-side is the side the puck is on; weak-side is the other. As a winger you are usually one or the other for a whole sequence rather than switching every second, and the two jobs are genuinely different — the strong-side winger takes the puck up the wall, the weak-side winger collapses to cover the slot.
- **The half-wall.** The boards roughly level with the faceoff dot, between the corner and the point. This is your home base in the offensive zone and on the power play.

- **The point.** The area just inside the blue line where the defencemen stand. **Covering the point** — denying the opposing defenceman the time and space to shoot or walk in — is your defensive-zone job description.
- **Rim versus reverse.** A **rim** sends the puck *onward* around the boards in the direction you're facing; a **reverse** sends it *back the way it came*, against the flow. They beat different kinds of pressure and they are not interchangeable — see below.

A note on the headings below. Each zone is broken into the same four situations. The fourth — *Without the Puck* — means what you do when the puck is not on your stick **and** you are not the player pressuring whoever has it. That is a genuinely different job in each zone, so each of those headings is named for the job it actually describes rather than left generic.

Defensive Zone

Your job is to help your team exit the zone cleanly and to limit what the opposing defenseman can do on your side.

Carrying the Puck — Free Space

Position	On the boards on your side, between the hash marks and the goal line — Breakouts is the authority on this landmark
Action	Come down from your point coverage as the breakout starts; don't stand there while the other team has the puck
Convention	The hash-mark spot belongs to the conventional swing breakout — flat/spread holds you higher, stretch sends a winger up ice, so find out which you're in
Action	If you receive the puck, look to move immediately — carry out along the boards, or pass to the centre
Goal	Exit the defensive zone cleanly and transition to offence
Never	Hold the puck in your own zone longer than you need to — your first look is always up ice

Where to be: On the boards on your side, **between the hash marks and the goal line** — roughly level with the faceoff dot or just below it. You get there by coming *down* from your point

coverage as the breakout starts; you do not stand there while the other team has the puck. Breakouts is the authority on this landmark.

Wall position is system-dependent, and the authority says so. The hash-mark spot belongs to the **conventional swing breakout** — the structure assumed throughout this document. Teams running a **flat/spread** structure ask wingers to hold higher toward the blue line; teams running an aggressive **stretch or flying-winger** structure send one winger up ice entirely. **Find out which one you're in** — the failure mode of a winger standing at the hash marks in a stretch system is exactly as bad as the reverse. See Breakouts.

What to do: You are one of the primary outlets when your team starts a breakout (the controlled exit from your defensive zone). The defenseman may pass to you, the center, or their D-partner depending on who is open. If you receive the puck, immediately look to move — either carry it out along the boards, or pass to the center if they are in a better position to exit.

Goal: Exit the defensive zone cleanly and transition to offence.

Key considerations: Don't hold the puck in your defensive zone too long. Get it moving quickly. Once you have control on the boards, your first look is always up ice.

Carrying the Puck — Under Pressure

Position	Against the boards, with the puck on the far side of your body from the checker
Technique	Backside into them, feet wide and low, feet still moving — a stationary player on the wall gets pinned
Technique	Aim for skates parallel to the boards, forearm and hip to the wall, head up; facing the boards chest-first is the fallback
Never	Turn your back to the wall or duck — and don't turn into pressure the instant you receive it
Read	Rim to beat a checker sealing you against the boards; reverse to beat one who has over-committed and skated past you
Rule	NHL Rule 56.1 permits your free hand to fend off an opponent or their stick — fingers closing on a jersey or a stick is a holding minor
Action	Know your out before you get there, and don't force a pass through traffic in your own zone
Goal	Don't lose the puck in a dangerous position — get it to safety

Where to be: Against the boards, protecting the puck with your body.

What to do: Shield the puck from the pressuring opponent. Look for your center swinging low or your defenseman as a safe outlet. If no pass is available, **rim** the puck (a hard shot along the boards that follows the curve of the rink onward to a teammate further around) away from danger, or **reverse** it (send it back the way it came, against the direction the pressure is flowing) to a teammate arriving behind you.

Rim and reverse are opposite plays and you pick by where the pressure is. A rim beats a checker who is sealing you against the boards, because it goes *past* them. A reverse beats a checker who has over-committed and skated past you, because it goes back into the space they just left.

Puck protection on the wall — the technique. Winning 50-50 battles along the boards is the defining physical skill of a winger, and "shield it with your body" is not instruction. Full detail in Body Contact and Battles; the essentials:

- **Puck on the far side of your body from the checker.** Your body is the wall between them and the puck. If the puck is on the same side as the pressure, you've already lost it.
- **Get your backside into them and your feet wide.** A wide, low base is almost impossible to move. Standing tall and narrow is why players get knocked off pucks.

- **Do not turn into pressure the instant you receive it** — take it, absorb the contact, then spin off. But note the ranking in the owning document: the orientation you are aiming for at the wall is **skates parallel to the boards, forearm and hip to the wall, head up**. Facing the boards chest-first is the *fallback* for when you are already facing the wall and cannot turn — and if you use it, get your stick and gloves up and spread on the glass, with no head contact at all. **Never your back to the wall, never duck.**
- **Keep your feet moving.** A stationary player on the wall gets pinned; a player with momentum can escape along the boards or spin out toward the middle.
- **Use your free hand to fend off.** This is explicitly legal: NHL Rule 56.1 permits the free hand to "fend off" an opponent or their stick, and Rule 54.2 permits using your arm in a strength move to block an opponent *provided you have body position*. What is penalised is using that hand to **hold, pull, tug or grab** — that's a holding minor — or to hold an opponent's stick. So: forearm and open hand to keep them off you, fine; fingers closing on a jersey or a stick, two minutes.
- **Know your out before you get there.** Decide where the puck is going while you're still skating to it, not after you're pinned.

Goal: Don't lose the puck in a dangerous position. Get it to safety.

Key considerations: Rimming the puck around the boards is a completely valid play. It resets possession and gives your team time to regroup. Don't try to force a pass through traffic in your own zone.

Pressuring an Opponent with the Puck

Position	High in the defensive zone, covering the opposing defenceman at the point on your side, between them and the slot
Convention	Staying high out of the corner is the low zone collapse job, not a law — under man-on-man you follow your check in, under hybrid only below the hash marks
Action	Find out which system your team plays before your first shift — breakdowns here are two players on different assumptions
Goal	Deny shots from the point and stop the opposition setting up a clean cycle
Read	If your man walks down off the point, follow a few feet, stay connected, and call the switch
Read	If the puck squirts up the strong-side boards to you, engage it — that is your breakout, not a corner battle
Read	If the centre goes into the strong-side corner, the weak-side winger collapses to the high slot until the puck leaves
Risk	Chase into the corner and the opposing defenceman walks in free, with nobody positioned for the breakout

Where to be: High in the defensive zone, covering the opposing defenseman at the point on your side. (The "point" is the area near the blue line where defensemen normally stand — covering the point means denying that defenseman the space to operate.)

What to do: Deny the opposing defenseman time and space at the point. Position yourself between them and the slot/net — this blocks the most dangerous shooting and passing lanes at once. Stay on your side of the ice.

Whether you stay high or go to the corner depends on your team's system. This is a coaching choice, not a law of hockey — see Defensive Zone Coverage.

- **Low zone collapse / zone coverage** — the system assumed throughout these documents, and the most common. You stay high on the point. The low battle belongs to the strong-side defenceman and the centre. **Do not go into the corner.**
- **Man-on-man** — you follow your assigned check wherever they go, including into the corner. The points get covered by whoever's man is there.
- **Hybrid** — man-on-man below the dots, zone above. You take your man down only if they go below the hash marks.

The rest of this section assumes low zone collapse. **Find out which one your team plays before your first shift** — most defensive-zone breakdowns are not effort problems, they're two players operating on different assumptions.

Goal: Deny shots from the point and prevent the opposing team from setting up a clean cycle (a play where their forwards rotate around the offensive zone passing to each other to maintain possession and create chances).

Key considerations: It is tempting to chase the puck into the corner when you see your team battling there. In a collapse system, resist it. If you go to the corner, the opposing defenseman is free to walk in for a shot, and your team has no one positioned for the breakout. Staying high is your job, not just your option.

Exception — when your man walks down: If the opposing defenseman you are covering moves down off the point to join the puck battle, follow them down a few feet to stay tight on them. Don't chase all the way into the corner — but stay connected and call out the switch so the center or defender knows you've moved with your man.

Exception — when the puck comes up the wall to you (strong-side winger): If a corner battle squirts the puck up the strong-side boards toward you, engage it. That's not a corner battle — it's your breakout opportunity. Grab the puck, get your feet moving, and start the exit.

Exception — when the center is in the corner (weak-side winger only): If the puck is in the strong-side corner and the center has gone in to help your defender, the **weak-side winger** collapses from the point to the high slot to cover the area the center has vacated. Anyone with a clear view should call the rotation — you, the center, or the weak-side defender. The strong-side winger holds their own point coverage. As soon as the puck moves out of the corner, the weak-side winger rotates back up to their point.

Without the Puck — Ready to Break Out

Position	High and level with your man while they have the puck; down the wall between the hash marks and the goal line the moment your team wins it
Action	Watch the battle rather than the puck and read who is coming out of it with possession
Action	Turn your feet before the puck is won, but don't leave the point until it actually is
Technique	Present yourself as an outlet — stick on the ice, feet already moving, calling for it
Convention	That trip down the wall is the conventional swing breakout — flat/spread holds you higher, stretch sends a winger up ice, so find out which you're in
Key	Anticipating while still onside and able to get back is coached; abandoning coverage on a hope is not — the test is whether you can recover
Goal	Be the first line of the breakout and get into the neutral zone with speed

The section above is you denying an opponent who has the puck. This one is the moment either side of that: the puck is loose or your team is winning it, and your job flips from coverage to outlet.

Where to be: This is the one job on the ice that is defined by a *move* rather than a spot, so hold both ends of it:

- **While they still have the puck** — high on your side, roughly level with the opposing defenceman you are covering. Unchanged from the section above.
- **As your team wins it** — down the wall on your side, to **between the hash marks and the goal line**. That is the outlet position, and it is about 40 feet below where you started. **In the conventional swing breakout**, that is — under a **flat/spread** structure you hold higher toward the blue line, and under a **stretch or flying-winger** structure one winger leaves up ice altogether. Find out which you're in (see the note under *Carrying the Puck — Free Space* above, and Breakouts).

Staying high is what makes that trip short and makes you the first outlet available; it is not where you receive the pass. A winger who never leaves the point is as wrong as one who left it early — the pass to a winger standing at the blue line is long, flat and intercepted, and it arrives in your back. Come down as the puck becomes yours.

What to do: Watch the battle rather than the puck, and read who is going to come out of it with possession. The instant it is yours, start down the wall and present yourself as an outlet — stick on

the ice, feet already moving, calling for it. Do not leave the point before your team actually has it; do turn your feet so that when they do, the first stride is already going.

Goal: Be the first line of the breakout. Get into the neutral zone with speed the moment your team has possession.

Key considerations: Staying high does two jobs at once — it covers the opposing point on defence *and* it leaves you one short trip down the wall from the outlet spot. Both are lost the moment you drift into the corner, which is why the discipline of staying high pays twice. There is a real distinction to hold onto here, and it separates a good winger from a cheating one: **turning your feet in anticipation while you are still onside and still able to get back is coached and valuable; abandoning your coverage on a hope is not.** The test is whether you can recover if you read it wrong. Full treatment in Breakouts, which is the authority for breakout positioning.

Neutral Zone

The transition zone. Your job is to carry the puck through your lane and support the breakout.

Carrying the Puck — Free Space

Position	In your lane along the boards, on your own side of the ice
Action	Skate hard through the neutral zone — carry into the offensive zone if the path is open, or set up an entry play with the centre
Goal	Move the puck through the neutral zone efficiently and enter the offensive zone with speed
Never	Drift into the centre of the ice — that's the centre's lane, and staying wide is what keeps the ice open for your line

Where to be: In your lane along the boards, carrying through the neutral zone.

What to do: Skate hard through the neutral zone in your lane. Look to carry into the offensive zone if the path is open, or set up for a zone entry play with the center. Stay on your side of the ice.

Goal: Move the puck through the neutral zone efficiently and enter the offensive zone with speed.

Key considerations: Don't drift to the center of the ice — that's the center's lane. Staying wide keeps the ice open and creates proper spacing for your line.

Carrying the Puck — Under Pressure

Position	Along the boards in your lane
Options	Hard rim, soft area dump, chip past the defenceman, cross-corner dump, or a flip over a trap
Read	Chip past a defenceman who is stepping up; soft-dump when you'll win the race; flip when a trap has closed every route along the ice
Technique	Angle your chase to take away their easier escape rather than skating straight at the puck
Never	Land a flip past the goal line — behind their defence but short of the line, or you have iced it
Never	Fight through neutral-zone pressure with the puck — a turnover here becomes an odd-man rush against
Action	When in doubt, dump it in; it's a safe play

Where to be: Along the boards in your lane.

What to do: If pressured, make a quick decision: dump the puck deep into the offensive zone and chase it, or pass back to a defenseman to reset. Don't try to fight through pressure in the neutral zone with the puck.

Dump-ins are not one play — pick the right kind. You are your team's most frequent dump-in taker, so this is a core skill, not a last resort. See Zone Entries for the full treatment.

- **Hard rim** — around the boards behind the net to the far corner. Beats a defence that collapses to the middle, and arrives where your F1 is heading. The most common dump.
- **Soft area dump** — a gentle chip into a specific empty area, aimed to *stop* rather than carom. Used when you'll win the race; a hard dump just gives it to their defenceman.
- **Chip past the defenceman** — flick it off the boards past a pinching or standing-up defender and skate onto it yourself. This is a *possession* play, not a surrender, and it's the best option against a defenceman who is stepping up.

- **Cross-corner / north-south dump** — into the far corner away from where their D is retreating, forcing the longest possible retrieval skate.
- **Flip / area dump over a trap** — lift the puck high so it travels *over* a congested neutral zone and lands in open space behind their defence. This is the answer when a trap has closed every route along the ice. Land it past the defence but **before the goal line**, or you have iced it.

Chasing it properly matters more than the dump itself. Don't skate straight at the puck — that lets the retriever pick either side. Angle your route to take away their easier escape (usually the strong-side wall) so they're forced to the side your support is arriving on. A dump-in with nobody chasing on an angle is just giving the puck away politely.

Goal: Keep possession or dump the puck safely into the offensive zone.

Key considerations: A turnover in the neutral zone is one of the most dangerous things that can happen — it leads to odd-man rushes (where the attackers outnumber the defenders coming back, e.g. 2-on-1 or 3-on-2 — a high-danger scoring chance) against your team. When in doubt, dump it in. It's a safe play.

Pressuring an Opponent with the Puck

Position	In your lane, blocking the passing lanes through your side
Action	Cut off the passing options and force the puck carrier wide toward the boards
Convention	Lane-blocking belongs to a containment structure — a 1-2-2, a 1-2-2 trap or a 1-3-1 — and is not a law of hockey
Options	Under an aggressive press the instruction reverses: forwards hunt the puck and the weak-side winger does leave the lane
Action	Find out which your team plays and what the call is for switching — most run two or three depending on the score and the shift
Risk	Leave your lane under containment and you open a seam the single defenceman behind the wall cannot cover
Goal	Prevent a clean entry — force a difficult pass, force them wide, or force a dump-in

Where to be: In your lane, blocking passing lanes through your side.

What to do: When the opposing team is moving the puck through the neutral zone, stay in your lane and cut off the passing options. Force the puck carrier wide toward the boards. In a containment structure, don't leave your lane to chase — block the lane and let the pressure develop naturally.

Which of those two things you do is your team's neutral-zone system, not a law of hockey. The lane-blocking job described here belongs to a **containment structure** — a **1-2-2**, a **1-2-2 trap** or a **1-3-1** — where the whole design is to deny the middle and wait for a mistake, and where one forward leaving the wall to chase opens the seam instantly. The realistic alternative is an **aggressive neutral-zone press**, the middle-third shape behind a 2-1-2 forecheck: there the instruction reverses, forwards hunt the puck, and the weak-side winger *does* leave the lane to pressure, because the point is to take the puck back rather than wait for it. **Find out which one your team plays — and what the call is for switching**, because most teams run two or three depending on the score and the shift. Neutral Zone Systems is the authority and sets out all of them.

Goal: Prevent a clean entry into your defensive zone. Force the opponent to make a difficult pass, go wide, or dump the puck in.

Key considerations: Under a containment structure, blocking lanes is more effective than chasing: if you leave your lane to pressure the puck, you create a gap that the opponent will exploit, and the single defenceman behind the wall cannot cover two lanes. Stay disciplined. Under a press that trade is reversed deliberately — you accept the gap in exchange for winning the puck back sooner — so the discipline there is to pressure *together* rather than one player freelancing.

Without the Puck — Filling Your Lane on the Rush

Position	In your lane, moving toward the offensive zone
Action	Time your skating so you arrive at the blue line in stride, and be a moving target for the centre or defenceman
Technique	Drag a trail skate along the line while your body, stick and momentum get ahead of it — and keep the blade touching
Rule	A dragged, touching skate is onside under all three rule sets; a lifted trail skate is onside in the NHL and IIHF but offside under USA Hockey Rule 630(a)
Rule	Tagging up is a five-man act — the arm stays up until every teammate has cleared (NHL Rule 83.3(i)); Rules Primer owns the rule in full
Action	Tag, then look before you go — as the winger usually first to the line, you are the one who re-enters too early
Never	Coast at the blue line to be safe — arriving late and slow costs your line more than a whistle would
Read	On your off wing the lane is the same, but the puck sits on your inside hand — it helps entering the zone and costs you on a breakout pass up your own wall

Where to be: In your lane, moving toward the offensive zone.

What to do: Skate hard through the neutral zone in your lane. Be a target for a pass from the center or defenseman. Time your skating so you arrive at the offensive zone blue line in stride — ready to attack.

Goal: Be a moving target and create a passing option through the neutral zone.

Key considerations: Timing matters, and the offside rule is far more generous than most players assume — you are offside only when **both** skates have completely crossed the blue line before the puck has, so a trailing skate on the line keeps you onside — and one held in the air over the neutral zone does too **under NHL and IIHF rules, but not under USA Hockey, whose Rule 630(a) requires skate contact with the neutral zone or the blue line**. A delayed offside is recoverable too — but **tagging up is a five-man act, not a solo one**. Rule 83.3(i) requires that "*all players* of the offending team clear the zone at the same instant (skate contact with the blue line)". Skate contact with the line is enough for you individually, so one foot on the line does your part; but the arm stays up and nobody is re-entered until the last teammate has also tagged. Tag, then **look** before you go — re-entering while a teammate is still deep is what gets the play whistled off, and as the winger who is usually first to the line you are the one who does it. **The**

rule in full, including tagging up and what turns a delayed offside into a whistle, is in Rules Primer and Zone Entries.

The winger-specific version is a technique, and it is worth drilling. You are the player who attacks the blue line widest and fastest, so you are the one the rule rewards most: **drag a trail skate along the line while your body, stick and momentum get ahead of it.** Done properly you are a full stride into the zone, at speed, and still legal. **Keep the blade in contact with the ice or the paint.** A dragged, touching skate is onside under all three rule sets; a *lifted* trail skate is onside under the NHL and IIHF but **offside under USA Hockey Rule 630(a)**, which most North American rec and youth hockey uses. The alternative — coasting at the line to be safe — is the single most common way a winger arrives at an offensive-zone battle with no speed and loses it. Do not slow down to be safe. Arriving late and slow costs your line more than a whistle would.

If you are playing your off wing — a left shot on the right side, or the reverse — your lane is the same but the puck now sits on your inside hand, which helps you entering the zone and costs you on a breakout pass up your own wall; Switching Positions → Playing your off wing covers the trade and the fix.

Offensive Zone

Your natural home as a forward. Your job is to create scoring chances, win battles in the corners, and put pressure on the opposing defence.

Carrying the Puck — Free Space

Position	Along the half-wall, or driving toward the net from the wing
Targets	Shoot, feed the centre in the slot, or find the defenceman at the point
Action	If you have space to drive the net, use your speed and get to the front of it
Convention	"Shoot first" is a bias, not a rule — a teammate with a clear look at an open side is always worth the extra pass
Never	Stand still — movement is what creates the opportunities
Goal	Create a shot on net, or force the defence to react and open space for teammates

Where to be: Along the half-wall (the boards area roughly level with the faceoff dot — between the corner and the point), or driving toward the net from the wing.

What to do: If open on the half-wall, look to shoot, pass to the center in the slot, or find the defenseman at the point. If you have space to drive the net, do it — use your speed and get to the front of the net.

Goal: Create a shot on net, or force the defence to react and open space for teammates.

Key considerations: Don't stand still. Movement creates opportunities. If you're open, look to shoot first — most wingers pass up good shots rather than take bad ones. That said, "shoot first" is a bias, not a rule: a teammate with a clear look at an open side is always worth the extra pass. What you're avoiding is the habit of *always* looking to pass, which lets a defence sit back and take away the seam.

Carrying the Puck — Under Pressure

Position	In the corner or along the boards
Technique	Use your body to protect the puck and fight to maintain possession
Options	Pass back to the defenceman at the point, or hold possession until the centre can support you
Read	Look up before passing to the point — the strong-side defender may have stepped down to support the cycle
Never	Force the puck out of the corner through heavy traffic — a rushed pass turns over possession
Goal	Maintain possession in the offensive zone and keep the pressure going

Where to be: In the corner or along the boards.

What to do: Use your body to protect the puck. Fight to maintain possession. Look for a pass back to the defenseman at the point, or hold possession until the center can support you. Don't try to force the puck out of the corner through heavy traffic.

Goal: Maintain possession in the offensive zone and keep the pressure going.

Key considerations: The corners are a battle area. Protecting the puck and waiting for support is better than a rushed pass that turns over possession. Your defenseman is usually an option at the

point — but the strong-side defender may have stepped down (moved from the blue line toward the top of the faceoff circle) to support the cycle, so look up before passing blindly to the point.

Pressuring an Opponent with the Puck

Position	As F2, in behind F1 on the strong side; as F3, higher in the zone covering the middle and the weak side
Key	F1, F2 and F3 are roles set by order of arrival — if you dumped the puck in and got there first, you are F1
Read	Take the next-most-likely escape route from wherever F1 has pushed the carrier — typically the strong-side boards or behind the net
Technique	Pin the puck against the boards, not the player
Rule	IIHF women's Rule 101.1 prohibits using the boards to eliminate an opponent from the play, push her into the boards, or pin her along the boards
Convention	A 2-1-2 sends two forwards deep and a 1-2-2 sends one, and F3 sits weak-side by default or puck-side in the stacked variant — find out which your team runs
Goal	Force a turnover or a bad outlet pass by trapping the carrier with no escape route
Key	Forechecking is about angles, not speed — stay in your role and trust your linemates to be in theirs

Forechecking means putting pressure on the opposing team in their own defensive zone (your offensive zone) — trying to win the puck back rather than retreat.

F1, F2 and F3 are roles, not positions — and not people. They are defined purely by **order of arrival**: whoever gets to the puck first is F1, the second support is F2, the highest is F3. If you dumped the puck in and you're first on it, **you are F1**, even though you're a winger and the centre is on the ice. Don't wait for the centre to arrive; take the role your position on the ice gives you and let your linemates fill in around you.

How many forwards go deep also depends on the system your team runs — a 2-1-2 sends two in, a 1-2-2 sends one. See Forechecking Systems. The description below assumes a **2-1-2** with the centre arriving first, which is the house default throughout but not a law of hockey.

Your role depends on which side of the ice the puck is on, and on who got there first.

Where to be:

- **Strong-side winger (F2):** Coming in behind F1 on the strong side to seal the puck. Read where F1 has pushed the carrier and take the next-most-likely escape route — typically the strong-side boards (corner) or behind the net.
- **Weak-side winger (F3):** Higher in the zone, covering any opposing forward leaking up the middle or a cross-ice pass to the weak side. **Which side F3 sits on is a genuine coaching split, not a law of hockey.** The weak-side default described here is the common one; in the **strong-side (stacked) variant** F3 shades to the puck side instead, so all three forwards overload one corner and the far-side breakout is conceded deliberately. Find out which your team runs — Forechecking Systems sets out both.

What to do:

- **As F2:** Be F1's second support on the strong side. Seal the puck wherever F1 has angled it. **Pin the puck against the boards, not the player** — that is the distinction the owning document draws, and it matters legally: **IIHF women's Rule 101.1 prohibits using the boards to eliminate an opponent from the play, push her into the boards, or pin her along the boards.** See Body Contact and Battles.
- **As F3:** Stay higher and read the play. Cover the weak-side breakout option and be ready to transition the moment the puck is won.

Goal: Force a turnover or a bad outlet pass by trapping the puck carrier with no escape route.

Key considerations: Effective forechecking is about angles, not just speed. Read where F1 has pushed the puck and seal the next-most-likely escape. Stay in your F2 or F3 role and trust your teammates to be in theirs — if everyone chases the puck, the opponent will pass around you.

Without the Puck — Getting Open and Crashing the Net

Position	On the half-wall, in your side's faceoff circle, or at the side of the net and the goalmouth
Never	Take the high slot between the dots and the top of the circles — that layer is the centre's
Technique	For a one-timer, open your stance toward the passer with your weight back, start the backswing as the pass is released, and hit the ice just behind the puck
Read	If the pass is bad, don't force the one-timer — take the extra touch, because a miss ends up in the neutral zone going the other way
Position	At the net front, live at the edge of the blue paint, get in the goalie's eyes and keep your stick free for tips
Rule	Screening from outside the crease without contact is legal, but positioning alone can void a goal if it stops the goalie moving freely or defending (NHL Rule 69.1)
Action	Crash the net the moment a shot is taken — time your arrival so you reach the side of the net just as it goes
Goal	Be a threat in your half of the zone, particularly from the side of the net for rebounds

Where to be: On the half-wall, in your side's faceoff circle, or at the side of the net and the goalmouth. **Leave the *high* slot — between the dots and the top of the circles — for the centre. The goalmouth, meaning the immediate net front, is a different patch of ice and it is very often yours** (see *Net-front and the crease* below). Two layers, two owners; running them together is how two forwards end up standing on the same square metre.

What to do: Get open for a pass. From the half-wall, be ready to shoot or feed the center in the slot. From your faceoff circle, be ready for a one-timer off a cross-ice pass. From the side of the net, look for rebounds and tip-ins. Crash the net the moment a shot is taken.

The one-timer — the basics of actually hitting one. Full detail in Shooting.

- **Set your feet before the pass arrives.** Open your stance toward the passer with your weight already on your back foot. Everything after this is just falling forward.
- **Start your backswing as the pass is released**, not when it arrives. The most common miss is being late.
- **Hit the ice just behind the puck**, the same as a slap shot — let the flex of the stick do the work rather than trying to smash it.

- **Aim low far side or for a tip.** A one-timer's value is that the goalie has to move across; you don't need to pick a corner.
- **If the pass is bad, don't force it.** A missed one-timer usually ends up in the neutral zone going the other way. Take the extra touch.

Net-front and the crease. You are the net-front player more often than anyone, so the working rule: **live at the edge of the blue paint, get in the goalie's eyes, keep your stick free for tips, and keep your body out of the crease.** Screening from *outside* the crease without contact is legal and one of the most valuable things you can do — but positioning alone can void a goal if it stops the goalie moving freely or defending the net (Rule 69.1), so don't crowd them so tightly they cannot move. Inside the blue paint, assume any contact costs you the goal. Full rule in Rules Primer; the same situation from the goalie's side is in Goaltender.

Goal: Be a threat in your half of the zone — particularly from the side of the net for rebounds.

Key considerations: Crashing the net for rebounds is one of the most effective ways for a winger to score. Time your arrival so you reach the side of the net just as the shot is taken.

Other Situations

A quick reference for situations outside the zone-by-zone framework above.

Faceoffs

Position	At the hash marks — one winger on the inside hash facing the slot, one on the outside hash facing the boards
Convention	The winger whose natural side matches the faceoff location usually takes the outside hash, but assignments vary by team, so ask
Action	Read the result of the draw and react instantly — pounce on a loose puck, support the centre, or get to your defensive position
Never	Creep inside the circle or over your hash marks before the drop — it is your centre who gets thrown out of the dot, not you
Rule	A second violation on the same draw is a bench minor; USA Hockey Rule 613(d) makes it an individual minor, and IIHF gives a team warning with no ejection
Action	Know in advance whether you are the backup draw taker, and aim for a clean tie-up rather than anything ambitious

The centre takes the draw; you line up at the hash marks — one winger on the **inside** hash (facing the slot), one on the **outside** hash (facing the boards). The usual default is that the winger whose natural side matches the faceoff location takes the outside hash, but assignments vary by team and situation, so ask. **The nine locations, the full five-player alignments and the set plays off each are in Faceoffs.** Your job in every one of them is the same: read the result of the draw and react instantly — pounce on a loose puck, support the centre, or get to your defensive position.

Two things about faceoffs that are specifically your responsibility:

- **Don't encroach.** If you creep inside the faceoff circle or over your hash marks before the puck drops, **your centre gets thrown out of the dot** — you don't. Your team then takes the draw with its second-best option, and a second violation on the same draw is a bench minor — **under USA Hockey Rule 613(d) it is a minor on the individual instead**, and under IIHF rules there is no ejection at all, just a team warning. That is the *first* violation (IIHF Rule 76.6); a **second** by the same team on the same draw is a **bench minor** for delay of game (IIHF Rule 76.7), so it is not free. Hold your position until the puck hits the ice.
- **Be ready to take the draw.** Centres get tossed several times a game. Know in advance whether you're the backup taker, and know what you're trying to do — usually just a clean tie-up rather than anything ambitious.

Power Play (your team has the man advantage)

Position	Almost always the half-wall or the net front — the formations are in Special Teams
Targets	From the half-wall you have four options: the point, the bumper, the net front, and the far half-wall through the seam
Technique	Walk down toward the goal line to drag a killer with you, then use the space you just made
Action	From the net front, screen, tip and hunt rebounds — get in the goalie's eyes and keep your body out of the crease
Rule	Don't initiate contact, and don't crowd the goalie so tightly he cannot move (NHL Rule 69.1)
Convention	The bumper is usually the centre, but plenty of units put a winger there — find out whether that spot is yours
Key	Quick puck movement is what beats a kill — it can cover any single option, but not three in two seconds

The formations are set out in Special Teams. Wherever they put you, it is almost always one of two spots: the **half-wall** or the **net front**.

From the half-wall you are the primary distributor on your side. Your four options are the point, the bumper, the net front, and the far half-wall through the seam — and the reason the half-wall is the best job on a power play is that a kill can take away any one of them but not all four. Walk down toward the goal line to drag a killer with you, then use the space you just made.

From the net front your job is screening, tips and rebounds. Get in the goalie's eyes; keep your body out of the crease, don't initiate contact, and don't crowd him so tightly he cannot move (Rule 69.1).

One thing worth asking rather than assuming: **the bumper is usually the centre, but plenty of units put a winger there**, especially a left-shot winger who can one-time a feed from the right half-wall. Find out whether that spot is yours.

Move the puck quickly, look for one-timer setups, and crash the net for rebounds. Quick puck movement is what beats a penalty kill; a kill can cover any single option, but not three in two seconds.

Penalty Kill (your team is short-handed)

Position	In a box you are one of the two high players covering a point; in a diamond you take a middle spot on a half-wall; in a wedge+1 you are often the puck-chaser
Action	Stay tight, block shots, and force the opposing point into low-percentage shots
Action	Clear the puck whenever you get it — you don't need to be fancy
Rule	A shorthanded team may ice the puck freely under NHL and IIHF rules; USA Hockey Rule 624(b)(1) grants it only from Youth 15-Only, Girls 16U, High School and Adult up
Rule	NHL Rule 81.6 removes the exemption from a team shorthanded by a major with nobody waiting on the penalty bench — Special Teams owns this
Never	Chase the puck around the perimeter and pull the shape apart — that is exactly what the power play wants

A kill is four skaters, normally two forwards and two defencemen. **The shapes are described in Special Teams;** your job inside each one:

- **Box** — the standard. You are **one of the two high players**, alongside your centre, each responsible for one point.

- **Diamond** — the centre usually takes the apex and you take one of the two middle positions, covering a half-wall.
- **Wedge+1** — you are often the "+1", the single puck-chaser outside the triangle.

Stay tight, block shots, and force the opposing point into low-percentage shots. Clear the puck whenever you get it — you don't need to be fancy, and a shorthanded team may ice the puck freely — **under NHL and IIHF rules**. USA Hockey gives the exemption only "*For all Youth 15-Only and above, Girls 16U and above, High School and Adult classifications only*" (Rule 624(b)(1)), so in most youth hockey your clear can still be iced; and NHL Rule 81.6 takes it away from a team shorthanded by a *major* with nobody waiting on the penalty bench. Special Teams owns it. Don't chase the puck around the perimeter and pull the shape apart; that's exactly what the power play is trying to make you do.

Icing

Rule	The dot is a decision deadline, not a finish line — NHL Rule 81.1 judges which player would first touch the puck, and the call is made by the time a skate reaches the dots
Action	Carry the extra stride so the puck is on your stick as it crosses the centre red line — that makes the dump legal however far it travels
Options	Or make the dump soft enough that you win the race to it yourself
Action	Sprint the first half of the chase — that is where the call is decided
Read	If you are clearly beaten to the dot, ease up; you gain nothing and the end boards are unforgiving
Risk	An icing leaves your line stuck on for a defensive-zone draw with no change and no timeout under NHL and IIHF rules — USA Hockey blocks neither
Key	The rule in full — hybrid icing, the wave-off list and "gaining the line" — is in Rules Primer

The rule itself — hybrid icing, the full wave-off list, "gaining the line", and how USA Hockey and rec leagues differ — is in Rules Primer. Icing touches a winger from both ends, which is why it is worth your attention more than most players'.

You take more dump-ins than anyone, and dumping from behind the red line is the classic accidental icing. Two fixes: carry the extra stride so the **puck is on your stick** as it touches the centre red line, which makes the dump legal however far it travels; or make the dump soft enough that you win the race yourself.

You are also the one chasing, and under hybrid icing that makes you the reason it gets waved off. Be precise about what the race actually is, because the common version is wrong. The dot is a **decision deadline, not a finish line**. Rule 81.1: icing "*is completed upon the determination as to which player (**attacking or defending**) would first touch the puck*", and that call "*will be made by no later than the instant the first player reaches the end zone face-off dots **with the player's skate being the determining factor***." (That closing clause matters: it is what fixes the deadline to a skate crossing the dot line.) So the linesperson is judging who would get to **the puck** first, and simply has to decide by the time someone reaches the dot. Beating the defender to the dot does not by itself wave anything off — being clearly on course to reach the puck first does. Sprint the first half of that race, because that is where it is decided. If you are clearly beaten to the dot, ease up: you gain nothing and the end boards are unforgiving.

The cost when it does get called is your line stuck on the ice for a defensive-zone draw with no change and no timeout — which is exactly the shift you don't want after a full-speed chase.

Line Changes

Convention	Wingers change as a group led by the centre — coaching craft rather than a measured finding; Center sets out what is and is not established
Action	When the centre calls the change, go with him rather than staying out for one more look
Risk	A line that dribbles off one player at a time plays a stretch of every shift a man short in the middle of the ice
Never	Change while the puck is still in your defensive zone and not under your team's control — you are the point coverage
Key	Shift length, the safe and unsafe windows to change, and why a bad change concedes goals are in Game Management

Wingers change as a group, and the group is led by the centre. His route covers more of the ice than yours and he fades first — **coaching craft rather than a measured finding**; Center sets out what is and is not established here — so when he calls it you go with him rather than staying out for one more look. A line that dribbles off one player at a time plays a stretch of every shift a man short in the middle of the ice, which is exactly the cost a change is supposed to avoid.

The one that costs wingers goals: **changing while the puck is still in your defensive zone and not under your team's control.** You are the point coverage. If you leave, the opposing defenceman is unmarked at the blue line with the puck coming to him.

Shift length, the safe and unsafe windows to change, and why a bad change concedes goals are in Game Management.

Backchecking

Action	Sprint back to your defensive zone the moment your team loses the puck — often faster than the opposing forwards
Convention	Wingers take the outside lanes and the centre the middle under the standard assignment — a coaching choice, not a law
Options	Others play first man back takes the middle, or man-on-man from the puck outward — find out which, and note somebody always owns the middle
Read	Inside your lane the man to find is the opposing F3, the late-arriving forward — stay between them and the puck
Never	Puck-watch — watch your assignment, and arrive at your covering position before the puck does
Action	Once you are set, transition into your normal defensive-zone role: cover the point, be ready to break out

When your team loses the puck in the offensive or neutral zone, your job as a winger is to sprint back to your defensive zone — often faster than the opposing forwards. Backchecking well is one of the most important defensive responsibilities of a winger, and one of the most commonly missed.

- **Take the outside lanes — under the standard assignment.** The most common backcheck scheme, and the one assumed throughout, gives the centre the middle lane and the two wingers the outside lanes. **That is a coaching choice, not a law.** Other teams use **first man back takes the middle**, whoever that is — so as a winger you can end up in the middle. Others pick up **man-on-man from the puck outward**. Find out which your team plays; Defending the Rush sets out all three. Under every variant, somebody owns the middle and nobody assumes it is somebody else.
- **Pick up the trailing forward.** Inside your lane, the man to find is the opposing F3 — the late-arriving forward. Stay between them and the puck. A trailer sneaking in unmarked while three defenders watch the carrier is named across coaching material as one of the cheapest goals a team gives up off a rush — **coaching consensus, not a tracked share**; nobody publishes a breakdown of rush goals by cause. Defending the Rush and Neutral Zone Systems state it the same way.

- **Watch your assignment, not the puck**, and arrive at your covering position before the puck does. Once you're set, transition into your normal defensive-zone role: cover the point, be ready to break out.

Lanes, gap, and the numerical situations in full: Defending the Rush.

Common Mistakes

- **Drifting into the corner in your own zone** when your team plays a collapse system. The point opens up and nobody is positioned for the breakout.
- **Cheating for offence** — leaving the zone early looking for a breakaway pass before your team actually has the puck. Anticipating is coached; abandoning coverage on a hope is not, and the test is whether you can still get back if you read it wrong.
- **Coasting at the offensive blue line** to avoid offside instead of dragging a trail skate and entering with speed.
- **Encroaching on a faceoff** and getting your own centre thrown out of the dot.
- **Drifting into the middle** in the neutral zone. That's the centre's lane; you collapse your line's spacing.
- **Standing still on the half-wall**. A stationary winger is trivially covered.
- **Puck-watching on the backcheck** instead of picking up the trailing forward.
- **Arriving at the net front too early** — get there as the shot is taken, not before.

Key Takeaways

1. Your lane is your responsibility. Width creates space for everyone else.
2. In the defensive zone, staying high does two jobs at once — covers the point *and* positions you for the breakout. That is the low zone collapse job; under man-on-man you follow your check instead, corner and all.
3. Know whether your team plays zone or man-on-man before your first shift. It changes almost everything above.
4. One skate keeps you onside — you can be well ahead of the puck and still be legal, so use it. Keep that skate **touching**: an airborne trail skate is onside in the NHL and IIHF but offside under USA Hockey (Rule 630(a)). And a delayed offside is usually recoverable: clear the zone, tag up with a skate on the line, re-enter — but **every teammate who is in the zone**

has to tag, at the same instant, before any of you may go back in (NHL Rule 83.3(i)). **Check your book before you rely on it:** under **USA Hockey Rule 630(d)** delayed offside exists only at Youth 15-Only and above, Girls 16U and above, High School and Adult — below those levels there is no tagging up at all and the offside is whistled immediately.

5. On the forecheck, F1/F2/F3 are roles set by who arrives first — if that's you, you're F1. Read the angle F1 took and seal the escape route. Angles beat speed.
 6. Puck protection is your defining physical skill: puck on the far side of your body, wide base, feet moving, and know your out before you arrive.
 7. A dump-in is a choice between five different plays — hard rim, soft area dump, chip past a pinching defender, cross-corner, flip over a trap — and the chase angle matters more than the dump.
 8. **Screening the goalie from *outside* the crease, without contact, is normally legal.** Get in their eyes and keep your body out of the crease; and don't crowd them so tightly that your positioning alone impairs their ability to move or defend, because that voids the goal on its own (Rule 69.1).
 9. Crashing the net for rebounds is one of the most effective ways a winger scores — coaching consensus, not a ranked measurement; what *is* sourced is that the ice in front of the net converts several times better than the perimeter, and Shooting owns those figures. Time the arrival with the shot.
 10. Backcheck to the outside lanes and pick up the trailing forward — one of the most commonly missed jobs on the ice. (Defending the Rush gives that title to the middle-lane driver; both are coaching emphasis rather than a measured ranking, so read them as "these are the two people nobody picks up", not as a league table.)
-

POSITIONS

Defender

Rule set: Written to NHL rules. Where IIHF, USA Hockey or typical rec-league rules differ in a way that changes how you play, it is flagged inline. This matters more for defencemen than anyone else — see the note on the trapezoid below. **Playing in Britain? The IIHF flags are yours** — every level of UK hockey runs the IIHF book, amended locally; see UK and England Rules.

RELATED

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Overview

- Goal** Stop the opposing team from scoring
- Position** The last line of defence before the goalie
- Key** You cover the slot and the area in front of the crease — the most dangerous ice there is
- Priority** Always be aware of threats coming toward your net
- Mindset** Calm, simple, reliable decisions

Your primary job is to stop the opposing team from scoring. You are the last line of defence before the goalie and must always be aware of threats coming toward your net. You cover the most dangerous area of the ice — the slot (the area directly in front of the net between the two faceoff circles, where most goals are scored from) and the area in front of the crease (the painted area directly in front of the goalie where they operate). Your decisions need to be calm, simple, and reliable.

A Note on Language

Position	High means toward the blue line you're facing, low means toward the goal line
Key	Strong-side plays the puck, weak-side holds the goalmouth — job titles, not descriptions
Action	Swap the two roles every time the puck crosses the middle
Key	The goalmouth is the weak-side defenceman's; the high slot is the centre's — two layers, two owners
Key	A rim sends the puck onward with the flow; a reverse sends it back against it
Never	Treat rim and reverse as interchangeable — they beat different kinds of pressure

Every line, zone and named area of the ice is defined in Rink Map and Glossary, which is the dictionary for this guide. Listed here are only the terms a defenceman uses in a particular sense, or leans on so heavily they need saying again.

- **High / low.** High means toward the blue line you're facing, low means toward the goal line. Almost everything you are told about your own positioning is a height instruction, in both zones: hold the line, stay above the puck, and don't go below the circles in the offensive zone without a forward taking your place at the line first.
- **Strong-side / weak-side.** Strong-side is the side the puck is on; weak-side is the other. For you these are not descriptions, they are **job titles** — the strong-side defenceman plays the puck, the weak-side defenceman holds the goalmouth, and the two of you swap every time the puck crosses the middle.
- **The point.** The area just inside the blue line where you stand in the offensive zone, and where the opposition's defencemen stand in yours. It is where you live; "covering the point" is what your wingers do to the man in your spot at the other end.
- **The goalmouth versus the high slot.** The **goalmouth** is the immediate net front and it is the weak-side defenceman's. The **high slot** — between the dots and the top of the circles — is the centre's. Two layers, two owners; confusing them is how net-front goals happen.
- **D-partner.** The other defenceman on your shift. Most of this document is really about the two of you as a unit.
- **Rim versus reverse.** A **rim** sends the puck *onward* around the boards in the direction you're facing; a **reverse** sends it *back the way it came*, against the flow. They beat different kinds of pressure and they are not interchangeable — see below.

A note on the headings below. Each zone is broken into the same four situations. The fourth — *Without the Puck* — means what you do when the puck is not on your stick **and** you are not the player pressuring whoever has it. That is a genuinely different job in each zone, so each of those headings is named for the job it actually describes rather than left generic.

Defensive Zone

The most important zone for a defender. Your job is to protect the area in front of your net.

Carrying the Puck — Free Space

Position	Behind your own net or along the boards
Action	Move the puck quickly and purposefully — don't hold it longer than you need to
Targets	Winger on the boards, the centre coming low, or your defensive partner
Options	Quick-up, up, wheel, D-to-D, reverse, rim, off the glass — run down them and take the first genuinely on, not a ranking of favourites
Read	Take the quick-up in the two or three seconds after your team wins the puck, before their forecheck exists — look up ice first, then down
Goal	Transition the puck out of danger and start your team's breakout
Never	Carry or pass D-to-D through the slot — skate behind the net to the other side instead
Rule	Shooting the puck over the glass and out of play from inside your own defensive zone is a two-minute delay-of-game minor, "except where there is no glass" (NHL Rule 63.2(iii))
Rule	USA Hockey has no equivalent — Rule 610(c) penalises only a deliberate shoot-out, and 631(d) makes an accidental one a last-play faceoff

Where to be: Behind your own net or along the boards.

What to do: Use the space to compose yourself and start the breakout (your team's exit from the defensive zone with controlled possession). Look for a winger on the boards, the center coming low, or your defensive partner. Move the puck quickly and purposefully — don't hold it longer than you need to.

Goal: Transition the puck out of danger and start your team's breakout.

Your breakout options. Read this as a **decision hierarchy for a retriever under pressure with no time to think** — run down it and take the first thing that is genuinely on — **not as a ranking of breakout plays**. Breakouts is explicit that the correct breakout is chosen by reading the shape of the forecheck in front of you, not picked off a list of favourites, and it is the authority. Full detail there.

- **Quick-up** — the counter, before their forecheck exists. In the two or three seconds right after your team wins the puck, the opposition is the least organised it will ever be; if a teammate is available up the ice, move it on your first touch. Breakouts calls this the lowest-risk, highest-reward exit available, and it is the one most defencemen never look for because their eyes go down instead of up. **First look up ice, then down.**
- **Up** — a direct pass to your winger on the boards, **between the hash marks and the goal line**. Fastest structured exit; take it when it's there.
- **Wheel** — skate the puck yourself around behind the net and up the far side. Good against a slow or one-man forecheck.
- **D-to-D** — pass across to your partner to change the angle of attack (see below).
- **Reverse** — send it back against the flow to a teammate arriving behind you. Beats an over-committed forechecker.
- **Rim** — hard around the boards to the far winger. Safe, but concedes possession more often than the others.
- **Off the glass and out** — no possession, but no goal against either. Always available and never wrong when you're in trouble. One caveat: the puck must stay *in play*. Shooting it **over** the glass and out of play from inside your own defensive zone is a two-minute delay-of-game minor (NHL Rule 63.2(iii)), and it is a penalty amateur defencemen take constantly. **The rule carries its own exception — "except where there is no glass"** — which matters more at rec rinks than in the NHL: where the boards have no glass above them, as at many bench areas and in a lot of older facilities, the penalty does not apply. Know your rink, but do not build a habit on it. Off the glass and along it, fine; over it, and you've put your team down a man.

D-to-D passing — and the one rule about it. Moving the puck to your partner makes the forecheck reset and shift across, which is often all you need. But: **never pass D-to-D through the slot**. Go behind your own net so the puck travels below the goal line, where an interception means nothing. A D-to-D pass in front of the net that gets picked off is a point-blank chance against, and it is one of the most punished mistakes in hockey.

Key considerations: Don't carry through the slot either. If no pass is on, skate behind the net to the other side rather than going through the middle.

Carrying the Puck — Under Pressure

Position	Along the boards or behind your own net, protecting yourself
Technique	Shield the puck with your body — don't panic
Options	Rim to your partner or the far-side winger, reverse it, or hold it tight behind the net until a teammate gets open
Read	Rim to beat a forechecker sealing you against the boards; reverse to beat one who has over-committed and skated past you
Never	Carry through the slot under pressure — a turnover in the highest-danger area is a direct scoring chance against
Rule	Your goaltender may play the puck behind the goal line only inside the marked trapezoid; outside it is a two-minute minor for delay of game (Rules 27.8 and 63.2(viii))
Rule	Take the trapezoid's dimensions from Rule 1.8, never from Rule 27.8 — 27.8's wording is stale, left over from before the trapezoid was widened in 2014-15
Key	The NHL, KHL and IIHF play a trapezoid; most rec, beer-league and youth associations outside Britain do not — know which you are in
Rule	The IIHF number is 27.7, not 27.8, and in England and Wales the status is unsettled — England Ice Hockey's Rules & Regulations 22.3 say it is "not currently enforced" while the In-House Rules are silent, so assume it binds and ask your league
Action	Plan your retrieval route before the puck arrives, and aim rims where a teammate can meet them, not into the corner

Where to be: Protect yourself along the boards or behind the net.

What to do: Shield the puck with your body. Rim the puck (a hard shot along the boards that follows the curve of the rink around to a teammate further along) to your partner or the far-side winger, reverse it (send it back the way it came, against the direction the forecheck is flowing), or hold it tight behind the net until a teammate gets open. Don't panic.

Goal: Maintain possession or safely exit the puck from danger.

Key considerations: Never try to carry through the slot under pressure. The slot is the highest-danger area — a turnover there is a direct scoring chance for the opponent.

Rim vs. reverse — pick by where the pressure is. A rim beats a forechecker who is sealing you against the boards, because it goes past them to the next teammate around. A reverse beats a forechecker who has over-committed and skated past you, because it goes back into the space they just vacated. Reading which one you're facing is a core defenceman skill.

The trapezoid — this constrains everything you do behind your net.

Your goaltender may only play the puck behind the goal line **inside the marked trapezoid**; outside it, behind the line, it is a two-minute minor for delay of game (Rules 27.8 and 63.2(viii)).

The one exception — skate contact with the crease — and where the trapezoid does and does not apply are in Rules Primer — read it, because whether your league has one changes your job more than it changes anyone else's. Short version: the NHL, the KHL and IIHF international play have it; most rec, beer-league and youth associations do not.

The dimensions come from Rule 1.8, never from Rule 27.8. The painted lines begin **eight feet from each goal post** at the goal line and run back to **eleven feet from each post — a 28-foot span — at the end boards**. Rule 27.8 still reads "six feet from either goal post", wording left over from before the trapezoid was widened by two feet a side in **2014-15**. That is **stale, not self-contradictory** — six feet from each post gives eighteen feet at the goal line, diverging coherently to the same twenty-eight feet at the boards that both rules quote. It is the old, narrower trapezoid described accurately; it is simply not the one painted today. **Never take dimensions from 27.8.** In practice that two feet a side is exactly the band where a rim dies, so it is worth knowing which figure is real. Same treatment in Breakouts, Forechecking Systems and Goaltender.

What it means for you, on every retrieval:

- **Your goalie cannot get a rim that dies in the corner.** You have to, under forecheck pressure. Plan your retrieval route before the puck arrives, not after — that decision is the difference between a breakout and a battle you lose facing your own end boards.
- **A rim aimed straight into the corner is a gift to the forecheck.** Aim rims to arrive where a teammate can meet them, or keep them tight enough that they carry all the way around.
- **Your goalie can still help you, just not out there.** They may stop a puck directly behind the net and leave it dead for you, or play it inside the trapezoid. A rim that stays close to the net is therefore retrievable with no race at all. Agree which of those you want — the call is **"leave it"**, and it has to come while you're still coming back, not as you arrive. See Goaltender and On-Ice Communication.

-  **If you play in Britain, find out before you plan any of this.** The IIHF book has the rule and numbers it **27.7**, not the NHL's 27.8 — but England Ice Hockey's own *Rules & Regulations* **22.3** say the Goalkeepers' Restricted Area is "*not currently enforced to allow ice rinks the necessary time to make the changes to implement this rule*", and the 2025-26 In-House Rules do not mention it at all. That edition of the *Rules & Regulations* is 2024-25, so the published documents do not settle whether the suspension still stands. **Play as though it binds, and ask your league. Look behind the net to see whether the lines are painted at all** — 22.3's own stated reason for the suspension is giving rinks time to repaint, so an unmarked sheet is a strong hint. It is a hint and not a ruling: IIHF 27.7 turns on "*the position of the puck*", not on the markings. UK and England Rules records the same uncertainty.
- **If you play without a trapezoid, rebuild the habit.** Your goalie becomes a genuine third puck-handler behind the net, and the retrievals you have been sprinting to are no longer yours. Find out before your first shift.

Pressuring an Opponent with the Puck

Position	Wherever the puck is on your side — the corner and behind the net included
Action	Pressure the puck carrier directly, or angle them away from the net and the slot
Technique	Pin the puck against the boards, not the player; use your body and an active stick
Rule	IIHF women's Rule 101.1 prohibits using the boards to eliminate an opponent from the play, push her into the boards, or pin her along the boards
Goal	Win the puck or force a bad play that your team can recover from
Convention	Under low zone collapse the wingers stay high and the low battle is yours and the centre's; under man-on-man they follow their check into the corner — a coaching choice, not a law of hockey
Action	Talk to your partner so you always know who is strong-side and who is weak-side, and find out which system you play before the puck drops

The two defenders work as a pair. The **strong-side defender** (the one on the same side as the puck) engages the puck carrier; the **weak-side defender** covers the net. As the puck moves around the zone, the two of you switch roles. This section describes the strong-side role; the next section describes the weak-side role.

Where to be: Wherever the puck is on your side — including in the corner or behind the net.

What to do: Pressure the puck carrier directly. **Pin the *puck* against the boards, not the player** — that is the distinction the owning document draws, and **IIHF women's Rule 101.1 prohibits using the boards to eliminate an opponent from the play, push her into the boards, or pin her along the boards** (Body Contact and Battles) — or angle them away from the net and the slot. Use your body and an active stick. The center will support you in the corner — two of you against one puck carrier is a battle you should win.

Goal: Win the puck or force a bad play that your team can recover from.

Key considerations: Communicate with your defensive partner so you always know who is the strong-side and who is the weak-side defender.

Whether the wingers help you in the corner depends on the system your team plays — this is a coaching choice, not a law of hockey. See Defensive Zone Coverage for the alternatives. The two you'll meet most often:

- **Low zone collapse (zone coverage)** — the default assumed throughout these documents. Wingers stay high covering the points, and the low battle belongs to the strong-side defenceman and the centre. Don't expect winger help in the corner.
- **Man-on-man** — wingers follow their assigned check wherever it goes, including into the corner. Here you *will* get help low, but the points may be left open when their man goes down.

Under either system, two things hold: if the puck escapes up the wall toward the strong-side winger, that's their breakout opportunity and they should engage it — that's not a corner battle. And if an opposing player drops off the point into the low battle, the winger covering them is responsible for tracking them down.

Know which system you're playing before the puck drops. Most breakdowns in the defensive zone are not effort problems — they're two players operating on different assumptions about who has the corner. Communication is everyone's job; call out switches as you see them, regardless of position.

Without the Puck — Weak-Side Coverage at the Goalmouth

Position	At the goalmouth, between any opposing forward and your goalie
Key	You guard the goalmouth, the centre covers the high slot — two layers of coverage in front of the net
Never	Get drawn to the puck — your partner and the centre are handling it
Technique	Body position first, stick second — a stick lift beats a cross-check at everything, including staying on the ice
Convention	"Position beats strength" is a tendency, not a law — plan the shift around tying up their stick, not out-leveraging somebody much bigger
Rule	NHL Rule 59.1 has no blade-on-ice element — under NHL, IIHF or Hockey Canada rules a two-handed shaft shove is a cross-check whatever your blade is doing
Read	Puck in the strong-side corner and the centre gone to the battle — the weak-side winger collapses to the high slot
Action	Call for that collapse; if it doesn't come, hold the goalmouth anyway and call louder
Risk	Both defenders drawn to the puck leaves the net front empty — the biggest mistake in this role

*The opposition still has the puck here. This section describes the **weak-side defender** role — the defender on the opposite side from the puck — which is the other half of the pair job described immediately above.*

Where to be: At the goalmouth — the immediate front-of-net area, between any opposing forward and your goalie. You and the center form two layers of coverage in front of the net: you guard the goalmouth (the screen, the tip-in threat), and the center covers the high slot (the player one layer further out, between the dots and the top of the circles).

What to do: Cover the goalmouth. Don't get drawn to the puck — your partner and the center are handling it.

Net-front technique — how to actually move someone. "Clear the front of the net" is the instruction every defenceman hears and almost nobody is taught, and it is where your position and the rulebook meet most often. **The technique is owned in full by Body Contact and Battles → Defending the net front** — the six-step order of operations, Mike Corbett's coaching on controlling sticks rather than bodies, and the cross-check rule you are most likely to break here by accident.

Read that section before you next play this role. Three things in it that a defenceman in particular gets wrong:

- **The order really is body position first and stick second.** A stick lift beats a cross-check at everything, including staying on the ice.
- **"Position beats strength" is a tendency, not a law** — the owning document says so explicitly, and against a large enough strength gap it fails. Do not plan a shift around out-leveraging somebody much bigger; plan it around tying up their stick.
- **Blade on the ice does not make it legal.** NHL Rule 59.1 has no blade-on-ice element in it at all; that phrasing is a USA Hockey officiating cue, not a definition of the offence. Under NHL, IIHF or Hockey Canada rules a two-handed shaft shove is a cross-check whatever your blade is doing.

The high-slot rotation. Stay disciplined and hold your position. When the puck is in the strong-side corner and the center has gone to help in the battle, the weak-side winger should collapse from the point to cover the high slot (unless that winger is already following their own man down — see exception below). Anyone with a clear view should call for the rotation — you, the center moving away, or the winger themselves. If for any reason it doesn't happen, hold the goalmouth anyway and call louder — an unmarked tap-in at the goalmouth is more dangerous than a high-slot shot through traffic.

Exception — weak-side winger is already low: If the weak-side opposing defenseman has come down off the point and the weak-side winger is following their man, the high slot rotation isn't available. In that case, the responsibility falls to you and your partner to be more vigilant about anyone arriving in the slot — call out anything you see entering the high-danger area.

Goal: Make sure no opponent is sitting unmarked at the goalmouth.

Key considerations: When the puck moves to the other side of the zone, you become the strong-side defender and your partner becomes the weak-side. Both of you must adjust together so there is always one defender on the puck and one at the goalmouth. The biggest mistake is both defenders being drawn to the puck and leaving the net front empty.

Neutral Zone

The transition zone. Your job is to prevent the opponent from entering your zone cleanly.

Carrying the Puck — Free Space

Position	Moving up through the middle of the ice or along the boards
Action	Carry with confidence and look to pass to a forward to push play into the offensive zone
Options	Pass to a forward, or use the boards to chip the puck ahead to a forward in stride
Goal	Transition the puck through the neutral zone efficiently
Never	Stickhandle through the middle under pressure
Mindset	Simple and safe beats clever and risky in the neutral zone

Where to be: Moving up through the middle of the ice or along the boards.

What to do: Carry with confidence and look to make a pass to a forward to push play into the offensive zone. Alternatively, use the boards to chip the puck ahead to a forward in stride.

Goal: Transition the puck through the neutral zone efficiently.

Key considerations: Don't stickhandle through the middle under pressure. Simple and safe beats clever and risky in the neutral zone.

Carrying the Puck — Under Pressure

Position	Near the boards or just inside your own blue line
Action	Move the puck quickly
Options	A bank off the boards, a pass to a forward, or a dump-in
Goal	Keep possession or relieve pressure safely
Never	Try to carry through heavy pressure
Risk	Losing the puck in the neutral-zone middle creates an immediate odd-man rush
Mindset	When in doubt, go simple

Where to be: Near the boards or just inside your own blue line.

What to do: Move the puck quickly. A bank off the boards, a pass to a forward, or a dump-in are all good options. Don't try to carry through heavy pressure.

Goal: Keep possession or relieve pressure safely.

Key considerations: The neutral zone middle is a dangerous place to lose the puck — it creates immediate odd-man rushes (where the attackers outnumber the defenders coming back, e.g. 2-on-1 or 3-on-2 — a high-danger scoring chance). When in doubt, go simple.

Pressuring an Opponent with the Puck

Position	Between the puck carrier and your net, facing the oncoming play, closing the distance as they come
Read	Step up at the blue line only if you are confident you can win the puck or force a turnover — otherwise back up under control and deny a clean entry
Goal	Prevent a clean zone entry; force a dump-in or a turnover
Risk	Step up and miss and you leave your partner alone in a 2-on-1
Never	Step up in the neutral zone unless you are certain you can win the puck

Where to be: Between the puck carrier and your net, facing the oncoming play, closing the distance as they come.

What to do: Step up at the blue line to challenge only if you are confident you can win the puck or force a turnover. Otherwise, back up under control and deny a clean entry. Support from the neutral-zone forwards is important here.

Goal: Prevent a clean zone entry. Force a dump-in or a turnover.

Key considerations: Don't step up in the neutral zone unless you are certain you can win the puck. If you step up and miss, you leave your partner alone in a 2-on-1 (the most common form of odd-man rush — two attackers against one defender, with the defender forced to choose between covering the shot or the pass). When in doubt, maintain your position and back up under control.

Gap control — the method

Key	Gap control is the defining skill of the position — your gap is the distance between you and the puck carrier
Risk	Too big a gap gives them a free run at you with speed and options; too small and one move puts them past you
Action	Start your feet before they reach you — you cannot close a gap from a standstill
Technique	Tighten the gap as they cross the red line and again at your own blue line — Defending the Rush owns the distances
Read	Watch their chest and hips, not the puck, hands or head — the torso has to point where the body is actually going
Action	Take away the middle and force them outside, where the wall becomes a second defender
Technique	Stick in the passing lane, on the ice, out front — it takes away the pass without committing your body
Technique	Pivot late — once you turn to skate forwards you have given up your ability to react

Gap control is the defining skill of the position, so here is the actual method. Your "gap" is the distance between you and the puck carrier. Too big and they get a free run at you with speed and options; too small and one move puts them past you. See Defending the Rush for the full treatment, including 2-on-1s and 3-on-2s.

- **Start your feet before they reach you.** The most common defenceman error is standing still and letting the attacker build speed into you. Begin skating backwards early so you're already matching their pace when they arrive — you cannot close a gap from a standstill.
- **Target roughly a stick-and-a-half of space** as they cross the red line, closing to about a stick length by your blue line. Close enough to reach the puck with a poke check, far enough that a single dekes doesn't beat you.
- **Read their chest and hips, not the puck, hands or head.** A skilled attacker fakes with the puck, the stick, the hands and the head — those are the tools of deception. Their torso and hips have to point where their body is actually going. Watch the middle of them.
- **Take away the middle, force them outside.** Angle your body so the inside lane is closed and the only route is toward the boards, where the wall becomes a second defender.
- **Stick in the passing lane, on the ice, out front.** An active stick on the ice takes away the pass without committing your body.

- **Pivot late.** Once you turn to skate forwards you've given up your ability to react. Hold your backward skating as long as you can.

Backward skating, and which way to pivot

Key	Backward skating is the physical foundation of gap control — you cannot hold a gap you are not fast enough to hold
Technique	Generate speed with C-cuts and backward crossovers rather than pushing straight back
Convention	Pivot to the boards side rather than the middle, so that when you are beaten you are beaten toward the wall — a coaching default, not a law
Read	Some coaches want a middle pivot when turning away would take your eyes off the puck, or when you have inside help and the greater danger is the attacker cutting behind you
Action	Ask which your coach wants and drill both directions — the correct pivot is decided by where the attacker is
Key	If you have just been moved up from forward, this is the barrier — the switch is a technical rebuild, not a set of new decisions

Backward skating is the physical foundation of all of this, and it is the skill that separates defencemen who can play a tight gap from those who can't — you cannot hold a gap you are not fast enough to hold. **Go and work through Skating; it is not optional reading for this position.** The two things it will tell you that change your gap immediately: generate speed with **C-cuts and backward crossovers** rather than pushing straight back, and **pivot to the boards side rather than the middle** — so that when you are beaten you are beaten toward the wall instead of into your own slot. Note that this is a **coaching default, not a law**: some coaches want a middle pivot on specific reads, such as when turning away would take your eyes off the puck, or when you have inside help and the greater danger is the attacker cutting behind you. Ask which your coach wants, and drill both directions — the correct pivot is decided by where the attacker is, not by which way you happen to be competent. See Skating → Which way to pivot. **If you have just been moved up from forward, this is the barrier** — Switching Positions is honest that the forward-to-defence switch is a technical rebuild rather than a set of new decisions, and takes correspondingly longer.

"Step up" and "pinch" are two different plays

- Key** Stepping up happens in the neutral zone or at your own blue line — you move forward to challenge an oncoming attacker early rather than retreating
- Key** Pinching happens at the offensive blue line — you step down into the offensive zone to stop a clearance and keep the puck in
- Risk** Miss a step-up and there is nothing but open ice behind you
- Risk** Miss a pinch and the puck is behind you going the other way — but your forwards are still in the zone to help
- Key** A pinch is generally the safer of the two, because you have teammates behind you; a neutral-zone step-up has no safety net

- **Stepping up** happens in the neutral zone or at your own blue line: you move *forward* toward an oncoming attacker to challenge them early rather than retreating. Risk: if you miss, there is nothing but open ice behind you.
- **Pinching** happens at the *offensive* blue line: you step *down* into the offensive zone to stop a clearance and keep the puck in. Risk: if you miss, the puck is behind you going the other way — but your forwards are still in the zone to help.

A pinch is generally the safer of the two, because you have teammates behind you. A neutral-zone step-up has no such safety net.

Without the Puck — Holding the Line as the Safety Valve

- Position** At your own blue line, in the middle of the ice — one defender each side of the centre line, roughly between the two neutral-zone faceoff dots
- Action** Stay in position and watch the play develop
- Action** Be a safety valve if your forwards need to pass back
- Technique** Keep your stick active to intercept any passes in your lane
- Goal** Be ready to either support the attack or pivot to defence instantly
- Never** Drift too far forward into the neutral zone — if your team turns the puck over you must be in position to protect against the rush

Where to be: At your own blue line, in the middle of the ice — one defender on each side of the center line, roughly between the two neutral-zone faceoff dots. Together you form the last line before your zone.

What to do: Stay in position. Watch the play develop. Be a safety valve if your forwards need to pass back. Keep your stick active to intercept any passes in your lane.

Goal: Be ready to either support the attack or pivot to defence instantly.

Key considerations: Don't drift too far forward into the neutral zone. If your team turns the puck over, you need to be in position to protect against the rush.

Offensive Zone

You are the last line of defensive responsibility, so your role in the offensive zone is to support without taking risks.

Carrying the Puck — Free Space

Position	Both defenders normally just inside the blue line
Action	Look to shoot, pass to a winger in the circle, or find your partner for a one-timer
Technique	Walk the line — skate laterally along the blue line to create better shooting angles
Read	The strong-side defender may step down to the top of the faceoff circle to support a cycle or create a shot, but only when there is no immediate threat of a turnover
Goal	Create a shot on net or maintain offensive-zone possession
Key	Three depths — just inside the line is the default, the top of the circle is activated and still recoverable, below the circles is always a commitment
Never	Go below the circles unless somebody has taken your job at the blue line first — when in doubt, stay at the line

Where to be: Both defenders normally play just inside the blue line. The strong-side defender may step down to the top of the faceoff circle (the edge of the circle closest to the blue line) to support a cycle (a play where your forwards rotate around the offensive zone passing to each

other to keep possession) or create a shot — but only when there is no immediate threat of a turnover.

What to do: Look to shoot, pass to a winger in the circle, or find your defensive partner for a one-timer (a shot taken directly off an incoming pass without stopping to handle the puck — devastating when timed well). Walk the line (skate laterally along the blue line) to create better shooting angles.

Goal: Create a shot on net or maintain offensive zone possession.

Key considerations: Picture three depths in the offensive zone: (1) just inside the blue line — the default position; (2) the top of the faceoff circle — the activated position, acceptable for supporting a cycle, and still recoverable; (3) **below the circles** — not always wrong, but **always a commitment**. At depth (3) you are a fourth forward, you cannot recover if it turns over, and someone must have taken your job at the blue line *before* you go, not after. The "step down" mentioned above is only to depth (2). Going to depth (3) is a separate, deliberate decision covered under *Activating* below. When in doubt, stay at the line. Offensive Zone Play owns the offensive-zone structure and is the authority on these three depths.

Carrying the Puck — Under Pressure

Position	At or near the blue line — if you had stepped down to support the cycle, retreat to the line now
Priority	Keeping the puck in the zone is priority one
Options	Under severe pressure, a reverse pass back to your partner or a chip out of the zone to reset
Never	Panic inward — hold the blue line
Never	Drift out over the line, or you are no longer available as an option
Goal	Maintain the zone; don't give up the blue line
Risk	Lose the line and get caught in the zone and the opponent exits cleanly — if you cannot hold it, exit and reset rather than gamble

Where to be: At or near the blue line. (If you had stepped down to support the cycle, retreat to the line now.)

What to do: Hold the blue line — don't panic inward. If the pressure is severe, consider a reverse pass back to your partner or a chip out of the zone to reset. Keeping the puck in the zone is priority one — but keep your own skates inside the line too, because if you drift out and the puck stays in, you're no longer available as an option.

Goal: Maintain the zone. Don't give up the blue line.

Key considerations: Losing the blue line and getting caught in the zone means the opponent can exit cleanly. If you cannot hold the line, exit and reset — don't gamble.

Pressuring an Opponent with the Puck

Position	Near the blue line, with the strong-side defender closer to the action
Action	When the opponent retrieves the puck after a turnover, the strong-side defender pinches to challenge the carrier and the weak-side defender holds back against an odd-man rush
Read	If the puck is deeper in the zone, both hold position at the top and intercept rather than chase
Goal	Prevent the opponent from exiting the zone cleanly
Technique	Pressure from the top, not from below — if you were stepped down when it turned over, recover to the line first, read, then decide whether to pinch
Convention	Only one defender pinches at a time — a near-universal coaching convention rather than a rule, with real exceptions coaches do call
Risk	If you both step up and the play breaks the other way, the opponent has a clean break against your goalie

Where to be: Near the blue line, with the strong-side defender (the one on the same side as the puck) closer to the action.

What to do: When the opponent retrieves the puck after a turnover, the strong-side defender pinches (steps down off the blue line into the zone) to challenge the carrier. The weak-side defender holds back to protect against an odd-man rush. If the puck is deeper in the zone, both hold position at the top and intercept rather than chase.

Goal: Prevent the opponent from exiting the zone cleanly.

Key considerations: An offensive-zone pinch is safer than a neutral-zone pinch because your forwards are still in the zone behind you — if you miss, they can help recover. Even so, only one defender pinches at a time — a near-universal coaching convention rather than a rule, with real exceptions coaches do call. If you both step up and the play breaks the other way, the opponent has a clean break against your goalie. Pressure from the top, not from below. If you had stepped down to support the cycle when the puck turned over, recover to the line first, read the new situation, then decide whether to pinch — don't try to pressure from below.

Without the Puck — Supporting the Cycle from the Line

Position	Both defenders just inside the blue line, the strong-side one potentially stepped down to the top of the circle
Action	Read the play below you, offer yourself as an outlet, and move laterally to find shooting lanes
Convention	One defender pinches, the other holds the line as a safety — near-universal coaching convention, not a rule; coaches call exceptions for a full-ice press, a delayed penalty and 6-on-5
Never	Activate unless a forward can back-fill above the puck for you
Convention	Activate off the weak side into the back door — the common default, not the only route; some teams activate strong side on purpose, so ask which yours does
Read	Activate on possession, not on hope — jump when your team has clear control below the goal line, and arrive late as the second wave rather than early
Action	Call it, so your partner slides over to cover the middle and your forwards rotate high
Key	One defenceman is always above the puck — which of you it is can change, that there is one cannot

Your team has the puck here. This section describes your role when a forward has it in the offensive zone and you don't — supporting the cycle from above.

Where to be: Same as when carrying — both defenders just inside the blue line, with the strong-side defender potentially stepped down to the top of the circle to support the cycle. If the puck turns over while you're stepped down, recover to the line first before reacting (see "Pressuring an Opponent with the Puck" above).

What to do: Read the play below you and offer yourself as an outlet. The forwards will look up to you when their options below are covered. Move laterally to find shooting lanes and stay open. Keep the puck alive in the zone — if a clearance attempt comes up the boards, step in and keep it in (a "pinch" — see below).

Goal: Keep the puck in the offensive zone and feed the forwards' attack from above.

Key considerations: Pinching in the offensive zone (stepping inside the line to keep the puck in) is part of the role here — but only one defender pinches at a time. The other holds the blue line as a safety. **That is a near-universal coaching convention rather than a rule**, and coaches do call exceptions — a full-ice press, a delayed penalty, 6-on-5. Unless you have been told one is on, assume the convention: if the puck turns over and you have both stepped in, there is nobody in position.

Activating — joining the attack as a fourth (or fifth) man. The conservative positioning above is the default, not a prohibition. Modern defencemen create a lot of offence by jumping into the play, and the difference between a good activation and a bad one is entirely the read:

- **Only activate when a forward can back-fill for you.** Someone has to be the safety valve above the puck. If all three forwards are below the circles and you jump, there is nobody home.
- **Activate off the weak side — the common default, not the only route.** The undefended arriving player is the dangerous one, so coming down the weak side into the back door generally beats charging into a crowded strong-side battle. Teams that run a five-man rotation, or that use the defenceman as the strong-side wall support in a cycle, activate strong side on purpose. Ask which yours does; Offensive Zone Play owns the choice.
- **Activate on possession, not on hope.** Jump when your team has clear control below the goal line, not while the puck is still 50-50 in a corner.
- **Call it.** Shout so your partner knows to slide over and cover the middle, and your forwards know to rotate high.
- **Late, not early.** Arriving as the second wave into the slot is what beats coverage. Arriving early just means you're another body to mark.

The rule of thumb: **one defenceman is always above the puck.** Which of you it is can change; that there is one cannot.

Other Situations

A quick reference for situations outside the zone-by-zone framework above.

Faceoffs

Key	The centre takes the faceoff; your position depends on the zone of the faceoff and your team's setup
Position	Defensive zone — one defender supports the boards-side winger near the hash marks, ready to chase pucks to the corner or get to the back of the net
Position	Defensive zone — the other is in the slot, ready to block a point shot or cover the net front
Position	Offensive zone — one at the strong-side point ready to shoot on a clean win, the other holds the weak-side point
Position	Neutral zone — both defenders back at your blue line, ready to defend a rush if the opposing centre wins it forward
Action	Be ready to react instantly to a tie-up or a loose puck

The center takes the faceoff. Your specific position depends on the zone of the faceoff and your team's setup:

- **Defensive zone faceoff:** One defender (the "boards-side defender") supports the winger at the outside hash mark (the boards-side winger) — positioned near the hash marks, ready to chase pucks to the corner or get to the back of the net. The other defender is in the slot, ready to block a point shot or cover the net front. Be ready to react instantly to a tie-up or a loose puck.
- **Offensive zone faceoff:** One defender at the strong-side point, ready to shoot on a clean win — a set play off a clean draw is one of the few chances in hockey where you get to shoot with your feet already set and traffic already in place. The other holds the weak-side point.
- **Neutral zone faceoff:** Both defenders back at your blue line, ready to defend a rush if the opposing center wins it forward.

Power Play (your team has the man advantage)

Key	1-3-1 — one defenceman only, playing the single point as the quarterback; if you are the second defenceman you are on the second unit, not on the ice
Action	As the quarterback, move the puck quickly, walk the line laterally to open shooting lanes, and use the threat of your shot to pull the box out of shape
Key	Umbrella — you are one of two defencemen high, so you have a point partner and can play give-and-go across the top
Key	2-3 — both defencemen at the points; the older structure, still the most common at rec level
Key	Overload — you are usually the lone weak-side outlet, the release valve when the strong side gets sealed
Priority	Keeping the puck in the zone is your first job — re-entries against a set penalty kill are the hardest thing in hockey
Action	Shoot for tips and rebounds rather than trying to beat the goalie clean through four bodies

The formations are set out in Special Teams. The question they answer for you is a blunt one — *whether you are on the ice at all, and whether you have a partner up there.*

- **1-3-1 (the modern default):** only **one** defenceman, playing the single point as the "quarterback". If that's you, you are the distributor: move the puck quickly, walk the line laterally to open shooting lanes, and use the threat of your shot to pull the box out of shape. If you're the second defenceman, you're on the second unit, not on the ice.
- **Umbrella:** you are one of two defencemen high, so you *do* have a point partner and can play give-and-go across the top.
- **2-3:** both defencemen at the points — the older structure, still the most common at rec level, and where you are most likely to have a partner.
- **Overload:** you are usually the lone weak-side outlet, and your job is to be the release valve when the strong side gets sealed.

Whichever you're in: your first job is **keeping the puck in the zone**. A power play that gets cleared has to re-enter, and re-entries against a set penalty kill are the hardest thing in hockey. Your second job is shooting for tips and rebounds rather than trying to beat the goalie clean through four bodies.

Penalty Kill (your team is short-handed)

Key	A kill is four skaters, normally two forwards and two defencemen — you and your partner are the bottom two in every shape
Key	Box — you and your partner low, owning the net front and the two low corners; this is the standard
Key	Diamond — one of you takes the low point at the net front, the other becomes one of the two middle players; run against a 1-3-1, because a box leaves the bumper unmarked
Key	Wedge+1 — you are almost always in the triangle, not the chaser
Action	Stay tight, box out the net front, block shots, and clear the puck on every opportunity
Rule	You may ice the puck freely while shorthanded — but NHL Rule 81.6 withdraws it from a team short by a major with nobody on the penalty bench
Rule	USA Hockey grants the shorthanded icing exemption only from Youth 15-Only, Girls 16U, High School and Adult upward (Rule 624(b)(1))
Never	Get pulled out of position chasing the puck around the perimeter — the power play wants you to chase, because that is what opens the seam

A kill is four skaters, normally two forwards and two defencemen. **The shapes are described in Special Teams;** in all of them you and your partner form the **bottom two**:

- **Box** — you and your partner low, owning the net front and the two low corners. This is the standard.
- **Diamond** — one of you takes the low point of the diamond at the net front, the other becomes one of the two middle players. Run against a 1-3-1, because a box leaves the bumper unmarked.
- **Wedge+1** — you are almost always in the triangle, not the chaser.

In all of them: stay tight, box out the net front, block shots, and clear the puck on every opportunity — under-pressure clears are perfectly fine and you may ice the puck freely while shorthanded — **with two carve-outs worth knowing before you rely on it**: NHL Rule 81.6 withdraws the exemption from a team shorthanded by a *major* that has left nobody on the penalty bench to come out, and USA Hockey restricts it by classification, so below Youth 15-Only / Girls 16U / High School / Adult a shorthanded team cannot ice the puck at all. Special Teams owns this rule. Don't get pulled out of position chasing the puck around the perimeter; let it come to you. The power play *wants* you to chase, because that's what opens the seam.

Icing

- Action** Aim your clears wide and high off the glass rather than flat up the middle
- Risk** The straight-line clear up the middle is the one most often intercepted at the blue line, and a rim that carries all the way down the ice is what gets whistled
- Never** Put it over the glass — that is the delay-of-game minor, not a clear
- Rule** After your own icing, under NHL and IIHF rules (81.4, 87.1) you cannot change lines and your team cannot take a time-out
- Rule** USA Hockey imposes neither — nothing in Rule 624 restricts substitution, Rule 204 lets you change at any stoppage, and Rule 636(f) puts no icing condition on time-outs
- Rule** USA Hockey grants the shorthanded icing exemption only from Youth 15-Only, Girls 16U, High School and Adult upward (Rule 624(b)(1))
- Rule** NHL Rule 81.6 withdraws it from a team short by a major with an empty penalty bench
- Key** When you are gassed, the glass is the answer — the punishment for a tired clear is being kept out there tired for a defensive-zone draw

The rule itself — hybrid icing, the full wave-off list, "gaining the line", and how USA Hockey and rec leagues differ — is in Rules Primer. Read it once properly, because you ice the puck more often than anyone else on your team and the outs are worth knowing.

Glass, not flat. You ice it most often on a straight-line clear up the middle from your own end, and that same clear is the one most often intercepted at the blue line. Aim **wide and high off the glass** instead: a glass clear rarely ices, is very hard to pick off, and gets the puck out even when it doesn't get it out cleanly. A rim that carries all the way down the ice is what gets whistled. (Off the glass, yes — *over* it, no: see the delay-of-game caveat under your breakout options above.)

The cost lands on your pair. After your own icing the draw is in your zone, and **under NHL and IIHF rules** you **cannot change** and your team cannot take a timeout. So the punishment for a tired clear is being kept out there tired, in the most dangerous zone on the ice, for a faceoff. When you are gassed, the glass is the answer. ⚠️ **One book is softer:** IIHF Rules 81.4 and 87.1 impose both restrictions exactly as the NHL does — so if you play British or European league hockey, assume the full penalty — but **USA Hockey imposes neither**, because nothing in Rule 624 restricts substitution, Rule 204 lets you change at any stoppage, and Rule 636(f) puts no icing condition on time-outs. Rules Primer owns this.

On the kill you may ice it freely — where your rule set allows it. Where it applies this is the single biggest structural advantage a penalty kill has, so use it ruthlessly rather than trying to

make a play you don't need to make. But it is not universal, and the two carve-outs are set out above and owned by Special Teams: USA Hockey grants the exemption only at Youth 15-Only and above, Girls 16U and above, High School and Adult (Rule 624(b)(1)), and NHL Rule 81.6 withdraws it from a team shorthanded by a *major* with an empty penalty bench.

Blocking Shots

Key	Blocking shots is a technique, not an act of courage — done badly it hurts you and doesn't stop the puck
Technique	Get close — blocking from ten feet is far safer and far more effective than blocking from thirty
Technique	Present the biggest possible surface square to the shooter — shin pads facing the shot, stick down on the ice beside you
Action	Stay on your feet if you can; if you go down, go down toward the shooter rather than sideways, with your hands and head behind your body
Never	Turn sideways, lift a leg, or lead with your stick — all three expose the parts of you that armour does not cover
Never	Block from a screen position — you deflect a puck your goalie never saw
Read	On a 2-on-1, blocking the shot means abandoning the pass — your goalie wants the shot
Convention	How much your team blocks at all is a coaching choice — ask your coach which they want and ask your goalie what they want

Blocking shots is a defenceman's job, but it is a *technique*, not an act of courage — done badly it hurts you and doesn't stop the puck. Full detail in Body Contact and Battles.

- **Get close.** The further away you are, the more the shooter can see and adjust around you. Blocking from ten feet is far safer and far more effective than blocking from thirty.
- **Take away the ice, don't dive at the puck.** Present the biggest possible surface square to the shooter — shin pads facing the shot, stick down on the ice beside you to seal the low gap.
- **Stay on your feet if you can.** A standing block keeps you in the play; a dropped block takes you out of it for two seconds, which is a lifetime if you miss.
- **If you go down, go down toward the shooter, not sideways,** and get your hands and head behind your body. The parts to protect are the ones armour does not cover — feet, hands and face. (*Which of them actually gets hurt most often is not established. No injury-*

*surveillance study breaks shot-blocking injuries down by body part, and the clinical literature says why: the only published paper on the mechanism — a three-player case series of lower-leg and ankle fractures from puck impacts in professional players — calls puck impact "a frequent and **underreported** cause of injury" (Foot & Ankle Specialist, 2026). So treat the ranking as coaching craft; the instruction to shield those parts stands on its own.)*

- **Never turn sideways, never lift a leg, and don't lead with your stick.** All three expose the parts of you that armour does not cover: turning sideways opens your unpadded flank and means you can no longer see the puck, a raised leg puts the gap between shin pad and pant into the shot lane, and a stick thrust out ahead of your body deflects pucks upward at your own face and your goalie. Present padded surfaces, keep both feet on the ice, keep the stick down beside you.
- **Don't block from a screen position.** Half-blocking a shot your goalie can't see is worse than not blocking at all; you've deflected an unseen puck.
- **Know when not to.** On a 2-on-1, blocking the shot means abandoning the pass. Your goalie wants the shot.

How much your team blocks at all is a coaching choice, and the owning document says so — some systems want defenders collapsing and blocking aggressively in front of the goalie, others want the lane taken away on your feet with the goalie left seeing everything. Neither is right in the abstract. **Ask your coach which, and ask your goalie what they want**, before you decide that a teammate who stayed up was being soft. See Body Contact and Battles and Goaltender.

Line Changes

- Key** Your shift is legitimately a little longer than a forward's, because more of it is gliding, reading and skating backwards rather than sprinting
- Key** Don't read that as covering less ground — the measured direction is the other way round, and Center owns that finding
- Key** The gap is real and smaller than you think — about a second and a half a shift, computed for this document from the NHL's own time-on-ice report and not a published figure
- Key** The "40-50 seconds for a D against 35-45 for a forward" figures are coaching talk with no source behind them, and both halves sit below what the league actually does
- Action** Change your pair on its own clock, not with a forward line — let the forwards go and take your change on the next safe window
- Never** Change while you are the last man back — say it out loud: "last man"

Your shift is legitimately a little longer than a forward's, because you spend more of it gliding, reading and skating backwards rather than at a full sprint. **Do not read that as covering less ground** — the measured direction is the other way round. Lignell and colleagues, tracking 36 NHL players through a game, found that "*defensemen (D) covered **29% more** ($p \leq 0.05$) skating in total than forwards (F) and were on the ice **47% longer***", while forwards performed "***54% more** ($p \leq 0.05$) high-intensity skating per minute*". Less sprinting per minute, more skating in total. Center owns that finding. **The gap is real, and it is smaller than you think.** In the 2025-26 NHL regular season defencemen averaged **49.3 seconds per shift against 47.6 for forwards** — a difference of about a second and a half. That is computed from the NHL's own time-on-ice report (total ice time divided by total shifts, all situations, every skater who took a shift: 325 defencemen, 615 forwards); it is not a published figure, and the same calculation on 2024-25 gives 48.7 against 47.4. The specific "40–50 seconds for a D against 35–45 for a forward" figures you hear are coaching talk with no source behind them, and both halves of it sit below what the league actually does. (How to Watch Hockey flags the related broadcast figure of "40–45 seconds" as not coming from the physiology literature — though it also notes that figure is *not* baseless, being close to the mean of 47 s computed here. It does not address positional bands at all; that comparison is this document's.) The measured *range* for an individual skater is **roughly 30 to 80 seconds** — measured by **Lignell et al. (2018)**, **Brocherie et al. (2018)** and **Bracko et al. (1998)**, and collected in Vigh-Larsen and Mohr's 2024 physiology review, which reports the band rather than having measured it; Conditioning and Recovery owns that figure. What the extra second or two buys you is one more rotation of the puck, not a ninety-second shift.

Two things are yours specifically. **Your pair changes on its own clock, not with a forward line** — five players stepping over the boards at the same moment is a rush against nobody, so let the forwards go and take your change on the next safe window. And **you are frequently the last man back**, in which case you do not change at all until somebody relieves you. Say it out loud: "last man."

Shift length, the safe and unsafe windows to change, and why a bad change concedes goals are in Game Management.

Defending the Rush — quick reference

Action	1-on-1 — force them outside, keep your stick in the passing lane, don't lunge; steer them to a bad shooting angle rather than making a highlight hit
Action	2-on-1 — take away the pass and give up the shot; sit in the passing lane between the two attackers with your stick flat on the ice on the passing side
Never	Slide on a 2-on-1 unless the pass is already released
Read	If the second attacker has been picked up by a backchecker and the shooter is walking into the slot unpressured with no realistic pass, it is no longer a 2-on-1 — close on the puck
Convention	3-on-2 — "two wide, middle to the backchecker" is the common default; "strong side takes the puck, weak side splits" the alternative
Action	Ask your coach which of the two you are playing — it is a coaching choice, not a law
Action	Under both 3-on-2 systems, retreat together and keep the middle of the ice sealed as long as possible
Never	Let an attacker get between you and your net — stay on the defensive side of the puck

Full detail in Defending the Rush. The three situations you must have automatic:

- **1-on-1:** Gap control (see the neutral zone section above). Force them outside, keep your stick in the passing lane, don't lunge. Your goal is to steer them to a bad shooting angle, not to make a highlight hit.
- **2-on-1: Take away the pass, give up the shot.** Position yourself in the passing lane between the two attackers, stick flat on the ice on the passing side. The shot is your goalie's job — they can see it and are set for it. A cross-ice pass to an open forward is a chance they cannot save. Do not slide unless the pass is already released. **The one honest caveat, from the owning document:** if the second attacker has been picked up by a backchecker and the shooter is walking into the slot completely unpressured with no realistic pass available, it is no longer a 2-on-1 — close on the puck. Read what is actually in front of you rather than the label.
- **3-on-2:** There are **two named systems here and you need to know which one your team plays** — this is a coaching choice, not a law. The common default is **"two wide, middle to the backchecker"**: each defenceman takes an outside attacker, nobody chases the puck carrier, and the middle attacker belongs to whoever is backchecking the middle lane — usually the centre, though *which* backchecker owns the middle is itself a coaching

choice, with "first man back takes the middle" and man-on-man-from-the-puck-outward both in use (see Center and Winger). The realistic alternative is "**strong side takes the puck, weak side splits**": the strong-side defenceman plays the carrier as a 1-on-1 and the weak-side defenceman drops off to split the middle and the far attacker, sitting in the passing lane exactly as on a 2-on-1. The default concedes the middle entirely if the backcheck does not arrive; the alternative never concedes the middle but leaves the far attacker more room.

Ask your coach which one you are playing — two defencemen running different versions on the same rush is worse than either. Under both: retreat together and keep the middle of the ice sealed as long as possible.

The universal rule: **stay on the defensive side of the puck**. Anything that puts an attacker between you and your net has already gone wrong.

Common Mistakes

- **Both defencemen drawn to the puck**, leaving the goalmouth empty. Coaches at every level name this as one of the commonest causes of goals against — **coaching consensus, not a statistic**; no published tracking data breaks goals down by cause this way. Defensive Zone Coverage owns that claim and states it the same way.
- **Standing still at the blue line** and letting an attacker skate into you with speed. Start your feet early.
- **Diving or sliding on a 2-on-1** before the pass is released — you take yourself out of the play and open both options.
- **Carrying the puck through your own slot**. Go behind the net instead.
- **Pinching with no read**. An offensive-zone pinch with forwards behind you is fine; a neutral-zone pinch that misses is a 2-on-1 against your partner.
- **Rimming into the corner and assuming the goalie will get it**. Under NHL and IIHF rules they legally cannot — though in England and Wales the restricted area's status is unsettled. Play as though it binds — an unpainted sheet is a hint, not a ruling, because the rule turns on where the puck is, not on the markings.
- **D-to-D through the slot**. Go behind the net.
- **Blocking a shot from a screening position**, deflecting a puck your goalie never saw.
- **Activating with no forward covering for you**, leaving nobody above the puck.
- **Standing tall while skating backwards**. Stay low or you get beaten wide.

- **Flat clears up the middle** — the classic icing, and the classic interception.
- **Going below the circles in the offensive zone with nobody back-filling.** Below the circles you are a fourth forward and cannot recover — which is fine if a forward has already taken the blue line for you, and an odd-man rush against if not. The error is the missing back-fill, not the depth.

Key Takeaways

1. One defender on the puck, one at the goalmouth. That holds under low zone collapse, the coverage these documents assume; under man-on-man you follow your check instead, and the net front belongs to whoever's man is standing there. Switch roles as the puck moves, and talk about it.
 2. Gap control is the job. Start your feet early, close the middle, force them outside, pivot late.
 3. On a 2-on-1, take the pass and let your goalie have the shot — a convention, not a law, and it stops applying if the shooter is walking into the slot completely unpressured with no realistic pass available.
 4. Never carry through your own slot. Behind the net is your safe pivot.
 5. Rim to beat a sealing forechecker, reverse to beat an over-committed one.
 6. In the NHL, the KHL and IIHF play, your goalie can only play the puck behind the goal line inside the trapezoid — so retrieval is on you. Most rec, beer-league and youth associations elsewhere have no trapezoid, and there your goalie is a third puck-handler back there. **In England and Wales the status is unsettled** — the IIHF book has it at Rule 27.7, England Ice Hockey's *Rules & Regulations* 22.3 say it is not currently enforced. Play as though it binds and find out before your first shift; unpainted lines are a hint, not a ruling.
 7. Only one defenceman pinches at a time — the other is the safety. That is a near-universal coaching convention rather than a rule, and coaches do call exceptions (a full-ice press, a delayed penalty, 6-on-5).
 8. Know whether your team plays zone or man-on-man in the defensive zone. Most breakdowns are two players on different assumptions.
-

POSITIONS

Goaltender

Rule set: Written to NHL rules. Where IIHF, USA Hockey or typical rec-league rules differ in a way that changes how you play, it is flagged inline. This matters more for goaltenders than anyone except defencemen — see the trapezoid section. **Playing in Britain? The IIHF flags are yours** — every level of UK hockey runs the IIHF book, amended locally; see UK and England Rules.

⚠ **Goaltending is where the books diverge most**, so the IIHF flags below are not decoration. The paddle limit, the penalty-shot violation ladder, whether you can be swapped mid-shootout, whether shorthanded icing can ever be withdrawn, and — decisively — **whether a goaltender-interference call can be reviewed at all** are all different under the rule set you actually play.

RELATED

[Center](#)[Defender](#)[Winger](#)[Switching Positions](#)[UK and England Rules](#)[Rink Map and Glossary](#)[Rules Primer](#)[On-Ice Communication](#)[Defending the Rush](#)[Special Teams](#)[Game Management](#)[Equipment](#)[Mental Game](#)

Overview

- Key** You are the only player who sees everything, all the time — and that view is wasted unless you talk
- Position** The last line of defence; when you make the mistake, everybody in the building knows whose it was
- Mindset** Goaltending is coached as much a mental skill as a physical one — reading, tracking, deciding, recovering
- Key** The one thing that happens behind you is a puck below your goal line, which is why post integration gets its own section
- Action** If you are a skater, read Overview, Communicating with Your Defence, Goaltender Interference and What a Goalie Needs From Their Skaters

You are the only player on the ice who can see everything, all the time. Every other player has a blind side; you effectively do not, because the play develops in front of you, you face it permanently, and you are the only one who isn't making decisions while sprinting. That view is the position's greatest asset and it is wasted unless you talk. (The one thing that *does* happen behind you is a puck below your goal line — wrap-arounds, jam plays and pucks behind the net — which is precisely why post integration exists and why it gets its own section.)

You are also the last line of defence. When everyone else makes a mistake, there is another layer behind them. When you make one, the light goes on and the horn sounds and everybody in the building knows exactly whose mistake it was. That is the honest mental demand of the position, and it is why goaltending is coached as much as a mental skill as a physical one: at higher levels almost every goalie can execute the saves, and the separation is made in reading, tracking, decision-making and recovering from mistakes.

Two audiences are served here. If you are learning to play goal, this is your technical and tactical grounding. If you are a skater, read the **Overview**, **Communicating with Your Defence**, **Goaltender Interference** and **What a Goalie Needs From Their Skaters** sections at minimum — most of the goals your team concedes from the net front are caused by skaters who do not know what their goalie is trying to do. **If you are a skater thinking about moving into the net**, read Switching Positions → Anyone → goaltender first — it explains why this is a different sport sharing a rink, and how to try it properly.

And if you have not started playing yet, going in as a goalie is the cheapest route onto the ice there is. Goalies are scarce at every level of amateur hockey, so places in adult learn-to-play programmes are routinely free or discounted, and clubs frequently own goal equipment and loan it rather than risk a goalie shortage. Getting Started covers the routes in, and Equipment covers the kit.

How This Document Maps onto the Other Position Documents

Center, Defender and Winger are all built on the same skeleton: three zones — **Defensive**, **Neutral**, **Offensive** — and inside each zone four situations: *Carrying the Puck in Free Space*, *Carrying the Puck Under Pressure*, *Pressuring an Opponent with the Puck*, and *Without the Puck*. Each finishes with an **Other Situations** section.

A goaltender does not fit that grid, and forcing it would teach you something false. You spend the whole game in one zone, you carry the puck essentially never, and you pressure nobody. So this document is organised by skill instead. Here is the translation, so that a reader moving between the four documents does not lose their place:

The skaters' framing	Where the equivalent lives here
Defensive zone — without the puck	Almost the whole document: <i>Stance and Depth, Angles and Positioning, Movement, Save Selection, Rebound Control, Tracking the Puck, Screens, Tips and Traffic</i> . This is your version of a skater's "finding space" — except the space you are finding is the shooting angle.
Defensive zone — carrying the puck, free space	<i>Playing the Puck</i> — retrievals behind your net, the trapezoid, the ranked list of safe outlets, and your part in icing.
Defensive zone — carrying the puck, under pressure	<i>Playing the Puck</i> → <i>The discipline of not playing it</i> , plus <i>Freezing the puck</i> under <i>Rebound Control</i> . Your equivalent of a defenceman's "get it off the glass" is a freeze or a clear.
Defensive zone — pressuring an opponent	You almost never do this. The two exceptions are the poke check (<i>Save Selection</i>) and coming out to smother a loose puck (<i>Playing the Puck</i>). Your real version of pressure is <i>Communicating with Your Defence</i> — you direct the four players who can pressure.
Neutral zone	Barely applies: you may not participate in the play beyond the centre red line (NHL Rule 27.7; IIHF Rule 27.6 , same rule, different number). Your neutral-zone job is watching for the shorthanded break — see <i>Power play</i> under <i>Situational Goaltending</i> .
Offensive zone	Only when your net is empty — see <i>6-on-5 with your net empty</i> .
Other Situations	<i>Situational Goaltending</i> : breakaways, penalty shots, 2-on-1s, 3-on-2s, shootouts, special teams and the empty net. Same job as the skaters' "Other Situations" section.

Two sections have no skater equivalent at all and are specific to this position: *Goaltender Interference, From Your Side of It* and *What a Goalie Needs From Their Skaters*.

A Note on Language

- Key** The shared vocabulary — lines, zones, named areas — is in Rink Map and Glossary; only goalie-specific terms are defined here
- Key** Depth is how far out you are along the puck-to-goal line; square is chest, hips and shoulders facing the puck, centred on that line
- Key** Five-hole is the gap between your legs; six-hole is the gap between your stick arm and your body
- Key** Front door is the shooter you are challenging; back door is the space you have opened up behind you, usually at the far post
- Key** The spoken call "back door" is narrower — it means an unmarked opponent waiting at the far post, a person rather than a depth
- Key** You do not play a series of shots; you play situations, most of which never end in a shot at all

Goaltending has its own precise vocabulary, and these terms recur throughout this document. **The shared vocabulary every position uses — the lines, the zones, the named areas of the ice, and the full glossary — is in Rink Map and Glossary;** only the goalie-specific terms are defined here.

- **The crease** = the light-blue painted area in front of the net where you operate. It is a semi-circle of six-foot radius drawn from the centre of the goal line, with straight side lines starting one foot outside each post and running four feet six inches out (NHL Rule 1.7).
- **Depth** = how far out of your net you are, measured along the line from the puck to the middle of the goal.
- **Square** = your chest, hips and shoulders facing directly at the puck, with the middle of your body on the line from the puck to the centre of the net.
- **Challenging** = coming out toward the shooter to reduce how much net they can see. The opposite is **staying deep** or **playing back**.
- **Five-hole** = the gap between your legs. **Six-hole** = the gap between your stick arm and your body, which opens when your paddle is too long or you roll your shoulder.
- **Blocker** = the rectangular pad on your stick hand. **Glove** or **trapper** = the catching mitt on the other hand.
- **Post** = the vertical pipes at the sides of the net. **Post integration** = the family of techniques for sealing yourself against a post and getting off it cleanly.

- **Front door / back door** = when you challenge a shooter, the shooter is the front door; the space you have opened up behind you, usually to the far side of the net, is the back door. Every positioning decision trades one against the other. (*The spoken call "**back door**" — see "Communicating with Your Defence" — uses the term slightly more narrowly: it means an unmarked opponent waiting at the far post. Same piece of ice, but the call is about a person, not about your depth.*)
- **Save selection** = choosing which save to make. Not "reacting" — choosing.
- **Reading the situation** = recognising where every player and the puck are, and deciding from that where to be and which save to use. You do not play a series of shots. You play situations, most of which never end in a shot at all.
- **Screen** = an opponent standing in your sightline. **Traffic** = bodies between you and the puck, from either team.

Stance and Depth

The ready stance

Position	Feet slightly wider than shoulder-width, weight on the inside edges of the balls of your feet
Technique	Get low with your knees, not your spine — bending at the waist drops your head and makes you fall through saves
Position	Hands out in front and visible in your own peripheral vision; hands at your hips must travel forward before they travel sideways
Technique	Stick blade flat on the ice a blade's length in front of your toes, angled so a puck deflects down and out
Key	Head still and level — your eyes are the instrument, and everything else exists to keep them steady
Rule	A goalkeeper's paddle may not exceed 26 inches (NHL Rule 10.2); too long and you stand taller and the six-hole opens
Rule	IIHF Rule 10.2 sets the widened portion at 71 cm — about 28 inches, roughly two inches longer than the NHL's

Everything else is built on this. A stance that is wrong in a small way at the start of the play is wrong in a large way by the time the shot arrives.

- **Feet slightly wider than shoulder-width**, weight on the inside edges of the balls of your feet. Weight on your heels means you cannot push, and you will fall backwards on the first lateral move.
- **Knees bent, chest up, back reasonably straight.** Bending at the waist to get low drops your head and pushes your shoulders forward, which is what makes goalies fall through their saves. Get low with your knees, not your spine.
- **Hands out in front of you and visible in your own peripheral vision.** This is the single cheapest improvement most rec-league goalies can make — a startling number of pucks simply hit hands that are already where the puck is going. Hands held back at your hips are hands that must travel forward before they can travel sideways.
- **Stick blade flat on the ice, roughly a stick-blade's length in front of your toes**, angled so a puck hitting it deflects down and out rather than up into your body. The stick is your first line of defence against low shots and passes through the crease.
- **Head still and level.** Your eyes are the instrument; everything else exists to keep them steady.

Paddle length matters more than beginners think. The paddle is the thick part of the goal stick between the blade and the shaft; the NHL maximum is 26 inches. **Under IIHF Rule 10.2 — the book you play under in Britain — the ceiling is higher:** *"The widened portion of the goalkeeper's stick extending up the shaft from the blade shall not extend more than 71cm from the heel and shall not exceed 9.0cm in width."* That is about 28 inches, roughly two inches more than the NHL allows, and the IIHF sets no height-exemption process because it does not need one. A paddle that is too long forces you to stand taller, pushes your stick hand away from your body and opens the six-hole. If your stance feels wrong and you cannot fix it, measure the stick before you rebuild the stance — and note that the extra two inches the IIHF permits are exactly the two inches that will cost you the six-hole.

Depth is the fundamental decision

Key	Every save begins with a decision you made before the shot — how far out of my net am I?
Priority	The trade is always front door against back door — shot taken away against pass still covered
Risk	Depth costs you reaction time, lateral coverage on a pass, and awareness of where the net is behind you
Read	One shooter, no pass available, shot from distance — challenge to the top of the crease or beyond
Read	Puck below the dots or in tight, or a pass available across the slot — get back
Convention	Depth against a screened shot from distance is a genuine coaching split, not a default — find out which your coach teaches
Never	Hide deep in the net or run at shooters — both are confidence problems, not technique problems

Every save begins with a decision you made before the shot: **how far out of my net am I?**

Think of it geometrically. The net is six feet wide. From the shooter's point of view, you are a wall of a certain size at a certain distance. Move a foot toward them and you cover noticeably more of the net from their perspective — the shooting angles that beat you shrink. Move a foot back and they open up again.

So why not just charge out every time? Because depth costs you three things:

1. **Time.** The further out you are, the less time you have to react to a shot from that distance, and the more of a deke you have to respect.
2. **Lateral coverage.** The further out you are, the further you have to travel to get across on a pass. A goalie two feet outside the crease facing a strong-side shooter has an enormous back door.
3. **Net awareness.** Out past the top of the crease it becomes genuinely hard to know where the goal is behind you, and "losing the net" is how goalies end up making a save while standing beside the post.

The trade is always front door against back door. You are choosing how much of the shooter's shot to take away versus how much of the pass you can still cover. There is no universally correct answer; there is a correct answer for each situation.

The rough defaults, which every goalie coach will adjust:

- **One shooter, no pass available, shot from distance:** challenge. Get to the top of the crease or beyond. Take the shot away and make them beat you with placement.
- **Puck below the dots or in tight:** get back. Depth buys the shooter nothing when the angle is already bad, and you need the ability to move.
- **Pass available across the slot:** back off. Being slightly less square to a shot you can still see beats being perfectly square to a shot that never comes while the back door is wide open.
- **Screened shot from distance: a genuine coaching split, not a default — find out which one your coach teaches.** The traditional answer is deeper than you would otherwise be, so you have time to find the puck through legs. A second school teaches the opposite and calls going deep an error: the BVHS goalie manual says "*Goalies often fall deep in their crease when facing pressure; this is a common error. This opens too much net and does not help see more of the puck,*" and asks instead that you "*maintain a close gap to the shooter to eliminate room for the puck to move, as well as tips.*" Both sides are trading the same two things — net coverage against sighting time — and disagreeing about which is scarcer. See the traffic section.

Two failure modes, and both are confidence problems, not technique problems. A goalie who has lost confidence goes to one extreme or the other: hiding deep in the net where the posts feel safe (and getting beaten to the corners), or running at shooters — sometimes out as far as the **hash marks**, the short marks on the sides of each faceoff circle level with the faceoff dot, about twenty feet from your goal line — and getting beaten by the first pass or the first change of direction. If you can see either pattern in your own game, treat it as a head problem before you rebuild your mechanics.

Angles and Positioning — The Core of the Position

If you take one thing from this document: **goaltending is not primarily about reflexes. It is about being in the right place, so that the save requires almost no reflex at all.** The saves that look spectacular are usually positioning failures that were rescued athletically. The saves that look easy are the good ones.

Playing the angle

Position	Stand on the line from the puck to the exact centre of the goal line, facing along it, centred on it
Technique	Be out — at the depth this situation calls for
Technique	Be square — chest and hips pointed at the puck, centred on the puck-to-net line
Technique	Be set — stationary, or as close to it as the play allows, at the moment of release
Priority	In that order: out and square but still moving at release is worse than slightly shallow and completely set
Action	Ask for the extra second in practice — if you are never set in practice, you will not be set in games

Imagine a line drawn from the puck to the exact centre of the goal line. Your job is to stand on that line, facing along it, with your body centred on it. Do that and you are covering the middle of the net by definition, and the shooter can only score by hitting the edges.

Mitch Korn's three-step formulation of cutting down the angle is the clearest one in circulation, and worth memorising in order:

1. **Be out** — at the depth this situation calls for.
2. **Be square** — chest and hips pointed at the puck, centred on the puck-to-net line.
3. **Be set** — stationary, or as close to it as the play allows, at the moment of release.

They are in that order for a reason. Out and square but still moving when the shot leaves is worse than slightly shallow and completely set. A goalie in motion at release cannot push in any direction, because their weight is already committed to one.

"Set, then shoot" is also how you should be practised. Coaches habitually let shooters fire before the goalie's feet are down. If you are never set in practice, you will not be set in games. Ask for the extra second.

Squaring up

Technique	Square is about your torso, not your feet — rotate your shoulders and hips and take small shuffles
Never	Turn your skates and skate along an arc facing the wrong way
Never	Take the big shuffle — two large steps instead of four opens the five-hole mid-step
Key	Smaller is better, always; a large shuffle also leaves you unable to change direction

Square is about your torso, not your feet. On a puck moving laterally across the top of the zone, you stay square by rotating your shoulders and hips and taking small shuffles — not by turning your skates and skating along an arc facing the wrong way.

The common error is the **big shuffle**: covering the distance in two large steps rather than four small ones. A large shuffle opens the five-hole mid-step and leaves you unable to change direction. Smaller is better, always.

The post-to-post arc

Position	Move along a shallow arc — out at the middle, curving back toward the posts as the puck goes wide
Key	As the puck moves toward the boards the angle closes on its own, and depth there just means you cannot get back
Technique	End each lateral movement at the post rather than near it — short side is the cheapest goal in hockey
Key	Korn's "Y-theory" — out, back, and diagonally toward the post — is the picture of what the arc looks like

You are not moving in a straight line across the crease. You are moving along a shallow arc — out at the middle, curving back toward the posts as the puck goes wide. Two reasons:

- **The geometry demands it.** As the puck moves toward the boards the angle closes on its own; you do not need depth to cover a shot from the goal line, and depth there just means you cannot get back.
- **The posts are your reference points.** Ending each lateral movement *at* the post rather than *near* it means you are never beaten short side, which is the cheapest goal in hockey.

Korn calls the efficient combination of moving out, back and diagonally to the post the "**Y-theory**" — out, back, and diagonally toward the post — and it is a good mental picture for what the arc actually looks like when you trace a goalie's feet over a shift.

Knowing where you are without looking

Key	You cannot look at the net, so build a set of physical references instead
Technique	Tap the posts with your stick or glove when the play allows — it is a position fix, not a nervous tic
Technique	Feel where your skates are relative to the blue paint; the crease lines are painted for you
Technique	Use the crease depth marks — they are painted as a depth reference (NHL Rule 1.7)
Action	Reset at every stoppage — skate your arc, tap both posts, find your top-of-crease spot

You cannot look at the net. The puck is at the other end of your attention and it moves faster than your head. So you build a set of physical references:

- **The posts.** Reach back and tap them with your stick or your glove when the play allows. Every goalie does this. It is not a nervous tic; it is a position fix.
- **The blue paint.** The crease lines are painted for you. The straight side lines run from one foot outside each post out to four feet six inches; the arc is six feet from the middle of the goal line. Feel where your skates are relative to the paint.
- **The depth marks.** NHL creases carry a five-inch line extending into the crease from each side line, four feet out from the goal line (Rule 1.7). They exist as a depth reference. Use them — **but look before you rely on them.** IIHF Rule 1.7 describes the crease in a sentence and puts the geometry in Appendix VI rather than in the rule text, so the paint you get under the IIHF book is not guaranteed to carry the NHL's marks. Find out what your own crease is actually painted with in warm-up.
- **The ice itself.** Your own skate ruts, the goal crease edge under your blade, the feel of the post against your shoulder or shin.
- **Reset at every stoppage.** Skate your arc, tap both posts, find your top-of-crease spot. Rebuild the map every whistle so you do not have to think about it during play.

Angle first, or depth first?

Convention	The mainstream modern emphasis is angle before depth — get on the line first, then add depth if the situation allows
Key	Being deep but off-angle is a goal; being on-angle but a little deep is a save you have to make
Read	Stepping off the post to face a short-side shot is the documented exception — add depth first to close the near-post gap
Key	Where the danger is a gap you have just created by moving, depth is the fix
Action	Ask your own coach which they teach — this is a difference in coaching philosophy, not a settled fact

The mainstream modern coaching emphasis is **angle before depth**: get on the line first, then add depth if the situation allows. Being deep but off-angle is a goal; being on-angle but a little deep is a save you have to make.

There is at least one well-documented exception. Philadelphia Flyers goalie development coach Brady Robinson teaches that when you are **stepping off the post to face a short-side shot**, depth is the first thing you add — because pushing out along the short side is what closes the near-post gap that opens the instant you detach from the post. Treat that as the shape of the exception generally: when the danger is a gap you have just created by moving, depth is the fix.

Ask your own coach which they teach. This is a genuine difference in coaching philosophy, not a settled fact.

Movement

Goalie skating is its own discipline. You almost never take a normal forward stride; you move laterally, backwards and diagonally in small controlled increments while keeping your body facing the puck.

On your feet

Options	Shuffle for short lateral moves, T-push for longer ones, telescope in and out, C-cut backwards to retreat
Technique	Shuffle without turning your skates and arrive stopped rather than drifting — you stay square the whole way
Technique	T-push turns the lead skate to form a T and covers real ground, but you are momentarily not square, so use it when you have time
Technique	Telescope straight out and straight back along the puck-to-net line, brisk and explosive, never a stroll
Technique	C-cut backwards on your inside edges so you retreat without ever taking your eyes off the puck
Convention	What the lead skate does in a shuffle is not settled — BVHS teaches the flats and calls an outside edge a fault that anchors you
Key	Take your control from the size of the shuffle and from stopping the hips together, not from digging the lead skate in
Key	Flow is a little backward motion on a rush — too much and you retreat into your own net

- **The shuffle** — moving side to side without turning your skates, staying square throughout. You push off the far foot (the "drive" leg), bring it back to stance, and arrive stopped rather than drifting. This is your default for short lateral moves and for anything where the puck may be shot mid-movement, because you are square the whole way. **What the lead skate should be doing is not settled.** Mitch Korn's definition specifies only the motion and the size, with no edge detail at all. The BVHS goalie manual teaches the lead leg on its **flats**, not an edge: *"When we do shuffle, we ideally want to be on our flats instead of an edge. This makes it easier to glide and stay light through your front leg."* It also names the **outside** edge, not the inside, as the one that bites — and treats that bite as a fault rather than a braking technique: *"If your front leg is on its outside edge, you will be anchored to the ice, and no matter how hard you push, you will be stuck."* Practical reading: get your control from the size of the shuffle and from stopping the hips together, not from digging the lead skate in.
- **The T-push** — for longer lateral distances. Turn the lead skate to point where you are going so your feet form a T, push hard off the back foot, and glide. Faster than a shuffle and it covers real ground, but you are momentarily not square, so use it when you have time — post to post on a puck behind the net, or recovering across after a rebound goes wide. The T-push is also the first motion of a two-pad slide.

- **Telescoping** — moving straight out and straight back along the puck-to-net line, staying in your stance the whole time. This is how you add and remove depth. It should be brisk and explosive, never a stroll.
- **Backward C-cuts** — retreating without turning around. You carve a "C" shape with one skate's inside edge, then the other, which pushes you backwards while your chest stays facing the play. This is how you retreat on a rush, how you back off a shooter who is closing on you, and how you get from a challenged position back into the net without ever taking your eyes off the puck. It is the goalie equivalent of a defenceman's backward skating and it is just as foundational.
- **Flow** — a general principle rather than a specific move. On a rush or against a deke you want a little backward motion rather than being planted flat-footed; flow gives you rhythm and lets you react in either direction. Too much flow and you retreat into your own net.

On your knees

Technique	Butterfly slide — push laterally off the heel of the up leg and arrive with both pads down
Goal	Cover ground without getting back to your feet, when a pass across the slot gives you no time to stand up
Technique	Keep your head and hands at the same level throughout, and close the five-hole as you land
Convention	The recovery taught with the modern butterfly keeps the puck-side leg down and lifts the far leg first
Never	Stand up away from the puck first — that is how goalies end up out of position on the second shot

- **The butterfly slide** (also called a **power slide**; the push itself is often called the *backside push*, but that names the mechanic rather than the move) — from a butterfly position with one pad down, you push laterally off the heel of the up leg and slide, arriving with both pads down. It lets you cover ground without getting back to your feet, which matters when a pass across the slot gives you no time to stand up. Keep your head and hands at the same level throughout and close the five-hole as you land.
- **Butterfly recovery** — getting back up. The convention taught with the modern butterfly is to keep the **puck-side leg down** and lift the far leg first, then push toward the puck. Standing up "away" from the puck first is how goalies end up out of position on the second shot.

Post integration: VH and RVH

Read	Seal the post when the puck is below the goal line or very tight to it — otherwise there is a gap at ice level
Technique	VH puts the near pad up vertical against the post and the far pad down along the ice — a wall up the post
Technique	RVH puts the near pad down along the goal line and keeps the inside leg up and vertical — a wall along the ice
Key	RVH kills the low short-side shot and the wrap-around; VH is better against a shot that can go up the post
Technique	Dig the off-post pad into the ice at 45 degrees — without that anchor the first shot drives you back into your net
Risk	You can get locked onto the post, the high short side is exposed, and an early seal encourages you to stop reading
Convention	Late on and early off is the conservative North American default; the Swedish tradition teaches an earlier, defined trigger — ask what yours is
Never	Drop to a post out of habit, without a read — that is the one thing nobody defends

When the puck goes below the goal line or very tight to the post, standing normally leaves a gap between your pad and the post at ice level, which is exactly where wrap-arounds and stuff attempts go. Post integration is how you seal that.

- **VH (vertical-horizontal)**, also called the split butterfly or "loading the post." The pad nearest the post goes **up, vertical, flat against the post**; the far pad goes **down, horizontal, along the ice**. Named for the orientation of the two pads. It covers a quick short-side shot well while keeping you able to track a pass out front.
- **RVH (reverse VH)** — the same idea reversed. The pad nearest the post goes **down, horizontal, along the goal line**, sealing the ice at the base of the post; the inside leg stays **up and vertical**, ready to push out. Your upper body leans into the post, with the seal made by skate, shin or pad depending on what you have been taught.

The load-bearing detail is the off-post leg, and it is the one most descriptions leave out: that pad has to be dug into the ice, not just held up. BVHS: *"the pad off the post is dug into the ice at a 45-degree angle. It is super important that we dig this foot into the ice, as when the pad on the post faces impact, we need to be anchored into the ice to stay out of the net and in position."* Without that anchor, "up and vertical, ready to push

out" is the version that gets driven backwards into your own net by the first shot that hits the post-side pad.

RVH was developed in Sweden in 2010 by goaltending coaches Linda Blomquist and Daniel Henriksson at Luleå Hockey (Swedes call it "SMS"), specifically to fix three problems they had with VH: difficulty staying attached to the post, poor rebound control, and difficulty getting off the post. It is now in near-universal use at professional level — **a characterisation drawn from goaltending-coaching sources rather than from any published count.**

In plain terms: VH puts a wall up the post and RVH puts a wall along the ice. RVH kills the low short-side shot and the wrap-around; VH is better against a shot that can go up the post.

The honest limitations, all of which are actively debated among professional goalie coaches:

- **You can get stuck.** The most common criticism of RVH is that goalies get locked onto the post and cannot detach in time for a play back to the slot. Bruins goaltending coach Bob Essensa, who teaches a shin-on-post seal, describes this as the standard objection he fields from other coaches.
- **The high short side is exposed.** With your body low against the post, the space over your shoulder is real, and shooters at higher levels look for it.
- **It encourages passivity.** Blomquist and Henriksson identified this as one of the three problems they had to solve before the technique was viable: a goalie who drops to a post seal early stops reading the play.

The practical rule — and it is one school, not the only one. The version taught here is the conservative North American default: post seals are for pucks that are genuinely below the goal line or genuinely on top of you; get on the post late, get off it early, and stay on your feet as long as the puck is still in front of the goal line. Other coaches, particularly in the Swedish tradition where RVH originated, teach an earlier and more systematic seal with a defined trigger line. **Both are defensible, and the trigger is a coaching choice, so ask what yours is.** What nobody defends is dropping to a post out of habit, without a read. Which seal your coach teaches — skate, shin or pad — is likewise theirs to set; learn it.

Save Selection

Note the word: **selection**. You are not reacting randomly; you are choosing the save that fits the situation, and the choice is made before the shot arrives, from your read of where everyone is.

- **Butterfly** — dropping to your knees with both pads extended sideways and the five-hole closed. It covers the great majority of the lower net, and most goals are scored low. It is the base save of modern goaltending for that reason.
- **Half butterfly** — one pad extends while the other stays underneath supporting your body. Mitch Korn calls it "probably the most used save" in hockey. It handles a low shot to one side while leaving you balanced and able to recover, and it can be executed while stationary, moving in any direction, or turning to stay square.
- **Glove save** — catching cleanly with the trapper. The best possible outcome of any high shot, because it produces no rebound at all and stops play or gives you the puck.
- **Blocker save** — deflecting with the rectangular pad on your stick hand. A blocker save always produces a rebound, so the technique is about *where* you send it: angle the blocker face so the puck goes to the corner, not back into the slot.
- **Pad saves** — the leg pads, standing or in butterfly. Pads are big and reliable but they are also springy, so pad saves need active management (see rebound control).
- **Body / chest save** — smothering the puck into your upper body by "caving in" your arms around it. Excellent for rebound control, poor if you have not tracked the puck, because a puck you have not seen into your chest will squirt out somewhere you are not looking.
- **Paddle down** — laying the stick's paddle flat along the ice to seal the bottom of the net across a wide area. It is for wrap-arounds and scrambles in tight when you can smother the shooter, and it is heavily over-used by young goalies. It sacrifices everything above about shin height, so it only makes sense when a low play is the only play available.
- **Poke check** — sliding your hand up the shaft and thrusting the blade out at the puck. Effective against a shooter who has the puck out in front of them on a breakaway or a wrap-around, or to clear a loose puck in the crease. It is a commitment: if you miss, you are down a stick-length of reach and your weight is forward.

The butterfly is a tool, not a religion

Never	Drop into a butterfly on every shot as a reflex — going down first and hoping the puck hits you
Risk	It gives away the top of the net, and once you are down you cannot get back up in time
Risk	It is worse the smaller you are — a twelve-year-old leaves a great deal of open net above them
Risk	It removes save selection — if your answer to every situation is the same, you are not reading anything
Key	The butterfly is a save selection, not a style
Convention	The dominant modern approach is hybrid — butterfly as a base, but reads, positioning and staying up when staying up is right
Action	Play the puck you can see, and stay up until going down is the answer

The single most common technical error in youth and rec goaltending is dropping into a butterfly on every shot as a reflex — going down first and hoping the puck hits you. This fails for concrete reasons:

- **It gives away the top of the net,** and once you are down you cannot get back up in time.
- **It is worse the smaller you are.** A 6'4" professional in a wide butterfly covers most of a six-foot net. A twelve-year-old does not, and there is a great deal of open net above them.
- **It removes save selection.** If your answer to every situation is the same, you are not reading anything.

Goalie coaches make the distinction constantly: the butterfly is a **save selection**, not a style. The dominant modern approach is **hybrid** — using the butterfly as a base but relying on reads, save selection and positioning, staying on your feet when staying on your feet is right, and returning to a standing position after a save where possible.

Play the puck you can see. Stay up until going down is the answer.

Rebound Control

This is the most under-appreciated skill in goaltending. A save that produces a rebound into the slot has not really been a save; it has converted a shot from distance into a shot from six feet. Rebound control is what separates goalies who make a lot of saves from goalies who concede few goals.

Joe Bertagna's ordering of your options is the cleanest framework available, and it is a genuine priority order:

1. **Prevent the rebound altogether.**
2. **Cover or clear the loose puck.**
3. **Direct the rebound somewhere safe.**
4. **Recover quickly for the next shot.**

Preventing the rebound — absorbing

Goal	Kill the puck's energy so it drops dead in front of you or stays in your equipment
Technique	Let the stick blade give slightly on contact — a rigid stick sends the puck straight back out
Technique	Relax into the shot rather than bracing against it; a tensed goalie is a trampoline
Options	Kill a high shot by catching it cleanly, trapping it against your other equipment, or smothering it into your chest

Absorbing means killing the puck's energy so it drops dead in front of you or stays in your equipment.

- **A soft stick.** On a shot along the ice into your stick, let the blade give slightly on contact rather than holding it rigid. A rigid stick sends the puck straight back out; a soft stick drops it at your feet where you can cover it.
- **Cushioning generally.** The same principle applies to your body and pads: relax into the shot rather than bracing against it. A tensed goalie is a trampoline.
- **Three ways to kill a high shot:** catch it cleanly in the glove; trap it with the glove hand against your other equipment; or smother it into your chest by caving your arms in around it.

Directing the rebound

Targets	The corners — wide and low toward the boards, below the goal line if you can
Technique	Angle your surfaces — rotate the blocker so its face points at the corner, not back up the ice
Never	Direct a rebound into the slot, where the other team's best players are standing
Action	Look off the puck before the shot is released and register who is where
Key	Be specific — "a left shot open at the back post", not "there's a guy open"

When you cannot absorb, you must aim. The target is **the corners** — wide and low toward the boards, below the goal line if you can, where no attacker is standing and where the puck ends up as a battle rather than a chance.

- **Angle your surfaces.** A pad or blocker turned even slightly changes where the puck goes. On a shot to your blocker side, rotate the blocker so its face points at the corner rather than back up the ice.
- **Never direct into the slot.** The area directly in front of you is where the other team's best players are standing.
- **Know where they are before the shot.** This is the mental half of rebound control, and it is the half that actually decides it. You must look off the puck *before* the shot is released and register who is where. Be specific about it: not "there's a guy open," but "there's a left shot open at the back post." That detail tells you both which save to select and where the rebound must not go.

Freezing the puck — and the rules that govern it

- Rule** You may hold the puck in your hands for up to three seconds unless actually being checked; longer is a minor (NHL Rule 67.3(i))
- Rule** IIHF Rule 67.3(I) writes the same three seconds but says "checked / pressured" — pressure, not a check, is the UK test
- Rule** Causing an unnecessary stoppage, dropping the puck into your pads or onto the net, or throwing it forward are all minors (NHL and IIHF Rule 67.3)
- Rule** Racing out to beat an attacker to a loose puck and jumping on it is a minor, but a save and then a cover is legal (NHL and IIHF Rule 63.2(vi))
- Rule** Freeze a puck dumped in from their own side of the centre red line and your own five cannot change for the draw (NHL and IIHF Rule 63.8)
- Read** Freeze when the rebound is contested and you have it clean, and whenever there are bodies around you
- Never** Freeze when your defenceman is arriving with time — it matters much less that you have the puck than that they don't

Freezing means covering the puck to stop play. It is a legitimate and important tool, and it is also regulated more tightly than most players realise.

The two books run in parallel here, and the numbering matches. Rules 63.2 and 67.3 carry the same subsection numbers in the NHL and IIHF books, so every citation below works under both — with one wording difference, flagged where it matters.

- **You may hold the puck with your hands for up to three seconds** unless you are actually being checked by an opponent. Longer than that is a delay-of-game minor (NHL Rule 67.3(i)). ⚠ **The IIHF wording is looser and it is the wording you play under in Britain:** IIHF Rule 67.3(I) penalises a goalkeeper who "*holds the puck with their hands for longer than three (3) seconds unless they are actually being 'checked / pressured' by an opponent.*" The NHL says checked; the IIHF says checked **or pressured**. That single added word is what most of the argument below is about — see the note.
- **Deliberately holding the puck in any way that causes an unnecessary stoppage** is a minor, as is dropping the puck into your pads or onto the top of the net (Rule 67.3(ii) and (iv)). Both books open Rule 67.3 with the same instruction to the referee: "*The object of this entire rule is to keep the puck in play continuously and any action taken by the goalkeeper which causes an unnecessary stoppage must be penalized without warning.*"

- **Throwing the puck forward toward the opponent's net is a minor** (Rule 67.3(iii)). If an opponent takes the thrown puck and scores, the goal stands and there is no penalty; if they don't score, play stops and you get the two minutes.
- **Racing out of your crease to beat an attacker to a loose puck and then jumping on it instead of playing it is a minor** (Rule 63.2(vi)). But — and both rulebooks say this explicitly, in the same Note — if you come out to cut down the angle, make the save, and *then* cover the puck, that is entirely legal.
- **Outside your crease, freezing the puck to deliberately cause a stoppage is a minor** for any player including you (Rule 63.2(i)). **The IIHF book says so in terms**, adding to the same clause: "*Regarding to a goalkeeper, this rule applies outside of their goal crease area.*" The NHL leaves that to be inferred.

A note on strict reading versus practice. Rule 63.2(vii) is worded to penalise a goalkeeper who, inside their own crease, deliberately falls on or gathers the puck so as to cause a stoppage "unless he is actually being checked by an opponent." The IIHF's 63.2(VII) is word-for-word the same on this point. Read literally that is much stricter than what you see in any game, where goalies freeze pucks routinely with nobody near them. In practice referees enforce it through the "unnecessary stoppage" standard of Rule 67.3(ii) — a save followed by a cover is fine; killing play for no reason is not. **This gap between the written rule and its enforcement is my reading of how the two NHL rules interact — the NHL publishes no interpretation of it.**

⚠ Under the IIHF book the gap is narrower, and that is the book you play under in Britain. IIHF Rule 67.3(l) writes the three-second limit as "*unless they are actually being 'checked / pressured' by an opponent*" — the NHL's 67.3(i) says only "checked". The IIHF has therefore written **pressure**, not contact, into the rule text itself, which is the standard the other two governing bodies reach through published interpretation. It does not repeat the word in 63.2(VII), so this is not a complete fix, but it means a British goalie arguing "nobody was on me, but I was under pressure" is arguing from the rulebook rather than from custom. Do not over-read it: the "unnecessary stoppage" instruction at the head of IIHF 67.3 is identical to the NHL's and says such an action "*must be penalized without warning.*"

Two other governing bodies publish full official interpretations of the same question, and both land where the practice does. Hockey Canada's Interpretation 3 to Rule 10.1(a) states that a goaltender "may freeze the puck in the goal crease when under pressure from attacking players", that they "may come out of their crease to cut down the angle and catch the shot or, after stopping the shot, cover the puck", and that a minor is assessed "after one warning" to a goaltender who "freezes the puck in the crease when not under pressure from attacking players". USA Hockey Rule 610(b) penalises a goalkeeper who "has an opportunity to play the puck prior to being pressured by an attacking player, but instead intentionally causes a stoppage of play", with

a Note that a goalkeeper "may only cover the puck while in the act of playing goal ... and any action that makes the puck unplayable without an immediate scoring opportunity must be penalized." So the pressure test is written down in three of the four books — just not the NHL's. If you play in a league where the referees are strict about it, find out early.

When to freeze, tactically:

- **Freeze when the rebound is contested and you have it clean.** A whistle beats a scramble.
 - **Freeze when your team is under sustained pressure and needs a change — but know the one case where it backfires.** Normally, after a freeze there is a defensive-zone faceoff and your tired skaters get a change and a breath, and this is one of the most valuable things you do that never shows up anywhere. **The exception is NHL Rule 63.8:** *"In the event that the puck is shot into the end zone by the attacking team from their own side of the center red line, and the opposing goalkeeper freezes the puck resulting in a stoppage of play, the ensuing face-off shall be conducted at one of the end zone face-off spots in the goalkeeper's defending zone. The defending team shall not be permitted to make any player substitutions prior to the face-off."* **IIHF Rule 63.8 is the same rule with the same number**, in near-identical words — *"In the event the puck is shot into the end zone by the attacking team from their own side of the center line, and the opposing goalkeeper freezes the puck resulting in a stoppage of play ... The defending team shall not be permitted to make any Player substitutions prior to the 'face-off'"* — and the IIHF Situation Handbook confirms it at Situation 63.33. So on a routine dump-in from centre, freezing it **locks your own tired five on the ice** for the draw, and the attacking team even chooses which dot it is taken at. On that specific puck, if your defenceman has any chance of getting to it, leave it. Risk Management covers the same rule from the attacking side — it is why "puck deep when your line is tired" works — and Game Management covers shift length and change discipline generally, which is what you are buying your skaters when you freeze one.
 - **Don't freeze when your team has a clean recovery available.** Every stoppage is a defensive-zone faceoff you might lose. Bertagna's formulation is the right test: it matters much less that *you* have the puck than that *they* don't. If your defenceman is arriving with time, leave it or clear it and let them break out.
 - **When in doubt with bodies around you, freeze.** A defensive-zone faceoff you might lose is a much smaller problem than a scramble in your crease that you are already losing.
-

Tracking the Puck

Key	Almost every soft goal has the same root cause — at some point you stopped seeing the puck
Technique	Follow the puck's trajectory with your head, not just your eyes, so it stays in the centre of your vision
Technique	Track it all the way into the pad, the glove, the chest — if you saw it hit you, you know where it went
Never	Look past the puck at where it is going rather than where it is
Never	Explode — flailing arms and a snapping head lose the puck at contact. Quiet head, quiet hands
Never	Be a spectator on a pass — your movement starts when the pass is released, not when it arrives
Convention	Read the release, not the player — but on a breakaway what to read is contested; see Breakaways
Mindset	The "cone of shame" — nothing outside the puck exists

Almost every soft goal has the same root cause: at some point in the sequence, you stopped seeing the puck.

Tracking is what sports-vision researchers call **object interception** — the same task as batting in cricket or baseball, or receiving in volleyball. Your eyes and your body have to solve where a moving object will be, and get something there.

The practical version:

- **Follow the puck's trajectory with your head, not just your eyes.** A small head turn keeps the puck in the centre of your vision, where your acuity is best, rather than at the edge.
- **Track it all the way into your body.** The most common tracking failure is looking at where the puck is *going* rather than where it *is* — Korn calls this "looking past" the puck. Watch it into the pad, into the glove, into the chest. This is also what makes rebound control possible: if you saw the puck hit you, you know where it went.
- **Don't explode.** Goalies who make saves with their arms flailing and their head snapping back lose sight of the puck at the moment of contact and are then guessing about the rebound. Quiet head, quiet hands.

- **Read the release, not the player.** Watch the puck on the blade and the blade's angle. Body fakes are designed to move you; the puck is not. **On a breakaway specifically, this is contested** — one school reads the puck, another reads the shooter's chest and hips on the grounds that the puck is the thing being faked with. See Breakaways.
- **Don't be a spectator.** Watching the puck travel on a pass instead of moving with it is the definitive positioning error. Your movement should start when the pass is released, not when it arrives.
- **The "cone of shame."** John Carratu's image for this, via USA Hockey: think of a dog in a plastic cone — it can only attend to what is directly in front of it. That is what you want. Nothing outside the puck exists.

A note on how goalies actually see. Modern tracking research distinguishes two kinds of eye movement: **smooth pursuit**, where your eyes glide continuously along a moving object's path, and **saccades**, where your eyes jump ahead to a predicted point. Both are used, and which one dominates depends on the shot. This is an active area of study rather than settled coaching doctrine — the practical takeaway is unchanged: see the puck, keep seeing it, and keep your head still enough that you can.

Screens, Tips and Traffic

A screen is a player standing in your line of sight. **In the ordinary case it is legal.** Nobody is going to blow a whistle for it, and nobody is coming to help you unless you make them. (Your one recourse is Rule 69.1, under which a goal can be disallowed if an attacker impairs your ability to move freely in the crease or defend the goal "either by his positioning or by contact" — but that is a judgement after the goal, not help in the moment. **In EIH or SIHA competition it is less than that:** with no video review and no coach's challenge, it is whatever the referee saw live — see *Goaltender Interference* below.) Handling traffic is therefore a skill you own.

Fighting for a sightline

Convention	Around or over a screen is a genuine coaching split — this document's default is around, BVHS teaches over to maintain size
Key	Both schools agree on what matters most — commit to one side and see the puck cleanly there
Never	Half-see the puck on both sides of a screen
Action	Move to find the puck — a step or a small shuffle can open a lane through traffic
Key	Slightly off the perfect angle with a clear view beats perfectly square and blind
Action	Call "screen" loudly, early and every time — it means move, or move the man in front of me

- **Around or over — a genuine coaching split, so ask your own coach.** This document's default is **around**: trying to see over a screen means standing tall, and standing tall means you cannot move, so drop your head to one side and find the puck through legs, under arms, around a hip. The BVHS goaltending manual teaches the opposite priority — "*We want to be looking over shoulders to maintain size*" — on the view that sacrificing size to get a clean look is the worse trade. Both schools agree on the part that matters most: **commit to one side and see the puck cleanly there**, rather than half-seeing it on both. This is the same split as the depth question above, and the two tend to travel together — coaches who want you deep want you looking around, coaches who want you tall and close want you looking over.
- **Move to find the puck.** A step or a small shuffle to one side can open a lane through traffic. Being slightly off the perfect angle with a clear view beats being perfectly square and blind.
- **Call it.** "Screen" is your call and it means *move, or move the man who is in front of me*. This is not a request. Say it loudly, say it every time, and say it early. See On-Ice Communication.

Playing bigger and deeper through traffic

Convention	Deeper against a screened point shot is the traditional adjustment — it costs net coverage but buys time to find the puck
Convention	At least one current manual calls the deep retreat a fault and keeps a close gap, looking through the short side of the screen
Action	Ask your coach which they teach; do not assume deeper is settled doctrine
Technique	Play bigger — hands out and wide, stick down and active, chest up
Key	When you may not see the release you are partly blocking rather than reacting, and that is the correct trade

Two adjustments, and they pull in different directions from your normal instincts:

- **Deeper — but this is the contested one.** The traditional adjustment is to back off toward your goal line against a screened point shot: depth costs you net coverage but buys you the one thing you desperately need, time to find the puck. A screened shot you see late from four feet deep is savable; the same shot from the top of the crease is not. **At least one current manual teaches the reverse and calls the deep retreat a fault** — BVHS: *"Goalies often fall deep in their crease when facing pressure; this is a common error. This opens too much net and does not help see more of the puck,"* preferring to *"maintain a close gap to the shooter to eliminate room for the puck to move, as well as tips,"* and to solve the sightline by looking *"through the short side of the screen"* rather than by retreating. **Ask your coach which they teach; do not assume deeper is settled doctrine.**
- **Bigger.** Since you may not see the release, make yourself a larger obstacle: hands out and wide, stick down and active, chest up. You are partly blocking rather than reacting, and that is the correct trade when you cannot see.

Reading a tip

Key	A tip changes direction a few feet in front of you and no reflex is fast enough to follow it — so do not try
Read	A forward set up at the goalmouth with their blade in the shooting lane makes every point shot a probable tip
Technique	Stay tall and patient as long as you can — a low tip hits you if you are big and set, a high one will not if you are already down
Key	Your best chance is the right place with a wide body and a still head, not a heroic reaction
Action	Shout to get the net-front player moved — that is your defenceman's job

A tip or deflection changes the puck's direction a few feet in front of you, and no reflex is fast enough to follow it. So you do not try.

- **Watch the sticks, not just the puck.** If a forward is set up at the **goalmouth** — the immediate area directly in front of your net, inside and around the top of the crease — with their blade in the shooting lane, treat every point shot as a probable tip.
 - **Stay tall and patient for as long as you can.** Dropping early on a shot that gets tipped means it goes over you. A tip that stays low will hit you if you are big and set; a tip that goes up will not if you are already down.
 - **Expect the puck to change direction and stay balanced.** Your best chance on a tipped puck is being in the right place with a wide body and a still head, not a heroic reaction.
 - **Get the net-front player moved.** This is your defenceman's job, and it is the thing to shout about. See the skaters' section below.
-

Playing the Puck

The trapezoid — the rule that defines what you can do

- Rule** You may not play the puck behind the goal line outside the trapezoid — a two-minute delay-of-game minor (NHL Rules 27.8 and 63.2(viii))
- Rule** The IIHF rule is the same but is numbered 27.7, not 27.8 (IIHF Rules 27.7 and 63.2(VIII)); in England and Wales its status is unsettled — England Ice Hockey's Rules & Regulations 22.3 say it is "not currently enforced", so assume it binds and ask your league
- Rule** The determining factor is the position of the puck, not of your body (NHL Rule 27.8; IIHF Rule 27.7)
- Rule** The one exception is keeping skate contact with your crease — none for a teammate nearby, for pressure, or for the puck coming to you (NHL Rule 27.8; IIHF Rule 27.7)
- Key** It applies in the NHL, the KHL and IIHF play; most rec, beer-league and youth associations outside Britain do not use it
- Rule** USA Hockey has no trapezoid but restricts where you may freeze the puck, on the same two minutes — and Rule 614(c) has four triggers, not one
- Rule** Freezing with the puck behind the goal line and your body entirely outside the crease is a minor wherever you are (USA Hockey Rule 614(c)(1))
- Rule** So is freezing outside the "goalkeeper's privileged" area, which reaches back from the faceoff-dot line but excludes the corners (USA Hockey Rule 614(c)(3))
- Rule** In front of the goal line there is no restriction, beyond not participating in the play past the centre red line (NHL Rule 27.7; IIHF Rule 27.6)
- Action** Take the dimensions from Rink Map and Glossary — NHL Rule 1.8, never NHL 27.8 (stale); IIHF Rules 1.8 and 27.7 both give the current 6.80 m / 8.60 m
- Action** Find out which rules you are under before your first shift

A goalkeeper may not play the puck behind the goal line outside the marked trapezoid. Doing so is a **two-minute minor for delay of game** (NHL Rules 27.8 and 63.2(viii)), and **the determining factor is the position of the puck, not of your body.**

There is exactly one exception: no penalty is assessed when you play the puck while maintaining skate contact with your goal crease. There is no exception for a teammate being nearby, none for being under pressure, and none for the puck coming to you.

Where it applies: the **NHL** (since 2005-06), the **KHL**, and **IIHF play** since the unified 2021-22 rulebook. **Most rec, beer-league and youth associations outside Britain do not use it —**

the qualifier matters, and the next paragraph is why — and **USA Hockey has no trapezoid** — no restriction on *where you may play the puck* behind your net. If you play under rules without a trapezoid, you are a genuine third puck-handler behind your net and your whole retrieval game — and your defencemen's — changes. Find out which rules you are under before your first shift.

 **In England and Wales, treat the trapezoid as unsettled — and play as though it binds everywhere in Britain.** The IIHF book is the base rule set for the NIHL, the English and Scottish recreational and junior game, university hockey and the GB sides — and for the Elite League too, on the corpus's reading, though the League runs its own Casebook that nobody here has read (UK and England Rules), and the 2025-26 England Ice Hockey and SIHA In-House Rules do not amend it. **But England Ice Hockey's own Rules & Regulations 22.3 say the restricted area is "not currently enforced to allow ice rinks the necessary time to make the changes to implement this rule."** That edition is 2024-25 and the current In-House Rules are silent on the point, so the published documents do not settle whether the suspension still stands. Assume it binds, ask your league, and look behind the net to see whether the lines are painted at all. **IIHF Rule 27.7** is the operative text and it says what the NHL's says: "*A goalkeeper shall not play the puck outside of the designated area behind the net. Should the goalkeeper play the puck outside of the designated area behind the goal line, a minor penalty for 'Delay of Game' shall be imposed. The determining factor shall be the position of the puck. The minor penalty will not be assessed when a goalkeeper plays the puck while maintaining skate contact with their goal crease.*" The delay-of-game companion is **IIHF Rule 63.2(VIII)**, the same subsection number as the NHL's.

 **The rule number is not the same, and this catches people out.** The NHL puts the restricted area at **27.8** and the centre-red-line rule at **27.7**. The **IIHF shifts both down one**: the restricted area is **27.7** and the centre-red-line rule is **27.6**. IIHF **27.8** is not a rule about you at all — it is a signpost reading "*A list of the infractions that shall result in a penalty to the goalkeeper can be found in Table 13.*" So quoting "Rule 27.8" at a British referee cites the index, not the offence. **And the IIHF's own two publications disagree with each other:** the 2025/26 Rule Book and its Table 13 both number the restricted area 27.7, while the 2025/26 Situation Handbook still answers every restricted-area question with "Rule 27.8" (Situations 27.6, 27.7, 27.9, 27.10 and 27.11) and cites 27.7 for the centre red line. Cite the **Rule Book's** numbering; know that the Handbook's is one out.

 **But "no trapezoid" is not "no restricted area" — USA Hockey restricts where you may freeze the puck, and it is the same two minutes.** **Rule 614(c)** assesses a minor for delay of game to a goalkeeper who falls on or gathers the puck and causes a stoppage in **four** separate cases, and the first is the one that catches goalies out: "*(1) The puck is behind the goal line and their body is entirely outside of the goal crease*"; "*(2) They fail to play the puck with their stick when provided the opportunity to do so prior to being pressured by an attacking player*"; "*(3) The puck is outside the boundaries of the 'goalkeeper's privileged' area*"; and "*(4) They hold*

or place the puck against any part of the goal frame or boards or intentionally drops the puck on the back of the netting." **Trigger (1) is not limited by the privileged area at all** — coming out behind your own net to smother a rimmed puck, with your body clear of the crease, is a minor under USA Hockey wherever on that line you are standing. That area is defined in the rule's own Note as "*an area outlined by connecting the end zone face-off spots with an imaginary line and imaginary lines from each face-off spot running perpendicular to the end boards*" — so it is a rectangle running from the faceoff-dot line back to the end boards. It is far more generous than a trapezoid and it does cover the ice directly behind your net, but **it excludes the corners**. So under USA Hockey you may skate into the corner and *play* the puck freely, and you may not smother it there. Play it; don't sit on it.

In front of the goal line there is no restriction at all, other than that you may not participate in the play beyond the centre red line (NHL Rule 27.7; **IIHF Rule 27.6**). The IIHF wording is the same and so is the test — "*The position of the puck is the determining factor for the application of this rule*" — and the IIHF Situation Handbook makes the sharp version of it explicit at Situation 27.5: a goalkeeper whose **skates are still in their own half** but who plays a puck that is over the centre red line takes the minor anyway.

How big is it, exactly? **Take the geometry from Rink Map and Glossary**, which owns the rink's dimensions and gives the NHL figures, the depth and the IIHF metric equivalents in one place. The part to carry in your head, because it is your two minutes: **under the NHL book** the dimensions come from **Rule 1.8**, and **never from Rule 27.8**. NHL Rule 27.8 defines your penalty correctly but still describes the area as beginning "six feet from either goal post" — wording left over from before the trapezoid was widened by two feet on each side in 2014. That is **stale, not self-contradictory**: six feet each side gives eighteen feet at the goal line, diverging coherently to the twenty-eight feet at the boards that both rules quote. It is the old shape, accurately described — and it is two feet a side narrower than the lines you are actually looking at, which is exactly the margin you would be penalised in.

 **The IIHF book does not have this defect, so if you play in Britain you can stop worrying about it.** IIHF Rule 1.8 gives the marking as "6.80m" along the goal line and "8.60m" at the boards, and IIHF Rule 27.7 — the penalty rule — repeats exactly those figures rather than leaving a superseded one behind. The shape is the shape you already know: 6.80 m is 22 ft 4 in against the NHL's 22 ft, and 8.60 m is 28 ft 3 in against the NHL's 28 ft. What genuinely differs is the **depth**, because the IIHF goal line sits 4.0 m from the end boards where the NHL's sits 11 ft — so an IIHF trapezoid is about two feet deeper. See Rules Primer for the penalty rules, and Defender for the retrieval consequences.

Stopping pucks for your defence

Action	Kill a rimmed puck dead behind the net and leave it stationary — you have converted a race into a pickup
Action	Call "leave it" early, while your defenceman is still coming back, not as they arrive
Technique	Blocking a rim with your pads is legal in front of the goal line, or behind it inside the trapezoid
Never	Body-block a puck behind the goal line and outside the trapezoid — get out of the way and let your defenceman have it
Rule	This is not a grey area under IIHF rules — blocking a pass with the leg pads out there is "playing" the puck and a minor (IIHF Situation Handbook, Situation 27.7)
Convention	Whether the goalie plays the puck at all is a coaching choice — ask, and then be consistent

Even with a trapezoid, you have real value behind the net. The most useful thing you do back there is often not a pass at all:

- **Stop a rimmed puck and leave it.** A puck rimming hard around the boards will end up in the far corner with a forechecker on it. If it comes through the trapezoid, kill it dead behind the net and leave it stationary for your defenceman. You have converted a race into a pickup. Call **"leave it"** so they know to come and get it, and say it early — while they are still coming, not as they arrive.
- **Get your body in the way — but mind where you are.** You do not have to make a play with the puck; killing a rim with your pads so it dies behind the net instead of reaching the corner is often the most useful thing you can do, and **in front of the goal line, or behind it but inside the trapezoid, it is completely legal.** Behind the goal line and *outside* the trapezoid, do not do it. NHL Rule 27.8 says a goalkeeper "shall not play the puck outside of the designated area behind the net" and does not define "play" narrowly, and the determining factor is where the puck is, not where you are. **Under the NHL book, whether a deliberate body block counts as playing the puck is still my reading rather than a quoted interpretation.**

⚠ **Under the IIHF book it is not a reading at all — it is answered, and answered against you.** The IIHF Situation Handbook 2025/26 puts exactly this case, at Situation 27.7: a goalkeeper retreating through the corner *"drops down on the knees and blocks the pass using the leg pads which is clearly inside the restricted area."* The answer: *"Since the goalkeeper 'plays' the puck in the restricted area, the goalkeeper must be assessed a minor*

penalty for delay of game." No stick, no possession, no attempt to make a play with it — a pad in the way of a pass is playing the puck. **That is the operative interpretation in Britain**, so the conservative reading this document takes is not caution there, it is the rule. Two things the Handbook also settles, both in your favour: the **goal line itself is not in the restricted area** (Situation 27.6), so a puck stopped *on* the line is fine; and a puck that comes off the glass and hits you while you are retreating is **no penalty**, because you must actually play it (Situation 27.9). Out there, get out of the way and let your defenceman have it.

- **Know your team's convention.** Whether your goalie plays the puck at all is a coaching choice. Some teams want the goalie handling everything they legally can; others want the goalie to touch nothing and stay in the net. Both are defensible. Ask, and then be consistent.

The safe outlets

Priority	Rank your options by risk before you move the puck
Options	Leave it for a defenceman with time — lowest risk, and always first when it is available
Options	A short pass to a defenceman on the wall on your strong side, where an interception means less
Options	A rim around the boards to the far winger — concedes possession but relieves pressure
Options	Off the glass and out, never wrong when you are in trouble. Goalies are allowed to be boring
Never	Pass up the middle — a goalie's turnover there is a shot on an empty net, and you are standing in it

When you do move the puck, rank your options by risk:

1. **Leave it for a defenceman with time.** Lowest risk, and it starts a controlled breakout. Always first when it's available.
2. **A short pass to a defenceman on the wall on your strong side.** Simple, short, and if it's intercepted it's intercepted below the goal line where it means less.
3. **A rim around the boards to the far winger.** Concedes possession but relieves pressure. Aim it to arrive where a teammate can meet it.
4. **Off the glass and out.** Never wrong when you are in trouble. Goalies are allowed to be boring.
5. **A pass up the middle.** Almost never. A goalie's turnover in the middle of the ice is a shot on an empty net, and you are the one standing in it.

The discipline of not playing it

Key	The best puck-handling decision a goalie makes is usually to leave the puck alone
Never	Leave your net for a 50-50 puck — lose the race and the net is empty with you behind the play
Rule	Racing out and jumping on a loose puck instead of playing it is a penalty (NHL Rule 63.2(vi))
Never	Handle it because you can — every touch is a chance to turn it over in the most dangerous place on the ice
Action	If you commit, commit — call "I've got it" and mean it
Mindset	A goalie who handles the puck well is an asset; one who believes they handle it well is a liability

The best puck-handling decision a goalie makes is usually to leave the puck alone.

- **Don't leave your net for a 50-50 puck.** If you lose the race, the net is empty and you are behind the play. The rulebook even anticipates this: racing out and jumping on a loose puck instead of playing it is a penalty (Rule 63.2(vi)).
- **Don't handle it because you can.** Every touch is a chance to make a turnover in the most dangerous place on the ice.
- **If you commit, commit.** The worst outcome is starting to play the puck, changing your mind, and leaving both you and your defenceman out of position. Call "**I've got it**" and mean it.
- **Watch the clock and the pressure, not your ego.** A goalie who handles the puck well is a real asset. A goalie who *believes* they handle the puck well is a liability.

Icing — you are the one who can wave it off

Rule	Skating toward the puck, feigning at it or attempting to play it waves off an icing; your defencemen cannot (NHL Rule 81.3)
Action	Usually you want the whistle, so do nothing, deliberately — drifting toward the corner hands them a live puck in your end
Rule	Under NHL and IIHF Rule 81.4 they cannot change after an icing; under USA Hockey Rule 624 they can
Read	Wave it off only when your defenceman is arriving with time and their forwards have already turned for the bench
Action	Decide before the puck arrives, not halfway through it — two strides is the whole action
Action	Talk either way — "leave it" or "I've got it"; silence produces two players and one puck
Rule	Going to the bench for an extra attacker does not wave off an icing, provided you make no attempt on the puck (NHL Rule 81.3)
Rule	Under USA Hockey only an actual touch waves it off — Rule 624(b) does not wave off for goalie movement

The rule itself is in Rules Primer. What is specific to you is that under NHL and IIHF rules **you can kill an icing without touching anything.** Merely skating in the direction of the puck, feigning at it, or attempting to play it waves the icing off (Rule 81.3 in both books, same number), and so of course does any actual touch. Your defencemen cannot do that; only you can. The IIHF wording is "*if ... the goalkeeper feigns playing the puck, attempts to play the puck, or skates in the direction of the puck on an icing at any time, the 'potential icing' shall not be called*" — and the IIHF Situation Handbook shows how little it takes: at Situation 81.5, a goalkeeper who **extends the stick towards the puck with both feet still in the crease, then pulls it back,** has already waved the icing off.

So the decision behind your net on every dumped puck is a real one, and it has to be made before it arrives:

- **Usually you want the whistle, so stay put.** An icing against them means a draw in *their* end, and **under NHL and IIHF rules (Rule 81.4) they cannot change** — you have converted a dump-in into an offensive-zone faceoff for your team against five players who are stuck out there. ⚠ **Under USA Hockey they can change:** Rule 624 restricts no substitution and Rule 204 permits one at any stoppage, so in North American rec and youth hockey you win the zone but not the tired line. Rules Primer owns this. Drifting toward the

corner "just in case" throws all of that away and hands them a live puck in your own end with a forechecker arriving. Do nothing, deliberately.

- **Wave it off only when the counterattack beats the whistle.** If your defenceman is arriving with time and their forwards have already turned for the bench, a live puck with numbers is worth more than a stoppage. Two strides toward the puck is the whole action — but decide before it arrives, not halfway through it.
- **Talk either way.** Your defenceman is skating back with his head down and has no idea which you have chosen. "**Leave it**" or "**I've got it**" settles it; silence produces two players and one puck.
- **Going to the bench for an extra attacker does not wave it off**, provided you make no attempt on the puck (Rule 81.3). Nor does simply retreating to your crease if you were already out of it. You can leave without giving them a live puck.
- **Freezing a dumped puck can lock your own team on the ice.** See Rule 63.8 under *Rebound Control* above — on a puck shot in from their own side of the centre red line, your freeze means **your** five cannot change.

Under USA Hockey rules none of the movement part applies: Rule 624(b) does not wave off icing for a goalie moving toward or feigning at the puck. Only an actual touch does. Find out which rule set you are under, because the same two strides mean opposite things.

Communicating with Your Defence

This is the most valuable thing you do that is not a save. Read this section twice.

You see everything. You are stationary, and you are facing the play while your defenceman is not. Your defenceman retrieving a puck in your corner is facing the end boards with a forechecker arriving from behind them — the exact view you have and they do not. If that information doesn't travel from you to them, they guess, and a guess in the defensive zone is a turnover in the highest-danger area on the ice.

A call converts a blind decision into an informed one, and it costs you nothing. The information was already sitting in your eyes, useless.

The core calls

Convention	These are the standard vocabulary, but words vary by team — agree yours in the room, not on the ice
Options	Pressure — "time" means lift your head and make the good play; "man on" means get rid of it now
Options	Direction — "over", "reverse", "up", "wheel". Over means behind the net, never through the slot
Options	Ownership — "leave it" means I will stop it and leave it for you; "I've got it" means go to your breakout position
Key	"Screen" means move, or move the man in front of me — your most important call and the one most often ignored
Key	"Back door" means an unmarked opponent at the far post, and the nearest player takes them right now
Key	"Shot" means you have the shooter, so your defenceman takes away the pass — not a warning that a shot is coming
Action	If your team already uses "shot" as a warning, pick a different word for the warning

These are the standard vocabulary. Words vary by team — agree yours in the room, not on the ice.

Pressure information (the most valuable category):

- **"Time"** or **"You've got time"** — nobody is near you. Lift your head and make the good play instead of the safe one. This call is exactly as valuable as its opposite, because a defenceman who fears pressure that isn't there throws the puck away.
- **"Man on"** — someone is on you right now, get rid of it. Some goalies use **"one on"** / **"two on"** to give the count, which is more useful still: one forechecker can be beaten with a reverse, two means you are being sealed and the puck has to leave.

Direction:

- **"Over"** — move it to the other side, behind the net, below the goal line. Never through the slot.
- **"Reverse"** — send it back the way it came, against the flow. The call for a forechecker who has over-committed and skated past your defenceman. Distinct from a **rim**, which goes onward around the boards and beats a forechecker who is sealing rather than over-running.
- **"Up"** — to the winger on the boards on the strong side.

- **"Wheel"** — skate it yourself, around behind the net and up the far side. You are telling them the route is clear, so they should commit.

Puck ownership:

- **"Leave it"** — I will stop it and leave it behind the net for you. Two syllables, distinguishable from "up" and "over" in a loud rink at speed, which is why it beats one-word alternatives.
- **"I've got it"** — I am playing this puck myself. Get to your breakout position, not to the puck.

Danger:

- **"Screen"** — I cannot see. Move, or move the man in front of me. **This is your most important call and the one most often ignored.**
- **"Back door"** — there is an unmarked opponent at the far post. The nearest player takes them, right now. This is the highest-danger unmarked position in hockey, and the call exists precisely because the person who can see it is almost never the person who can cover it.
- **"Shot"** — **not a warning that a shot is coming. It means you have the shooter, so your defenceman should take away the pass.** This is documented word for word in published goaltending material: *"When the puck is at the point, or when the opposing team has a two-on-one, it can be difficult for your defense to know what you want them to do. If you'd prefer that they take away the pass or guard the open man, call for 'shot!'... If you want the shot, call for it!"* (Sportmentary — Ice Hockey Goalie: Communication Tips (<https://sportmentary.com/ice-hockey/ice-hockey-basics/ice-hockey-goalie-communication-tips/>)). Use it in that sense, because "a shot is coming" tells a skater nothing they can act on while "I have the shooter" tells them exactly where to put their stick. If your team already uses "shot" as a warning, pick a different word for the warning — the two meanings are incompatible and a defenceman has half a second to decode it. On-Ice Communication covers the same split from the defenceman's side.

How to call well

- Action** Early beats loud — call while the play is still developing, not as the puck arrives
- Action** Short beats descriptive — one or two syllables; nobody parses a sentence at full speed
- Never** Call sometimes — a goalie who calls intermittently trains their defencemen to filter them out
- Action** Say the same thing every time; consistency is what makes a call fast to act on
- Action** Get answered — tell your defencemen you need an acknowledgement

- **Early beats loud.** A call that arrives as the puck does is decoration. Call while the play is still developing.
- **Short beats descriptive.** One or two syllables. Nobody parses a sentence at full speed.
- **Every time, or not at all.** A goalie who calls sometimes trains their defencemen to ignore them, which is worse than silence, because the one time you shout something urgent it gets filtered out with the rest.
- **Say the same thing every time.** Consistency is what makes a call fast to act on.
- **Get answered.** A call with no response gets made quieter next time and then not at all. Tell your defencemen you need an acknowledgement.

Full treatment, including the whole team's vocabulary and who owns which call: On-Ice Communication.

Situational Goaltending

Breakaways

Key	One attacker, you, and a lot of time to think — which is the actual difficulty
Technique	Meet them well out, then retreat on C-cuts, matching their speed so the angle stays closed the whole way
Technique	Keep a little backward flow so you can react either way; flat-footed means you can react to nothing
Never	Move first — their whole plan is to make you commit, and the last one to move wins
Convention	What to watch is a genuine coaching split — the puck, or the shooter's chest and hips. Ask your goalie coach and be consistent
Read	Puck out in front and winding up, respect the shot and stay big; pulled to the forehand with the head up, respect the deke
Risk	The poke check works when the puck gets too far in front of them — miss and you have neither reach nor balance

One attacker, you, and a lot of time to think — which is the actual difficulty.

The shooter's half of this is in Shooting, "Breakaways and Shootouts — the Shooter's Side" — approach speed, deception, the classic moves, where they are aiming, and how they decide between shooting and deking. Read it: everything they are coached to do is a way of making you commit first, and knowing the plan is most of the defence against it. The penalty-shot and shootout rules below are stated identically in both documents.

- **Come out and retreat with them.** Meet them well out, then back in on C-cuts, matching their speed so the angle stays closed the whole way. Standing still at the top of the crease lets them pick a corner; charging out lets them go around you.
- **Keep flow.** A little backward motion means you can react either way. Flat-footed means you can react to nothing.
- **Stay on your feet as long as you possibly can.** The shooter's whole plan is to make you commit. The last one to move wins.
- **What to watch is a genuine coaching split.** One school says **watch the puck, not the body** — everything above the puck is theatre, and a body fake exists only to move you. The other says the puck is exactly what the shooter controls and fakes with, so read the part of them that cannot lie: the BVHS goalie manual's breakaway checklist step 3 is *"Read the play: Watch the shooter's chest and hips, not their stick or eyes. Hold your ground and wait for them to make the first move."* Note that the two schools agree on what they are *against* — the stick, the eyes and the shoulders — and disagree only on whether the puck or the torso is the honest signal. **Ask your goalie coach which they teach, and be consistent about it**, because switching mid-play is how you end up reading neither.
- **Take away what they are showing you.** If they have the puck out in front and are winding up, respect the shot and stay big. If they're pulling it to their forehand with their head up, respect the deke and stay patient.
- **The poke check is available but expensive.** It works when the puck gets too far in front of them. If you miss, you have neither reach nor balance.

Penalty shots

- Rule** You must remain in your crease until the shooter has touched the puck, or the shot is retaken (NHL Rule 24)
- Rule** A second violation adds a misconduct and a third a game misconduct, the third retake being against the alternate goalkeeper (NHL Rule 24.4)
- Rule** Under IIHF Rule 24.4 the third violation is a game misconduct and "a goal shall be awarded" — no retake, no alternate goalkeeper
- Rule** No goal can be scored on a rebound, with one exception — off the post or crossbar, then off you, then in (NHL Rule 24)
- Rule** The spin-o-rama is not permitted; the lacrosse-style move is, below shoulder height and released below the crossbar (NHL Rule 24)
- Rule** Only a designated goalkeeper or alternate goalkeeper may defend a penalty shot (NHL Rule 24.2)
- Key** There is no clock on it — be patient and let them run out of ideas

Same as a breakaway, plus rules you should know precisely (NHL Rule 24):

- **You must remain in your crease until the shooter has touched the puck.** If you leave early and the shot fails, it is taken again. A second violation adds a misconduct; a third, a game misconduct — and the shot is retaken each time, the third retake being taken "*against the alternate goalkeeper*" (NHL Rule 24.4).

⚠️ 🇬🇧 **The IIHF ends the ladder differently, and it ends it worse for you.** IIHF Rule 24.4 tracks the NHL through the retake and the second-violation misconduct, then diverges at the top: "*A third (3rd) such violation shall result in the goalkeeper being assessed a game misconduct penalty **and a goal shall be awarded.***" No fourth attempt, no alternate goalkeeper, no chance to save it. Under the book you play in Britain, a third early departure simply concedes.

- **The shooter must keep the puck moving toward your goal line.** Once they shoot, the play is complete. **No goal can be scored on a rebound**, with one exception: puck off the post or crossbar, then off you, then in.
- **The spin-o-rama (a full 360° turn on approach) is not permitted.** The lacrosse-style move — picking the puck up on the blade and whipping it — *is* permitted, provided the puck is never raised above shoulder height and is not released higher than the crossbar.

- **Only a designated goalkeeper may defend a penalty shot** — Rule 24.2: *"Only a player designated as a goalkeeper or alternate goalkeeper may defend against a penalty shot."*
IIHF Rule 24.2 says the same thing in the same words, and adds one provision the NHL does not: the team against whom the shot was awarded **may swap goalkeepers to face it**, but *"the substitute goalkeeper is required to remain in the game until the next stoppage of play."*

Everything else in this list holds under the IIHF book too, in the same Rule 24 and with the same numbering — the crease requirement, the single rebound exception off post or crossbar then off you, the banned spin-o-rama, and the permitted lacrosse move below shoulder height and released no higher than the crossbar are all verbatim in IIHF Rule 24.2. Only the violation ladder differs, and that is flagged above.

Practically: they get one attempt, from centre ice, with a long approach and no rebound available, and the pressure is all on them. **There is no clock on it** — neither NHL Rule 24 nor the shootout provisions of Rule 84.4 sets a time limit, and neither does IIHF Rule 24, whose only timing provision (24.7) is that *"The time required for the taking of a 'Penalty Shot' shall not be included in the regular playing time or overtime."* So any "you have N seconds" figure you hear is folklore under either book. Be patient and let them run out of ideas.

2-on-1s — and what you want from your defenceman

Convention	The standard convention is that your defenceman takes away the pass and you take the shot — a convention, not a law
Action	Play the puck carrier as if it were a one-on-none — square up, come out to your normal depth, make the save
Key	The cross-ice pass to an open forward is the chance you cannot stop; the shot is the one you can
Action	Say it out loud — "I've got the pass" / "take the shooter" — it only works if you both know which half is yours
Never	Let your defenceman slide or dive before the pass is released; that opens both options at once
Action	Ask your defencemen and your coach what your team does — some take away the shooting lane instead

The standard convention is that the defenceman takes away the pass and you take the shot. Your defenceman positions in the passing lane with their stick flat on the ice, and you play the puck carrier as if it were a one-on-none: square up, come out to your normal depth, and make

the save. The cross-ice pass to an open forward is the chance you cannot stop; the shot is the one you can.

The call for it is "**I've got the pass**" / "**take the shooter.**" Say it out loud rather than assuming it — this only works if both of you know which half is yours.

Name it as a convention, because it is one. Some coaches vary it: against a strong shooter with a weak trailer, or when a backchecker has picked up the second attacker, the defenceman may instead take away the shooting lane. Ask your defencemen and your coach what your team does. What must not happen is the defenceman sliding or diving before the pass is released — that opens both options at once. The full treatment of every numerical situation, from the skaters' side, is in Defending the Rush.

3-on-2s

Convention	The common default is each defenceman taking an outside attacker, the middle man left to whoever backchecks that lane
Read	The same read as a 2-on-1, but with a wider back door
Action	Don't over-challenge — stay a little deeper and prioritise lateral movement over the last foot of angle
Action	Call "odd man" to tell everyone to stop thinking about the puck and start counting
Action	Find out which version your team plays, because they fail in different directions

The common default is each defenceman taking an outside attacker and neither chasing the carrier, with the middle attacker left to whoever is backchecking that lane — usually the centre, though some teams instead have the strong-side defenceman take the puck carrier and the weak-side defenceman split the middle and far man. Both are coaching choices and they fail in different directions, so find out which one your team plays (Defending the Rush sets out both). From your side, the read is the same as a 2-on-1 but with a wider back door: don't over-challenge, stay a little deeper, and prioritise the ability to move laterally over the last foot of angle. Talk — "odd man" tells everyone to stop thinking about the puck and start counting. (An **odd-man rush** is any attack where the attackers outnumber the defenders who got back: a 2-on-1, a 3-on-2, a breakaway.)

Shootouts

- Rule** Shootout attempts are governed by the penalty-shot rules, including staying in your crease until the shooter touches the puck (NHL and IIHF Rule 84.4)
- Rule** Once the shootout begins you cannot be replaced unless injured, and a substitute goalie gets no warm-up shots (NHL Rule 84.4)
- Rule** The IIHF reverses that — "The goalkeepers from each team may be changed after each shot" (IIHF Rule 84.4(VI))
- Rule** NHL shootouts run three shooters a side; IIHF championship shootouts run five (IIHF Rule 84.4(II))
- Rule** In Britain the count is three, not the IIHF's five — overtime runs only in NIHL and some SNL fixtures (In-House Rules, Rule 84 and Appendix 1)
- Key** Each shooter gets a long, slow approach — patience is the whole thing
- Never** Commit first; most shootout goals are scored on goalies who do

A shootout attempt is governed by the penalty-shot rules (Rule 84.4 in both books, and IIHF 84.4(VII) says so explicitly: "*The shots will be taken in accordance with Rule 24 – Penalty Shot*"), including the requirement that you stay in your crease until the shooter touches the puck. Two things worth knowing under the NHL book: **once the shootout begins you cannot be replaced unless you are injured**, and **no warm-up shots are permitted for a substitute goalie**. So there is no rescue and no easing in.

⚠️ 🇬🇧 **The IIHF says the opposite, and it is the difference between having a rescue and not.** IIHF Rule 84.4(VI) is one line: "*The goalkeepers from each team may be changed after each shot.*" There is no injury requirement and no warm-up prohibition. A coach under the IIHF book can pull you after a single shootout goal against; a coach under the NHL book cannot. It also runs longer — the IIHF championship procedure begins with "*five (5) different shooters from each team taking alternate shots*" against the NHL's three, before either goes to sudden death.

Whether you face a shootout at all in Britain is a competition question, not a rules one. Overtime is not universal in England Ice Hockey and SIHA competition, and where it is played the game-winning-shots format is set locally rather than by IIHF Rule 84.4 — the format, the shooter count and which competitions use it are in UK and England Rules. Check your league's regulations rather than assuming either the NHL or the IIHF championship procedure.

Approach: you get three or more shooters, each with a long, slow approach. Patience is the whole thing. Most shootout goals are scored on goalies who commit first.

Power play (your team is up a man)

- Read** Very few shots, and then occasionally a rush the other way against tired defencemen
- Risk** The failure mode is being cold and mentally elsewhere when it arrives
- Action** Stay engaged — track the puck at the far end and move your feet at every stoppage
- Action** Talk more, not less — your point men have their backs to the neutral zone and you have the only clear view
- Read** Be ready for the shorthanded rush, usually a 2-on-1 or a breakaway, because your team has committed bodies

Quiet. You will see very few shots and then, occasionally, a rush the other way against tired defencemen. The failure mode is being cold and mentally elsewhere when it arrives.

- **Stay engaged.** Track the puck at the far end. Move your feet at every stoppage.
- **Talk more, not less.** Your **point men** — the teammates stationed at the opposition blue line — have their backs to the neutral zone; you have the only clear view of a shorthanded break developing.
- **Be ready for the shorthanded rush**, which is usually a 2-on-1 or a breakaway, because your team has committed bodies.

Penalty kill (your team is down a man)

Read	A lot of traffic, a lot of shots you cannot see, and lateral puck movement designed to make you move
Action	Know whether your team runs a box, a diamond or wedge+1 — it tells you which lanes are conceded
Priority	Prioritise seeing the puck; whether that means playing deeper is the coaching split flagged above
Goal	Use freezes to buy whistles, not seconds — fresh legs, a reset and a draw
Key	No time comes off the penalty, because play is stopped and the clock stops with it
Rule	Shorthanded icing is allowed only if your rule set grants it — USA Hockey Rule 624(b)(1) starts at Youth 15-Only and above
Rule	NHL Rule 81.6 withdraws the exemption from a team shorthanded by a major that has left the penalty bench empty
Rule	IIHF Rule 81.6 carries no such withdrawal, so under the UK's book shorthanded icing is unconditional

The opposite: a lot of traffic, a lot of shots you cannot see, and a lot of lateral puck movement designed to make you move.

- **The default shapes are the box (two forwards high, two defencemen low), the diamond (a single apex, used against a 1-3-1 because a box leaves the bumper in the middle of the slot unmarked), and wedge+1 (a tight triangle plus one puck-chaser).** Know which one your team runs, because it tells you which lanes are being conceded and therefore where the shots will come from. See Special Teams.
- **Expect shots from the point through traffic**, so prioritise seeing the puck. Whether that means playing deeper than usual is the coaching split flagged under Playing bigger and deeper through traffic — follow whichever your goalie coach teaches.
- **Use freezes to buy whistles — not seconds.** A freeze on the kill is worth more than a freeze at even strength, because it gets exhausted killers a change and forces the power play to set up again from a faceoff. Be clear about what it does *not* do: a freeze stops play, so the clock stops with it. **No time comes off the penalty.** What you are buying is fresh legs, a reset and a draw — which is plenty. (And remember Rule 63.8: if they dumped it in from their own side of the centre red line, freezing it stops *your* team changing too.)
- **Your team may ice the puck freely while shorthanded — if your rule set allows it.** Say so, because killers under pressure sometimes try to make a play they don't need to

make. But find out first: USA Hockey grants the exemption only "*For all Youth 15-Only and above, Girls 16U and above, High School and Adult classifications only*" (Rule 624(b)(1)), so below those levels shouting "ice it" buys your tired killers a defensive-zone draw instead of a rest. NHL Rule 81.6 also withdraws it from a team shorthanded by a *major* that has left the penalty bench empty. 🇬🇧 **Under the IIHF book neither restriction exists.** IIHF Rule 81.6 grants the exemption flatly — "*If the puck was so shot by a Player of a side below the numerical strength of the opposing team, play shall continue, and the 'icing' violation shall not be called*" — with no classification limit and no empty-penalty-bench clawback, and the England Ice Hockey and SIHA In-House Rules do not amend it. So in Britain "ice it" is always available to a killer, at every level. Full rule in Special Teams.

6-on-5 with your net empty

- Action** Go hard and go early when called — a slow change risks a too-many-men penalty or a goal with you halfway up the ice
- Rule** Leaving your stick or equipment near the net, or piling snow there, awards a goal to the other team (NHL and IIHF Rule 67.5)
- Rule** You may shoot at their empty net with your stick, but not throw the puck forward (Rule 67.3(iii)) or play past the centre red line (NHL Rule 27.7; IIHF Rule 27.6)
- Action** Coming back in, reset your references — posts, paint, depth — before the faceoff
- Read** Defending a 6-on-5, play a little deeper and expect low-to-high plays and back-door passes rather than clean shots
- Key** A whistle does not run their clock down; what it destroys is the possession they spent thirty seconds building

When your coach pulls you for an extra attacker, your job changes completely.

- **Go hard and go early when called.** A slow change to the bench is how you end up with a too-many-men penalty or a goal against with you halfway up the ice.
- **Do not leave anything behind.** If you intentionally leave your stick or any equipment near the net, or pile snow there, and it would tend to prevent the puck entering, a **goal is awarded** to the other team (Rule 67.5 in both books). IIHF 67.5 adds the condition explicitly — the goal is awarded only if you had "*been replaced for an extra attacker, otherwise a minor penalty shall be assessed.*" Take your stick.
- **You are legally allowed to score.** If the puck is loose in your own end and the other net is empty, you may shoot it — with your stick. You may **not throw the puck forward toward the opponent's net** (Rule 67.3(iii)), and you may not participate in the play beyond the

centre red line (NHL Rule 27.7; **IIHF Rule 27.6**, and the IIHF's determining factor is the position of the *puck*, not your skates).

- **Coming back in.** When play stops, get in fast and reset your references — posts, paint, depth — before the faceoff.

Defending against a 6-on-5 (their net empty, you facing an extra attacker): play a little deeper, expect low-to-high plays and back-door passes rather than clean shots, and freeze everything you can. **A whistle does not run their clock down** — play is stopped, so the clock is stopped too. What a whistle does is destroy the possession: they have to win a faceoff and rebuild the setup they spent thirty seconds establishing, with the pulled goalie exposed to any clearance. That is the value, and it is a real one. (*Watch Rule 63.8 here too: if the puck was shot in from their own side of the centre red line, freezing it means your five cannot change either.*)

Goaltender Interference, From Your Side of It

Key	Rules Primer owns Rule 69 — read it there; this is only the part that changes what you do
Rule	The blue paint is yours — an attacker who initiates contact with you inside your crease voids the goal (NHL Rule 69)
Rule	Outside your crease incidental contact is permitted while you play the puck, if the attacker made a reasonable effort to avoid it (NHL Rule 69.4)
Rule	On rebounds and loose pucks incidental contact is permitted and the goal counts — don't wait for a whistle, win the puck (NHL Rule 69.7)
Rule	A screen from outside your crease without contact is normally legal; a vision-obstructing body inside the paint voids the goal (NHL Rule 69.3)
Rule	Being pushed into your own net disallows the goal — unless one of your own players pushed the attacker into you (NHL Rule 69)
Rule	IIHF Rule 69 is the same rule with the same subsection numbers, so every citation here is your citation in Britain
Rule	But there is no on-ice video review and no coach's challenge in EIHL or SIHA competition — the referee's call stands (In-House Rules, Rule 69.1; see UK and England Rules)
Action	Establish and hold your crease position early, and shout for your defenceman rather than dropping to the ice
Never	Embellish — referees see everything you do all night, and a goalie who sells contact gets fewer calls when it matters

You should know exactly what protection you have, because a lot of goalies believe they have more than they do and play accordingly. **This section is the rule read from behind the goal line. Rules Primer owns Rule 69** — the premise (an attacker's position, inside or outside the crease, does not by itself decide anything), the two grounds on which a goal is disallowed, the strict inside-the-crease standard of Rule 69.3, and what all of it asks of an attacking player. Read it once. The short version from your side is that **the blue paint really is yours**: an attacker who initiates contact with you inside your crease voids the goal, incidental or otherwise.

🇬🇧 **Every Rule 69 citation in this section is also an IIHF citation.** The IIHF's Rule 69 carries the same subsection numbers as the NHL's — 69.1 the premise and the two grounds, 69.3 inside the crease, 69.4 outside it, 69.7 rebounds and loose pucks — and the substance is the same. The IIHF's premise clause is word-for-word: an attacking player's position *"whether inside or outside the goal crease, should not, by itself, determine whether a goal should be allowed or disallowed."* The one drafting difference is vocabulary — the IIHF writes **"relevant contact"** where the NHL writes "contact", and defines it in 69.1 as *"any contact that is made between or among a goalkeeper and attacking Player(s), whether by means of a stick or any part of the body."* That is a definition, not a narrower test: the standard you are protected by is the same one.

⚠️ 🇬🇧 **What is not the same is whether anyone can look at it again — and for this rule that is the whole difference.** IIHF Rule 69.1 ends by saying the rule *"will be enforced exclusively in accordance with the on-ice judgement of the Referee(s), but may be subject to a Video Review ... or to a Coach's Challenge."* **The England Ice Hockey and SIHA In-House Rules delete that half.** They amend Rule 69.1 to read *"On-ice video review is not available in EIH or SIHA competition"*, amend Rule 37 to say video review *"may not be used by referees, official scorers, timekeepers, or any other game official"*, and amend Rule 38 so that *"a Coach's Challenge is not permitted."*

So in EIH and SIHA competition, goaltender interference is decided once, live, by a referee looking through traffic, and that is the end of it. Goals disallowed on review in NHL highlights are decided in your league by whether the referee happened to see the contact. This has two practical consequences and they pull in opposite directions. **First: say it at the time or not at all.** There is no later. If someone is in your paint, the moment to make it visible is before the puck goes in, not after. **Second: expect to eat some.** A goal that would be wiped out on review in a televised game will stand in yours. That is not an injustice to argue about for the next ten minutes; it is the competition you signed up to. See UK and England Rules for the full amendment and the other four IIHF rules it strips review from.

What follows is only the part that changes what *you* do.

- **You are not "fair game" just because you are outside your crease (Rule 69.4).** Contact other than incidental contact that produces a goal means the goal is disallowed, and unnecessary contact should be penalised in every case. But **incidental contact is permitted** when you are in the act of playing the puck outside your crease, provided the attacker made a reasonable effort to avoid it. So leaving the paint to play a puck costs you some of your protection — not all of it, but some. Know that before you go.
- **Rebounds and loose pucks are a free-for-all (Rule 69.7).** When you and an attacker are simultaneously going for a loose puck, inside or outside the crease, incidental contact is permitted and a resulting goal counts. Do not wait for a whistle in a scramble; win the puck.
- **A screen set from outside your crease, without contact, is normally legal** — both qualifiers belong to the legality claim itself; a significant vision-obstructing position established *inside* the blue paint voids the goal under Rule 69.3. See Screens, Tips and Traffic above, which is where the skill of dealing with it lives. Rule 69.1 can void a goal for an attacker's positioning alone, but that is a post-goal judgement, not real-time relief. If you are blind, that is a problem for you and your defencemen to solve.
- **Being pushed into your own net with the puck by an attacker means the goal is disallowed** — but if the attacker was themselves pushed or fouled by one of *your* players, the goal can stand. Your defenceman shoving an opponent into you can cost your team the goal.
- **You can be penalised too.** If, by your actions outside your crease, you deliberately interfere with an attacker trying to play the puck or an opponent, that is on you.
- **Don't embellish, and under the IIHF book there is a named penalty for it.** The rule is enforced on the referee's on-ice judgement, subject to a coach's challenge in the NHL — **and to nothing at all in EIH or SIHA competition**, as above. **IIHF Rule 64.1 writes a goalkeeper-specific clause into diving/embellishment:** *"A goalkeeper who deliberately initiates contact with an attacking Player other than to establish position in the crease, or who otherwise acts to create the appearance of other than 'incidental contact' with an attacking Player, is subject to the assessment of a minor penalty for 'diving / embellishment'."* Selling it is not just reputationally expensive under the rules you play — it is two minutes. And referees see everything you do all night, so a goalie with a reputation for it gets fewer calls in the games where it matters.

Practically: establish and hold your crease position early; if someone is standing in it, make it visible and shout for your defenceman rather than dropping to the ice. And accept the part you cannot change — a screen set from **outside** your crease, without contact, is legal, and dealing with it is a skill, not an injustice. What is *not* legal is a body established inside your blue paint to obstruct your vision (Rule 69.3), or positioning anywhere that actually stops you moving or

defending (Rule 69.1) — those void the goal, so say so out loud at the time. **The IIHF Situation Handbook confirms the blunt version at Situation 69.1:** a player standing in the crease screening the goalkeeper when a goal is scored means *"The goal shall be disallowed, and no additional penalty assessed."*

One thing worth knowing that is not in Rule 69 at all. An attacker who holds a glove or a stick directly in front of your face to blind you is not doing a legal screen — under the IIHF's published answer it is not judged under Rule 69 but under **Rule 75, unsportsmanlike conduct**, and it is a minor. IIHF Situation Handbook, Situation 69.3, asks whether an attacking player *"can ... hold its hand/glove or stick directly in front of the goalkeeper's eyes/face with the obvious intent of impairing the ability to see the puck"* and answers: *"No. This shall be treated as unsportsmanlike conduct and penalized with the assessment of a minor penalty under Rule 75 if witnessed by the Referee(s)."* Note the last four words. With no video review in EIHL or SIHA competition, *"if witnessed"* is the whole rule — so call it loudly while it is happening.

What a Goalie Needs From Their Skaters

- Action** Clear the net front with technique — inside shoulder ahead of theirs, box out, and lift their stick
- Never** Screen your own goalie, and don't back into the crease when you are being pushed
- Never** Block a shot from a screening position — get to the shooter and block from close, or get out of the lane entirely
- Action** On a 2-on-1 take the pass and give your goalie the shot, and don't slide or dive before the pass is released
- Action** Let your goalie play the puck when they call for it — "I've got it" means get to your breakout position
- Action** Tell your goalie what you want while you are still coming back for it, not as you arrive
- Action** Box out on rebounds — find a body, not the puck
- Never** Blame the goalie out loud; answer their calls instead, because one word back is enough

This section is written for the other five players. Most net-front goals against are not goalie errors. They are skater habits that make the goalie's job impossible.

- **Clear the net front, with technique.** Get your inside shoulder ahead of theirs, box out, and lift their stick. Position *usually* beats strength — Body Contact and Battles owns that

claim and flags it as coaching consensus rather than a measured law, with a large enough strength gap winning anyway — and a stick lift takes away the tip and the rebound without giving up your own body position — while repeated cross-checks to the back put your team down a man. Full detail in Body Contact and Battles.

- **Do not screen your own goalie.** Standing in front of your own net with your back to the shooter, in your goalie's sightline, is one of the most common and least discussed causes of goals against. If you are the one blocking the view, move — and do not back into the crease when you're being pushed.
 - **Do not block a shot from a screening position.** Half-blocking a puck your goalie cannot see is *worse* than not blocking it, because you have just deflected an unseen puck. Get to the shooter and block from close, or get out of the lane entirely. There is no useful middle.
 - **On a 2-on-1, take the pass and give your goalie the shot** — and do not slide or dive before the pass is released. Say which half you are taking.
 - **Let your goalie play the puck when they call for it.** "I've got it" means get to your breakout position, not to the puck. Two players arriving at the same puck behind your own net is how goals get scored on empty nets.
 - **Tell your goalie what you want before you need it.** If you want the puck stopped and left behind the net, say so while you are still coming back for it — a defenceman who calls "leave it" from the neutral zone gets a dead puck waiting for them; the same call as they arrive gets a collision.
 - **Box out on rebounds.** After the save, the goalie is on the ice recovering. The most dangerous player is the one arriving unmarked at the second puck. Find a body, not the puck.
 - **Answer their calls.** A goalie whose calls get no response stops making them, and then you have lost the only player with a full view of the ice. One word back is enough.
 - **Don't shoot at your goalie's head in warm-ups,** and don't fire pucks at them from ten feet in drills. Both are more common than they should be.
 - **Never blame the goalie out loud.** They already know. The only thing your comment changes is their next twenty minutes.
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Equipment Notes

- Rule** Everything except your skates and stick must be built solely for protection, with no undue assistance in keeping goal (NHL and IIHF Rule 11.1)
- Rule** In England and Scotland a neck laceration protector is mandatory for everyone, adults included — no warning, straight to a 10-minute misconduct (In-House Rules, Rule 9.12)
- Rule** If it comes off in play you must leave the ice and may not retrieve it, and a second offence escalates to a game misconduct (In-House Rules, Rule 9.12)
- Rule** IIHF Rule 9.12 is the base — mandatory in all categories, minor penalty after a warning; the In-House Rules remove the warning
- Rule** Neck laceration protection is mandatory and a dangler does not satisfy it — Hockey Canada Rule 3.6(c) requires a BNQ-certified throat protector
- Rule** USA Hockey Rule 304(g) requires a HECC-certified neck laceration protector in every age classification except Adults
- Rule** Paddle length is capped at 26 inches (NHL Rule 10.2), and only players 6'6" or taller may apply for the exemption
- Rule** IIHF Rule 10.2 allows 71 cm, about 28 inches, with no exemption process
- Key** Too long a paddle makes you stand taller, drifts your stick hand from your body and opens the six-hole
- Action** Replace equipment you have outgrown — gear that hurts you teaches you to flinch, and flinching cannot be coached out
- Key** Fit and comfort beat brand and looks, and dull goalie edges destroy lateral movement first

Brief here — full treatment in Equipment.

- **Everything except your skates and stick must be built solely for protection** (NHL Rule 11.1, and IIHF Rule 11.1 in near-identical words). You may not wear anything that gives "undue assistance in keeping goal." At professional level, pad width, pad height, chest protector and pant dimensions are all regulated and inspected. The pad specifics are in **Rule 11.2**, not 11.1: NHL leg pads "shall not exceed eleven inches (11") in extreme width when on the leg of the player", and each goalie's maximum pad height is set individually by the League from their own floor-to-knee and knee-to-pelvis measurements. **IIHF Rule 11.2 sets the same width in metric — "The leg guards worn by goalkeepers shall not exceed 28cm in extreme width" — but sets no individual height entitlement**, so the NHL's per-goalie height calculation is a League scheme, not something to expect anywhere else.

- **🇬🇧 Neck laceration protection is mandatory for you, whatever your age, and this is the rule most likely to catch out a British goalie who learned the game from North American material.** This is the signature catastrophic injury in your position, so treat it as the first line of the section rather than the last. In **England and Scotland**, the England Ice Hockey / SIHA In-House Rules make a neck laceration protector "*mandatory for all players in all IIHF categories and SIHA competitions*" — **adults included** — with **no warning given** and an **immediate 10-minute misconduct** for going without, a requirement to leave the ice if it comes off in play, and a second offence that escalates to a game misconduct. That is stricter than the IIHF book it amends: **IIHF Rule 9.12** already makes it mandatory "*For all Players in all categories of IIHF Competition*" but assesses only a minor "*after warning by the Referee.*" The In-House Rules delete the warning. Enforcement detail, the visor and chin-strap rules that sit beside it, and the rest of the amendment list are in UK and England Rules.

The dangler is an addition, not a substitute, under every book that addresses it.

IIHF Rule 9.12 permits it separately — "*A goalkeeper may attach a throat protector to the chin of their facemask*" — as a permission alongside the mandate, not in place of it. **Hockey Canada Rule 3.6(c)** says so outright, requiring a **BNQ-certified throat protector** for players registered in minor and female hockey and adding that "*goaltenders who wear an attachment to the mask or helmet designed to protect the throat, must still wear a BNQ-certified throat protector.*" **USA Hockey Rule 304(g)** requires a **HECC-certified neck laceration protector** "*that covers as much of the neck area as possible*" for all players including goalkeepers in **every age classification except Adults** (BNQ-certified protectors also satisfy it through the 2026-27 season; Adults are strongly recommended to wear one) — **and that adult exemption is the North American position, not yours.** Full standards, certification periods and the Canada/US/Europe divergence are in Equipment.

- **Paddle length is capped at 26 inches** (Rule 10.2 — the widened portion of the stick may not extend more than 26 inches from the heel, nor exceed three and a half inches in width). **There is an exemption process, and only players 6'6" or taller may use it:** a longer paddle must be requested in writing and approved by Hockey Operations before the stick is used. (*Oddly, the 2025-26 rulebook sets the maximum length of an exempted paddle at "twenty-six inches (26")" — the same as the ordinary limit, which makes the exemption as written do nothing. The parallel provision for skaters' sticks in Rule 10.1 does grant real extra length, 65 inches against 63. Read the goalkeeper's figure as probably stale; it is not something to plan equipment around.*) For everybody else 26 inches is the ceiling under the NHL book. **🇬🇧 Under IIHF Rule 10.2 the limit is 71 cm — about 28 inches — with no exemption process at all**, and a 9.0 cm width cap that works out at 3.54 inches against the NHL's three and a half — the same limit for practical purposes. So the stick that is illegal in the NHL is legal in Britain, which is a licence rather than an instruction: the extra two

inches are exactly the two inches that make you stand taller, drift your stick hand from your body and open the six-hole. Get this right before you rework your technique.

- **Equipment confidence is a real thing, and old gear destroys it.** Knowing your arm pads will handle a high shot, and that your pads will not be overpowered when you close the five-hole, is what lets you stay in the shot instead of turning away from it. Gear that hurts you teaches you to flinch, and flinching is a technique problem you cannot coach out — so if you are an adult returning to the position in equipment you bought as a teenager, replacing it is probably the single largest available improvement to your game. Fit and comfort beat brand and looks, and a properly sharpened, correctly profiled skate matters more than either: dull goalie edges destroy lateral movement first.

The Mental Side

The goal that goes in

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| Mindset | Every goalie lets in goals and some will be bad — the skill is what you do in the ninety seconds afterwards |
| Action | Have a reset ritual and perform it identically every time, so it signals that the previous shift is finished |
| Never | Do the analysis during the game — "what could I have done?" takes attention you need for the next play |
| Key | Short memory, long memory — forget the goal for the rest of the game, remember the read in the week after |
| Never | Point at a teammate, with your hands, your body language or a look |

Every goalie lets in goals. Some of them will be bad. The puck will go through you, or off your defenceman's shin, or you will be on the wrong post. The building will react and there is nowhere to hide.

The skill is not avoiding this. It is what you do in the ninety seconds afterwards.

- **Have a reset ritual and use it every time.** Skate a small circle. Get a drink. Scrape your crease. Tap both posts. Whatever it is, make it identical every time, so that performing it becomes the signal to your body that the previous shift is finished.

- **Do the analysis later.** During the game, "what could I have done?" is a trap; it takes attention you need for the next play. There is video and there is tomorrow.
- **Short memory, long memory.** Forget the goal for the rest of the game. Remember the read that caused it in the week after.
- **Never point at a teammate.** Not with your hands, not with your body language, not with a look. It is the fastest way to lose a dressing room, and it is almost always a defence mechanism for your own confidence rather than an accurate description of what happened.

Spotting your own confidence problems

- Key** Korn's defence mechanisms are symptoms of your head, not real problems
- Read** Blaming your equipment — suddenly nothing is right, the stick, the skates, the arm pads
- Read** Blaming your defence — "there was no way to stop that one"
- Read** Positioning drift — hiding very deep, or running at shooters and losing the net. Both show up plainly in warm-ups
- Read** Mood swings to either extreme — quiet and sorry for yourself, or conspicuously cocky
- Read** Guessing and flopping — leaving your feet early and no longer tracking the puck off the stick

Mitch Korn's list of defence mechanisms is uncomfortably accurate. If you catch yourself doing these, treat them as symptoms of your head rather than as real problems:

- **Blaming your equipment.** Suddenly nothing is right — the stick, the skates, the arm pads.
- **Blaming your defence.** "There was no way to stop that one."
- **Positioning drift.** Either hiding very deep in the net, where the posts feel safe, or running at shooters to cut the angle down to nothing and losing the net entirely. Both show up plainly in warm-ups.
- **Mood swings to either extreme** — going quiet and sorry for yourself, or going conspicuously cocky.
- **Guessing and flopping.** Leaving your feet early, no longer tracking the puck off the stick, and ending up swimming on the ice.

The honest version of the mental demand

- Mindset** "The most psychologically demanding position in team sport" is widely repeated with no study behind it — treat it as opinion
- Key** The supported version: at the top level the separation is mental — reading, anticipation, tracking, save selection and toughness
- Risk** Confidence is startlingly fragile — several strong games, one bad period, and it can be gone for a week
- Key** Nobody else on your team plays a position where every mistake is final and public
- Mindset** Goalies need to enjoy making saves — if the save is the thing you love, the goals are a price

Goaltending is routinely described as the most psychologically demanding position in team sport.

That is a widely repeated claim with no study behind it, so treat it as opinion. The narrower version is well supported by coaches and still substantial: at the top level, where everyone has the physical skills, the separation is made in **mental** ones — reading, anticipation, tracking, save selection and toughness; confidence is startlingly fragile, and a goalie can play several strong games, have one bad period and lose it for a week; and nobody else on your team plays a position where every mistake is final and public.

The counterweight is the part that actually keeps people in the position: **goalies need to enjoy making saves.** If the save is the thing you love, the goals are a price. If the goals are the thing you think about, no amount of technique will hold up. Full treatment in Mental Game.

Common Mistakes

- **Dropping into the butterfly before the shot.** You have given away the top of the net and removed your own save selection. Go down when going down is the answer.
- **Hands at your hips.** Get them out in front where pucks can hit them.
- **Half-seeing a screen from both sides.** Around or over is a genuine coaching split — this document's default is around (tall means immobile), and the BVHS manual teaches over to maintain size. Ask your own coach. What nobody defends is splitting the difference: pick a side and find the puck cleanly there.
- **Being deep and off-angle.** Under the mainstream teaching — angle first, then depth — deep and off-angle is a goal. Treat that as a coaching philosophy rather than a law: there is a

documented exception when you step off the post to a short-side shot, where depth is what closes the gap you just opened. Ask your coach which they teach.

- **Charging at shooters.** Cutting down the angle is not the same as running out of your net. You lose the net, the pass and your feet at once.
- **Shuffling too big.** Large shuffles open the five-hole mid-step. Smaller is better every time.
- **Rebounds into the slot.** Angle your blocker and pads at the corners. Know where their forwards are *before* the shot.
- **Losing sight of the puck at contact.** Explosive, flailing saves see nothing and control nothing. Watch it into the equipment.
- **Being a spectator on a pass.** Move when the pass is released, not when it arrives.
- **Dropping to a post out of habit, with no read.** Late on and early off, with post seals kept for pucks genuinely below the goal line, is **one school — the conservative North American default this document follows.** The Swedish tradition where RVH originated teaches an earlier, more systematic seal with a defined trigger line, and both are defensible. Ask what your trigger is. The actual mistake is going down there because it is what you always do.
- **Playing the puck in the corner under NHL or IIHF rules.** Two minutes, and it is entirely avoidable.
- **Drifting toward a dumped puck you wanted whistled.** Under NHL and IIHF rules, moving in its direction waves off the icing and hands them a live puck in your end. Decide first, then stand still or go.
- **Handling the puck because you can.** Every touch is a chance for a turnover in front of your own empty net.
- **Silence.** You have the best view on the ice. A goalie who doesn't talk is throwing away the most valuable thing they own.
- **Calling "screen" once and giving up.** Say it every time, loudly, until it changes something.
- **Carrying the last goal into the next shift.**

Key Takeaways

1. **Positioning, not reflexes.** Good goaltending looks boring. Be out, be square, be set — in that order.
2. **Depth is the fundamental decision**, and it is always a trade of front door against back door. Deeper against passes; further out against a clean single shooter. **Depth against a**

screen is genuinely disputed — the traditional teaching is deeper for sighting time, and a second school calls falling deep under pressure a common error and keeps a close gap instead. Ask your coach.

3. **Angle before depth — but treat that as a coaching philosophy, not a law.** The mainstream teaching is that deep and off-angle is a goal while on-angle and slightly deep is a save. There is a well-documented school that reverses the priority in one specific case — stepping off the post to a short-side shot, where depth is what closes the gap you just opened. **This is a genuine difference between coaches, not a settled fact. Ask yours which they teach.**
 4. **Track the puck all the way into your body.** Almost every soft goal starts with losing sight of the puck.
 5. **The butterfly is a save selection, not a style, and not a religion.** Stay on your feet until going down is the answer.
 6. **Rebound control in priority order: prevent, cover or clear, direct safely, recover.** Direct everything to the corners and know where their forwards are before the shot.
 7. **Your voice is the most valuable defensive tool on the ice.** "Time," "man on," "over," "reverse," "leave it," "I've got it," "screen," "back door." Early, short, every time.
 8. **Under NHL and IIHF rules you may only play the puck behind the goal line inside the trapezoid** — one exception, skate contact with the crease. Most North American rec leagues have no trapezoid at all. **In England and Wales the status is unsettled:** the IIHF book is in force and the In-House Rules do not amend Rule 27, but England Ice Hockey's *Rules & Regulations* 22.3 say the restricted area is "*not currently enforced*" (IIHF Rule 27.7 — note the number, not the NHL's 27.8). Play it as though it binds until your league tells you otherwise, and know which you're in.
 9. **A screen from outside the crease, without contact, is normally legal** — both qualifiers belong to the legality claim itself. The blue paint is yours; your sightline is not — Rule 69.1 only helps you where the attacker's positioning or contact actually stops you moving or defending. **And in EIH or SIHA competition nobody reviews it**, so whatever the referee saw live is the decision. Handling traffic is a skill, not an injustice.
 10. **On a 2-on-1 you want the shot and your defenceman takes the pass** — say it out loud, because it is a convention, not a law. And **you will let in bad goals**: have a reset ritual, use it every time, and do the analysis tomorrow.
-

Switching Positions

Rule set: Written to NHL rules. Where IIHF, USA Hockey or typical rec-league rules differ in a way that changes how you play, it is flagged inline. **Playing in Britain? The IIHF flags are yours** — every level of UK hockey runs the IIHF book, amended locally; see [UK and England Rules](#).

RELATED

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Overview

Almost every player who sticks with hockey gets moved at some point — wing to centre, forward to defence, onto the other side of the ice, occasionally into the net. The four position documents here each describe a job in full. **This document is about the journey between them:** what carries over unchanged, what has to be relearned from scratch, and — the part nobody warns you about — which of your existing good habits will actively work against you in the new job.

It does not re-explain the positions. Where you need to know what a centre does in the defensive zone, the link is to [Center](#), and that document is the authority.

How claims in this document are labelled

Convention	Everything here is coaching craft unless it says otherwise — widely done, tested by nothing
Never	Repeat any of it to a teammate as though it were measured
Key	There is no published evidence base for how players move between positions — read that as "nothing published", not as proof that nothing exists
Key	The one piece of governing-body guidance is USA Hockey's 8U "no full-time goalies" recommendation, and it says nothing about how a transition is made
Action	Treat a claim as sourced only where a named rulebook, study or document is cited — and carry that citation's own qualifications

Most of what follows is **coaching craft**: what experienced coaches and players do, tested by nothing. That is not a reason to ignore it — most of hockey is coaching craft — but it is a reason not to repeat it to a teammate as though it were measured. The labelling convention is borrowed from Mental Game, which uses it throughout:

- **"Coaching craft."** Widely done, never tested. The default status of everything in this document unless it says otherwise.
- **Sourced.** A named rulebook, study or other document here is cited, and the citation carries its own qualifications.

Why almost all of it is craft. There is no published evidence base for how players move between hockey positions. The rulebooks and casebooks do not touch the subject, the coaching manuals do not touch it, and USA Hockey's American Development Model material — its About, Parents, Coaches and Long-Term Athlete Development pages — does not address switching position either. Read that as "nothing published", not as proof that nothing exists; but it does mean everything below that is not attached to a citation is craft, and is labelled as such.

One piece of governing-body guidance does exist, and it is worth having. USA Hockey's *Parent Handbook 2025-26* recommends **no full-time goalies at 8U** — a statement against early positional specialisation, quoted in full under *If you are a parent* below. It is the only one of its kind, and it says nothing about how a transition is made or how long one takes.

What *is* sourced here is sourced properly: the off-wing trade-offs, the goaltender equipment rules, the faceoff-improvability figures, the backward-skating and relearning material.

What transfers, whatever the switch

Start here, because it is more than new movers expect and it is the reason a switch is rarely a disaster.

- **Skating.** Every stride, edge, crossover, stop and tight turn you own comes with you. The single exception is backward skating and pivoting, which is a genuine technical barrier and gets its own treatment under *Forward* → *defence* below. Everything else is portable. Skating.
- **Scanning.** Turning your head to take a picture of the ice before the puck arrives is the same skill in every position — only the things worth looking for change. This is one of the few areas of hockey with real measurement behind it: Berg et al. (2025) coded 2,545 puck receptions by 88 SHL and SDHL professionals, and Scanning and Anticipation owns those figures and their qualifications. Do not restate them from memory; read them there.
- **Puck protection.** Body between the checker and the puck, wide base, feet moving. A defenceman shielding a puck behind their own net and a winger shielding one on the half-wall are doing the same thing. Body Contact and Battles.
- **Reading pressure.** Knowing whether a checker has sealed you against the boards (rim) or over-committed and skated past you (reverse) is a read, not a position. All three skater documents teach the same distinction because it is the same distinction.
- **Rules knowledge.** Offside, icing, faceoff violations, the trapezoid, goaltender interference. Your new position exposes you to a different subset of them, not to different rules.
- **The framework itself.** Center, Winger and Defender are built on one grid: three zones, and inside each, four situations — carrying in free space, carrying under pressure, pressuring an opponent, and playing without the puck. **You already know the questions. You are learning twelve new answers, not a new sport.** Reading your new position document with that grid in mind is the fastest orientation available.

What does not transfer: the map in your head

Key	What you lose is a set of location reflexes — where to look first, where to drift, who you pick up when the puck goes to a particular place
Key	Those reflexes are position-specific and took a season to build
Risk	For the first few weeks you will be thinking about things you used to do without thinking, and thinking is slow
Mindset	That is normal and it passes

What you actually lose is a set of location reflexes — where to look first, where to drift when nothing is happening, who you are responsible for when the puck goes to a particular place. Those took a season to build and they are position-specific. For the first few weeks in a new spot you will be **thinking** about things you used to do without thinking, and thinking is slow. That is normal and it passes.

Wing → centre

Position	Under a low zone collapse your defensive-zone responsibility moves with the puck — low to the corner when it is low and strong-side, back to the high slot when it is not
Convention	Zone, man-on-man and hybrid are coaching choices, not laws — ask your coach which one your team plays before your first shift
Action	Swing low on the breakout — inside the faceoff dots and below the hash marks, so your defenceman has a middle-lane option
Never	Stand where a winger stands, out on the wall, where one opponent can cover two of you
Convention	That is the conventional swing breakout specifically — a centre fly or a flat/spread breakout wants you somewhere else, so find out which you are in
Action	Start faceoff work with stance, grip and the defensive-zone draw — the NHL win-rate spread is owned by Faceoffs and is far too wide to be luck
Action	Call the line change, and call it earlier than you used to
Key	A centre works more of the ice — three zones, full width — not more distance; Center owns that claim and the measurement behind it

The most common switch in hockey, and the biggest step up in responsibility short of changing to defence.

What is genuinely new

- **You are responsible in all three zones instead of one lane.** As a winger your defensive-zone job had a home — high on your side, on the opposing point. The centre's job has no home; **under a low zone collapse, the coverage assumed throughout, your responsibility moves with the puck:** down to help in the corner when the puck is low and strong-side, back to the high slot when it is not. Under **man-on-man** you track an assigned

opponent instead, and under a **hybrid** it is man-on-man below the dots and zone above. These are coaching choices, not laws of hockey, and the job is materially different between them. **Ask your coach which one your team plays before your first shift** — that single question is the highest-value thing a new centre can do. Defensive Zone Coverage is the authority; Center describes the job inside each.

- **Faceoffs, which are a whole new skill.** You have almost certainly never taken one seriously. The good news is that it is learnable, and there is evidence for that rather than just encouragement: **among the 109 centres who took at least 500 draws in the NHL in 2025-26, win rates ran from 62.1% down to 39.7% — a 22-point spread on a repeatable, isolated, closed-skill action.** That figure is **computed from the NHL's official skater statistics** and is owned by Faceoffs; carry that label if you repeat it. Nothing that wide is luck, which means it responds to work. Start with stance, grip and the defensive-zone draw; the technique, the nine locations and the five-player alignments are all in Faceoffs.
- **Low support in your own end.** This is the habit inversion that catches wingers hardest, and it is set out below.
- **The conditioning step-up.** Every coach you meet will tell you the centre covers more ice than anyone and fades first. **Be careful with that, because half of it has been measured and the measurement goes the other way.** Lignell and colleagues tracked 36 NHL players through a game and found that "*defensemen (D) covered 29% more ($p \leq 0.05$) skating in total than forwards (F) and were on the ice 47% longer. However, F performed 54% more ($p \leq 0.05$) high-intensity skating per minute than defensemen.*" So forwards work harder per minute; defencemen cover more ground. What is **not** measured anywhere is centre against winger — the external-load literature splits players only into forwards and defence — so the centre-specific half of the claim is coaching craft. Center owns this and states the defensible version: a centre works more *of* the ice (three zones, full width), not more distance. Shift length — the 30–80 second range and the physiological reason the top of that range is where the wheels come off — is owned by Conditioning and Recovery, which carries the Lignell citation too. The practical version regardless of the evidence: as a centre you are the one who calls the line change, and you will need to call it earlier than you used to.

First thing to work on: the swing low. In the conventional swing breakout, the centre gets **inside the faceoff dots and below the hash marks** so the defenceman has a middle-lane option — and the commonest new-centre error is standing where a winger stands, out on the wall, where one opponent can cover two of you. **That is the conventional swing breakout specifically.** Under a **centre fly** you deliberately leave early up the middle and the weak-side winger drops in to take low support; under a **flat or spread breakout** the wingers hold higher

and the exit is made with longer passes. Find out which you are in — Breakouts is the authority and Center sets out the consequences of getting it wrong.

What to stop worrying about: scoring. Your value as a new centre is almost entirely in being where you are supposed to be, taking the draw, and being available under the puck. The offence comes later and it comes from the middle of the ice, which you are now standing in.

Centre → wing

Position	Your lane is the outside third of the ice on your side, running the length of the rink
Never	Drift into the middle because that is where the decisions are — it collapses your line's spacing every time
Position	In your own end, between the opposing defenceman on your side and the slot, denying the shot and the seam at once
Convention	That point-coverage job is the low zone collapse version — under man-on-man you follow your check wherever they go, corner included
Action	Leave the point the moment your team wins the puck and come down the wall to the outlet spot between the hash marks and the goal line
Technique	On the wall, puck on the far side of your body from the checker, backside into them, feet wide — and know where it is going before you arrive
Never	Direct traffic from the wall — the rotations are no longer yours to manage, and chasing them takes you out of your lane
Key	You will touch the puck less — the share of ice time skaters actually hold it is owned by Playing Without the Puck

Usually experienced as a demotion. Usually isn't — coaches move centres to the wing to get a defensively reliable player onto a line that needs one, to put a good shot in a shooting position, to reduce a young player's load, or simply because they have four centres and three of them have to play somewhere.

What is genuinely new

- **Lane discipline, which is a spacing instruction and not a personality one.** Your lane is the outside third of the ice on your side, running the length of the rink. Three forwards in three lanes stretch a defence across the whole width of the rink; three forwards in one lane

can be covered by two defenders. A former centre's reflex is to drift toward the middle because that is where the decisions are — and that reflex collapses the line's spacing every time. Winger.

- **The point-coverage job.** In your own end you now cover the opposing defenceman on your side: position yourself between them and the slot, denying the shot and the seam at once. **This is the low zone collapse job; under man-on-man you follow your check wherever they go, corner included.** It is also where this guide's most overloaded phrase lives. **"Stay high" means two different things about twenty feet apart** — covering the opposing point while the other team has the puck, and holding near the blue line in a flat or spread breakout. And the first sense **expires**: the moment your team wins the puck, you come down the wall to the outlet spot between the hash marks and the goal line. A winger who never leaves the point is as wrong as one who left it early. Winger sets out both ends of that move.
- **Much less puck time, and much more time deciding without it.** You had the puck more as a centre because the structure fed it to you. Across the whole game the difference is smaller than it feels: NHL skaters hold the puck for roughly **3.3% to 4.2% of their ice time at 5-on-5**, from a 2025 University of Waterloo study of 1,194 games — **5-on-5 only, normalised per 20 minutes of ice time**, and owned with all its qualifications by Playing Without the Puck. What changes for you is not the quantity so much as the shape: fewer touches, arriving in a narrower band of ice, more of them at speed on the wall.

First thing to work on: wall play. Winning a 50-50 puck against the boards is the defining physical skill of a winger and it is not something a centre gets much practice at — puck on the far side of your body from the checker, backside into them, feet wide, and know where the puck is going before you arrive. Body Contact and Battles owns the technique.

What to stop worrying about: organising everybody. You have spent your hockey life being the connective player, and the temptation is to keep directing traffic from the wall. Communication is still everyone's job — call what you can see — but the rotations are no longer yours to manage, and chasing them is how a winger ends up out of their lane.

Forward → defence

The largest change available in hockey without putting on pads. Two of the three things that change are attitudinal and can be fixed in a fortnight. The third is physical and cannot.

The technical barrier is real: backward skating and pivots

Key	Gap control is entirely a skating problem — you cannot hold a tight gap unless you travel backwards nearly as fast as they travel forwards
Risk	Too big a gap and you get walked into the zone; pivot early and you are beaten by the first change of direction
Key	Both of those are skating failures being scored as decision failures
Technique	Backward C-cut — one foot at a time to full extension, full weight onto the pushing foot, recovery back underneath you
Never	Push weakly with both feet at once, which is the slow way most beginners default to
Action	Drill backward crossovers, where backward speed actually comes from, and pivots in both directions
Convention	Pivoting toward the boards is a coaching default, not a law — some coaches want a middle pivot on specific reads, so ask yours and be competent both ways
Convention	Skating timeframes are coaching-provider estimates rather than measurements — weeks for edge feel, months for stopping both ways, a season for a rebuilt stride

Be honest with yourself about this, because it is the part most conversion stories skip. **Gap control — the distance you hold between yourself and an oncoming puck carrier — is entirely a skating problem.** You cannot hold a tight gap against a forward with speed unless you can travel backwards nearly as fast as they travel forwards. A defenceman who can't will do one of two things: leave a huge gap and get walked into the zone, or pivot early to skate forwards and get beaten by the first change of direction. As Skating puts it: **both of those are skating failures being scored as decision failures.**

So the first thing a converting forward needs is not tactical. It is:

- **The backward C-cut stride** — one foot at a time to full extension, full weight transferred onto the pushing foot, recovery back underneath you. Pushing weakly with both feet at once is the slow way most beginners default to.
- **Backward crossovers**, which are where backward speed actually comes from.
- **Pivots in both directions**, drilled deliberately. The standard coaching instruction is to **pivot toward the boards**, so that when the pivot goes wrong you are beaten toward the wall rather than into your own slot — but Skating → Which way to pivot is explicit that this is a **coaching default, not a law**, and some coaches want a middle pivot on specific reads.

Ask yours, and be competent both ways, because the correct pivot is decided by where the attacker is and not by which way you happen to be good.

Timeframes for skating changes are coaching-provider estimates rather than measurements, and Skating says so where it gives them: weeks for noticeably better knee bend and edge feel, a few months for competent stopping and turning both ways, a season for a genuinely rebuilt stride or a weak side brought up to match the strong. Read them as experienced guesses.

"Force them outside" and "getting beaten wide" are not the same thing

Technique	Angle your body so the inside lane is shut and the only route runs toward the boards, where the wall becomes a second defender
Position	Still between the attacker and the net — that is what makes it forcing outside rather than getting beaten wide
Risk	Beaten wide means the attacker is past your outside shoulder with open ice behind you, and there is nothing left
Key	Stay on the defensive side of the puck — anything that puts an attacker between you and your net has already gone wrong
Never	Read the instruction as "never let anyone get to the outside"
Key	Gap distances themselves belong to Defending the Rush, which owns them — take the numbers from there

New defencemen routinely hear both instructions and conclude the position contradicts itself. It doesn't, and the distinction is worth getting straight before your first shift.

- **Forcing them outside** means angling your body so the inside lane is shut and the only available route runs toward the boards, where the wall becomes a second defender and the shooting angle is poor. **You are still between the attacker and the net.** This is what Defending the Rush and Defender mean by taking away the middle.
- **Getting beaten wide** means the attacker gets past your outside shoulder with open ice behind you. You are no longer between them and the net, and there is nothing left.

The instinct to build is therefore *stay on the defensive side of the puck* — anything that puts an attacker between you and your net has already gone wrong — not *never let anyone get to the outside*. Gap distances themselves belong to Defending the Rush, which owns them: 2–3 stick lengths in the neutral zone, closing to about a stick and a half at the red line and one stick length at your own blue line.

What else is genuinely new

Mindset	One layer behind you now, not two — that changes how you weigh risk, not how hard you compete
Never	Carry or pass D-to-D through your own slot — go behind the net, where an interception means nothing
Position	One of you on the puck, one at the goalmouth, swapping every time the puck crosses the middle — and talk constantly
Convention	Under a low zone collapse the goalmouth is yours and the high slot is the centre's; under man-on-man the net front belongs to whoever's man is standing there
Rule	Shooting the puck over the glass and out of play from inside your own defensive zone is a two-minute delay-of-game minor (NHL Rule 63.2) — off the glass and along it is fine
Rule	USA Hockey has no equivalent — Rule 610(c) penalises only a deliberate shoot-out, and 631(d) makes an accidental one a last-play faceoff
Risk	You will ice the puck far more often — defensive-zone draw, no line change, no timeout, and it lands on your pair; Rules Primer owns the rule text
Options	Three offensive-zone depths — just inside the blue line by default, the top of the circle activated, below the circles only if a forward has taken your spot at the line
Convention	Only one defenceman pinches at a time — a near-universal coaching convention rather than a rule, with real exceptions coaches do call

- **Your mistakes are visible and close to final.** As a forward, a bad read had two layers behind it. As a defenceman it has one — your goalie — and that changes how you should weigh risk, not how hard you should compete. (The position with no layers behind it at all is described honestly in Goaltender, and it is worth reading that section before you decide your new job is the exposed one.) The practical consequence is the most repeated defensive instruction in this guide: **never carry or pass D-to-D through your own slot** — go behind the net, where an interception means nothing.
- **You play as half of a pair, not as one of three.** One defenceman is on the puck, one is at the goalmouth, and the two of you swap every time the puck crosses the middle. Under low zone collapse the goalmouth is yours and the high slot is the centre's; that split is the whole of net-front defending, and under **man-on-man** the net front belongs instead to whoever's man is standing there. Talk constantly. Defender.
- **New rules exposure.** Two penalties you have probably never taken. **Shooting the puck over the glass and out of play from inside your own defensive zone is a two-**

minute delay-of-game minor (NHL Rule 63.2), and new defencemen take it constantly — off the glass and along it is fine, over it is not. And **you will ice the puck far more often than you used to**, with the consequence landing on your pair: defensive-zone draw, no line change, no timeout. Defender covers both, and Rules Primer owns the rule text.

- **Restraint in the offensive zone.** Three depths: just inside the blue line (default), the top of the circle (activated, still recoverable), and below the circles (a commitment you cannot recover from, and only correct if a forward has already taken your spot at the line). **Only one defenceman pinches at a time** — a near-universal coaching convention rather than a rule, with real exceptions coaches do call.

First thing to work on: backward skating, and it is not close. Book the power-skating session. Everything tactical in the position is downstream of it.

What to stop worrying about: offence. A converting forward's shot and vision are an asset that will surface on its own once the defensive habits are automatic. Activating into the rush before you can hold a gap just means arriving at your own blue line out of position and out of breath.

Defence → forward

Mindset	Attack space instead of denying it — find the space nobody is defending, arrive in it late, and force somebody to make a decision
Never	Wait until the play is obviously safe before moving — by then the space has closed
Key	F1, F2 and F3 are roles defined by order of arrival, not positions and not people — if you are first on the puck you are F1
Convention	How many forwards go deep is your team's system — a 2-1-2 sends two, a 1-2-2 sends one — and which side F3 sits on is a genuine coaching split, so ask
Rule	Offside needs both skates completely over the line before the puck — and a raised skate keeps you onside under NHL and IIHF rules but not under USA Hockey Rule 630(a)
Convention	Centre in the middle on the backcheck and wingers in the outside lanes is a coaching choice, not a law — under every scheme somebody owns the middle
Action	Work your first three steps and your stop-and-start — a forward's shift is a sequence of accelerations
Mindset	Stop being above the puck — somebody is above it, and on most shifts it is not you

The overlooked direction, and often the harder mental adjustment of the two, because you are being asked to unlearn caution that has been rewarded for years.

What is genuinely new

- **You read forechecks from the other side of them.** As a defenceman you spent every retrieval reading a forecheck coming at you — how many are in, which side F1 angled you to, whether the pressure has sealed you or over-committed. That knowledge is worth a great deal now, because you are the one applying it. **F1, F2 and F3 are roles defined by order of arrival, not positions and not people** — if you dumped the puck in and you are first on it, you are F1, whatever your jersey says. How many forwards go deep is your team's system: a **2-1-2** sends two in, a **1-2-2** sends one, and **which side F3 sits on is a genuine coaching split** — weak-side is the common default, but the strong-side (stacked) variant deliberately overloads one corner and concedes the far-side breakout. Forechecking Systems is the authority. Ask which one you are running.
- **You attack space instead of denying it.** This is the real change and it is a change of intent. A defenceman's whole training is to close ice, occupy the dangerous seam, and take options away. A forward's job is the mirror: find the space nobody is defending, arrive in it late, and force somebody to make a decision. The specific reflex that has to go is **waiting until the play is safe before moving** — as a forward, the moment the play is obviously safe is the moment the space has closed.
- **Timing the offensive blue line.** You have rarely been the player arriving at it at speed. The rule is far more generous than most players assume: you are offside only when **both** skates have completely crossed the line before the puck has, so a trailing skate on the line keeps you onside. **A skate held in the air over the neutral zone also keeps you onside under NHL and IIHF rules — but not under USA Hockey, whose Rule 630(a) requires skate contact, and most North American rec and youth hockey is played under USA Hockey rules.** Keep the blade down and you are legal in all three books. Full treatment in Rules Primer and Zone Entries.
- **The backcheck is now a lane assignment.** Under the standard positional scheme, the centre takes the middle and the wingers the outside lanes. **That is a coaching choice, not a law** — other teams use "first man back takes the middle", others pick up man-on-man from the puck outward. Defending the Rush sets out all three. Under every one of them somebody owns the middle and nobody assumes it is somebody else.

First thing to work on: your first three steps and your stop-and-start. A forward's shift is a sequence of accelerations — forecheck, reverse, backcheck, reverse again — and a defenceman's skating diet is heavier on gliding, reading and backward work. Straight-line speed matters less than how fast you get to it.

What to stop worrying about: being above the puck. It was the correct instinct and it is no longer your instinct to have. Somebody is above the puck; on most shifts it is not you.

Anyone → goaltender

Key	Goaltending is a different sport that shares a rink — not a position you drift into for a few weeks to see how it goes
Technique	Short lateral pushes — shuffles and T-pushes, in and out along the angle, post-to-post, recovery to your feet — almost all inside-edge work in a deep stance
Action	Ask your club whether they have house goalie gear and a goalie coach before you buy anything
Rule	Except when all goalkeepers are incapacitated, no player on the game roster may wear the equipment of the goalkeeper (USA Hockey Rule 203(d))
Rule	In Britain a neck laceration protector is mandatory for every player at every age, adults included — no warning is given, and the first offence is an immediate 10-minute misconduct (England Ice Hockey In-House Rules 9.12)
Rule	In England it applies at practice too, not only in games — "all on ice activities" (England Ice Hockey Rules & Regulations 24.3)
Rule	A HECC-certified neck laceration protector is required in all age classifications except Adults (USA Hockey Rule 304(g))
Rule	A BNQ-certified throat protector is required for minor and female hockey, and a dangler on the mask does not satisfy it on its own (Hockey Canada Rule 3.6(c))
Action	Go to a goalie-specific session rather than a team practice, and give it a block of weeks — the first night is unrepresentative in both directions
Action	Read "What a Goalie Needs From Their Skaters" in Goaltender whether or not you ever play the position

Say this plainly: **goaltending is a different sport that shares a rink.** Goaltender opens by explaining why it cannot even use the same document structure as the other three — you spend the whole game in one zone, you carry the puck essentially never, and you pressure nobody. It is not a position you drift into for a few weeks to see how it goes.

Four things make this switch different in kind from the others.

- **The skating is a separate discipline.** Short lateral pushes — shuffles and T-pushes — movement in and out along the angle, post-to-post, and recovery to your feet: almost all inside-edge work over very short distances in a deep stance. Skating is explicit that ordinary skating work builds leg strength and edge feel but that the position-specific movement should be trained with a goalie coach.
- **The equipment is a barrier, and partly a legal one.** Goalie gear is sized from a seated floor-to-knee measurement rather than by height or age, is regulated by dimension rather than only by safety, and costs several times a skater's kit — full treatment in Equipment, which also makes the point that matters most here: **many clubs own a set of house goalie gear, so ask before you buy.** And you cannot simply borrow pads mid-game. **USA Hockey Rule 203(d):** *"Except when all goalkeepers are incapacitated, no player on the game roster shall be permitted to wear the equipment of the goalkeeper."* If a team has no designated goalkeeper able to continue it must appoint a **temporary goalkeeper** — defined in the USA Hockey glossary as *"a player not designated as a goalkeeper on the official scoresheet who assumes that position when no designated goalkeeper is able to participate"*, who has goalkeeper privileges and must return to being a skater as soon as a designated goalie is available — **or** put an extra skater on the ice with no goalkeeper privileges at all.
- **Neck protection — check the rule for your classification, because it is not the same everywhere.**  **If you play in Britain, there is no age exemption and you should stop reading the North American rules here.** The England Ice Hockey In-House Rules, Rule 9.12: *"A neck laceration protector is mandatory for all players in all IIHF categories and SIHA competitions."* Enforcement is stricter than the IIHF's warning-then-minor — *"No warning will be given for failing to wear a neck guard: an immediate 10-minute Misconduct Penalty will be issued"*, and a second offence escalates to a game misconduct. England Ice Hockey's *Rules & Regulations* 24.3 extends it beyond games to *"all on ice activities"*, so it applies at practice too. The exemption below is American and is not yours. Equipment owns the standards; the short version for everyone else is that neither North American book applies universally. **USA Hockey Rule 304(g)** requires a HECC-certified neck laceration protector for all players including goalkeepers *"in all age classifications except Adults"* — adults are strongly recommended, not required — and a note to that rule lets **BNQ**-certified protectors satisfy it through the 2026-27 season. **Hockey Canada Rule 3.6(c)** requires a BNQ-certified throat protector *"for players registered in minor and female hockey"*, and adds the detail that catches new goalies out: *"goaltenders who wear an attachment to the mask or helmet designed to protect the throat, must still wear a BNQ-certified throat protector"* — **a dangler hanging off the mask does not satisfy the requirement on its own.**

- **It needs its own coaching from the start.** Grooving a compensation is the most expensive mistake in skill acquisition — Practice and Development makes the general case — and goaltending is dense with technique that is nearly impossible to self-correct, because you cannot see yourself and the feedback (the puck went in) is far too coarse to tell you why.

How to try it properly, if you want to. Ask your club whether they have house gear and a goalie coach. Go to a goalie-specific session rather than a team practice, where you will simply be shot at. Give it a block of weeks rather than one night, because the first night is unrepresentative in both directions. And read *Goaltender* — particularly *Stance and Depth, Angles and Positioning* and the honest section on the mental demand — before you decide.

One thing every skater should do regardless of whether they ever play the position: read the *What a Goalie Needs From Their Skaters* section of *Goaltender*. Most net-front goals a team concedes are not goalie errors; they are skater habits, and the switch is not necessary to fix them.

Playing your off wing

Position	Off wing means the puck sits on the inside of your body, between you and the middle of the ice
Goal	Enter the offensive zone with your stick toward the centre — more options for moving the puck and a better forehand angle from prime mid-ice
Convention	The off-wing half-wall is standard on the power play because it keeps the cross-seam one-timer live — Special Teams owns that
Risk	A breakout pass up the wall now arrives on your backhand, which costs a beat and can weaken the exit
Technique	Put your back to the boards to receive it
Options	An open blade curve makes backhand receptions easier — Equipment covers the trade-off
Key	Most professionals still play their strong side at even strength, on CARHA's account citing nhlspecialteams.com rather than tracking of its own
Key	A defenceman's off side puts retrievals behind your own net and D-to-D passes on your backhand — Rink Map and Glossary covers the reasoning

Your **off wing** means a left-shot playing right wing, or a right-shot playing left wing, so the puck sits on the inside of your body — between you and the middle of the ice — rather than toward the boards. It is not a demotion, it is not a promotion, and it is much more common than new players expect.

Why coaches do it. Entering the offensive zone with your stick toward the centre of the ice opens more options for moving the puck, and gives a better angle for a forehand shot from a prime mid-ice location; a winger coming in on their strong side has the stick along the boards and needs more work and more time to get into a shooting position. On the power play the **off-wing half-wall is standard**, precisely because it puts the puck on your inside hand and makes the cross-seam one-timer live at all times — Special Teams owns that. The CARHA Hockey material, **citing nhlspecialteams.com rather than any tracking of its own**, notes that at even strength the majority of professionals still play their strong side, and that it is typically players with stronger puck-handling who elect the off wing.

What actually gets harder, and the fix. The cost is on the boards in your own end. A breakout pass up the wall that used to arrive on your forehand now arrives on your backhand, which costs a beat and can weaken the exit. The concrete adjustment, from the same source: **put your back to the boards to receive it**. Receiving on the backhand is a trainable skill and Passing and Receiving covers it directly; it is also one of the arguments for an **open blade curve**, which makes backhand receptions easier (Equipment).

For defencemen this trade is weighted differently. Handedness normally determines a defenceman's side, because retrievals behind your own net and D-to-D passes come to your forehand on your natural side. Playing your off-side is common and not a disaster, but those two touches come to your backhand — Rink Map and Glossary covers the reasoning and notes that analysis of NHL pairings has generally found natural-side pairs perform better.

The habits that actively work against you

Key	Your existing instincts are not neutral — several of them are precisely wrong in the new job
Risk	Because they are automatic they surface exactly when you are under pressure and have no time to think
Convention	Coaching craft throughout — but the most consistently described pattern in this whole topic
Action	Name the habit out loud before the shift — "I am going to feel wrong going into that corner and I am going in anyway"
Key	Unlearning is slower than learning
Never	Rely on general effort — the only reliable lever you have is deliberate attention on the specific reflex

This is the section that distinguishes a position switch from simply learning a new position. Your existing instincts are not neutral. Several of them are precisely wrong in the new job, and because they are *automatic* they surface exactly when you are under pressure and have no time to think.

Coaching craft throughout — but it is the most consistently described pattern in this whole topic.

Switch	The habit that served you	What it becomes
Wing → centre	Lane discipline: hold your side, don't chase	Passivity. You stay on the wall or in the high slot when the puck is in the corner, and your strong-side defenceman is alone in a battle they will lose
Wing → centre	"Stay high" on the opposing point	Standing too high on the breakout. Your defenceman has no middle-lane option and eats the forecheck
Centre → wing	Go where the decision is	Drifting into the middle. You collapse your own line's spacing and let two defenders cover three forwards
Centre → wing	Manage the rotations	Talking instead of covering. The opposing point man is unmarked while you organise
Forward → defence	Attack the puck, win it back	Chasing. Both defencemen drawn to the puck, goalmouth empty. Coaches at every level name this as one of the commonest causes of goals against — coaching consensus, not a statistic; Defensive Zone Coverage owns the claim and the caveat
Forward → defence	Skate forwards at the problem	Pivoting early, and getting beaten by the first change of direction
Defence → forward	Stay above the puck, never gamble	Reluctance to attack. You arrive late to space that has already closed, and your line plays 2-on-5 in the offensive zone
Defence → forward	Contain, deny, wait for the mistake	Not initiating the forecheck. F1 is whoever gets there first, and if you hesitate nobody is F1
Any → off wing	Receive on your forehand	Turning to find the forehand on a wall pass, and losing the puck while you do

The general fix is the same in every row: **name the habit out loud before the shift.** "I am going to feel wrong going into that corner and I am going in anyway." Unlearning is slower than learning — Practice and Development treats this seriously under *The unlearning problem* — and the only reliable lever an individual player has is deliberate attention on the specific reflex, not general effort.

The honest timeline

Convention	There is no published measurement of how long a position switch takes — everything below is craft, with enormous individual variation
Convention	A few shifts to stop being lost — you will know where to stand long before you know when to move
Convention	A handful of games before the routine reads are automatic, and a season before the position feels like yours
Convention	Longer, and possibly much longer, for anything skating-dependent — forward to defence is a technical rebuild, not a set of decisions
Risk	Expect a real performance dip, and expect it to feel like evidence you cannot play the position
Never	Abandon the change in week three, right at the bottom of the dip — that is the classic error
Mindset	Improvement is a staircase, not a line — plateaus are normal and some of them are the useful kind

There is no published measurement of how long a position switch takes (see the note at the top of this document). What follows is craft, and it is consistent with the one adjacent thing this guide does have a view on: Practice and Development states plainly that **every published adult-beginner timeframe comes from coaching providers and retailers rather than research**, and should be read as experienced guesses with enormous individual variation.

With that stated, the shape people describe:

- **A few shifts** to stop being lost. You will know where to stand long before you know when to move.
- **A handful of games** before the routine reads are automatic — who you pick up, where you go when the puck goes to a particular place.
- **A season** before the position feels like yours rather than like a job you are doing carefully.
- **Longer, and possibly much longer, for anything skating-dependent** — which in practice means the forward-to-defence switch, where your ceiling is set by backward skating and that is a technical rebuild rather than a set of decisions.

Two things worth knowing in advance, both of which Practice and Development owns:

- **New techniques feel worse before they feel better.** A switch is a large-scale version of that. Expect a real performance dip, expect it to feel like evidence you cannot play the position, and know that abandoning a change in week three — right at the bottom of the dip — is the classic error.
- **Improvement is a staircase, not a line.** Plateaus are normal and some of them are the useful kind.

Asking for a switch — and being moved without being asked

If you want to move

- Action** Ask a day or two later, in private — not on the bench, not immediately after a game, not in front of the group
- Action** Ask a specific question — "What would I need to show you to get a look at centre?" beats "Can I play centre?", which gets a shrug
- Action** Ask to try it in practice first — far easier for a coach to say yes to than a change on a game sheet, and it costs them nothing
- Action** Then do the work where it is visible — if the answer is "I need to see you win draws", take draws at the end of every practice
- Mindset** Accept that some answers are structural — four centres and no left wingers is a roster fact, not a judgement of you

The model here is the same one Mental Game sets out for asking about ice time, and it works for the same reason.

- **Ask at the right time.** Not on the bench, not immediately after a game, not in front of the group. A day or two later, in private.
- **Ask a specific question, not a vague one.** "What would I need to show you to get a look at centre?" is hard to dodge and gives you something to work on. "Can I play centre?" gets a shrug.
- **Ask to try it in practice first.** This is much easier for a coach to say yes to than a change on a game sheet, and it costs them nothing.

- **Then do the work where it is visible.** If the answer is "I need to see you win draws", take draws at the end of every practice — which Faceoffs recommends anyway, for every player.
- **Accept that some answers are structural.** A team with four centres and no left wingers is going to keep you on the left, and that is a roster fact rather than a judgement of you.

If you have been moved without being asked

Mindset	It is usually not a punishment — roster arithmetic, an injury, a line that needs a defensively reliable player, or a spot that suits you better
Key	Moving a forward to defence is frequently what happens to the player a coach trusts most with the puck in their own end
Action	Find out the system before you find out your feelings about it — zone or man-on-man in the D-zone, and which forecheck
Action	Ask what a good shift from you looks like in this spot — coaches rarely get asked, and the answer is more useful than you expect
Mindset	Separate the message from the delivery — being told bluntly does not make the decision wrong
Never	Audition for your old position by playing the new one badly — it reads as sulking and makes a temporary move permanent
Action	Tell your linemates you are new to the position — thirty seconds before the shift saves three games of the same overlap error

- **It is usually not a punishment.** The commonest reasons are roster arithmetic, an injury, a line that needs a defensively reliable player, or a coach who thinks the new spot suits you better. Some of them are compliments in disguise: moving a forward to defence is frequently what happens to the player a coach trusts most with the puck in their own end.
- **Find out the system before you find out your feelings about it.** One question — zone or man-on-man in the D-zone, and which forecheck — determines most of what your new job actually is. Ask it before your first shift, not after your first mistake.
- **Ask what specifically they want from you there.** "What does a good shift from me look like in this spot?" You will get a much more useful answer than you expect, because coaches rarely get asked.
- **Separate the message from the delivery.** Being told bluntly does not make the decision wrong, and being told kindly does not make it right. Mental Game.
- **Do not audition for your old position by playing the new one badly.** It reads as sulking even when it isn't, and it is the single most reliable way to make a temporary move

permanent.

- **Say something to your linemates.** A line where nobody has acknowledged that the centre is new to the position will spend three games making the same overlap error. Thirty seconds of conversation before the shift fixes most of it — Team Play and Culture makes the general case for talking before rather than after.

If you are a parent

Convention	Many programmes deliberately rotate young players through positions so nobody specialises early
Key	USA Hockey's Parent Handbook 2025-26 recommends an 8U experience with "no full-time goalies", and says playing multiple sports is encouraged
Key	A coach rotating your eight-year-old through the net and through defence is following the model, not experimenting on your child
Mindset	Treat a move as information about the team, not a verdict on your child
Action	Let them ask the coach the specific question themselves — it is a more valuable skill than the position is
Key	Beyond that one recommendation the published guidance runs out; registration, programmes and age classifications are owned by Getting Started

Youth players get moved constantly, and at younger ages many programmes deliberately rotate players through positions so nobody specialises early. **That last part is not just custom — it is the governing body's own recommendation at the youngest age group.** USA Hockey's *Parent Handbook 2025-26* states that the 8U experience it recommends "*includes no full-time goalies, 7-9 players per team, station-based practices and cross-ice games to maximize fun, puck touches and skill development for every player*", and on the same page that "*playing multiple sports is encouraged.*" A coach rotating your eight-year-old through the net and through defence is following the model, not experimenting on your child.

Beyond that specific recommendation the published guidance runs out — see the note at the foot of this document. Treat a move as information about the team, not a verdict on your child, and let them ask the coach the specific question themselves; it is a more valuable skill than the position is. The registration, programme and age-classification background sits in Getting Started, which owns it.

Common Mistakes

- **Assuming your new position works like your old one with different geography.** The four jobs are genuinely different jobs, not the same job at different coordinates.
- **Not asking which system your team plays.** Zone or man-on-man in the defensive zone, which forecheck, which backcheck assignment, which breakout. Every one is a coaching choice, every one changes your new job materially, and a new player is the one person on the ice with an unlimited licence to ask.
- **Trying to prove yourself in week one.** The switch is judged over a month. Playing safe and being where you are supposed to be buys you the time to be good later.
- **Treating a move to the wing as a demotion,** and playing like someone serving a sentence.
- **Converting to defence without fixing your backward skating,** then interpreting the results as evidence you cannot read the game.
- **Abandoning the switch at the bottom of the dip.** Week three is where it feels worst and where most people quit, which is exactly the pattern Practice and Development describes for any technique change.
- **Trying goal casually.** It needs its own gear, its own coach and its own skating discipline — and under USA Hockey Rule 203(d) you may not even wear the equipment unless you are a designated or temporary goalkeeper.
- **Carrying your old instinct into the new job's worst moment.** Under pressure, the automatic pattern is what surfaces. Name it before the shift.
- **Repeating "the centre covers the most ice" or any similar positional claim as though it were measured.** Most of what is said about positions is craft. Say so.

Key Takeaways

1. **More transfers than you think.** Skating, scanning, puck protection, reading pressure and the rules all come with you. What you lose is a map — a set of location reflexes — and maps get rebuilt.
2. **The first question in any new position is a system question, not a technique question.** Zone or man-on-man, which forecheck, which backcheck lane. Every one is a coaching choice and not a law of hockey. Ask your coach before your first shift.
3. **Wing to centre is a coverage change first and a faceoff change second.** Your defensive-zone responsibility now moves with the puck, and the hardest new habit is swinging low so your defenceman has a middle-lane option.

4. **Faceoffs are learnable, and there is a number behind that claim** — a 22-point spread among NHL centres taking 500-plus draws in 2025-26, computed from the NHL's official statistics and owned by Faceoffs.
 5. **Centre to wing is not a demotion.** It is a lane-discipline job with a point-coverage assignment, and the trap is drifting into the middle because that is where the decisions used to be.
 6. **Forward to defence is limited by backward skating, not by attitude.** Gap control is a skating problem; a defenceman who cannot skate backwards fast enough has skating failures scored against them as decision failures.
 7. **"Force them outside" and "getting beaten wide" are different things.** Steering an attacker to the boards while you stay between them and the net is the job. Letting them past your outside shoulder is the failure.
 8. **Defence to forward means attacking space rather than denying it** — and the reflex that has to go is waiting until the play is safe, because by then the space has closed.
 9. **Goaltending is a different sport sharing a rink.** Its own skating discipline, its own equipment (which under USA Hockey Rule 203(d) you may not simply borrow), and its own coaching from day one. Try it properly or not at all.
 10. **Your old good habits are the problem.** A winger's lane discipline becomes a centre's passivity; a defenceman's caution becomes a forward's reluctance to attack. Name the habit out loud before the shift — under pressure, the automatic pattern is what surfaces.
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