

Skating

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. Skating technique itself is not governed by rule — nothing in this document changes between rule sets. **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

Skating is the only skill in hockey that you use on every single second of every shift. Everything else — passing, shooting, checking, reading the play — is performed *while* skating, and is limited by how well you skate. This document covers the physical technique: how to stand, how to push, how to turn, how to stop, and how to get faster. It is the "how to get there" that the rest of this guide assumes you already have.

It is also the highest-leverage thing you can work on, for three reasons worth stating once: every other skill is performed *while* skating and is limited by it; every tactical system in this guide — Forechecking Systems, Defensive Zone Coverage, Breakouts, Time and Space — describes places you have to *reach* before the play turns; and skating is technique before it is athleticism, so it responds to deliberate practice at any age. What separates fast skaters is usually knee bend, edge control and recovery speed, not what they were born with.

If you only read one section, read The Basic Stance. Almost every skating fault in adult and youth hockey traces back to standing too tall.

If you cannot yet skate at all, this document is one step too early. Learn to skate first or alongside — public sessions and a learn-to-skate course, not a hockey practice; Getting Started covers how to find both, and why programmes tell you to do it in that order.

The Basic Stance

Everything starts here. Get the stance right and half the faults in the rest of this document disappear on their own.

Knee bend — the one that matters

Technique	Bend your knees until they cover or pass your toes — around 90 degrees at the knee
Position	Toe first, knee out in front of it, chest somewhere between the two
Never	Sit back behind your toes onto your heels
Never	Take the "sitting on a stool" cue into the forward stride — it belongs to backward skating
Never	Combine the stacked shoulders-knees-toes line with a deep bend — they are different positions
Key	Standing tall costs you power, balance, reaction time and edge angle
Read	If your thighs don't burn after a hard shift, you weren't low enough

Bend your knees until they are over or past your toes. The most common single description is a knee angle in the region of 90 degrees — thigh heading toward horizontal — with your knees "covering" your toes, so that looking straight down you cannot see the toes of your skates.

Two cautions about the cues you will hear for this, because both are widely repeated in forms that do not survive contact with geometry:

- **"Shoulders, knees and toes in a straight vertical line" is a different position from a 90-degree knee bend, and you cannot have both.** If your knee is bent to 90 degrees, the knee is out past the toe and the shoulders are back behind it — that is the point. Treat the stacked-line image as a description of a *shallower* athletic stance, not as something to combine with a deep bend.

Careful with the reference point here, because the next bullet says "chest over the toes" and that sounds like the opposite. It is not. *Behind the knee* and *over the toes* are measured against two different landmarks: the **knee** is out past the toe, so your shoulders can be behind the **knee** and still be out above the **toes** at the same time. The order front to back is toe, then knee out in front of it, with your chest somewhere between the two. What you are ruling out is the third position — shoulders back **behind the toes**, which is sitting back on your heels.

- **"Sitting on an invisible stool with your backside almost parallel to the ice" belongs to backward skating, not to the forward stride.** That is Robby Glantz's cue and he gives it for the backward stance (see Backward Skating below), where you genuinely do sit that low. Carried into the forward stride it produces the *sitting back* fault: weight onto the heels, hips behind the feet, no ability to extend. Forwards skating: chest over the toes, backside back but not down on a chair.

Standing too tall is the single most common fault in hockey skating, and it costs you four separate things. **Power** — your push comes from extending a bent leg, and a straight leg has nothing left to extend, so you are shuffling rather than striding. **Balance** — a low centre of gravity is harder to knock over, which is why players get bumped off pucks by opponents who are not stronger than them. **Reaction time** — from a deep bend you can push in any direction immediately; from a straight leg you must bend first, and that extra beat is a goal. **Edge angle** — you cannot tilt a blade onto a steep edge without bending the knee and ankle, so tall skaters are stuck on flat blades.

A useful self-check: if your thighs don't burn after a hard shift, you probably weren't low enough.

Chest up and back straight

- Technique** Bend at the knees and hips, not at the waist
- Never** Hunch your upper body forward — it kills your extension and blocks your view
- Key** Chest proud, backside back — the bottom of a squat, not reaching for your toes
- Technique** Hard acceleration is the one deliberate exception — torso forward roughly 45 degrees

Bend at the knees and hips, **not at the waist**. Hunching your upper body forward puts your weight onto the front of the blade, kills your extension and blocks your view. The image most coaches use is "chest proud, backside back" — like the bottom of a squat, not like reaching for your toes.

There is one deliberate exception, covered later: during hard acceleration you *do* lean the torso forward, roughly 45 degrees, because you're trying to drive horizontally rather than glide.

Weight over the balls of the feet

- Position** Weight on the balls of the feet — the pads just behind your toes
- Never** Sit on your heels — heel-heavy weight makes you slow to start and easy to knock backwards
- Never** Ride your toes — toe-heavy weight is unstable and encourages toe running
- Read** You should be able to lift your toes slightly inside the boot and still feel pressure through the front of the foot

Not on your heels, not on your toes. **The balls of the feet** — the pads just behind your toes. Heel-heavy weight makes you slow to start and easy to knock backwards. Toe-heavy weight makes you unstable and encourages "toe running" (see the stride faults below).

You should be able to lift your toes slightly inside your boot and still feel pressure through the front of the foot.

Head up

- Technique** Eyes up and scanning the ice — not just chin up
- Never** Look down at the puck — your head drags your upper body forward off the balls of your feet
- Key** A player skating with their head down is skating with their weight wrong

Not "chin up" — **eyes up, scanning the ice**. This is a skating point, not just a hockey-IQ point: your head weighs a lot relative to your balance, and looking down at the puck pulls your whole upper body forward off the balls of your feet. Players who skate with their head down are also skating with their weight wrong. See Scanning and Anticipation for what to do with the information once your eyes are up.

Hands in front, off your body

- Position** Hands out in front where you can see them in your peripheral vision
- Technique** Stick on the ice, elbows relaxed and away from your ribs
- Never** Tuck your hands into your hips — it shortens your reach, locks your upper body and empties the passing lane

Stick on the ice, hands out in front where you can see them in your peripheral vision, elbows relaxed and away from your ribs. Hands tucked into your hips do three bad things: they shorten your reach, they lock your upper body so it can't counterbalance your legs, and they leave you with no stick in the passing lane.

Arriving at the boards — head up, skates parallel, take it along your side

Action	Go into the boards on an angle, never straight at them
Goal	Better puck control and less risk of injury — a leg, side or arm absorbs most of the impact
Key	This is the case you control completely, because it is decided several strides out in the route you pick
Priority	Everything after the route is contact, not skating — read Body Contact and Battles in full

There is one skating decision inside the most important safety rule in hockey, and this is it. **Go into the boards on an angle, never straight at them** — "*Skating into the boards at an angle means better puck control and less risk of injury... A leg or side or an arm will absorb most of the impact*" (USA Hockey, *Introduction To Body Contact*, "Angling In"). **This is the case you control completely, because it is decided several strides out**, in the route you pick long before anybody is near you — which is why it belongs in a skating document at all.

Everything after that point is contact, not skating: what to do once a hit is unavoidable, why a chin tucked to the chest straightens the cervical spine and is the posture behind almost every catastrophic neck injury (it can happen at walking speed), the parallel-skates and forearm-and-hip orientation, the spread-the-load fallback, and being hit from behind. **Body Contact and Battles → Receiving a Hit Safely owns all of it** — read that section in full. It is the most important section in that document, and nothing here replaces it.

Edges — Hockey Is Played on Edges, Not on Flat Blades

What an edge is

Technique	The blade is ground with a hollow, leaving an inside edge (big-toe side) and an outside edge (little-toe side)
Never	Skate on a flat blade — both edges lightly touching is a resting position, not a skating one
Key	Almost every functional thing you do on skates is done with the blade tilted onto one edge
Read	Deeper bend, steeper edge, tighter arc

A hockey skate blade is not flat across its width. It is ground with a hollow down the middle, leaving **two edges**:

- The **inside edge** — the side nearest your other foot, on the big-toe side.
- The **outside edge** — the side away from your other foot, on the little-toe side.

Standing on a flat blade means both edges are lightly touching. That is a resting position, not a skating position. **Almost every functional thing you do on skates is done with the blade tilted onto one edge.**

Which edge you're on is set by how far you lean and how much you bend your knee and ankle. Deeper bend, steeper edge, tighter arc.

What each edge is for

Technique	Inside edges generate power — the stride, the first push of a crossover, stops, tight-turn drive, acceleration
Technique	Outside edges give control — turning, holding an arc, cutting back, puck protection, escapes, deception
Key	Your outside edges are almost certainly your biggest single skating weakness
Read	Committing your weight out over the skate feels like falling until you trust it
Never	Move between hollows — skate on a consistent one, because your whole feel for the edges is calibrated to it

- **Inside edges generate power.** The forward stride, the first push of a crossover, hockey stops, tight-turn drive and acceleration all come off inside edges.
- **Outside edges give control.** Turning, holding an arc, cutting back against pressure, puck protection, lateral escapes and deception all live on outside edges.

Most players are far better on their inside edges than their outside edges, for a simple reason: inside edges are what you land on naturally when you're upright and nervous. Outside edges require you to commit your weight *out over* the skate, which feels like falling until you trust it. Coaching sources consistently name the same obstacles: standing too upright, not enough knee bend, weak ankles, and fear of leaning into the edge.

Your outside edges are almost certainly your biggest single skating weakness. That's where the improvement is.

One equipment note, because it directly changes what your edges do: how deeply your blades are hollowed sets how much they bite. Deeper grips more, shallower glides more, neither is correct — but **skate on a consistent hollow**, because your whole feel for the edges is calibrated to it. See Equipment.

Basic edge drills

Action	C-cuts on one foot, forward and backward, inside edges then outside edges
Action	Inside-edge circles, then outside-edge circles, then figure eights forward and backward
Action	Slalom edge transfers and one-foot glides for ankle strength and balance
Technique	Build the outside-edge circle from walking pace on a wide arc, adding lean only as the edge holds
Read	Wobbly is the edge of your control and where the improvement is; out of control means slow down
Convention	Ten to fifteen focused minutes, done often, over long exhausting sessions — one source's guidance

Do these slowly and cleanly. Edge work is not conditioning — one source recommends about **ten to fifteen focused minutes, done often**, over long exhausting sessions. Quality repetitions beat volume.

1. **C-cuts.** On one foot, push out and curve the blade back in so it carves a "C" into the ice. Do them forward and backward, on inside edges and then on outside edges, one foot at a time.

This is the purest isolation of a single edge under load.

2. **Inside-edge circles.** Skate a faceoff circle on one foot, on the inside edge of the *outer* foot. Then the other direction. Then the other foot.
3. **Outside-edge circles.** The same circle, but held on the outside edge of the *inner* foot. This is the hard one, and it is the one people fall on, because committing your weight out over the skate feels like falling until the edge catches. Build up to it: start at **walking pace on a wide arc**, helmet on, and increase the lean only as the edge holds. Feeling wobbly means you are at the edge of your current control, which is where the improvement is — feeling out of control means you have gone past it, so slow down rather than pushing through.
4. **Figure eights.** Two markers (or two faceoff circles) and a continuous figure-eight path. Each lobe forces one foot onto an inside edge and one onto an outside edge, and the crossing point forces you to change edges under momentum. Do them forward, then **do them backward** — backward figure eights are where most players fall apart, which is exactly why they're valuable.
5. **Slalom / edge transfers.** Glide straight on two feet and roll both ankles left, right, left, right, weaving down the ice. Cheap, quick, and it builds the ankle strength everything else depends on.
6. **One-foot glides.** Glide the length of the ice on one foot, flat, then tilted in, then tilted out. Pure balance.

The Forward Stride

The stride has three parts that cycle continuously: **push (extension) → recovery → glide.**

The push — sideways-and-back, never straight back

Never	Push straight back — the blade just slides along the ice and gives you nothing
Technique	Push out to the side and slightly back against the inside edge, so the blade cuts across its own direction of travel
Read	If it feels like walking or running, it is wrong — skating is not running
Action	Finish the push — extend until the leg is done, because most players stop far too early
Technique	Finish with the toe — a snap of the toe out and back, not a stab downward into the ice
Key	Coaching sources put the toe flick at roughly a third of the push's total power

This is the most misunderstood point in hockey skating. **You do not push backwards.** A skate blade pushed straight back just slides along the ice and gives you nothing. You push **out to the side and slightly back**, at an angle, against the inside edge — the blade grips because it's cutting across its own direction of travel.

Laura Stamm's power-skating material calls pushing straight back "one of the most common errors in hockey skating", and explains why it happens: it's what walking and running feel like. Skating is not running. The motion has to be learned deliberately.

Full extension. Finish the push. Coaching references put the pushing leg's extension in the range of roughly 160–180 degrees at the knee — essentially straight — though at least one high-performance source argues the effective *power* range is nearer 130–170 degrees and that chasing a locked-out leg wastes time. **(That 130–170° is the secondary source's retelling. The primary it traces to — Pagé's 1975 thesis — says "maximum power range of 130-155 degrees", and takes it from a general kinesiology textbook rather than measuring it on skaters. See the verification note at the foot of this document.)** Either way, the practical instruction is the same: **most players stop their push far too early.** Extend until the leg is done.

Finish with the toe. The last part of the push comes off the front of the blade — the "toe flick". Stamm's material puts its contribution at roughly **one third of the total power of the push**, which makes it the largest single thing most players are leaving on the table. It is a snap of the toe out and back, not a stab downward into the ice.

The recovery — bring it back under you

Action	Bring the foot back in under your hips, not down in front of you
Technique	The recovery leg returns with the knee flexed and lands under your centre of mass
Never	Land the recovery foot in front of you — it acts as a brake on every stride
Key	Speed is not just a bigger push; it's a faster return

After full extension your foot is a long way out to the side. **Bring it back in under your hips, not down in front of you.** The recovery leg returns with the knee flexed (one source suggests roughly 90–110 degrees; **the primary that figure traces to, Pagé 1975, actually reports 95–114° — see the verification note at the foot of this document**) and the foot lands under your centre of mass, ready to become the next glide leg or the next push.

Recovery speed is one of the clearest differences between fast and slow skaters. The Hockey Institute (<https://hockeyinstitute.org/high-performance-skating/>)'s summary of the skating-biomechanics literature puts it plainly — "*faster skaters return the recovery skate to the ice after push-off quicker than slow skaters*" — attributing it to **Page (1975). That study backs the claim with numbers:** Pierre Pagé's 1975 Dalhousie master's thesis *Biomechanics of Forward Skating in Ice Hockey* measured "*the mean total recovery time of the skate blade*" at **0.37 seconds for the fast skaters compared with 0.48 seconds for the slow skaters** — a quarter off the return time. In a discriminant analysis with velocity removed, recovery time "*accounted for 74.2 percent of the differentiation*" between the fast and slow groups. (*Read it for what it is: fourteen players — six bantam, two recreational, three university varsity and three professional — filmed on 16 mm in 1975, and correlational. The effect is large and the direction is not in doubt, but this is a small mixed-level sample, not a modern controlled study.*) **Speed is not just a bigger push; it's a faster return.**

Landing the recovery foot *in front* of you is a specific and common error — it acts as a brake on every stride.

The glide

Position	Your weight rides on a single bent leg between pushes
Technique	Keep the knee bent during the glide
Never	Straighten up mid-glide — you then have to re-bend before the next push

Between pushes, your weight rides on a single bent leg. **Keep the knee bent during the glide.** Straightening up while you glide is the standing-tall fault reappearing mid-stride, and it means you have to re-bend before the next push.

Arms — and an honest disagreement between coaching schools

Convention	Front-to-back arm drive is the traditional and most widely taught method — a coaching choice, not settled fact
Options	Some high-performance coaches teach a side-to-side swing instead, mirroring the lateral leg push
Never	Swing the hands across the centreline of your chest — it twists your shoulders off line
Key	Both camps agree the action must be rhythmic and coordinated with the legs, not a random flail
Action	Use whichever your coach teaches; start front-to-back if nobody has taught you either

The traditional and most widely taught method is front-to-back — arms driving straight forward and straight back, elbow bending on the way back, shoulders staying square up the ice. **But this is a coaching choice, not settled fact.** Some high-performance coaches argue the opposite: because the legs push *laterally*, the arms should mirror that with a side-to-side action. At least two coaching sources teach the lateral swing explicitly.

Both camps agree the action must be **rhythmic and coordinated with the legs, not a random flail**, and both call the "**across-the-body**" swing — hands crossing the centreline of your chest — a fault, because it twists your shoulders off line. Use whichever your coach teaches; if nobody has taught you either, start front-to-back.

Common stride faults

- **Short, choppy strides.** Lots of leg movement, no extension, no distance covered. Looks busy, goes nowhere. Cure: exaggerate the finish of the push and the width of the leg.
- **Running on your toes.** Digging the front of the blade in and taking little running steps. This is the correct technique for the *first two or three steps* of a start, and wrong for everything after that. Cure: consciously get back onto the whole blade once you're moving.
- **Arms swinging across the body.** See above.
- **Standing tall.** The root cause of most of the others.

- **Recovering the foot in front instead of underneath.** A brake on every stride.
- **Pushing straight back.** No grip, no power.

A self-test

Action Skate goal line to goal line at a comfortable pace and count your strides

Action Do it again trying to use fewer

Read If your count drops significantly, you weren't extending

Key Repeat it monthly — a free, honest measure of your extension

Skate goal line to goal line at a comfortable pace and count your strides. Then do it again trying to use fewer. If your count drops significantly, you weren't extending. Repeat it monthly — it's a free, honest measure of your extension that requires no equipment and no coach.

Acceleration and the First Three Steps

Starting is a different technique from striding, and this catches almost everybody.

Why the first three steps matter more than top speed

Read You are constantly starting, stopping, turning and re-starting, not running long straight sprints

Goal Win the loose puck, the rebound, the step on a defender, the recovery when you get turned around

Read Almost every race you contest in a game is decided within about three strides

Key Your top speed is rarely the deciding factor; your first three steps almost always are

Hockey is not a sport of long straight sprints. The Hockey Institute (<https://hockeyinstitute.org/high-performance-skating/>)'s summary of game-play analysis reports that "*the average length of time spent in a skating characteristic is 1.5 seconds*", attributing it to **Bracko (1998)** — you are constantly starting, stopping, turning and re-starting. (*The study is Bracko, Fellingham, Hall, Fisher and Cryer, "Performance skating characteristics of professional ice hockey forwards", Sports Medicine, Training and Rehabilitation 8(3):251-263. It observed **twelve NHL forwards**, and a "skating*

characteristic" is one of **27 discrete on-ice movement states** — 15 scored by time, 12 by frequency — with two-foot glide the largest at 39.0% of on-ice time. But the **1.5-second figure itself is not in the published paper's abstract or in Bracko's own published tables**; it appears in his coaching handout, self-cited to the 1998 study. The nearest published sequence — seventeen consecutive characteristics timed from a faceoff — averages nearer 1.8 seconds. Treat 1.5 s as the author's rounded rule of thumb rather than a reported statistic.) The direction — that game skating comes in bursts of a second or two — is not seriously disputed. Almost every race you contest in a game is decided within about three strides: the race to a loose puck, the race to a rebound, the step you gain on a defender, the recovery when you get turned around.

Your top speed is rarely the deciding factor. Your first three steps almost always are.

The technique

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| Technique | Run the first few strides on the toes — the front two to three inches of the inside edges of both blades |
| Position | Feet turned out slightly, heels closer together than toes, so both blades bite |
| Technique | Lean the torso forward around 45 degrees, "nose over toes" — drive horizontally, don't lift yourself upwards |
| Technique | Short strides first, lengthening with each step — but the pushing leg still extends fully every time |
| Action | Quick feet, high stride rate — in the start, cadence beats reach |
| Action | Drive the arms hard; this is the one phase where every school agrees the arms do real work |
| Technique | Use a T-start, the pushing skate set perpendicular behind you, to drive along the ice |
| Never | Hop or crossover-start from a standstill — that spends energy going up |

Starting is short, quick and toe-driven. Striding is long, extended and whole-blade. Specifically, for the start:

- **Run the first few strides on the toes** — roughly the front two to three inches of the **inside edges** of both blades. Your feet are turned out slightly (heels closer together than toes), so both blades bite.
- **Lean the torso forward, around 45 degrees, "nose over toes"**. You want to generate horizontal force, not lift yourself upwards. If you feel like you'd fall on your face if you stopped moving your feet, that's roughly right.

- **Short strides first, lengthening with each step.** The acceleration pattern goes short-short-short and then progressively longer as you convert into the full stride. Note that "short" describes what it looks like — the pushing leg should still extend fully; it just doesn't have far to travel yet.
- **Quick feet, high stride rate.** In the start, cadence beats reach.
- **Arms drive hard.** This is the one phase where everybody agrees the arms are doing real work.

One high-performance reference asserts that skaters reach full speed in as few as **two to three strides** when the start is done well. **The biomechanics literature contradicts that flatly, and it is worth knowing why the claim persists.** Budarick and colleagues tracked elite male and female players through a 34-metre sprint from a standing start and found that *"the skaters did not reach their ultimate maximum speed even after 34 m, as marginal increases in speed (acceleration) still occurred"* — elite men were still only around three-quarters of peak speed seven steps in, and did not enter the maximal-speed zone until the tenth step. Marino's review of the power-skating research says the same in plain words: *"it takes several strides and a considerable distance for a skater to reach full velocity."*

But something real does happen at the third stride, and that is almost certainly what the claim has garbled. It is the **run-to-glide transition** — the point where the running-style start turns into true skating. Budarick found that *"the run to glide transition can be identified at approximately the third stride (fifth step), where marked differences in forward COM acceleration and step widths occurred"*, and the same transition had already been measured a decade earlier: Buckeridge and colleagues (2015) summarise it as *"as hockey players reached the third stride, skating technique shifted towards a gliding motion, as characterised by larger knee flexion amplitudes"* — **note that this sentence sits in Buckeridge's literature review and reports Lafontaine (2007), not Buckeridge's own data**, so it corroborates Budarick from a genuinely separate study rather than from the Buckeridge measurements themselves. So: not full speed in three strides, but **the change from digging out to skating in three strides** — which is still why the first three matter so much. The uncontroversial half of the same point is the part worth acting on: **horizontal-driving starts beat vertical ones.** The **T-start** (pushing skate set perpendicular behind you, like the top of a T) drives you along the ice; hopping or crossover starts from a standstill spend energy going up.

The transition out of the start

Action Once you're moving, get off your toes onto the full blade and lengthen into the stride

Never Stay on your toes — you are then permanently accelerating and never gliding, for a low top speed

Action Whistle starts — three explosive steps from a dead stop, then glide; ten of them

Action Start out of a hockey stop in both directions, because most game starts begin from a stop

Action Race a teammate over 10–15 metres; anything longer stops being an acceleration drill

Once you're moving, **get off your toes and onto the full blade** and lengthen into the stride described in the previous section. Players who stay on their toes are permanently accelerating and never gliding — they burn enormous energy and hit a low top speed.

Drills: whistle starts (three explosive steps from a dead stop, then glide — ten of them); starting out of a hockey stop in both directions, because most game starts begin from a stop rather than from standing still; and short races of 10–15 metres against a teammate. Anything longer stops being an acceleration drill.

Crossovers

A **crossover** is how you generate speed while travelling on a curve. Instead of losing speed through a turn, you gain it.

The mechanics

Key	A crossover has two pushes, and most players only do one
Technique	Stride-push — the outside skate drives low and hard to full extension on its inside edge, finished with the toe, then crosses over in front
Technique	Under-push — the inside skate pulls under and out on its outside edge to full extension, snapping at the toe
Never	Just pick one foot up and put it over the other — that is a crossover with half its propulsion switched off
Action	To go faster around a turn, drive the under-push leg back under your body faster — not wider, not harder
Action	Skate laps doing nothing but the under-push, never crossing the outside foot over at all

Skating around a circle to your left, your left skate is the inside skate and your right is the outside skate. There are **two pushes per crossover**, and most players only do one:

1. **The stride-push (outside leg).** Your outside (right) skate drives low and hard against the ice on its **inside edge**, to full extension, finished with the toe flick. It then recovers low across the ice and **crosses over in front** of the inside leg.
2. **The under-push (inside leg).** While that is happening, your inside (left) skate pulls **under and out** from beneath your body, held on its **outside edge**, until it reaches full extension and snaps at the toe. Robby Glantz calls this the "y-pull" because of the leg shape at the finish; it's also widely called the crossunder or X-push.

The under-push is the half that most players are missing. If you are simply picking one foot up and putting it over the other, you have a crossover with 50% of its propulsion switched off. The way to feel it: skate a circle and, for a few laps, do *nothing but* the under-push — never cross the outside foot over at all, just repeatedly pull the inside leg out from under you on its outside edge.

To go faster around a turn, drive the under-push leg back under your body faster. Not wider, not harder — faster.

Body position

Position	Knees deeply bent, back straight, and lean the whole body into the circle from the ankles
Key	The back of your helmet out in front of your knees
Never	Lean the upper body in while your legs stay upright — the edges aren't engaged, so you're just falling sideways
Technique	Land each skate on a genuine edge — inside skate on its outside edge, crossing skate on its inside edge
Never	Cross over too early — the under-push happens out to the side first, or your skates collide

- Knees deeply bent, back straight, and lean the **whole body** into the circle from the ankles, not from the shoulders. Glantz's cue is again "the back of your helmet out in front of your knees."
- **Don't lean the upper body into the turn while your legs stay upright.** That's the classic amateur crossover: it looks like leaning, but the edges aren't engaged, so you're just falling sideways.
- Land each skate on a genuine edge — the inside skate lands on its outside edge, the crossing skate lands on its inside edge, both at a real angle rather than flat.
- **Don't cross over too early.** The under-push has to happen out to the side before the outside foot comes over, or your skates collide.

Strong side and weak side

Read	Almost everyone has a stronger crossover direction and a weaker one — find out which is yours
Risk	You drift toward turns in your strong direction without noticing, which makes you predictable
Risk	A defenceman with a weak backward crossover side gets beaten wide there once an opponent notices
Risk	A winger with a weak side takes a worse backcheck route, because turning that way costs speed
Convention	Two laps weak for every one strong, sustained over a season — a rule of thumb, not a measured optimum
Never	Believe any claim that one particular side is always the weak one — it is established nowhere

Almost everyone has a stronger crossover direction and a weaker one. This is not only a beginner problem — power-skating coaches report that professional players routinely ask for work on their weak side. (Which side is more commonly weak is not established anywhere; ignore any claim that it is always one particular direction, and just find out which is yours.)

The cost of a weak side in games is concrete and specific:

- You will drift toward turns in your strong direction without noticing, which makes you predictable.
- A defenceman with a weak backward crossover side gets beaten wide on that side once an opponent notices, and good opponents notice within a period.
- Wingers with a weak side take a worse route on the backcheck — the race back to your own end — because turning that way costs them speed.

Fix: whenever you do circle work, weight it deliberately toward the weak side — a common coaching prescription is **two laps weak for every one strong**, sustained over a season rather than a week. It's the most boring high-value thing in this document. The ratio is a rule of thumb, not a measured optimum; the part that matters is that the imbalance is deliberate and persistent.

Backward Skating

Skating backwards well is the defining physical skill of a defenceman, and the single clearest divide between defencemen who can hold a tight gap and those who cannot. See Defender and Defending the Rush for what you do with it tactically; this is how you do it physically.

Why it's a defenceman's skill specifically

- Key** Gap control is entirely a skating problem — you cannot hold a gap you are not fast enough to hold
- Risk** Too big a gap and you get walked into the zone; pivot early to skate forwards and the first change of direction beats you
- Read** Both of those are skating failures being scored as decision failures
- Action** Forwards need it too — retreating through the neutral zone, and covering for a pinching defenceman

Gap control — the distance you maintain between yourself and an oncoming puck carrier — is the core defensive skill, and it is entirely a skating problem. You cannot hold a stick-and-a-half 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).

Both of those are skating failures being scored as decision failures.

Forwards need it too, in smaller doses: reading the play while retreating through the neutral zone, and any forward covering for a **pinching** defenceman — *pinching* means a defenceman stepping down from the offensive blue line to keep a puck in the zone, which leaves their spot empty and someone else has to fill it.

The backward stride — C-cuts

- Technique** One foot at a time carves a C into the ice, pushing out then back in, while the other skate glides straight back
- Action** Push one foot at a time to full extension, finishing with a snap of the toes inward
- Action** Transfer your full weight onto the pushing foot during the thrust
- Action** Recover the foot back underneath you, exactly as in the forward stride
- Never** Push weakly with both feet at once — the slow way most beginners default to

The engine of backward skating is the **C-cut**: one foot at a time carves a "C" or half-moon into the ice, pushing out and then back in, while the other skate glides straight back beneath your body.

- Push **one foot at a time to full extension**, finishing with a snap of the toes inward. Pushing weakly with both feet at once is the slow way that most beginners default to.
- **Transfer your full weight onto the pushing foot** during the thrust. Weight left behind on the other skate is power you didn't apply.
- Recover the foot back underneath you, exactly as in the forward stride.

Stance — even lower than forwards

Position	Sit as if on a stool, backside almost parallel to the ice, knees covering your toes, back straight
Key	The back of your helmet in front of your knees — a hip hinge, not a tip at the waist
Position	Weight over the middle of the blade — you should be able to lift your toes and still feel it fully loaded
Never	Lean too far forward — weight on the front of the blade kills speed and control going backwards
Never	Swivel your hips during the recovery — it destroys directional control and drifts you off your line
Read	If you feel the front of the blade digging, you have gone past it whatever your helmet is doing

Glantz's material describes the backward stance as sitting on a stool with your backside almost parallel to the ice, knees bent deeply enough that they cover your toes, back straight, and **the back of your helmet in front of your knees**.

The critical error is the reverse of the forward-skating one: **leaning too far forward puts your weight on the front of the blade**, which kills both speed and control when you're travelling backwards.

"Too far" needs a boundary you can actually feel, because the cue above and the fault here point in the same direction. Use two different checks for two different body parts:

- **Upper body — use Glantz's cue.** The back of your helmet in front of your knees. That is a *hip-hinge* position: you get there by sitting your backside down and back onto the stool, which throws your chest forward as a counterweight. It is not achieved by tipping over at the waist.

- **Feet — use blade pressure as the referee. Weight sits over the middle of the blade.** If you can feel the front of the blade digging, or you are up on the ball of your foot, you have gone past it regardless of what your helmet is doing. You should be able to lift your toes slightly inside the boot and still feel the blade fully loaded underneath you.

The failure mode is bending at the waist instead of sinking at the hips: that moves your chest forward *without* moving your backside back, so your weight goes onto the toe of the blade. Sink first, then let the chest follow. Swivelling your hips during the recovery is the other common fault — it destroys your directional control and sends you drifting off the line you meant to hold.

And, as always: standing tall is why defencemen get beaten wide.

Backward crossovers

Goal	C-cuts are your cruising gear; backward crossovers are your acceleration and your lateral coverage
Technique	The outside leg lifts and steps over the top of the inside leg, landing on its inside edge
Technique	The inside leg pulls under and out, rolling from inside edge to outside edge, finishing at full extension off the toe
Position	Shoulders level and hips open to the play, so you keep the puck and the attacker in view
Key	The under-pull of the inside leg is the half most players are missing
Never	Deliberately switch the outside leg off — its backward contribution is unsourced here, not absent
Action	Learn crossovers standing still and C-cuts separately, then both together, then around the circles

C-cuts are your cruising gear; **backward crossovers are your acceleration and your lateral coverage.** When an attacker steps on the gas or attacks a lane, C-cuts alone will not keep up.

The mechanics mirror the forward crossover — **the outside leg crosses, the inside leg pulls under.** Skating backwards around a circle to your left, your left skate is the inside skate (nearest the centre of the circle) and your right is the outside skate.

- **The outside leg crosses over.** Your outside (right) skate lifts and steps **over the top of** the inside leg, landing on its inside edge on the far side. How To Hockey states it directly:

"cross the outside leg over the inside leg. By crossing over with your outside leg you will be forced to bring the inside leg under."

- **The inside leg pulls under and pushes.** As the outside foot crosses, your inside (left) skate is pulled **under and out** from beneath you, rolling from its inside edge onto its **outside edge**, finishing at full extension with a drive off the toe. Same source: *"Your inside leg will start on its inside edge, you will pull it under your body and transfer to your outside edge, and then get a final push by fully extending your leg and driving off with the toe."*
- The legs form an "X" before recovery, and the inside leg recovers back underneath your hips.
- Keep your **shoulders level and your hips open to the play** so you can still see the puck and the attacker while you're covering ground sideways.

If you take one thing from this section: the under-pull of the *inside* leg is the half most players are missing. Stepping the outside foot over without pulling the inside leg out from under you is a crossover with most of its power switched off — and for a defenceman, that is the difference between holding a gap and getting beaten wide.

The parallel with the forward crossover is close but not exact — do not read this as "the outside leg does nothing." Going forwards, there are genuinely **two pushes** (see Crossovers above): the outside leg's full stride-push, and the inside leg's under-push. Going backwards, the outside leg lands on its inside edge after crossing and can certainly drive from there — but the source for this section describes only the inside leg's under-pull and does not spell out an outside-leg push, so **the outside leg's contribution backwards is unsourced.** Practical upshot: build the under-pull, because that is the one that is missing and the one that is sourced; do not deliberately switch the outside leg off.

Learning progression. How To Hockey's step-by-step method has **three** steps: practise **crossovers while standing still, and backward C-cuts**; then **try using both together**; then **try it going around the circles**. Three further steps are worth inserting, but they are **added scaffolding, not part of that source's method**: around a circle, isolate the inside leg's under-pull on its own; then isolate the outside leg's cross on its own; then, once both are clean, make them quick. Treat the extras as coaching craft.

Backward skating drills

- Action** Goal line to goal line C-cuts, nothing else, full extension on each push
- Action** Backward figure eights around two faceoff circles, and single-leg backward skating for edge strength
- Action** Partner mirroring — hold a constant stick-length gap while your partner changes speed and direction
- Action** Transition combinations — backward crossovers, mohawk, forwards, pivot back to backwards, repeat
- Key** Partner mirroring is the drill that most directly transfers to games

- **Goal line to goal line C-cuts.** Nothing else. Full extension each push.
- **Backward figure eights** around two faceoff circles, and **single-leg backward skating** for edge strength.
- **Partner mirroring.** Your partner skates forwards with changes of speed and direction; you skate backwards holding a **constant stick-length gap**. This is the drill that most directly transfers to games.
- **Transition combinations.** Backward crossovers → mohawk turn → forwards → pivot back to backwards → repeat. This builds the conditioning needed to keep your technique clean when you're tired, which is when gaps get lost.

Pivots and Transitions

A **pivot** (or transition) is changing between skating forwards and skating backwards without stopping. Losing speed in a pivot is losing the play.

Forward to backward — the open-hip pivot

Action	Stay square as long as you can — every moment going forwards is a moment you could step up on the puck
Technique	Open your hips, not your shoulders; the hips and lead leg initiate and the upper body follows
Technique	Open the lead skate outward, transfer weight onto it, bring the trailing skate around, and start C-cutting immediately
Never	Turn your shoulders first — it spins your head off the play and your eyes off the puck carrier
Never	Stand up as you pivot — that is precisely when players get beaten

You're skating forwards and need to be skating backwards, facing the same way you were.

- **Stay square as long as you can.** Every moment you're still going forwards is a moment you could still step up on the puck.
- **Open your hips, not your shoulders.** The hips and the lead leg initiate; the upper body follows. Turning your shoulders first spins your head off the play and takes your eyes off the puck carrier.
- Open the lead skate outward, transfer weight onto it, bring the trailing skate around, and immediately start C-cutting so you don't decelerate.
- **Keep your knees bent through the whole thing.** Most players stand up as they pivot, which is precisely when they get beaten.

The mohawk

Technique	Heels come together and the feet open out toward 180 degrees, rotating heel-to-heel without crossing your feet
Goal	Change forwards-to-backwards or backwards-to-forwards fast and low, with no crossover step
Read	It needs real hip mobility and comfortable outside-edge control, so it is usually taught after crossover-based pivots
Key	Elite defencemen flow between C-cuts, crossovers, edge changes and mohawks without thinking about which one they're using

A **mohawk** is a pivot in which your heels come together and your feet open out toward 180 degrees, so you rotate through a heel-to-heel position without crossing your feet. It's fast, it keeps you low, and it lets you go forwards-to-backwards or backwards-to-forwards without a crossover step.

It also requires real hip mobility and comfortable outside-edge control, which is why it's usually taught after crossover-based pivots. It's worth the work: elite defencemen flow between C-cuts, crossovers, edge changes and mohawks without thinking about which one they're using.

Backward to forward

Read	You're retreating, the puck turns over, and you need to go
Technique	Open the hip toward the direction you want to travel, plant, and drive out on your inside edge with a short toe start
Key	This is where most forwards lose a step on a rush going the other way
Action	Drill it in both directions specifically

The reverse transition — you're retreating, the puck turns over, and you need to go. Open the hip toward the direction you want to travel, plant, and drive out on your inside edge with a short toe start. This transition is where most forwards lose a step on a rush going the other way, and it's worth drilling both directions specifically.

Which way to pivot — a coaching default, not a law

Convention	Defencemen pivot toward the boards rather than the middle — the standard coaching instruction, not a law
Goal	If you are beaten during the pivot, be beaten toward the wall, where the boards are a second defender and the angle is poor
Options	Some coaches want a pivot to the middle on specific reads — when pivoting away would blind you to the puck, or when you have inside help
Read	The correct pivot direction is decided by where the attacker is, not by which way you happen to be good at
Action	Ask your coach which they want, and drill both directions
Key	Pivot late — once you've turned to skate forwards, you have given up your ability to react to a change of direction

The standard coaching instruction for defencemen is to pivot toward the boards, not toward the middle of the ice. The reasoning is about failure mode, not aesthetics: if the pivot goes wrong or the attacker beats you during it, you want to be beaten **toward the wall** — where the boards act as a second defender and the shooting angle is poor — rather than beaten **into the slot**, which is a scoring chance.

Two honest caveats:

- **It's a default, not an absolute.** Some coaches will have you pivot to the middle in specific reads — for example when you must keep your eyes on the puck and pivoting away would blind you, or when you have inside help and the greater risk is the attacker cutting behind you. Ask your coach which they want.
- **It requires you to be competent pivoting both ways**, because the correct pivot direction is decided by where the attacker is, not by which way you happen to be good at. Drill both.

The more universal version of the instruction: **pivot late**. Once you've turned to skate forwards, you have given up your ability to react to a change of direction. Hold your backward skating as long as you possibly can.

Falling and Getting Up

Learn-to-skate progressions teach this **before** they teach stopping, and for a good reason: you will fall long before you can stop, and a fall you have rehearsed costs you a bruise while a fall you have not can cost you a wrist or a head. It takes about five minutes to learn and almost nobody who came to hockey as an adult has been shown it.

How to fall

Action Get low first — bend the knees and sink as you feel yourself going

Action Go to the side, onto your hip, thigh and the side of your backside

Never Land on your tailbone, your knees, or a straight arm

Never Stick a hand out to catch yourself — a locked arm concentrates your whole body weight into one wrist

Action Slide with it — sliding spreads the impact over time, and fighting the fall turns it into a collision

Key Tuck your chin going over backwards to the ice; do not tuck it going forwards into the boards

- **Get low first.** As you feel yourself going, bend the knees and sink. The closer you are to the ice when you land, the less there is to absorb.
- **Go to the side, onto the fleshy part.** Aim for your hip, thigh and the side of your backside. Those have padding, both anatomically and in your kit. Avoid landing on your tailbone, your knees, or a straight arm.
- **Do not stick a hand out to catch yourself.** A locked, outstretched arm concentrates your whole body weight into a wrist. Keep the hands loose and close, and let your side take it.
- **Slide with it.** Ice lets you slide, and sliding spreads the impact over time instead of delivering it all at once. Fighting the fall is what turns it into a collision.
- **Tuck your chin toward your chest if you are going over backwards.** This one stops the back of your head hitting the ice.

Two apparent conflicts with the boards section above, and why neither is one.

The chin. Tuck your chin when you are falling *backwards to the ice* — it keeps your skull off the surface. Do **not** tuck your chin going *forwards into the boards* — that is the "Heads Up, Don't Duck" case, where a tucked chin lines the neck up to take an axial load. Falling flat: chin in. Hitting a wall: head up.

The hands. Against the boards you *do* get your arms and gloves out — spread wide on the glass, so the load is shared across two forearms, two gloves, your side and your legs. Falling to the ice you do **not**, because there is nothing to spread it across: your hand is the only thing between the ice and your whole descending body weight, and it arrives at one point through one wrist. **The rule underneath both is the same — spread the impact over the largest area you can.**

On the wall that means arms out; on the ice it means your hip, thigh and the side of your backside, which is the biggest padded surface you own.

How to get up

Priority	Assess first — two or three seconds to check you are not injured, before anything else
Never	Get up fast off a fall you have not checked — that is how a stinger becomes a serious injury
Never	Play on if you are hurt — stay down and let play be stopped
Action	Roll onto your hands and knees, then bring one skate up and plant it flat beside your hands, knee at a right angle
Action	Push down through that front skate and your hands, and bring the second skate up beside it
Technique	Come up into your stance — knees bent, chest up — not up to standing tall
Key	The order is assess, then hurry; two seconds against six is a scoring chance

1. **Assess first.** The cited get-up sequence opens with "*take a moment to assess*" — two or three seconds to check you are not injured. **Do this before anything else, and do not let the rest of this section talk you out of it.** Getting up fast off a fall you have not checked is how a stinger becomes a serious injury, and if you are hurt the correct action is to stay down and let play be stopped.
2. Roll onto your hands and knees, facing the ice.
3. Bring **one skate up and plant it flat** beside your hands, knee bent to roughly a right angle. This is the whole trick — you are building a base under yourself before you try to rise.
4. Push down through that front skate and your hands, and bring the second skate up beside it.
5. Come up into your stance — knees bent, chest up — not up to standing tall. Rising all the way up just means you fall again.

Practise it at home on a carpet until it needs no thought, then do it on the ice a few times deliberately at the start of a session. **Once you have cleared step 1**, speed matters: a shift does not stop because you fell over, and the difference between two seconds and six seconds on the ice is a scoring chance. The order is assess, then hurry — not the other way round.

Stops and Starts

The two-foot hockey stop

Technique	Rotate your hips roughly 90 degrees so both skates turn perpendicular to your direction of travel, and let the blades scrape
Position	Feet roughly shoulder-width apart, shoulders level, weight toward the balls of the feet, chest up, head facing forward
Technique	The outside skate rides its inside edge; the inside skate rides its outside edge
Action	Keep the knees bent and sink further as you stop — the stop is absorbed by your legs
Never	Lean back away from the stop — that's the instinct, and it puts you on your backside
Risk	Stopping on the leading inside edge alone is slower, costs more energy, wears the edge, and leaves you off-balance for the start

The standard stop. From forward motion, **rotate your hips roughly 90 degrees** so both skates turn perpendicular to your direction of travel, and let the blades scrape the ice.

- Feet roughly **shoulder-width apart**, shoulders level.
- **The outside skate** (the one further from the side you're turning toward, which ends up leading) rides its **inside edge**; **the inside skate** rides its **outside edge**.
- **Knees stay bent and sink further as you stop.** The stop is absorbed by your legs. Straightening up throws you over.
- Weight toward the balls of the feet, chest up, head facing forward.
- Don't lean back away from the stop — that's the instinct, and it puts you on your backside.

The reason both edges matter: a stop on only the leading skate's inside edge does work, but it takes longer, costs more energy and wears the edge out faster. It also leaves you off-balance for the start out of the stop, which is the point of stopping in the first place.

The one-foot stop

Technique	The same idea on one skate — usually the leading foot on its inside edge, the other lifted or trailing
Goal	Quicker to initiate, and it leaves one foot free to push off immediately in a new direction
Read	It demands more balance — learn the two-foot stop first

Same idea, on one skate — usually the leading foot on its inside edge, with the other skate lifted or trailing. It's quicker to initiate and lets you keep one foot free to immediately push off in a new direction, which is why you see it constantly in games. It demands more balance. Learn the two-foot stop first.

The snowplough

Technique	Point both toes slightly inward, press on both inside edges, and bend the knees to push the blades outward
Risk	It's slow and it doesn't leave you in an athletic position
Options	The half-version, one foot ploughing, sheds a little speed without committing to a full stop
Key	It always works

The beginner's stop: point both toes slightly inward, press on both inside edges, and bend the knees to push the blades outward against the ice. It's slow and it doesn't leave you in an athletic position, but **it always works**, and the half-version (one foot ploughing) is genuinely useful for shedding a little speed without committing to a full stop.

The point most players never fix

- Read** Most players can only stop properly one way, and it costs them constantly
- Risk** You unconsciously take longer routes to avoid the weak side, and turn instead of stopping, which carries you further from the puck
- Risk** You arrive at battles decelerating instead of set, and lose the stop-and-start-back-the-other-way exchange
- Action** In any stop-and-start drill, alternate sides deliberately rather than always stopping the comfortable way
- Action** In your own skating, stop at every blue line and goal line, half of them on the weak side

Most players can only stop properly one way, and it costs them constantly. If your other side is a wobbly snowplough you will, unconsciously, take longer routes to avoid stopping that way, turn instead of stopping (which carries you further from the puck), arrive at battles decelerating instead of set, and lose the stop-and-start-back-the-other-way exchange — one of the most common races in the game.

Fix: in any stop-and-start drill, alternate sides deliberately rather than always stopping the comfortable way, and in your own skating stop at every blue line and goal line, half of them on the weak side.

Starting out of a stop

- Goal** The stop should leave you loaded — low, on your edges, weight balanced — so the first step out is immediate
- Action** Practise them as one movement: stop, three explosive steps the other way, stop, three steps back
- Key** A stop is only valuable because of what follows it

A stop is only valuable because of what follows it. The stop should leave you **loaded** — low, on your edges, weight balanced — so the first step out is immediate. Practise them as one movement: stop, three explosive steps the other way, stop, three steps back. That single drill contains most of what hockey actually asks of your legs.

Tight Turns and Agility

A turn is not a crossover

Technique	A crossover generates speed through a wide arc — your feet cross and you accelerate
Technique	A tight turn changes direction in the smallest possible space — feet parallel, both skates on the ice, carving a small radius
Position	In the tight turn the outside skate is on its inside edge and the inside skate on its outside edge
Read	Take a crossover route when you have room and want speed; take a tight turn when you have no room
Options	Coming off the wall, escaping a checker, cutting back on the forecheck, turning back into the middle after a dead rush

These are different tools and players conflate them constantly:

- A **crossover** is for **generating speed** through a wide arc. Your feet cross; you're accelerating.
- A **tight turn** is for **changing direction in the smallest possible space**. Your feet stay parallel and both skates stay on the ice; you carve around a very small radius on two edges — the outside skate on its inside edge and the inside skate on its outside edge — leaning your whole body into the turn.

You take a crossover route when you have room and want speed. You take a tight turn when you have no room — coming off the wall, escaping a checker, cutting back on the **forecheck** — the pressure you apply in the opposition's end to win the puck back, as opposed to the *backcheck*, which is racing back toward your own end — or turning back into the middle after a rush is dead.

How to turn tighter

Key	You cannot make a tight turn standing up — radius is set by lean angle, and lean angle by knee and ankle bend
Action	Sink lower, get the edges to a steeper angle, and keep the chest up
Technique	Let your whole body go into the circle, not just your feet
Never	Drop your gaze through the turn — it drags your weight forward

Radius is set by lean angle, and lean angle is set by knee and ankle bend. **You cannot make a tight turn standing up.** Sink lower, get the edges to a steeper angle, keep the chest up, and let your body — not just your feet — go into the circle.

Keep your head and eyes up through the turn. Turning is one of the moments where players reflexively drop their gaze, and it drags their weight forward.

Edge work in traffic

Read	Games rarely give you a clean circle
Action	Cutback or escape turn — tight-turn back against your own momentum to shake a checker committed to your original direction
Action	Lateral escapes — one or two hard lateral pushes sideways out of a stick-check, without giving up the puck
Technique	Turning under a stick — drop your shoulder and your knee bend at the same time so you pass under it rather than into it
Key	The cutback is entirely an outside-edge skill
Never	Train the tight turn one way only — it has a weak side too

Games rarely give you a clean circle. What you actually need is:

- **The cutback / escape turn.** With the puck along the wall, tight-turn back against your own momentum to shake a checker who is committed to your original direction. This is entirely an outside-edge skill.
 - **Lateral escapes.** One or two hard lateral pushes to move sideways out of a stick-check without giving up the puck.
 - **Turning under a stick.** Dropping your shoulder and your knee bend at the same time so you pass under a checking stick rather than into it. See Body Contact and Battles.
 - **Turning both ways at speed.** The tight turn also has a weak side. Same fix as everything else in this document.
-

Skating With the Puck — and by Position

Action	Do your crossover, transition and tight-turn drills with a puck at least half the time
Never	Slow down the moment you receive the puck — the fixes are owned by Puck Handling, but the fault shows up in your stride
Convention	Centre — prioritise transitions, turning both ways, and holding technique together when tired
Convention	Winger — prioritise the first three steps, straight-line speed, and the forecheck-to-backcheck reversal
Convention	Defenceman — prioritise backward skating, backward crossovers, pivots both ways, and lateral mobility along the blue line
Action	Goaltenders — train the position-specific movement, shuffles and T-pushes and post play, with a goalie coach
Key	If you are changing position, the skating is where the switch is won or lost

Two topics that belong to skating but are owned by other documents, so they are cross-linked rather than repeated here.

Skating with the puck. Adding a puck degrades your stride until you deliberately train it: your arms stop driving, your head drops, your feet narrow, and most players simply stop striding and coast. The visible symptom is **a player receiving the puck and immediately slowing down**, at the moment they most needed speed. The fixes — skate first and handle second, push the puck into space and skate onto it, one-handed carries, head up with the puck in peripheral vision — are owned by Puck Handling → Carrying at Speed, which covers them in full. Only one instruction belongs on the skating side: **do your crossover, transition and tight-turn drills with a puck at least half the time**, because that is how you will use them.

Skating by position. Everyone needs everything, but if practice time is limited: a **centre** should prioritise transitions, turning both ways, and holding technique together when tired; a **winger** should prioritise the first three steps, straight-line speed, and the stop-and-start reversal from forecheck to backcheck; a **defenceman** should prioritise backward skating, backward crossovers and pivots in both directions, plus lateral mobility along the blue line. These are practical coaching priorities, not rules, and a team playing a heavy forecheck or a stretch-pass system will weight them differently. The full treatment of each position's demands is in Center, Winger and Defender. **If you are changing position, the skating is where the switch is won or lost** — Switching Positions covers which direction demands a genuine technical rebuild rather than a set of new decisions.

Goaltenders skate a genuinely different discipline — short lateral pushes (shuffles and T-pushes), movement in and out along the angle, post-to-post, and recovery to the feet, almost all inside-edge work over very short distances in a deep stance. Goalies still benefit from ordinary skating work for leg strength and edge feel, but the position-specific movement should be trained with a goalie coach. See Goaltender.

Verification note: the goaltending paragraph is an orientation, not instruction — but it is not unsourced. Three governing-body sources teach these movements directly. USA Hockey Goaltending's technique pages define the T-push as "*side to side explosive movement used to cover big and small areas of the crease*" and the shuffle as "*side to side short distance movement*" that "*helps goaltender stay square to the puck while minimizing holes in stance when moving.*" The IIHF's coaching drill library carries a full goalkeeper skating series, including post play: "*To the best scoring area, you can move with t-push or shuffle and back to the post using same techniques.*" Hockey Alberta's *Goaltender Guide* sets out step-by-step progressions for the T-push, shuffle, knee shuffle, sliding into posts and post-to-post play. Train the position-specific movement with a goalie coach, and use those three as the reference.

How to Actually Get Better

The highest-value drills, in order

Priority	Edge work first — C-cuts, inside and outside circles, figure eights forward and backward
Priority	Then weak-side crossovers, forward and backward, two laps weak for every one strong
Priority	Then stops and starts both directions, then transitions, then full-extension stride work
Action	Then the same things again with a puck
Convention	Long top-speed sprinting isn't on the list — that is a judgement, not a measured finding

If you get thirty minutes of open ice, this is the order to spend it in:

1. **Edge work** — C-cuts, inside and outside circles, figure eights forward and backward. Ten to fifteen focused minutes, often, beats an hour occasionally — coaching guidance from a single source rather than a measured optimum, but consistent with what Puck Handling says about hands.
2. **Weak-side crossovers** — forward and backward, two laps weak for every one strong.
3. **Stops and starts both directions** — stop, three explosive steps, stop, repeat.
4. **Transitions** — forward to backward to forward, continuously, down the length of the ice.
5. **Full-extension stride work** — goal line to goal line, counting strides, trying to reduce the count.
6. **The same things with a puck.**

Notice that long top-speed sprinting isn't on the list. That is a judgement, not a measured finding, and it follows from the point made under acceleration: game skating comes in bursts of a second or two, so the minutes you spend on edges, starts and transitions buy you more than the minutes you spend on a full-length sprint.

Power skating

Goal	Coached skating technique as a standalone discipline, separate from team practice
Key	You cannot see yourself skate — almost every fault in this document is invisible from the inside
Convention	Roughly one dedicated session a week in season, two to three in the off-season — one provider's guidance, an order of magnitude rather than a prescription
Action	With no coach available, have someone film you skating from the side and from behind

Power skating is coached skating technique as a standalone discipline, separate from team practice. It is worth it, for one reason above all others: **you cannot see yourself skate**. Almost every fault in this document is invisible from the inside — you genuinely do not know whether you're finishing your push or recovering under your body. A coach (or video of yourself) is the only reliable way to find out.

One provider's guidance suggests roughly **one dedicated power-skating session per week in season, or two to three per week in the off-season**, for meaningful change. Treat that as a reasonable order of magnitude rather than a proven prescription.

A cheap substitute if there's no coach available: have someone film you skating from the side and from behind. The faults are obvious on video and invisible in the moment.

Off-ice work

- Goal** Off-ice work doesn't teach technique — it removes the physical limits that stop you executing it
- Key** Ankle stability, single-leg strength and hip mobility are what deep knee bend, outside edges and the mohawk run on
- Action** Slide boards for the lateral push and the weight transfer between feet
- Action** Single-leg strength — split squats, single-leg deadlifts, step-ups; skating is a single-leg sport and two-legged squats don't cover it
- Action** Lateral bounds — push off one leg, land on the other, stick it — plus single-leg balance work

Off-ice training doesn't teach you technique, but it removes the physical limits that stop you executing it — **ankle stability, single-leg strength and hip mobility**, which is what deep knee bend, outside edges and the mohawk actually run on. The four things that map most directly onto skating are **slide boards** (the lateral push and the weight transfer between feet), **single-leg strength** (split squats, single-leg deadlifts, step-ups — skating is a single-leg sport and two-legged squats don't cover it), **lateral bounds** (push off one leg, land on the other, stick it), and **single-leg balance work**. Programming and volume live in Conditioning and Recovery.

Skate fit and sharpening

- Action** Check for an equipment problem before you conclude you have a technique problem
- Risk** Boots too big, too soft or not done up properly make deep knee bend and hard edges physically impossible
- Risk** Dull or unevenly ground blades, or an unfamiliar hollow, change everything about how the edges feel

Before you conclude you have a technique problem, check that you don't have an equipment problem. Boots that are too big, too soft, or not done up properly make deep knee bend and hard edges physically impossible — the foot moves inside the boot instead of the blade moving on the ice. Blades that are dull, unevenly ground, or on a hollow you're not used to will change everything about how the edges feel. See Equipment.

How long it takes

Convention	Weeks for better knee bend and edge feel, a few months for stopping and turning both ways — one provider's guidance, not measurement
Convention	A season for a genuinely rebuilt stride or a weak side brought up to match; multiple years for elite edge control and explosive transitions
Mindset	You will not become fast this month, but you can become noticeably more stable, lower and more balanced this month
Key	That alone changes how many battles you win

Honest expectations, drawn from one coaching provider's guidance rather than from measurement: **weeks** for noticeably better knee bend and edge feel (it is mostly a matter of deciding to stay low); **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; **multiple years** for elite edge control and explosive transitions.

The realistic framing for an adult player: **you will not become fast this month, but you can become noticeably more stable, lower and more balanced this month**, and that alone changes how many battles you win.

Common Mistakes

- **Standing too tall.** The root cause of most other faults. If nothing else changes after reading this, bend your knees.
- **Pushing straight back instead of out to the side.** The blade slides instead of gripping. It feels like running, which is exactly why it's wrong.
- **Not finishing the push.** Cutting the extension short — and skipping the toe flick, which coaching sources put at around a third of the push's power.
- **Recovering the foot in front of the body** instead of under your hips. A brake on every stride.
- **Running on your toes past the first few steps.** Correct for a start, exhausting and slow for everything after it.
- **Arms swinging across the chest.** Wrong under every school of skating instruction.

- **Living on your inside edges.** Outside edges are where turning, deception, escapes and puck protection come from, and most players never train them.
- **A crossover with no under-push.** Half the propulsion, switched off.
- **Only being able to stop one way** — and quietly reorganising your entire game to avoid the other way.
- **Leaning too far forward when skating backwards.** The mirror of standing tall; it puts weight on the toe of the blade and kills speed and control.
- **Standing up during pivots.** The moment you rise, you're beaten.
- **Pivoting to the middle rather than the boards by default** as a defenceman, so that being beaten costs you the slot rather than the wall. Pivoting to the middle is sometimes the correct read — the mistake is doing it unthinkingly, or because it is your only competent direction. See Which way to pivot.
- **Slowing down the moment you get the puck.** The most common and least-noticed fault in the game — see Puck Handling → Carrying at Speed.
- **Ducking your head going into the boards, or arriving perpendicular to them.** Go in on an angle, get your skates parallel to the wall, and take it on your forearm and hip — not on the point of your shoulder, and never head-first.
- **Never having learned to fall or get up.** You will do both far more often than you will do a mohawk, and only one of them can hurt you. **And getting the chin backwards.** Tuck your chin falling *backwards to the ice* — it keeps your skull off the surface. Do **not** tuck it going *forwards into the boards*: that is the "Heads Up, Don't Duck" case, where a tucked chin straightens the cervical spine to take an axial load.
- **Practising only your strong side**, because it's more fun to do things you're good at.

Key Takeaways

1. **Bend your knees.** Knees over the toes, chest up, weight on the balls of your feet, head up, hands in front. Standing tall is the fault behind most other faults. The one deliberate exception is hard acceleration, where the torso does lean forward.
2. **Hockey is played on edges, not flat blades.** Inside edges make power; outside edges give control — and for most players the outside edges are the biggest single weakness, because they are the ones you never land on by accident.
3. **Push out to the side and back, never straight back**, and finish with the toe. Coaching sources put the toe flick alone at roughly a third of the push's power.

4. **Recover the foot under your hips, and recover it fast.** Coaching research says fast skaters return the recovery skate to the ice more quickly than slow ones — speed is not just a bigger push.
 5. **Starting is a different technique from striding** — short, quick, toe-driven steps on the inside edges, torso leaning about 45 degrees forward. The first three steps win most races in hockey.
 6. **A crossover has two pushes.** If you're just stepping one foot over the other, you're using half of it.
 7. **Backward crossovers are the defenceman's skill.** You cannot hold a gap you're not fast enough to hold, and you cannot pivot late unless your backward skating is good enough to survive holding it.
 8. **Pivot late, open the hips before the shoulders, and — as a default — pivot toward the boards** so that being beaten costs you the wall rather than the slot.
 9. **Learn to stop both ways.** Every player has a weak side; the ones who don't fix it spend the whole game taking longer routes to avoid it.
 10. **Train the weak side deliberately and persistently** — two laps weak for every one strong is the common prescription, a coaching rule of thumb rather than a measured optimum. Get someone to film you, and expect months for the basics and years for the rest; those timeframes come from one coaching provider's guidance, not from measurement.
 11. **Head up, don't duck, and never arrive at the boards perpendicular or head-first.** Go in on an angle; if contact is coming, get your **skates parallel to the wall** and take it on your **forearm and hip** — not the point of your shoulder, and never your back. A chin tucked to the chest straightens the cervical spine and is the posture behind almost every catastrophic neck injury in hockey; it can happen at walking speed. This is the most important thing on this list. See Arriving at the boards and Body Contact and Battles.
 12. **Learn to fall and learn to get up.** You will do both far more often than anything else here, and falling is the only item on this list that can hurt you. Tuck your chin falling *backwards to the ice*; do **not** tuck it going *forwards into the boards*.
-

Puck Handling

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

Puck handling is everything you do with the puck on your stick: **stickhandling** (moving the puck around on your blade — sometimes called dribbling), **carrying** (skating with it), and **puck protection** (keeping it when someone is trying to take it). It is the skill that buys you the extra half-second in which every other decision becomes possible.

Most players train the flashy end of this — dekes and dangles — and neglect the two parts that actually decide games: playing with your **head up**, and being physically hard to separate from the puck. This document gives those two the weight they deserve.

The Grip and the Hands

Everything downstream — soft hands, protection, deception — is decided by where your hands are and how hard you are squeezing.

The top hand does the work

Technique	Steer with the top hand — it opens and closes the blade and does most of the stickhandling
Position	Top hand nearest the butt-end — left hand for a left-handed shooter, right for a right-handed one
Technique	Let the shaft slide fairly freely through a loose bottom hand, which guides and stabilises
Never	Let the bottom hand grip and therefore fight the top hand
Action	Tighten the bottom hand to set the angle on a wide reach or hold the puck against a stick
Technique	Off-ice, slide a cut-off bottle or tube over the shaft so the bottom hand cannot cheat

Your **top hand** is the hand nearest the butt-end of the stick (left hand for a left-handed shooter, right for a right-handed shooter). It is your control hand. It opens and closes the blade over the puck, it drives the puck side to side, and it does most of the actual stickhandling. Think of the stick as a lever: the top hand is the end you steer with.

Your **bottom hand** is a guide and a stabiliser. When you shoot or pass it becomes the power hand; while you are stickhandling it does much less, and the shaft should slide fairly freely through a loose grip. **It is not doing nothing, though** — it steadies the blade, it sets the angle on a wide reach, and it is what you tighten on when you need to hold the puck against a stick. The fault to avoid is a bottom hand that *grips* and therefore fights the top hand, not a bottom hand that participates: see Grip pressure below, where a tight bottom hand is named as the single most common cause of pucks bouncing off the blade.

Test it off the ice: slide a cut-off water bottle or a paper-towel tube over the shaft and hold *that* with your bottom hand instead of gripping the stick. The shaft slides freely, your bottom hand cannot cheat, and your top hand is forced to learn the job. Ten minutes of this teaches more than an hour of ordinary reps.

Grip pressure — hold it like a bird

Technique	Hold it firmly enough that it cannot escape, softly enough that you do not crush it
Never	White-knuckle the stick — it is the single most common cause of pucks bouncing off the blade
Key	A squeezed hand cannot feel, and if you cannot feel the puck you cannot play with your head up
Read	The bottom hand is nearly always the culprit

Firmly enough that it cannot escape, softly enough that you do not crush it. A white-knuckle grip is the single most common cause of pucks bouncing off the blade. A squeezed hand cannot feel anything, and if you cannot feel the puck you cannot play with your head up. The bottom hand is nearly always the culprit.

Hands away from the body

Position	Top hand out in front of your chest, roughly a fist's distance off your torso, elbow slightly bent
Never	Hip lock — top hand glued to the hip, puck rattling in a narrow slot in front of your skates
Goal	Reach the full arc around your body — far left, far right, out front, and behind your heels
Key	Hands pinned to the hips leave no far side, so the puck is always in front of the checker too
Risk	With tight hands, every stick check that arrives will get a piece of the puck

Watch a new player and you will usually see **"hip lock"** — the top hand glued to the hip, the puck rattling back and forth in a narrow slot directly in front of the skates. It feels safe. It is the opposite of safe.

- Pull the top hand **out in front of your chest**, roughly a fist's distance off your torso, with a slight bend in the elbow.
- From there, your blade can reach the full arc around your body: far left, far right, out front, and behind your heels.

Why a player with tight hands cannot protect anything. Puck protection means putting your body between the checker and the puck. If your hands are pinned to your hips, the puck can only ever be directly in front of you — which is directly in front of the checker too. You have no far side to move it to. Hands tight to the body is not a stylistic flaw; it is a structural inability to shield the puck, and every stick check that arrives will get a piece of it.

The one-handed extension

Technique	Release the bottom hand and reach one-handed — it adds most of a forearm's length to your reach
Options	Pull in a puck outside your normal radius, stretch it away from a checker, or reach around a sealing stick
Action	Practise it deliberately — reach wide, release, control the puck, recover the grip
Key	It should not feel like an emergency

Letting go with the bottom hand and reaching one-handed adds most of a forearm's length to your reach. Use it to:

- pull a puck in from outside your normal radius,
- stretch the puck away from a checker while your body stays between them and it,
- reach around a stick that is sealing your normal handling lane.

Practise it deliberately — reach as far as you can to one side, release the bottom hand, control the puck, recover the grip. It should not feel like an emergency.

Basic Stickhandling

Soft hands

Technique	Let the blade give as the puck arrives — loose grip, active wrists, a slight draw-back on contact
Goal	Deaden the puck rather than let it rebound off the blade
Key	Catch it like an egg
Never	Handle with stiff wrists — stiff wrists mean dead hands

"Soft hands" means the blade **gives** when the puck arrives instead of repelling it. Loose grip, active wrists, and a slight draw-back of the blade on contact so the puck deadens rather than rebounds. The coaching cue is *catch it like an egg*. Stiff wrists mean dead hands.

Cup the blade

Technique	Angle the blade so it leans over the top of the puck rather than standing vertical
Never	Cup the forehand only — an uncupped backhand lets the puck roll up the blade and flip over
Goal	Keep the puck sitting in the pocket of the blade
Technique	Roll the top-hand wrist to change the cup from forehand to backhand — the heart of stickhandling
Read	A puck that keeps jumping off your stick is nearly always an uncupped blade plus a tight grip

Cupping means angling the blade so it leans over the top of the puck rather than standing vertical. Cup on the forehand and cup on the backhand — the puck sits in the pocket instead of rolling up the blade and flipping over. Nearly all "the puck keeps jumping off my stick" problems are an uncupped blade plus a tight grip.

Rolling the top-hand wrist is what changes the cup from forehand to backhand. That wrist roll is the mechanical heart of stickhandling.

Wrists, not arms

Technique	Move the puck with your wrists and hands, not by swinging your shoulders
Never	Use big arm sweeps — slow, visible from twenty feet, and they drag your upper body off balance
Key	You can abort a wrist move halfway through; you cannot abort an arm swing
Action	Drill soft touch — puck or ball back and forth as fast as you can with minimal lower-arm movement

The puck should move because your wrists and hands moved, not because your shoulders swung. Big arm sweeps are slow, visible from twenty feet away, and they drag your whole upper body off balance. Quick wrists are fast, quiet, and reversible — you can abort halfway through a wrist move, and you cannot abort halfway through an arm swing.

A useful off-ice drill (**soft touch**): move a ball or puck back and forth as fast as you can with as little lower-arm movement as possible. Only the hands and the top forearm should be working.

Wide dribbles and tight dribbles

Options	Wide — big sweeping pulls outside your feet, for open ice, setting up a deke, or crossing a defender's stick
Options	Tight — small quick touches near your skates, for traffic, the boards, the slot and protecting
Risk	Wide handling exposes the puck to a poke check — an opponent jabbing their blade out along the ice
Risk	Tight handling limits your reach, and you get pinned if you never widen
Never	Own only one of the two — wide-only players get poke-checked, tight-only players never move a defender

These are two different tools, and you need both. One term first: a **poke check** is an opponent jabbing their stick blade straight out along the ice to knock the puck off yours — the most common way a puck is taken from a carrier, and the thing most of the advice below is defending against.

	Wide	Tight
Looks like	Big sweeping pulls, well outside your feet	Small, quick touches near your skates
Use it for	Open ice, setting up a 1-on-1 deke, moving the puck across a defender's stick	Traffic, the boards, the slot, protecting
Risk	Exposes the puck to a poke check	Limited reach; easy to get pinned if you never widen

The mistake is having only one. Players who only handle wide get poke-checked in traffic. Players who only handle tight can never move a defender.

Front-to-back as well as side-to-side

Never	Handle side-to-side only — it is a rhythm, and three seconds of it tells a defender where the puck will be
Action	Train the whole reachable circle — in front, both sides, and behind your heels on both sides
Technique	Add quick diagonal transfers, front-left to rear-right and back again
Goal	Front-to-back range is what makes the toe drag possible and pulls the puck back from a side check

Almost everyone learns side-to-side and stops. Side-to-side alone is a rhythm, and rhythms get read — a defender who has watched you go left-right-left-right for three seconds knows exactly when the puck will be on your backhand.

Train the whole reachable circle:

- in front of you,
- both sides,
- **behind your heels** on both sides,
- and quick diagonal transfers (front-left to rear-right, rear-right to front-right, and so on).

Front-to-back is also what makes the toe drag possible, and it is what lets you pull a puck back in when a checker's stick arrives from the side.

Keep the puck moving

- Never** Let a stationary puck sit on a stationary blade — it is the easiest thing in hockey to take
- Action** Keep constant small movement on the puck
- Goal** Stop a defender committing to a poke check — they never know which touch is the one they can reach

A stationary puck on a stationary blade is the easiest thing in hockey to take. Constant small movement — dribbling — keeps a defender from committing to a poke check, because they never know which touch is the one they can reach.

Head Up

This is the single most valuable habit in this entire document. If you take one thing from it, take this.

Why it matters more than anything else

- Key** Reading the forecheck, finding support, timing an entry and hitting a moving teammate all need your eyes off the puck
- Never** Stare at the puck — it locks you out of every tactical idea in the game, however well you understand it
- Risk** A puck-watcher gets hit hard, because they cannot see the checker coming

Look at what the rest of this guide asks you to do. Read the forecheck and pick the right side. Find the support option. Time your zone entry. Scan before you receive. Hit a moving teammate with a pass. Every single one of those requires your eyes to be off the puck.

A player who stares at the puck is not a worse hockey player by a little. They are locked out of every tactical idea in the game, no matter how well they understand it, because understanding arrives through the eyes. They also get hit hard, because they cannot see the checker coming.

How to develop it — feel, don't look

Never	Simply order yourself to look up — you will look up, lose the puck, and look straight back down
Technique	Learn the blade by touch — toe, middle and heel, forehand and backhand — and name them as you go
Action	Peek, don't stare — start with eyes up and glance down only when you have genuinely lost the puck
Position	Eyes up and forward, not chin to the ceiling — that puts the puck at the bottom edge of your vision
Action	Widen your handling — feel comes from variety, and a six-inch slot teaches one sensation

Do not simply order yourself to look up; you will look up, lose the puck, and look back down. Build the **feel** first, and the eyes lift on their own.

1. **Learn the blade by touch.** Move the puck slowly and deliberately and pay attention to how it feels on the **toe**, in the **middle**, and on the **heel** — and on the forehand and backhand of each. Different spots feel genuinely different through the shaft. Name them in your head as you go.
2. **Peek, don't stare.** Start with your eyes up and glance down only when you have genuinely lost the puck's position. Then make the glances shorter and rarer. The goal is knowing where the puck is without looking, not heroically refusing to look.
3. **Keep the puck in your peripheral vision.** Head up does not mean chin to the ceiling. Eyes up and forward puts the puck at the bottom edge of your vision, which is enough.
4. **Widen your handling.** Feel comes from variety. A player who handles only in a six-inch slot has learned one sensation; a player who handles around their whole body has learned dozens.

Drills for head-up handling

Action	Stickhandle facing numbers, words or a TV and call out what you see — if you cannot read it, your head is down
Action	Mine field — scatter a dozen pucks or balls and handle through them without hitting any
Action	Weave through zigzagged pucks, sticks or cones so your eyes have to plan a route
Action	Play two-player keep-away — nothing exposes a puck-watcher faster
Technique	Use a golf or tennis ball — the unpredictable bounce forces faster hands and better feel
Read	Expect a small step backwards the first time you take off-ice hands onto the ice

- **Read something.** Stickhandle off-ice facing a wall with numbers, words or a TV, and call out what you see. If you cannot read it, your head is down.
- **Mine field.** Scatter a dozen pucks or balls on a smooth surface and stickhandle through them without hitting any. It forces your eyes to the obstacles rather than the puck.
- **Weave and obstacle courses.** Set pucks, sticks or cones in a zigzag and move through them while handling. Now your eyes have to plan a route.
- **Two-player keep-away.** Nothing exposes a puck-watcher faster than someone actively trying to take it. You will look up because you must.
- **Use a golf ball or tennis ball.** They bounce and roll unpredictably, which forces faster hands and — perversely — better feel. When you go back to a puck it feels enormous and slow.

Honest note: off-ice work transfers well but not perfectly. The first time you take your off-ice hands onto the ice, expect a small step backwards while you adjust to skates, a longer stick relative to your height, and a puck that slides much more freely. That is normal. Five steps forward, one step back.

Stickhandling in Tight

Most puck touches in a real game happen in about the space of a phone box, with a stick in your feet and a body on your back. Open-ice hands are the fun part; tight hands are the useful part.

Small-area control

Technique	Shorten everything — small touches, close to your skates, blade always cupped
Never	Make a big pull in traffic — it is a gift-wrapped turnover
Position	Handle in the space you own — the small triangle between your two skates and the toe of your blade
Action	Turn away from pressure, rotating the puck behind your body rather than beating the stick on the pressure side

- **Shorten everything.** Small touches, close to your skates, blade always cupped.
- **Keep the puck moving through small arcs,** not big pulls. A big pull in traffic is a gift-wrapped turnover.
- **Handle in the space you own,** which in traffic is usually the small triangle between your two skates and the toe of your blade — plus whatever your body is shielding.
- **Turn away, not into.** When pressure arrives from one side, the first instinct should be to rotate the puck behind your body, not to try to beat the stick on the pressure side.

Your feet and body are part of your handling

Position	Use your skates as a wall — a puck in your feet is in one of the harder places on the ice to reach
Technique	Trap the puck against the inside of your skate and pull it back out to your blade
Action	Use your hips and backside as the barrier, not your stick — the stick should be busy handling
Never	Believe the space between your feet is legally protected — no rulebook reserves it
Rule	A stick in your skates is tripping if it brings you down (NHL Rule 57.1), and hooking with no fall at all if it restrains you (Rules 55.1, 56.1)
Rule	Under USA Hockey Rule 639 a loss of balance is enough, and its Standard of Play names the can-opener between the legs
Rule	Kicking the puck is legal in all zones, but you cannot score with a distinct kicking motion (NHL Rule 49.2)
Rule	A kicked puck that deflects in off a body is no goal; off your own stick it is a good goal (NHL Rule 49.2(ii), (iii))
Rule	You may catch the puck out of the air but must immediately knock it down; closing your hand on it is a minor (NHL Rule 67.2)

- **Use your skates as a wall.** Pucks that come loose into your feet are not lost — they are in one of the harder places on the ice for an opponent to reach. **This is a practical protection, not a legal one.** There is no rule anywhere that reserves the space between your feet — no rulebook mentions it. A checker may put their stick in there. What turns that into a penalty is the *effect*, and the threshold is lower than "he knocked me over":
 - **Tripping**, if it brings you down — *NHL Official Rules 2025-2026, Rule 57.1: "A player shall not place the stick, knee, foot, arm, hand or elbow in such a manner that causes his opponent to trip or fall."*
 - **Hooking**, with no fall at all, if the stick is used to restrain you. Rule 55.1 defines hooking as *"using the stick in a manner that enables a player to restrain an opponent"*, and Rule 56.1 adds that a player without body position *"who uses his stick (either the blade or the shaft, including the butt-end of the shaft) to impede or prevent his opponent from moving freely on the ice shall be assessed a hooking penalty."* Stick in your skates, dragging you up, is that.
 -  **Under USA Hockey the bar is lower again, and this is the book most North American rec and youth players are under.** Rule 639 defines tripping as causing an opponent to *"lose balance or fall"* — losing balance is enough, no fall required — and USA Hockey's Standard of Play names this exact move: *"Placing the stick between the legs of the opponent (can opener/corkscrew) that causes a loss of balance **or impedes the progress** of the opponent."* Impeding progress alone is a minor. (USA Hockey 2025-29 Playing Rules, verified 27 July 2026.)

What makes your feet safe is geometry and your own body — the checker has to reach past your skates, past your legs, and around whichever way you are turned, and doing that at speed usually costs them their balance or a penalty. Learn to trap a puck against the inside of your skate and pull it back out to your blade.

- **Kick it to yourself.** Kicking the puck is legal in all zones under NHL rules (**Rule 49.2**); the restrictions are on scoring. You cannot score with a distinct kicking motion, and the same rule states that *"a goal cannot be scored by an attacking player who kicks a puck that deflects into the net off any player, goalkeeper or official."* **But read the clarifiers 49.2 attaches to that**, because they matter for exactly the skill described here — the test is **body versus stick**: *"(ii) A kicked puck that deflects off the **stick** of any player (excluding the goalkeeper's stick) shall be ruled a **good goal**,"* and *"(iii) A goal will be allowed when an attacking player kicks the puck and the puck deflects off his own stick and then into the net."* (A kicked puck that deflects off a **body**, including the goalie's, is no goal.) So kicking a puck from your feet up onto your blade, or forward into space, is a completely legal and very

useful skill — and if it goes off your own blade and in, it counts. Practise it: pull the puck into your feet, kick it forward, catch it on the blade.

- **Use your hips and backside as the barrier**, not your stick. Your stick should be busy handling; your body should be doing the blocking.
- **Do not use your hand.** The instinct when a puck pops up into your feet is to grab it, and that is a penalty. **Rule 67.2** permits you to "*catch the puck out of the air but [you] must immediately place it or knock it down to the ice.*" You get a minor for "closing his hand on the puck" if you catch it and skate with it to avoid a check or gain territory, if you cover it on the ice to keep it from an opponent, or if you pick it up off the ice while play is in progress. Knock it straight down at your feet and play it with your skate or your blade. (Note this is a *penalty*, not merely a stoppage. Note also that knocking it down to a **teammate** is a hand pass, and the test is **where the puck is, not where the players are** — **Rule 79.2**: "*Play will not be stopped for any hand pass by players in their own defending zone. The location of the puck when contacted by either the player making the hand pass or the player receiving the hand pass shall determine the zone it is in.*" See Passing and Receiving.)

The toe drag

Technique	Push the puck out on the forehand to offer it, roll the toe over its far side, drag it back toward your feet
Technique	Loosen the top hand as you roll — the stick is held almost in the fingertips
Key	Re-tightening and rolling the blade back to catch it is the hard part, and where the move is usually lost
Goal	It is a protection move as much as a beat-a-guy move — a failed one leaves the puck in your skates
Read	Use it against a reaching stick, a defender with their weight forward, or to pull the puck around net-front traffic
Never	Use it in a game until you can do it cleanly several times in a row in practice

The **toe drag** is a pull using the very tip (toe) of the blade to draw the puck back toward your feet, usually after pushing it out to bait a stick.

How it works:

1. Push the puck out on your forehand, offering it.

2. Loosen the top hand and roll the blade over the puck so the toe is on the far side of it. At this moment the stick is held almost in the fingertips.
3. Drag the puck back toward your body with the toe.
4. Re-tighten the grip and roll the blade back to catch it — **this is the hard part**, and it is where the move is usually lost.

Why it is a protection move as much as a beat-a-guy move. Dragging the puck *toward your feet* moves it into the safest place you have. Even a failed toe drag often ends with the puck in your skates, where you can kick it back to your stick. That is a much better failure state than most dekes.

When to use it: against a stick that is reaching, against a defender who has committed their weight forward, and in front of the net to pull the puck around traffic before you shoot. Do not use it in a game until you can do it cleanly several times in a row in practice.

Puck Protection

Protection is where possession is actually won and lost. Dekes decide a handful of plays a game; protection decides dozens.

The whole idea in one sentence: **put your body between the checker and the puck, get low and wide so you cannot be moved, and know where the puck is going before you get there.**

Puck on the far side

Position	Puck on the side of your body away from the pressure, with your torso as the wall between them
Never	Let the puck sit on the pressure side — their stick has a shorter distance to travel than yours
Technique	Handle with the outside hand where you can, out toward the toe of the blade, away from the poke-check lane
Position	Keep your blade on the far side of the puck too, so a poke has to go through the puck and your stick
Key	A far-side puck is only available to a player whose hands can operate wide

The foundation. The puck lives on the **side of your body away from the pressure**. If the checker is on your right, the puck is on your left, and your torso is the wall between them.

- If the puck is on the same side as the pressure, you have already lost it — you are relying on your stick to beat their stick, and their stick has a shorter distance to travel.
- Handle it with the outside hand where you can, out toward the toe of the blade, away from the poke-check lane.
- The stick should be on the far side of the puck too, so that a poke has to go through the puck *and* your blade.

This is why hands-away-from-the-body matters so much. A far-side puck is only available to a player whose hands can operate wide.

Wide, low base

Position	Feet wider than shoulder width, knees bent and hips sunk, chest up so you can still see
Never	Stand tall and narrow — it is the reason players get knocked off pucks
Key	Leverage often beats strength in a board battle, and base is the variable you actually control
Action	Keep the feet moving with small choppy steps — a stationary player gets pinned

Standing tall and narrow is the reason players get knocked off pucks. Get:

- **feet wider than shoulder width,**
- **knees bent, hips sunk,** weight low,
- **chest up** so you can still see.

Low and wide is hard to move, because leverage often beats strength in a board battle — a stronger player standing upright will frequently lose to a weaker player who is properly down in their base. Not always, and a large enough strength gap wins anyway; the point is that base is the variable you actually control.

Keep your feet moving. A stationary player gets pinned; a player with momentum can escape along the wall or spin out to the middle. Small choppy steps, not a planted stance.

Back into the checker

Position	Backside and the outside of your hip into the pressure, not your chest
Key	Your back and rear end are the strongest, widest surface you own, and cannot be stripped through the front
Goal	Put shoulder, arm, hip and leg on the pressure side at once — three or four barriers instead of one
Never	Turn to face pressure the instant you receive the puck — that is how players get pinned to the boards
Action	Take the puck facing the wall or facing away, absorb the contact, then spin off
Priority	Never turn your back to a checker arriving at speed near the boards — skates parallel to the wall, forearm and hip, head up

Turn so your **backside and the outside of your hip** are into the pressure, not your chest.

Reasons:

- Your back and rear end are the strongest, widest surface you own.
- Facing away means you cannot be stripped through the front.
- It puts your shoulder, arm, hip and leg all on the pressure side simultaneously — three or four barriers instead of one.

Turning to face pressure the instant you receive the puck is how players get pinned to the boards. Take the puck facing the wall or facing away, absorb the contact, *then* spin off.

Where this stops being puck protection and becomes a safety problem. Everything above is about a checker who is already on you in a low-speed battle. It is **not** advice for a puck race to the wall with a checker arriving at speed. In that situation the rule from Body Contact and Battles → Receiving a Hit Safely overrides everything here: **never turn your back to the boards, and never duck.** Get your **skates parallel to the wall** and take the contact on your **forearm and hip**, head up and chin off your chest. Turning your back to an oncoming checker near the boards is the single behaviour most associated with catastrophic spinal injury in hockey — and it can happen at walking speed. Puck protection is never worth that trade.

The free hand and the arm bar — what is actually legal

Rule	The free hand may fend off an opponent or their stick, but holding, pulling, tugging or grabbing is a holding minor (NHL Rule 56.1)
Rule	You may use your arm in a strength move to block, provided you have body position and are not holding with the hands (NHL Rule 54.2)
Technique	Keep the free hand high on your own shaft and use the bar of forearm and shaft as your blocker
Never	Hang onto an opponent's stick after fending it off
Key	The infraction is holding, not interference — interference concerns a player who does not have the puck
Rule	IIHF wording is substantively identical, and USA Hockey Rule 622 reaches the same place

This is widely misunderstood and worth getting exactly right, because it is the difference between a strong play and a penalty.

What the NHL rulebook says (2025-26):

- **Rule 56.1, "Free Hand":** *"When a free hand is used to hold, pull, tug, grab or physically restrain an opponent from moving freely, this must be penalized as holding. The free hand may be used by a player to 'fend off' an opponent or his stick, but may not be used to hold an opponent's stick or body."*
- **Rule 54.2, Holding:** *"A player is permitted to use his arm in a strength move, by blocking his opponent, provided he has body position and is not using his hands in a holding manner, when doing so."*

What that means for you:

Legal	Penalty
Free hand up on your own shaft, using the stick and forearm as a bar	Grabbing, tugging or pulling the opponent or their stick — holding , a two-minute minor
A stiff arm across as a block , when you have body position	Hooking your arm around them, or clamping onto their stick
Momentarily fending off an opponent's stick with the free hand	Hanging onto the stick after fending it off

The safest habit — and the one recommended here — is to keep the free hand **on your own stick**, high on the shaft, and use the resulting bar of forearm and shaft as your blocker. You get the same physical benefit with none of the officiating risk, and you keep two hands available to move the puck the instant the pressure releases.

Note that the infraction here is **holding**, not interference — interference concerns checking or impeding a player who does *not* have the puck, which is not your situation when you are the puck carrier. Some coaches say "that's interference"; the correct word is holding.

The other rule sets agree, and the IIHF's definition is substantively identical to the NHL's — same test, same permitted use, different house style (the IIHF text says "a Player... their", the NHL "a player... his"). IIHF Official Rulebook 2025/26: *"When a 'free hand' is used to hold, pull, tug, grab or physically restrain an opponent from moving 'freely', this must be penalized as 'holding'. The 'free hand' may be used by a Player to 'fend off' an opponent or their stick but may not be used to hold an opponent's stick or body."* USA Hockey reaches the same place through **Rule 622 - Holding an Opponent**, which defines holding as *"the action of a player wrapping their arms around an opponent or using a free hand to clutch, grab or hold the stick, jersey or body on the opponent... or using a free arm/hand to restrain or impede the opponent's progress"*, penalised as a minor. Verified against the primary rulebook texts on 27 July 2026.

Spinning off pressure

Key	Protection buys time, not a place to live — once you have absorbed the contact, get out
Technique	Spin with your back into the checker and weight low, pushing off the outside edge of the outside skate
Technique	The outside skate is the one further from the side you are turning toward; its outside edge is the little-toe side
Options	Or take a tight turn across their path, so your body stays between them and the puck throughout
Read	Spin the moment you feel them lean in — spin before they commit and they simply follow you
Key	Both moves are edge-work moves before they are hand moves

Protection is a way to buy time, not a place to live. Once you have absorbed the contact, get out.

- **The spin-off / pivot.** With your back into the checker and your weight low, rotate away from them and take the puck with you. The push comes off the **outside edge of the outside skate** — "outside" here is defined relative to the *turn*, not to the checker or the boards: as in Skating, the **outside skate is the one further from the side you are turning toward**, and its **outside edge** is the little-toe side. Turning left, that is the little-toe side of your right blade, and driving against it throws your body left. Their momentum is going into where you were; you are already leaving.
- **The tight turn.** Cut across the checker's path rather than away from it, so that your body stays between them and the puck through the whole turn.
- **Time it against their commitment.** Spin the moment you feel them lean in. If you spin before they commit, they simply follow you.

Both moves are edge-work moves before they are hand moves. See Skating.

Using the boards

- Position** Hip and forearm against the wall, so the checker can only come from one direction
- Never** Take it on your back at the wall — skates parallel, forearm and hip, head up and chin off your chest
- Never** Get square to the boards with your feet planted — that is how you get pinned and lose it to the second forechecker
- Action** Angle yourself so you always have an escape along the wall, and keep the feet moving so you can take it
- Options** The wall is an outlet too — a rim onward around the boards or a reverse back against the flow both win the battle

The boards are a free extra defender, on your side.

- Put your **hip and forearm** against the wall and the checker can only come from one direction. You have halved the problem. **Never your back** — the override earlier in this section governs here too: skates parallel to the wall, forearm and hip, head up and chin off your chest (Body Contact and Battles, which owns this).
- **Do not get square to the boards and stop.** Facing directly into the wall with your feet planted is how you get pinned and lose the puck to the second forechecker.
- Angle yourself so you always have an escape along the wall, and keep the feet moving so you can take it.

- Remember the wall is also an outlet, not just a shield: a **rim** (a hard puck sent onward around the curve of the boards) or a **reverse** (a puck sent back against the direction the pressure is flowing) both count as winning the battle. See Breakouts.

Know your out before you get there

Key	Protection is not a destination — every second you hold the puck, a second checker is arriving
Never	Plan to shield it until something happens — what happens is a turnover
Action	Decide your outlet while still skating to the puck — usually the low support player or the next man arriving
Options	With nobody there, your out is a rim, a reverse, a spin to the middle, or a chip off the wall past the checker
Read	Know where the pressure is coming from, and therefore which side the puck must be on when you arrive
Convention	How long you are expected to hold the puck on the wall is a system decision, not a law — ask your coach

This is the idea that separates players who protect the puck from players who merely survive contact.

Protection is not a destination. Every second you hold the puck under pressure, a second checker is arriving. If your plan is "shield it until something happens," what happens is a turnover.

Decide while you are still skating to the puck:

- Who is my outlet? (Usually the low support player or the next man arriving.)
- If nobody is there, is my out a rim, a reverse, a spin to the middle, or a chip off the wall past the checker?
- Where is the pressure coming from, and therefore which side does the puck need to be on when I arrive?

Answering those three before your stick touches the puck is what scanning is for. A player who scans arrives with a plan and holds the puck for half a second. A player who does not arrives with no plan, protects beautifully for three seconds, and loses it.

This is a good place to name a coaching choice. How long you are *expected* to hold the puck on the wall is a system decision, not a law. Some teams want a quick chip or rim out immediately to avoid any risk; others want you to hang on, draw two checkers, and wait for support to arrive so the exit is with possession. These are genuinely different jobs. Find out which one your coach wants.

Carrying at Speed

This document owns carrying with the puck; Skating owns the stride itself. Read that one for what a good stride is, and this one for what the puck does to it.

Why so many players slow down the moment they get the puck

- Never** Decelerate to a comfortable handling speed on receiving the puck — it hands the defence a free two seconds
- Read** What degrades is your arms driving the stride, your head position, and the width of your feet
- Risk** A dropped head pulls your weight forward off the balls of your feet and shortens your extension
- Key** Speed is the most valuable thing you have, and good hands are meant to cost you none of it

Handling and skating compete for attention, and the stride is what gets dropped. Hence the most common sight in amateur hockey: a player receives a pass in stride, immediately decelerates to a comfortable handling speed, and hands the defence a free two seconds. Specifically, what degrades is that your arms stop driving the stride because they are working the stick, your head drops (which pulls your weight forward off the balls of your feet and shortens your extension), and your feet narrow, which weakens your edges. **Speed is the most valuable thing you have, and the whole point of good hands is that they cost you none of it.**

Carry, don't dribble, when you are moving

Never	Stickhandle every step at full stride
Position	Puck slightly ahead of you and slightly to the side, usually on the forehand where your blade sits
Technique	Push the puck out, take two or three hard strides, catch up to it, push it out again
Action	Touch it just enough to keep it honest — a small dribble every few strides so a poke cannot be timed
Key	A few big pushes and powerful strides beat continuous fussy handling every time

At full stride you should not be stickhandling every step. Instead:

- **Put the puck slightly ahead of you and slightly to the side**, usually on the forehand, out where your blade naturally sits during a stride. Ahead means you are skating toward it, not dragging it; to the side means it is not in the way of your feet.
- **Take real strides.** Push the puck out, take two or three hard strides, catch up to it, push it out again. A few big pushes and powerful strides will beat continuous fussy handling every time.
- **Touch it just enough to keep it honest** — a small dribble every few strides so a defender cannot time a poke, then back to skating.

Pushing it into space and skating onto it

Key	You and the puck do not have to travel together
Action	Push the puck into the space you are going to be in, then skate onto it
Options	Chip it off the boards past a defender, or slip it past their skates and take the other route around
Goal	Beat a stick that is sealing your handling lane — the puck goes past it, and so do you, separately
Key	You do not need hands to beat a defender if the puck can go one side and you can go the other

The advanced version, and the one that keeps your speed highest: **you and the puck do not have to travel together.**

- Push the puck into the space you are going to be in, then skate onto it. This is how you beat a stick that is sealing your handling lane — the puck goes past the stick, and so do you, separately.
- Chip it off the boards past a defender and skate around them to collect it. The wall makes the pass for you.
- Slip it between or past a defender's skates and take the other route around them.

This is also the honest answer to a lot of 1-on-1s: you do not need hands to beat the defender if the puck can go one side and you can go the other.

Head up while carrying

Key	Carrying is cheap in attention — a stride spent looking at the puck is a stride not spent reading the defence
Risk	If you can only look up when you slow down, you will only make decisions when you are slow
Action	Practise one-handed carries — top hand only for a stride or two, which frees the other arm to drive
Action	Do your crossover, transition and tight-turn drills with a puck at least half the time
Goal	Speed across the blue line forces defenders to retreat; a carrier who decelerates at the line is easy to defend

The reason to carry rather than dribble at speed is that carrying is cheap in attention. Every stride you spend looking at the puck is a stride you did not spend reading the defence. If you can only look up when you slow down, you will only make decisions when you are slow.

Two habits that pay here: **practise one-handed carries** — top hand only for a stride or two, which frees the other arm to drive — and the one instruction that belongs on the skating side of the seam, **do your crossover, transition and tight-turn drills with a puck at least half the time** (Skating), because that is how you will use them. Where all of this matters most is on zone entries: speed across the blue line forces defenders to retreat, and a carrier who decelerates at the line makes the entry easy to defend.

Deception and Dekes

The principle: a deke works on what you show, not what you do

- Key** A deke is a false signal — defenders commit on your hips, shoulders, head, eyes, weight and blade angle
- Action** Commit fully — the fake has to look exactly like the real thing right up to the last instant
- Never** Fake with your hands alone — a neutral body gives the defender no false information
- Action** Accelerate out of it — the move creates the gap, your legs collect it

A defender cannot wait to see what you actually do — by then it is too late for them. So they read your **signals**: your hips, your shoulders, your head, your eyes, your weight, your blade angle. They commit based on those signals.

That is the whole mechanism. **A deke is a false signal.** You show one thing, they commit to it, and you do the other. A defender who commits the wrong way is already beaten, and everything after that is just skating.

Three consequences follow, and they matter more than any individual move:

1. **Commitment sells it.** A half-hearted head turn or a lazy shoulder dip fools nobody. The fake has to look exactly like the real thing right up to the last instant. If you would not have believed it, neither will they.
2. **A fake with only your hands is not a fake.** Moving the puck left while your body stays neutral gives the defender no false information — they read your body, and your body said nothing. Your head, shoulders, hips and feet have to join in.
3. **You must accelerate out of it.** A deke that is not followed by a burst just gives the defender time to recover. The move creates the gap; your legs collect it.

The four channels of deception

Options Head and eyes — a sharp, committed head turn, or a look-off at an option you will not use

Options Shoulders and hips — a weight shift or shoulder dip, the most convincing because they carry real weight

Options Stick and puck — blade angle and windup, faking a shot or a pass

Options Feet and edges — change of pace, stutter steps, a crossover started and abandoned

Key Change of pace is the most underused fake in the game

- **Head and eyes.** A sharp, committed head turn. Look-offs — staring at a passing option you are not going to use.
- **Shoulders and hips.** A weight shift or shoulder dip. These carry real physical weight, so they are the most convincing.
- **Stick and puck.** Blade angle and windup — faking a shot or a pass.
- **Feet and edges.** Change of pace, stutter steps, a crossover started and abandoned. Change of pace is the most underused fake in the game.

The moves

Options Fake shot — load exactly as for a real shot, then pull the puck around or pass; only works if your shot is a threat

Options Toe drag — offer the puck to a reaching stick and pull it back inside the reach, best against an early poker

Options Inside-out — threaten the middle so they shift to protect it, then cut back to the outside

Options Outside-in — drive wide so they open their hips to the boards, then cut back underneath into the slot

Options The slip — push the puck past them on one side, skate the other, and collect it behind them

Risk Slip forward, not out of trouble — a failed slip in your own zone leaves a loose puck in front of your net

Options Between the legs — worth it only when your legs are the route to the far side, or the puck must come from behind you

Key The head and shoulder fake is the cheapest, safest, most transferable move — if you learn one, learn that

The fake shot. Load into a shooting position — weight transfer, blade drawn back, hands and shoulders exactly where they go for a real shot — then don't shoot. Defenders drop into a block or turn their hips; goalies commit to a save. Then pull the puck around them or pass. It works because the shot is genuinely threatened, so it only works if your actual shot is a threat. See Shooting.

The toe drag. Covered under Stickhandling in Tight. As a deke, it works by offering the puck to a reaching stick and pulling it back inside the reach. Best against a defender who pokes early.

Inside-out. Attack toward the middle of the ice, get the defender to shift their weight to that side to protect the dangerous area, then cut back to the outside. Effective because defenders are coached to protect the middle first, so the inside threat is always believed.

Outside-in. The reverse: drive hard wide as though you are going around them, get them to open their hips and turn toward the boards, then cut back underneath them into the middle. This is the move that creates the best scoring chances, because it finishes with you in the slot.

The slip (or skate-through). You and the puck take different routes. Push the puck past the defender on one side — through their feet, under their stick, or off the boards — skate around the other side, and pick it up behind them. It defeats a defender who is focused on the puck rather than on you, and it costs you almost no speed. A failed slip usually becomes a loose puck rather than a clean strip — **but where that loose puck ends up is the whole risk assessment, so qualify it by zone.** In the offensive zone or the neutral zone, a loose puck behind a defender is often still a race you can win, and the play is cheap. In **your own zone** it is not cheap at all: a slip that fails there leaves a loose puck in front of your net with you on the wrong side of the defender, which is a scoring chance. Slip forward; do not slip out of trouble.

Between the legs. Moving the puck through your **own** legs from front to back or side to side. Genuinely useful in two situations: when a checker is on one side and your legs are the only route to the far side, and when your back is to the pressure and the puck needs to get from behind you to in front. Outside those two cases it is a low-percentage flourish. Judge it honestly: if you would not attempt it in practice with someone checking you, do not attempt it in a game.

The head and shoulder fake. The cheapest, safest, most transferable move in hockey. Sharp head turn one way, shoulder dips with it, weight visibly shifts — then push off the loaded edge and go the other way. It costs nothing, it cannot be poke-checked, and it works on defenders at every level. If you learn one move from this section, learn this one.

Over-deking

Never Use four fancy fakes where one convincing one would do

Risk Every extra move is another moment the puck spends exposed and another chance for a stick to arrive

Read If you find yourself on your third move, the play has already gone wrong

More moves is not better. Every extra move is another moment the puck spends exposed and another chance for a stick to arrive. The best deceptive players use one convincing fake and accelerate, not four fancy ones. If you find yourself on your third move, the play has already gone wrong.

Beating a Defender 1-on-1

Attack a shoulder, not the chest — and know which shoulder you are choosing

Never Skate straight at their chest — they stay square, keep both lanes closed and stand you up

Goal Make them turn — the moment their hips turn, one lane exists that did not before

Options The outside shoulder opens the lane back underneath them, but it is where a well-coached defenceman wants you

Options The inside shoulder forces them to defend the dangerous ice, but you are attacking into help

Read Outside when you have a speed advantage; inside when you do not, or when they have already shaded you wide

Convention Which shoulder is not settled coaching doctrine — ask your coach which they want from your position

The one thing every source agrees on is the negative: **do not skate straight at their chest**. A defender you attack head-on stays square, keeps both lanes closed and simply stands you up. Skate at a shoulder, so they have to turn — and the moment their hips turn, one lane exists that did not before.

Which shoulder is a genuine choice, not a settled rule, and the two options do different things:

- **Attacking the outside shoulder** (the one nearer the boards) forces them to open their hips toward the wall, which opens the lane back underneath them into the middle. It also puts you on an angle where a change of direction is a small movement for you and a large one for them. The catch is that **this is where a well-coached defenceman wants you**. The standard defensive instruction for a 1-on-1 on the wing is to line up so that *"your outside shoulder should more or less line up with his inside shoulder. This encourages him to try to beat you to the outside, where he's less of a threat"* (Hockey Player Tips (<https://hockeyplayertips.blogspot.com/2008/04/how-to-play-defence-one-on-one.html>)). Against a defender doing that properly, driving the outside shoulder is taking the option they offered you.
- **Attacking the inside shoulder** — driving at the middle of the ice — forces them to defend the dangerous ice first, which is what they are coached to protect above all else, so the threat is always believed. That is the same mechanism as the **inside-out** move described under Deception and Dekes above. The cost is that you are attacking into help: the middle is where the other defender and the backchecker are.

How to choose. Take the outside shoulder when you have a speed advantage and want to beat them wide or cut back underneath. Take the inside shoulder when you do not have the speed to win a wide race, when you have support arriving in the middle, or when the defender has already committed to shading you outside. Either way, the point is to make them turn — and then to take the lane their turn opened, not the one you planned before the rush started.

Note: neither choice is settled coaching doctrine, and the published material is stronger on the defensive side of this matchup than the attacking side. Ask your coach which they want from your position.

Change speed, not just direction

Key	Defenders defend direction well and timing badly
Action	Slow down to bait, then explode — a defender who has just slowed cannot re-accelerate backwards quickly
Read	Attack while they are transitioning from backwards to forwards, or moving laterally
Never	Use straight-line speed every rush — it leaves the defender only one problem to solve

Defenders defend direction well. They are coached to it, they practise it, and their backwards skating is built for it. What they defend badly is **timing**.

- **Slow down to bait, then explode.** A defender maintaining a gap has to match your speed. If you decelerate, they must decelerate or run into you — and a defender who has just slowed down cannot re-accelerate backwards quickly. Go the instant they settle.
- **Attack while they are transitioning.** The moment they pivot from backwards to forwards, or move laterally, they are momentarily unable to change direction again.
- **Vary it.** Straight-line speed on every rush is the easiest thing in the world to defend, because the defender only has to solve one problem.

Use their momentum

- Key** A defender who has committed weight in one direction cannot recall it
- Read** If they lunge or reach with the stick, their weight is forward — go around them, not through them
- Read** If they turn their hips to the wall, the middle is open behind them
- Action** Against a hard backwards skater, a sudden stop leaves them retreating into space you no longer occupy

A defender who has committed weight in one direction cannot recall it. Attack *into* the space their commitment created:

- If they lunge or reach with the stick, their weight is forward — go around them, not through them.
- If they turn their hips to the wall, the middle is open behind them.
- If they are skating backwards hard to maintain gap, a sudden stop leaves them retreating into space you no longer occupy.

The honest point

- Key** Most 1-on-1s are won by change of speed and body position, not by hands
- Action** If you have a step, just skate — skating right at the defenceman to try a move is how you get stood up
- Goal** Creating a chance, not beating the defender — a deke leaving you no speed and no angle has achieved nothing
- Read** A drive wide that beats nobody but draws two defenders and opens a pass to the middle has achieved a great deal

Most 1-on-1s are won by speed change and body position, not by hands.

Watch closely and you will see that the majority of successful beats are: a defender flat-footed and beaten wide by pure pace, a defender caught in transition, or a puck chipped into space with the attacker skating around to it. Hands are the smallest contributor.

Two practical consequences:

- **If you have a step, just skate.** Coaches see this constantly — a player with a clean breakaway lane who skates *right at* the defenceman to try a move, and gets stood up. If you have speed, use it. (What to do once you are clear and it is only you and the goalie — approach speed, deception, the moves, and shoot-or-deke — is in Shooting, "Breakaways and Shootouts".)
- **Beating one defender is not the goal; creating a chance is.** A deke that beats the defender but leaves you with no speed and no angle has achieved nothing. A simple drive wide that beats nobody but draws two defenders and opens a pass to the middle has achieved a great deal.

When *Not* to Stickhandle

Good hands are a tool for when there is no better option. Reaching for them when there *is* a better option is the most expensive habit in amateur hockey.

In your own defensive zone

- Never** Stickhandle in your own defensive zone — a turnover here is a scoring chance immediately, with no recovery time
- Action** Get the puck moving — pass it, rim it, reverse it, or put it off the glass and out
- Key** Nobody has ever been criticised for a clean, boring defensive-zone exit

A turnover here becomes a scoring chance immediately, and there is no recovery time. Get the puck moving: pass it, rim it, reverse it, or if nothing is on, put it off the glass and out. Nobody has ever been criticised for a clean, boring defensive-zone exit. See Breakouts and Risk Management.

Through the middle of the ice

- Never** Dangle through the middle of your own end or the neutral zone — high cost, low reward
- Risk** The middle holds the most defenders, a lost puck goes straight to the slot, and no boards help you
- Options** Carry through the middle when it is genuinely open — carrying is not stickhandling

The middle is where the most defenders are, where a lost puck goes straight to the slot, and where you have no boards to help you. Dangling through the middle of your own end or the neutral zone is a high-cost, low-reward bet. Carry through the middle when it is genuinely open; do not *stickhandle* through it.

When a simple pass is available

- Never** Dangle when a pass was on — the most common amateur error in the game
- Key** A pass moves the puck faster than any player can skate and does not expose it to a stick check
- Action** Look for the pass first, and only then consider the move
- Priority** A pass to a teammate in a worse position usually still beats a move against a defender in a good one

This is the most common amateur error in the game: dangling when a pass was on. A pass moves the puck faster than any player can skate, it does not expose the puck to a stick check, and it moves the defence more than a deke does. If a teammate is open, the pass is almost always the better play — and a pass to a teammate in a worse position is still usually better than a move against a defender in a good one.

The habit to build: **look for the pass first, and only then consider the move.** Not the other way around.

Against multiple defenders

- Never** Try to beat two players — pretending otherwise is how a 2-on-2 becomes a rush the other way
- Options** Pass to the teammate the second defender's arrival has left open
- Options** Chip the puck into the space behind them
- Options** Protect it, take the contact, and wait for support

You can beat one player. You cannot beat two, and pretending otherwise is how a 2-on-2 becomes a rush the other way. When a second defender is arriving:

- pass to the teammate their arrival has left open,
- chip the puck into space behind them,
- or protect it, take the contact, and wait for support.

When you are the last player back

- Never** Try a move when losing the puck means an odd-man rush against you — always
- Convention** How much individual carrying a team wants varies enormously — some coaches want the first available pass, every time
- Convention** Some want wingers attacking 1-on-1 on the wall; others want everything chipped behind the defence for a forecheck
- Convention** The default assumed here is a possession-oriented breakout with a 2-1-2 forecheck — ask your coach

If losing the puck means an odd-man rush against you, the move is off. Always.

A coaching choice, named: how much individual puck carrying a team wants varies enormously. Some coaches want defencemen to skate the puck out of the zone whenever the lane is there; others want the first available pass, every time, with no exceptions. Some want wingers to attack 1-on-1 on the wall; others want everything chipped behind the defence for a forecheck. The default assumption here is a possession-oriented breakout with a **2-1-2 forecheck**, but the honest answer is that this is your coach's call. Ask.

Handling Bad Pucks and Playing Your Position

Most pucks you receive in a real game are imperfect, and handling them well contributes more to your possession numbers than any deke. **The full treatment of receiving — giving a target, cushioning the puck, killing a bounce, taking a puck out of your feet, and the first touch — belongs to Passing and Receiving, which owns that material.** Read it there rather than here.

The three points that are specifically puck-control rather than receiving, and that are worth repeating on this side:

- **A bad puck needs a cupped blade and a soft draw-back — bouncing, on edge or flat, the cup is the same.** It is the *open* blade that a puck ski-jumps over. What changes is the touch count: **let a bouncing or rolling puck settle before you do anything with it** — one extra beat to flatten it is faster than chasing your own deflection, and trying to pass or shoot a puck that is still on edge is the commonest error there is.
- **A puck in your skates is an asset, not a loss.** Trap it against the inside of a skate blade and pull it out to your stick, or kick it forward — legal in all zones, with the limits only on scoring, as set out under Stickhandling in Tight above. Practise it off-ice: puck behind you, pull it into your feet, kick it forward, collect it in front. It is the single most useful recovery skill there is.
- **A backhand puck under pressure is often the *right* puck.** If the checker is on your forehand side, the backhand is the far side, and the far side is where the puck belongs. Cup the backhand as hard as you cup the forehand — an open backhand blade lets the puck roll straight up and over — and remember that backhand control is mostly the same top-hand wrist roll you already trained.

What each position actually needs

Key	The underlying skills are the same; the situations that demand them are not
Technique	Defencemen — backwards and lateral handling, head-up handling while walking the line, retrievals with your back to pressure
Priority	For a defenceman, protection beats deception — beating a forechecker in your own end has a catastrophic failure mode
Technique	Wingers — wall protection above all, the 50-50 puck on the half-wall, carrying at speed, tight hands in the slot
Technique	Centres — hold the puck just long enough to move a defender, then release it; you almost always have options
Never	Dangle as a centre — centres who dangle are usually centres who forgot they had three teammates

The underlying skills are the same; the situations that demand them are not, and the full job descriptions live in the position documents.

- **Defencemen** need backwards and lateral handling, tight head-up handling while *walking the line* at the offensive blue line, and above all **retrievals with your back to pressure** — going back for a dumped puck with a **forechecker** (an opponent pressuring you in your own end) bearing down. Protection beats deception here: beating a forechecker 1-on-1 in your own end is a spectacular play with a catastrophic failure mode. See Defender.
- **Wingers** need wall protection above everything — winning the **50-50 puck** (a loose puck neither team controls, that either could win) on the half-wall is the defining physical skill of the position — plus carrying at speed without slowing, the 1-on-1 on the outside, and tight hands in the slot. See Winger.
- **Centres** need handling *with support around them*: you almost always have options, so the job is to hold the puck just long enough to move a defender and then release it. Centres who dangle are usually centres who forgot they had three teammates. See Center.

How to Practise

Puck handling is the one hockey skill you can meaningfully improve without ice. Take the opportunity.

Kit

- Action** Get a smooth surface — a shooting pad or plastic tiles is the single most valuable purchase
- Options** A synthetic off-ice puck is the best general-purpose choice, designed to slide on rough surfaces
- Options** A golf or tennis ball is free, bouncy, brutal, and builds fast hands
- Never** Train exclusively with a weighted puck or stick — you build a stroke that only works with weight
- Read** A stick feels long in shoes and a puck feels heavier off-ice, which is why off-ice pucks are slightly lighter

Very little: **a smooth surface** (a shooting pad or plastic tiles — the single most valuable purchase), and **something to handle**. In rough order of realism: a real puck on a slick pad; a synthetic off-ice puck or biscuit, which is the best general-purpose choice because it is designed to slide on rough surfaces; a weighted stickhandling ball for driveways; or a golf or tennis ball, which is free, bouncy, brutal, and builds fast hands. A weighted puck or stick is optional for strength work — never train exclusively with it, or you build a stroke that only works with weight.

Off-ice adjustments. On skates you are a couple of inches taller, so your stick feels long in shoes, and a standard puck feels heavier off-ice because of the friction — which is why purpose-made off-ice pucks are slightly lighter. See Equipment.

Little and often beats occasionally and long

- Convention** Ten to fifteen focused minutes every day builds better hands than two hours once a week
- Key** That is coaching guidance, not a measured finding — no controlled comparison of the two schedules is cited here
- Action** Make it frictionless — leave the pad and a ball where you walk past them
- Key** The session you actually do beats the session you planned

Ten to fifteen focused minutes every day builds better hands than two hours once a week. This is near-universal coaching advice, given in this form by several of the sources listed below — but it is coaching guidance rather than a measured finding, and no controlled comparison

of the two schedules is cited here. It is consistent with how motor skills are generally understood to consolidate, which is why it is worth following. Skating makes the same recommendation about edge work in the same hedged terms.

Make it frictionless: leave the pad and a ball where you walk past them. The session you actually do beats the session you planned.

Progressive difficulty

Action	Climb the ladder rather than repeating the bottom rung
Technique	Stationary slow eyes down, then eyes up, then fast eyes up, then moving, then unstable, then constrained
Technique	Then weighted, then back to normal for the contrast, then contested keep-away against another person
Key	Nothing but that last rung exposes what you cannot really do

Every drill has a ladder, and the point is to climb it rather than repeat the bottom rung:

stationary slow with eyes down (learn the shape) → **stationary slow with eyes up** (learn the feel) → **stationary fast, eyes up** → **moving** (walking, then running on the spot, then around the pad) → **unstable** (one leg, balance board) → **constrained** (through obstacles, inside a taped box, around your own feet) → **weighted**, then back to normal for the contrast → **contested**, keep-away against another person. Nothing but that last rung exposes what you cannot really do.

A starter set of drills

- Action** Soft touch — fast, tiny back-and-forth with minimal arm movement, cupping both ways
- Action** Wide reach — puck as far to one side as you can, then the other, releasing the bottom hand to extend
- Action** Around the body — front, both sides, behind the heels, then quick diagonal transfers
- Action** Figure 8 around two objects two to six feet apart; also upright, to train pushing the puck away and pulling it back
- Action** The yo-yo — push out on the forehand, pull back with the toe, push out to the side, pull back again
- Action** Human figure 8 — move the puck around and between your own feet
- Action** Kick-pass — puck behind you, pull it into your feet, kick it forward, collect it in front
- Key** Do all of them with your eyes somewhere else — that is the only version that counts

- **Soft touch** — fast, tiny back-and-forth with minimal arm movement, cupping both ways.
- **Wide reach** — puck as far to one side as you can, then the other; release the bottom hand to extend further.
- **Around the body** — front, both sides, behind the heels, then quick diagonal transfers between those zones.
- **Figure 8** — around two objects two to six feet apart; also try it upright (objects in front of you rather than beside) to train moving the puck away and pulling it back in.
- **The yo-yo** — push the puck out on the forehand, pull it back with the toe, push it out to the side, pull it back again. This is the toe drag and the pull-in habit in one drill.
- **Human figure 8** — move the puck around and between your own feet. Trains the in-tight and in-your-feet control described under Stickhandling in Tight.
- **Kick-pass** — puck behind you, pull it into your feet, kick it forward, collect it in front.

Plus the head-up drills already listed under Head Up — the mine field, the weave, reading text off a wall, and two-player keep-away. Those are not a separate set; they are these same movements done with your eyes somewhere else, which is the only version that counts.

Bridge it to the ice

- Key** Off-ice hands are not on-ice hands until you have used them under pressure
- Action** In every practice, deliberately spend time doing the same movements on skates
- Action** Get into small-area games — keep-away, cross-ice, anything confined
- Goal** Small areas force the tight handling and protection that matter, at game speed, against real sticks

Off-ice hands are not on-ice hands until you have used them under pressure. In every practice, deliberately spend some time doing the same movements on skates, and get into **small-area games** — keep-away, cross-ice, anything confined. Small areas force the tight handling and protection that matter, at game speed, against real sticks. See Practice and Development.

Common Mistakes

- **Hip lock.** Top hand welded to the hip. It caps your reach, makes the puck live directly in front of the checker, and makes real puck protection physically impossible.
- **Squeezing the stick.** A tight bottom hand is the number one cause of pucks bouncing off the blade, and a hand that squeezes cannot feel — which means you cannot play head up.
- **An uncupped blade.** The puck rolls up and flips over. Cup it on the forehand *and* the backhand.
- **Staring at the puck.** Locks you out of every tactical idea in hockey and gets you hit. Build feel first; the eyes follow.
- **Side-to-side only.** A rhythm a defender can read, and no front-to-back range means no toe drag, no pull-in and no protection behind the body.
- **Only handling in front of you.** You need the full arc around your body — the far side is where protection happens.
- **Standing tall in a battle.** Narrow feet and a high centre of gravity is why players get knocked off pucks. Get wide, get low.
- **Turning to face pressure on the wall.** In a low-speed battle, get your hips and backside between the checker and the puck, absorb it, then spin off — facing up into the checker gets you pinned. **But never turn your back to a checker arriving at speed near the boards:** skates parallel to the wall, forearm and hip, head up. That one is a safety rule, not a possession one — see Body Contact and Battles.

- **Protecting with no plan.** Shielding beautifully for three seconds while a second checker arrives is a slow-motion turnover. Know your out before you get there.
 - **Grabbing with the free hand.** Fending off a stick is legal; holding, pulling or tugging is a minor. Keep the hand on your own shaft.
 - **Slowing down the instant you get the puck.** Carry it ahead and to the side and keep striding; the whole point of good hands is that they cost no speed.
 - **Half-hearted fakes.** A fake that would not have fooled you will not fool them. Commit fully, or do not bother.
 - **Hand-only dekes.** Moving the puck without moving your head, shoulders or feet gives the defender no false information at all.
 - **Over-deking.** Three moves where one would do. Every extra move is another second the puck is exposed.
 - **Dangling when a pass was on.** The most common and most expensive error in amateur hockey. Look for the pass first.
 - **Dangling in your own end or through the middle.** Highest cost, lowest reward area on the ice.
 - **Neglecting the backhand.** Half the game, trained at a tenth of the rate — and under pressure it is usually the *correct* side, because it is the far side.
 - **Practising in long, rare sessions.** Fifteen minutes a day beats two hours a week — coaching consensus rather than a measured finding, but consistent everywhere.
 - **Believing the space between your feet is legally protected.** It is not — no rulebook reserves it. But do not swing the other way and assume a stick in there is legal until you fall: it is **tripping** if it brings you down (NHL Rule 57.1), **hooking** with no fall at all if it restrains or impedes you (Rules 55.1 and 56.1), and **under USA Hockey Rule 639 a loss of balance is enough** — its Standard of Play names the can-opener specifically, penalising a stick between the legs that causes "a loss of balance **or impedes the progress**" of the opponent. The protection you actually rely on is geometric, and it is real, but do not stand there waiting for a whistle.
 - **Treating "attack the outside shoulder" as a law.** It is one approach, and it is the one a well-coached defenceman is trying to steer you into. Choose the shoulder deliberately.
-

Key Takeaways

1. **Top hand does the work, bottom hand guides — loosely — and both stay away from your body.** The bottom hand is not idle, but it must not grip; a tight bottom hand is the number one cause of pucks bouncing off the blade. Hands pinned to the hip make puck protection structurally impossible, because there is no far side to move the puck to.
 2. **Hold it like a bird and cup the blade.** A loose grip and a blade angled over the puck fix the large majority of "the puck keeps bouncing off my stick" problems.
 3. **Head up is the highest-value habit in the game.** Develop it by feeling the puck — learn the toe, middle and heel by touch — not by forcing yourself to look up.
 4. **Handle around your whole body, front-to-back as well as side-to-side.** Side-to-side alone is a rhythm, and rhythms get read.
 5. **Puck on the far side, base wide and low, backside into the checker.** That is puck protection in one line, and it wins more possessions than every deke you will ever learn. **The one exception overrides it absolutely:** never turn your back to a checker arriving at speed near the boards — skates parallel to the wall, forearm and hip, head up (Body Contact and Battles).
 6. **Know your out before you get there.** Protection buys a second, not a minute. Decide who you are passing to — or where you are rimming it — before your stick touches the puck.
 7. **The free hand may fend off, but not hold.** Fending off an opponent's stick is legal (NHL Rule 56.1); grabbing, pulling or tugging is a holding minor. Keep the hand on your own shaft.
 8. **Do not slow down when you get the puck.** Push it slightly ahead and to the side, take real strides, and let the puck and your body take separate routes when a stick is in the way.
 9. **A deke works on what you show, not what you do** — so commit fully, involve your head and shoulders, use one fake rather than four, and accelerate out of it.
 10. **Most 1-on-1s are won by change of speed and body position, not hands** — and the most common amateur error of all is dangling when a pass was on.
-

Passing and Receiving

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

Puck Handling

Puck Support and Spacing

Risk Management

Scanning and Anticipation

Breakouts

UK and England Rules

Overview

Passing is the skill that makes every system on the ice actually work. A breakout, a forecheck, a power play — all of them are just diagrams until someone can put the puck on a moving teammate's blade and that teammate can control it in one touch.

This document covers both halves. The passing half is well taught. The receiving half — giving a target, cushioning the puck, and taking the first touch into space rather than into your feet — is the half almost nobody practises, and it is the half that loses more pucks.

A Note on Language

Terms used throughout, defined here so the document stands alone:

- **Tape-to-tape** — a pass that arrives flat on the receiver's stick blade, on the taped part, ready to be played immediately.
- **Blade** — the flat part of your stick that touches the ice. Its **heel** is the end nearest the shaft; its **toe** is the far end.
- **Cupping the blade** — tilting the top edge of the blade slightly forward over the puck, so the face is closed rather than open to the sky.
- **The slot** — the dangerous scoring area in front of the net, between the two faceoff circles. The **high slot** is from the faceoff dots up to the top of the circles; the **goalmouth** is the

immediate net front.

- **Half-wall** — the boards area roughly level with the faceoff dot, between the corner and the point.
- **The point** — the area just inside the offensive blue line where defencemen normally stand.
- **Strong side** — the side of the ice the puck is on. **Weak side** — the other side.
- **Checker** — the opponent currently pressuring you.
- **Support** — a teammate positioning themselves to receive a pass from you.

Why Passing Beats Carrying

Key	The puck moves faster than any skater can — that single fact is the whole argument
Goal	Force four or five opponents to re-read the ice and re-choose their assignment
Action	Move it, then move yourself — your first thought should be "who is open", not "where can I skate"
Options	Carry when nobody is open, when the defender's gap control is poor, or when you need to buy time for support
Risk	Carrying concentrates the risk on one player; a completed pass makes the checker's work irrelevant
Never	Turn the shot-speed and skating-speed records into a ratio for passing — pass speed is not published anywhere

The puck moves faster than any skater can. That single fact is the whole argument, and three things follow from it: a pass forces four or five opponents to re-read the ice and re-choose their assignment, where a carry lets them keep the same reference point and skate with it; a team that moves the puck well beats a team of better individual skaters, because you cannot out-skate five people but you can out-pass them; and carrying concentrates the risk on one player while a completed pass makes the checker's work irrelevant.

*(No figure is given here for how far a pass travels in the time it takes to skate a stride, because **pass** speed is not published anywhere. NHL EDGE publishes shot speed and skating speed but has no pass-speed statistic, and the one published study of NHL passing using the league's own tracking data — Radke et al., LINHAC 2023, listed in this document's sources — does not report one either. It mentions "a puck traveling at speeds between 30 and 100 MPH" only as a worked example while discussing the tracking system's positional accuracy, not as a measurement of*

passes, so it is not quoted as one here. The general gap is published, at least for shots: NHL EDGE tracking has the hardest recorded shot of the tracking era at **104.69 mph** — Tage Thompson, 26 October 2024 — against a top recorded skating speed of **24.82 mph**, Miles Wood, 10 April 2025 (Colorado at Vancouver; NHL.com reported it the following day). Those are the two extremes of each, and a pass is much slower than a shot, so do not turn them into a ratio for passing. The argument does not need a number — be sceptical of anyone who quotes you one.)

None of this means never carry. Carrying is right when nobody is open, when you are attacking a defender with poor gap control, or when you need to buy time for support to arrive — see Puck Handling. The default, though, is *move it, then move yourself*. If your first thought with the puck is "where can I skate," you are a beat behind the player whose first thought is "who is open."

The Pass Types

Each type below gets the same treatment: how to do it, when to use it, and what it costs you when it goes wrong.

Flat / sweep pass — the fundamental

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| Technique | Start the puck near the heel with your bottom hand mid-shaft, and cup the blade over it |
| Technique | Sweep, do not slap — the puck rolls heel to toe and leaves off the toe |
| Technique | Transfer your weight from the back leg through your hips toward your front foot |
| Technique | Follow through with the blade pointing at the target, finishing low around knee height |
| Read | Use it as the default whenever the lane is clear and the receiver can be reached along the ice |
| Risk | Low, and the risk is lane selection rather than technique — a clear lane is a precondition |

Mechanics.

- **Start the puck near the heel** of the blade, with your bottom hand roughly mid-shaft for leverage.

- **Cup the blade** over the puck. A cupped blade keeps the puck flat and stops it skipping or bouncing off the face; an open blade sends it up on edge.
- **Sweep, do not slap.** The bottom hand pushes the puck along the ice in one continuous motion and the puck rolls **heel to toe**, leaving off the toe. The passing article this document leans on puts both halves of that plainly: "*Your bottom hand 'sweeps' the ice. Do not slap at the puck,*" and "*pass the puck from the middle or heel of the blade — the player and the stick blade are stronger — the passes are flat, crisp, and the puck can be spun flat from heel to toe.*" **What that source is, once, so the later citations to it are read correctly:** a two-page "Coaches' Playbook" column by **John Hamre**, an assistant coach with the U.S. National Team Development Program, in the January 2002 issue of *American Hockey*, USA Hockey's own magazine. It is one named coach writing in a governing body's magazine — a good source for passing mechanics, which is all it is used for here, and **not** a USA Hockey playing rule or an official curriculum. Slapping at the puck is the single most common cause of an inaccurate pass, because contact becomes a single instant rather than a guided path.
- **Transfer your weight** from the back leg through your hips toward your front foot as you release. Power comes from your body, not your arms.
- **Follow through pointing the blade at the target**, finishing low — roughly knee height — with the blade still near the ice. **Follow-through is a cue, not the mechanism.** The puck leaves on the angle the blade face is pointing at separation; finishing at the target is how a human being reliably produces that angle, because nobody can meter a blade angle deliberately. Shooting owns that reconciliation and states it the same way — and it is the reason this document can also say, of a one-touch pass, that "the blade face at the moment of contact *is* the pass". Same physics, two different cues for it.

When to use it. As the default. Any time the lane is clear and the receiver can be reached along the ice, this is the pass. It is the easiest pass to receive, which is the point.

Risk. Low, and the risk is almost entirely lane selection rather than technique — a flat pass through a stick or a skate is a turnover, so a clear lane is a precondition.

Saucer pass — over the obstacle, flat on landing

Technique	Open the face of the blade slightly, like a wedge
Technique	Sweep heel to toe, rolling your wrists upward and drawing the blade toward your body to put spin on it
Technique	Land it a few feet short of the receiver's blade so it settles and slides the last stretch
Read	Use it when it is the only option — a stick lying in the lane, or a pass that must cross a body
Never	Saucer when a flat pass is available — air is a difficulty you are adding on purpose
Risk	Moderate to high — one that lands on edge is worse than no pass, because the receiver commits and then loses it

Mechanics.

- **Open the face of the blade** slightly, like a wedge.
- **Start on the heel and sweep across to the toe**, rolling your wrists upward and releasing off the toe.
- **The release generates spin.** Spin is what stops the puck wobbling and what makes it land flat rather than tumbling on edge. Drawing the blade slightly toward your body as the puck rolls heel-to-toe is what puts the spin on.
- **Land it a few feet short of the receiver's blade.** A saucer that is still airborne when it reaches the stick is nearly uncatchable. Aim for it to settle and slide the last stretch.
- Height scales with the obstacle. Over a stick in tight it needs only a few inches of air; over a long distance it can travel far higher.

When to use it. When it is the *only* option — a defender's stick is lying in the lane, or the pass must cross a body. The classic uses are cross-slot passes in the offensive zone and passes across a defender's stick during a two-on-one rush.

Risk. Moderate to high. Too much lift and it flies over the receiver's blade; too little and it is a rolling puck for the checker. A saucer pass that lands on edge is worse than no pass at all, because the receiver commits to it and then loses it. **Do not use a saucer when a flat pass is available.** Air is a difficulty you are adding on purpose.

Snap / hard pass — when it needs to be there now

Technique	A shortened sweep — less backswing, a sharp snap of the wrists, blade still cupped, still following through at the target
Goal	Trade a little accuracy for a lot of speed to beat a window that is closing
Read	Use it into a seam a backchecker is about to fill, to a teammate about to be checked, or into the slot for a one-timer
Never	Snap one at a stationary teammate in a low-pressure spot
Risk	A hard pass your teammate cannot handle is your turnover, not theirs

Mechanics. A shortened, more violent version of the sweep. Less backswing, a sharp snap of the wrists, blade still cupped, still following through toward the target. You are trading a little accuracy for a lot of speed.

When to use it. When the lane is open but closing — a seam through the middle that a backchecker is about to fill, or a pass to a teammate who is about to be checked and needs the puck early. Also the right pass into the slot for a one-timer, where puck speed is part of the shot.

Risk. Hard passes are harder to receive. If you snap one at a stationary teammate in a low-pressure spot, you have made their life difficult for no reason. Pace is a tool for beating a closing window, not a display of strength. A hard pass that a teammate cannot handle is your turnover, not theirs.

Backhand pass — the half of the game most players skip

Technique	Start the puck at the middle or heel on your backhand side and roll it heel-to-toe, exactly as on the forehand
Technique	Pull with the bottom hand and sweep across your body, top hand rotating to keep the face closed
Technique	Drive through with the lower shoulder — the power comes from the body turning, not the arms alone
Read	Use it whenever the play is on your backhand side and turning to your forehand would cost you the window
Risk	Backhand passes are slower and float more, so the lane needs to be a little cleaner
Key	A checker who knows you cannot pass backhand takes the forehand side away and forces the turn

Mechanics.

- The puck starts near the **middle or heel** of the blade on your backhand side, drawn back past your rear foot, and rolls heel-to-toe on the sweep exactly as it does on the forehand — that roll is what sends the puck out flat instead of on edge. Hamre's column, quoted above, is explicit that this is not a forehand-only rule: "*(The same principles apply to backhand passes.)*"
- **Pull with the bottom hand** and sweep across your body, keeping the blade cupped over the puck the whole way. The top hand rotates to keep the face closed.
- Drive through with the lower shoulder — backhand power comes from the body turning, not from the arms alone.
- Follow through toward the target, exactly as on the forehand.

When to use it. Whenever the play is on your backhand side and turning to your forehand would cost you the passing window. Common cases: a defenceman moving the puck to their partner on the backhand side, a winger on their off wing feeding across the slot, and any escape from wall pressure where you have your back to the ice.

Risk. Backhand passes are slower and float more, so the lane needs to be a little cleaner. But the real risk is not throwing them.

Why neglecting it halves your options. Every position on the ice has two sides. If you can only pass off one of them, you have to turn your body to make half your plays, and turning takes time you frequently do not have. Players who cannot pass backhand telegraph everything — defenders learn to take away the forehand side and force the turn, knowing the turn kills the play. A competent backhand pass does not need to be pretty; it needs to exist, so that the checker cannot cheat to one side.

Bank / board pass — the boards as a teammate

Technique Play the angle, not the target — aim at the spot on the wall that reflects toward your teammate

Technique Keep it flat and firm, and hit the boards low, where the bounce is truest

Read Use it when a stick or body sits in the direct lane but the boards run behind them

Action Call it, and test a bank in warm-up — board liveliness genuinely varies rink to rink

Risk Low risk, moderate reliability — the puck never enters the lane the checker is defending, but the bounce is not fully predictable

Mechanics.

- **Play the angle, not the target.** The puck comes off the boards at roughly the mirror of the angle it goes in at, so aim at the spot on the wall that reflects toward your teammate, not at your teammate.
- **Keep it flat and firm.** A puck that hits the boards on edge or at a soft pace dies against the wall or pops out unpredictably.
- **Hit the boards low.** Contact near the bottom of the boards gives the truest bounce. Higher up you may catch the glass stanchion or a change in the board material and lose the angle entirely.
- **Learn the building.** Board liveliness genuinely varies rink to rink. Test a bank pass in warm-up.

When to use it. When a defender's stick or body sits in the direct lane but the boards run behind them — most often to beat a forechecker along the wall, to move the puck around the back of the net, or to get the puck past a defender pinching down the wall at your offensive blue line.

Risk. Low risk, moderate reliability — and those are two different things, so keep them apart.

- **Why it is safe:** the puck never travels through the lane the checker is defending. It goes behind them, off a wall they cannot cover, so there is nothing for a stick or a skate to intercept. That, and only that, is the safety argument.
- **Why it is only moderately reliable:** the bounce is not fully predictable, and boards vary rink to rink. Unpredictability is the *cost* of the play, not the reason it works — an unpredictable puck is one your teammate may also fail to read. Compare the rim below, where the same logic applies and the same caveat holds: a puck your teammate is not expecting is a turnover regardless of how well it beat the checker.

It is underused because it does not feel like a "real" pass — but a bank a teammate collects is a completed pass, and beating a stick with geometry costs you nothing. Call it, so the reliability problem is the boards' and not your teammate's.

Rim vs reverse — two opposite plays, keep them straight

Options	Rim goes onward around the boards; reverse goes back the way the puck came, against the flow
Technique	Rim hard, flat and low on the boards, following the curve of the rink
Technique	Reverse short and firm, usually on the backhand, into the space behind you
Read	Choose by the checker's momentum, not their position — rim if they still have you pinned, reverse if they have skated past you
Action	Call your intention on the rim; one a teammate is not expecting is a turnover to their opposite number
Never	Reverse on hope — it is a support-dependent play, and a reverse into nobody is a turnover in the most dangerous place on the ice

These two are constantly conflated. They go in **opposite directions** and they beat **different kinds of pressure**.

	Rim	Reverse
Direction	<i>Onward</i> around the boards, continuing the way the play is already flowing	<i>Back</i> the way the puck came, against the flow of pressure
Mechanics	Hard, flat, low on the boards, following the curve of the rink	Short, firm, usually on the backhand, into the space behind you
Beats	A checker sealing you against the wall — the puck goes <i>past</i> them	A checker who has over-committed and skated past you — the puck goes back into the space they just left
Typical use	Defensive-zone exit under pressure; clearing to the far corner	Puck battle on the wall or behind the net with a teammate arriving late

How to choose. Look at the checker's momentum, not their position. If they are still coming and have you pinned, rim it. If they have already gone by you and their feet are pointed the wrong way, reverse it.

Risk on the rim. A rim that a teammate is not expecting is a turnover to their opposite number, and a soft rim dies in the corner. Rims also need a called intention — see On-Ice Communication.

Risk on the reverse. A reverse into a teammate who is not there is a turnover in the most dangerous place on the ice. Reverses are a *support-dependent* play: never reverse on hope. Cross-

reference Puck Support and Spacing.

Area pass / chip into space — passing to a place, not a person

Goal	Aim at a patch of ice your teammate will reach before an opponent does, not at a blade
Technique	Flat, with enough pace to clear the nearest defender's stick but not so much that it runs to the far boards
Read	Use it when no teammate is open but one is about to be, or in the neutral zone when a direct pass would thread traffic
Key	It cannot be intercepted the way a direct pass can, because it is not aimed at a body — it becomes a race
Risk	Only a good play if your teammate has a genuine speed or angle advantage; otherwise you are giving the puck away politely

Mechanics. You are not aiming at a blade; you are aiming at a patch of ice that a teammate will reach before an opponent does. Put it flat and with enough pace to get past the nearest defender's stick, but not so much that it runs to the far boards ahead of your teammate. Chipping it off the boards past a defender into open ice is the same idea.

When to use it. When no teammate is currently open but one is about to be — the classic case is chipping a puck past a defender who is standing you up at the blue line, into the space behind them where your winger is already skating. Also the safe option in the neutral zone when a direct pass would have to thread traffic.

Risk. Low, and this is the point: an area pass cannot be intercepted in the way a direct pass can, because it is not aimed at a body. It becomes a **race** rather than a turnover. The risk is only that you lose that race — so it is only a good play if your teammate has a genuine speed or angle advantage. An area pass into a defender's feet with nobody chasing it is just giving the puck away politely.

Drop pass — and why it fails so often

Technique	Leave the puck flat and dead behind you — a puck pushed backwards is nearly impossible for a forward-skating trailer to receive
Action	Keep skating hard and take a defender with you, or nobody has been removed from the play
Read	Almost exclusively on the rush, entering the offensive zone with speed, with a trailer at a clear head of steam
Never	Drop it if you are not sure the trailer is there
Risk	High, and the most over-attempted pass in amateur hockey — a failed drop at the blue line becomes a counter-attack against committed forwards
Convention	Some zone entry systems build one in deliberately — that is a coaching choice, not a general rule, so find out

Mechanics. You carry the puck forward, leave it stationary or nearly stationary behind you, and keep skating so that the defender follows you rather than the puck. A trailing teammate picks it up in open ice.

Two things make it work, and both are usually missing:

1. **The puck must be left flat and dead**, not passed backwards. A puck pushed backwards is moving away from the trailer, who is skating forwards — the closing speed makes it nearly impossible to receive cleanly.
2. **You must keep skating hard and take a defender with you.** A drop pass where you slow down is a free puck for the defence, because nobody has been removed from the play.

When to use it. Almost exclusively on the rush, entering the offensive zone with speed, when you have a trailer with a clear head of steam. It also appears deliberately in some **zone entry systems** — see Zone Entries — but whether your team uses one is a coaching choice, not a general rule; find out.

Risk. High, and it is the most over-attempted pass in amateur hockey. It fails because:

- The trailer is not actually there, or is level with you rather than behind you.
- Neither player has said anything, so the drop is a surprise to both.
- It is done blind, so it goes to a spot rather than to a teammate.
- It happens at the offensive blue line, where a failed drop puts the defence straight into a counter-attack against a forward group that has all committed forward.

Default position: if you are not sure the trailer is there, do not drop it.

Stretch pass — the risk/reward play

Technique	A long, hard pass needing a full weight transfer and a long follow-through — most misses are underpowered, not misaimed
Options	Flat if the lane is clear, saucered if it must cross a stick
Read	Use it when the opposition has over-committed to the forecheck and there is genuinely a man behind them — best on a turnover
Rule	A pass may cross both blue lines and the centre red line; NHL Rule 83 (Off-side) is the only restriction on how far forward it may go
Rule	The receiver is off-side when both skates completely cross the leading edge of the blue line before the puck does (NHL Rule 83.1)
Risk	High reward, high cost — a miss is usually an immediate change of possession with your own forwards caught up ice
Key	Ask whether a teammate is actually behind their forwards right now, or whether you are hoping

Mechanics. A long, hard pass — usually from a defenceman in or near their own zone — to a forward who has broken behind the opposition's forwards, often near the far blue line. Flat if the lane is clear, saucered if it must cross a stick. It requires real power, which means a full weight transfer and a long follow-through; most missed stretch passes are underpowered rather than misaimed.

Rules note. In the NHL a pass may cross both blue lines and the centre red line — the two-line pass restriction was removed by a **playing-rule change for the 2005-06 season, adopted alongside** the new Collective Bargaining Agreement rather than by it — the CBA is a labour agreement and does not set playing rules. The IIHF had already abolished the restriction in 1998.

NHL Rule 83 — Off-side is now the only restriction on how far *forward* a pass may go, and it contains no two-line provision. (Icing, Rule 81, still limits sending the puck from your own half of the ice past the opposing goal line, but that is a different rule doing a different job.) So the stretch pass is legal everywhere you are likely to play. The receiver still has to stay onside: under **Rule 83.1**, "*a player is off-side when both skates are completely over the leading edge of the blue line involved in the play*" — so **both skates** must not completely cross the far blue line before the puck completely crosses it.

When to use it. When the opposition has over-committed to the forecheck and there is genuinely a man behind them. Best on a turnover, when their forwards' feet are still moving the wrong way.

Risk. High reward, high cost. If it connects you have a breakaway or a two-on-one. If it misses, it is usually an immediate change of possession with your own forwards caught up ice, which is how odd-man rushes against get created. The honest test: *is a teammate actually behind their forwards right now, or am I hoping?* Hope is not a passing lane. See Risk Management.

Passing Into Space vs Onto the Tape

This is the single most important passing concept, and the one that separates players who complete passes from players who complete *useful* passes.

Onto the tape means the puck arrives exactly at the receiver's current blade position. Correct when the receiver is stationary or when they are about to shoot.

Into space means the puck arrives at a point ahead of the receiver, timed so that they skate onto it without breaking stride. Correct in almost every other case, and especially in transition.

Why it matters. A pass to a moving teammate's current position is behind them by the time it gets there. They have to reach back, slow down, or turn — and every one of those kills the speed that made the play dangerous. Receiving **in stride** is the whole point: the receiver keeps their speed, keeps their head up, and keeps the defence retreating.

How to judge the lead

Read	Read the feet, not the chest — their skates tell you where they are actually going and how fast
Technique	Pick a catch-point ahead of them and pass to that spot, rather than tracking a moving blade with your eyes
Read	Faster receiver, longer lead; harder pass, shorter lead — the two variables trade against each other
Targets	Lead them toward the play they want to make — a winger driving the net wants it ahead and to their forehand
Key	When in doubt, lead them slightly — a pass ahead can be skated onto, a pass behind cannot

- **Read the feet, not the chest.** A player's chest can be facing anywhere. Their skates tell you where they are actually going and how fast.
- **Pick a catch-point, then pass to it.** Do not try to track a moving blade with your eyes — choose the spot where their stick will be when the puck arrives, and pass to that spot. You are aiming at a place in the future.
- **Faster receiver, longer lead; harder pass, shorter lead.** The two variables trade against each other. A slow floater to a sprinting winger needs a large lead; a snap pass to the same winger needs much less.
- **Lead them toward the play they want to make,** not just into empty ice. A winger driving the net wants the puck slightly ahead and to their forehand; a defenceman stepping into a shot wants it slightly ahead and *toward* their shooting side.
- **When in doubt, lead them slightly.** A pass marginally ahead can be skated onto. A pass behind cannot be skated backwards onto.

Passing Mechanics That Matter

Action	Head up, always — if you have to look at the puck to pass it, your passing is limited by your stickhandling
Action	Take your look over both shoulders while the puck is travelling to you, not after it arrives
Technique	Move your weight from the back leg to the front leg through the pass — arm-only passes float, and floaters get intercepted
Technique	Finish with the blade pointing where you want the puck, low to the ice
Targets	Put the puck on the receiver's forehand, away from the checker, and slightly in front of them
Priority	When those three preferences conflict, away from the checker wins

Beyond the pass types, five habits determine whether your passes arrive.

1. Head up, always. Keeping your head up lets you see the lane, see the checker, and avoid the hit. If you have to look at the puck to pass it, your passing is limited by your stickhandling — go work on Puck Handling until the puck is handled by feel.

2. See the whole ice *before* you receive. The best passers have already decided where the puck is going before it reaches them. Take your look over both shoulders while the puck is travelling to you, not after it arrives — by then a checker is on you and the information is out of date. This is the core habit in Scanning and Anticipation.

3. Weight transfer. Power comes from moving your body weight from the back leg to the front leg through the pass. Arm-only passes float, and floaters get intercepted. This is the same power chain as a wrist shot — see Shooting.

4. Follow through at the target. Finish with the blade pointing where you want the puck, low to the ice. A pass that misses left or right was almost always sent that way by the blade face, and the follow-through is the cue that controls it — see the note under the flat pass above, and Shooting, which owns the face-versus-follow-through account. *(That "almost every" is coaching observation, not a counted failure analysis.)*

5. Pass to the correct side of the receiver. This is the most commonly ignored mechanic in the list. Given a choice, put the puck:

- **On their forehand**, because the forehand gives them more control and more immediate options than the backhand.
- **Away from the checker.** If a defender is closing from their left, put the puck on their right — you are passing them a shield as well as a puck.
- **Slightly in front of them**, so their first touch is forward.

Those three preferences can conflict. When they do, **away from the checker wins** — a backhand reception with time beats a forehand reception with a stick in your ribs.

Receiving — The Neglected Half

Passing is drilled; receiving is assumed. That is backwards, because a pass is only as good as the touch that ends it. Everything below is a skill you can practise deliberately.

Give a target

Technique	Stick blade flat on the ice, out in front of your body, angled toward the passer, and held still
Key	That blade is the passer's aiming point — off the ice or waving, and the passer has to guess
Action	Add your voice as well as your stick; a called name plus a target blade removes all ambiguity
Goal	A still blade says "I am open and I want it now" without a word

Put your **stick blade flat on the ice**, out in front of your body, angled toward the passer, and hold it still.

That blade is the passer's aiming point. If your stick is off the ice, waving around, or tucked in beside your skates, the passer has to guess, and guessing is how passes end up in feet. A still blade on the ice is a promise, and it is also a communication — it says *I am open and I want it now* without a word.

Add your voice as well as your stick. A called name plus a target blade removes all ambiguity. See On-Ice Communication.

Cushion the puck — give with it, do not block it

Technique	Meet the puck out in front, bottom hand pushing the stick away from your body
Technique	As the puck makes contact, draw the blade back toward your body, letting it travel with the puck for a few inches
Technique	Soft hands means a loose grip — a tight grip makes the blade rigid, and a rigid blade is a wall
Key	A blocked pass rebounds a foot or two off your blade, and that foot is all a checker needs

This is the central receiving skill.

- **Meet the puck out in front**, with your bottom hand pushing the stick away from your body.
- **As the puck makes contact, draw the blade back toward your body** — the bottom hand comes in. You are absorbing the pass, letting the blade travel with the puck for a few

inches rather than stopping it dead.

- **Soft hands means loose grip.** A tight grip makes the blade rigid, and a rigid blade is a wall. A puck that hits a wall bounces off it.

A blocked pass rebounds a foot or two off your blade. That foot is all a checker needs. A cushioned pass stops dead on your blade, under control, ready to play.

Receive on your forehand where you can

Technique	Adjust your body angle before the puck arrives so the pass comes to your forehand
Goal	A cupped blade, more surface area under control, and immediate access to a shot or a pass
Priority	Getting your blade to the puck matters more than which side it is on — do not let the preference make you late
Action	Practise backhand receptions specifically, because in traffic you will not get to choose

Your forehand gives you a cupped blade, more surface area under control, and immediate access to a shot or a pass. Where you have the freedom to choose — and you usually do, by adjusting your body angle before the puck arrives — turn so the pass comes to your forehand.

But do not let this become a rule that makes you late. **Getting your blade to the puck matters more than which side it is on.** Practise backhand receptions specifically, because in traffic you will not get to choose.

Angle the blade to kill a bounce

Technique	Cup the blade over the top of the puck whether it is hopping, rolling on edge or sliding flat — the angle does not change
Technique	Keep your top hand off your hip; a top hand on the hip creates a ski-jump effect and the puck rides over the blade
Read	A flat puck can be played in one touch; a hopping or on-edge puck costs you a second, so budget the extra beat
Technique	Take it on the middle of the blade, not the toe — the toe gives you the least surface and the weakest part of the blade
Action	Angle the face away from the direction you do not want the puck to go, so a squirt goes somewhere safe
Rule	Batting the puck above the normal height of the shoulders with a stick is prohibited — knock high pucks down at chest height (NHL Rule 80.1)
Rule	You may catch the puck out of the air but must immediately place it or knock it down to the ice (NHL Rule 67.2)

Pucks arrive rolling, on edge, or hopping — from a bad pass, a bouncing rim, or a rut in the ice.

Cup the blade for all of them. The blade angle does not change with the type of bad puck; what changes is how many touches it costs you.

- **Cup the blade over the top of the puck**, top edge tilted forward, whether it is hopping, rolling on edge or sliding flat. The cup is what traps the puck down onto the ice. An open blade is the failure mode, not the fix: Hamre's column (see Flat / sweep pass for what that source is) describes exactly what an open face does — *"the blade of the stick will 'cup the puck' if the top hand is off the hip. (If the top hand is on the hip, a 'ski jump' effect is created for the puck by the stick blade, and the puck will jump over the blade.)"* So the cup is produced by keeping the top hand off your hip, and it is the **uncupped** blade that a puck rides over.
- **The genuine difference is the puck's own motion, not your blade angle.** A puck sliding flat can be received and played in one touch. A puck that is hopping or on edge normally cannot — you cup it, let the first touch knock it flat, and play it on the second. Budget the extra beat instead of trying to make one touch do both jobs.
- **Take it on the middle of the blade, not the toe.** Stabbing at a bad puck with the toe gives you the least surface, the least control and the weakest part of the blade. Hamre's

column makes the same point about the blade, though it makes it about **giving** a pass rather than receiving one: from the middle or heel "*the player and the stick blade are stronger.*" The transfer to receiving is this document's inference, not his instruction.

- **Angle the face slightly away from the direction you do not want the puck to go**, so a puck that squirts off your blade squirts into a safe area rather than into the slot.
- **Rules note (NHL) — how high you may play an airborne puck.** With the stick, **Rule 80.1** is explicit: "*Batting the puck above the normal height of the shoulders with a stick is prohibited.*" Knock a high puck down at chest height, not above your shoulders. **Carry the condition with the rule:** the whistle is not automatic. Play stops only "*when a puck is struck with a high stick and subsequently comes into the possession and control of a player from the offending team*" — bat it above your shoulders straight to an opponent and the referee waves it off. Do not plan around that; plan around chest height. (Full treatment, including the separate crossbar ceiling on tipped goals under Rule 80.3, is in Shooting.) With the hand, **Rule 67.2** allows the catch but not the carry: "*A player shall be permitted to catch the puck out of the air but must immediately place it or knock it down to the ice.*" Closing your hand on it and skating is a minor penalty, and knocking it down to a teammate is a hand pass (see below).

Receiving a pass in your feet

Technique	Kick it forward to your stick with the inside of your skate — one deliberate, controlled kick, not a panicked scuff
Options	Or open your hips and let it run through, then collect it behind your stride
Never	Reach backwards with your stick while continuing to skate forwards
Rule	Kicking the puck is permitted in all zones, but you cannot score with a distinct kicking motion (NHL Rule 49.2)
Rule	A kicked puck that deflects into the net off any body is no goal; off your own stick it counts (NHL Rule 49.2)
Rule	A hand pass stops play everywhere except your own defending zone, and the puck's location decides the zone (NHL Rule 79.2)

It will happen, and it is a skill, not an accident to be complained about.

- **Kick it forward to your stick with the inside of your skate.** One deliberate, controlled kick to a spot in front of you — not a panicked scuff.

- **Or open your hips and let it run through**, then collect it behind your stride. Turning your body slightly is usually faster than reaching.
- **Do not reach backwards with your stick while continuing to skate forwards.** That is how you end up bent over, off balance, and hit.
- **Rules note (NHL):** kicking the puck to a teammate is legal — **Rule 49.2**, *"Kicking the puck shall be permitted in all zones."* Kicking it *into the net* is where it gets restricted, and the rule is more forgiving than the headline suggests. The two prohibitions: *"A goal cannot be scored by an attacking player who **uses a distinct kicking motion** to propel the puck into the net with his skate/foot"*, and *"a goal cannot be scored by an attacking player who kicks a puck that deflects into the net off any player, goalkeeper or official."* The first is the one that decides most goalmouth scrambles, and it is the one people forget. But 49.2 then lists the exceptions that matter, and they turn on **body versus stick**:
 - *"(i) A kicked puck that deflects off the body of any player of either team (including the goalkeeper) shall be ruled no goal."*
 - *"(ii) A kicked puck that deflects off the **stick** of any player (excluding the goalkeeper's stick) shall be ruled a **good goal**."*
 - *"(iii) A goal will be allowed when an attacking player kicks the puck and the puck deflects off his own stick and then into the net."*
 - *"(iv) A goal will be allowed when a puck enters the goal after deflecting off an attacking player's skate or deflects off his skate while he is in the process of stopping."*

So kicking a puck onto your own blade and in is a goal; kicking one that caroms off a body is not. Batting it to a teammate with your **hand** goes unpunished only in your own defending zone, and the test is the **puck's** location, not yours — **Rule 79.2**: *"Play will not be stopped for any hand pass by players in their own defending zone. The location of the puck when contacted by either the player making the hand pass or the player receiving the hand pass shall determine the zone it is in."* Anywhere else it is a hand pass and play stops. The skate carries no height restriction; the stick does — **Rule 80.1** prohibits *"batting the puck above the normal height of the shoulders with a stick."*

Receiving a bad pass

Action	Get your body in front of it — shin pads, skates and chest are legal tools, and a puck stopped by your body is still your puck
Priority	Kill it first, look second — stop the puck, then play it
Never	Try to receive a difficult puck and make a play in the same motion
Mindset	Accept a lost half-second and take the safe next option; forcing the original plan through a bad reception is the actual mistake

The measure of a good receiver is what they do with a bad pass.

- **Get your body in front of it.** Your shin pads, your skates and your chest are all legal, legitimate tools for stopping a puck. A puck stopped by your body is still your puck.
- **Kill it first, look second.** Do not try to receive a difficult puck and make a play in the same motion. Stop it, then play it. Trying to do both is how bad passes turn into turnovers.
- **Accept a lost half-second.** If a bad pass costs you the play you wanted, take the safe next option. Forcing the original plan through a bad reception is the actual mistake.

Receive with your body open to the ice

Position	Hips and shoulders turned so you can see up ice and across the ice as the puck arrives, not square to the passer
Action	Arrive at the puck on an angle rather than straight at the passer, curling into the reception
Goal	Your next option should already be visible when the puck lands on your blade
Key	Decide which way you are going before the puck arrives, and be pointing that way when it does
Risk	A closed body invites the pressure to arrive on your back — worst on the offensive half-wall and on breakout receptions

Open means your hips and shoulders are turned so you can see up ice and across the ice at the moment the puck arrives — rather than square to the passer with your back to everything you want to do next.

- Arrive at the puck **on an angle**, not straight at the passer. Curl into the reception so that your momentum and your sightline already point where you want to go.

- Your next option should already be visible when the puck lands on your blade. If you have to turn to find it, you have given the forechecker the time they needed.
- The general term for this is *checking your shoulder and opening up*; the practical version is: **decide which way you are going before the puck arrives, and be pointing that way when it does.**

This is especially valuable on the half-wall in the offensive zone and on any breakout reception, where a closed body invites the pressure to arrive on your back.

Receiving while moving

Technique	Reach the blade out ahead of your skates, not beside them — receiving beside your feet leaves you no room to cushion
Action	Keep your feet moving through the reception; gliding to catch a pass costs you a stride every time
Never	Let your stick pull your body off line — turn to the puck with your feet, then use your hands
Action	Adjust your speed to the pass, not the pass to your speed — a small glide or an extra stride makes a difficult pass easy
Risk	A stationary receiver is a target

Almost all real receptions happen at speed.

- **Reach the blade out ahead of your skates**, not beside them. Receiving beside your feet leaves you no room to cushion.
 - **Keep your feet moving through the reception.** Gliding to catch a pass is a habit that costs you a stride every single time, and a stationary receiver is a target.
 - **Do not let your stick pull your body off line.** Turn to the puck with your feet, then use your hands. Reaching with the arms while your skates go elsewhere puts you off balance — see Skating.
 - **Adjust your speed to the pass, not the pass to your speed.** A small glide or a hard extra stride to meet the puck at the right moment is invisible to everyone else and makes a difficult pass into an easy one.
-

The First Touch Determines Everything

Key	Receive the puck into the position it needs to be in for your next action, not the position it happens to arrive in
Action	Take the touch away from pressure — if a checker is closing from your left, cushion it slightly to your right
Action	Take the touch into your shooting position in the slot, beside your back foot and ready to release
Action	Take the touch forward in transition, so your next stride is a stride and not a stop
Action	Take the touch into open ice in the middle with nothing on — do not stop it under your feet and then look up
Read	The test — after your first touch, could you pass or shoot immediately? If not, that touch was wasted

A good first touch buys you half a second. A bad one costs you the puck. Nothing else in receiving matters as much as this.

Half a second does not sound like much. On the ice it is the difference between a shot and a blocked shot, between a clean exit and a puck battle in your own corner, between finding the open man and throwing it away.

The principle: receive the puck into the position it needs to be in for your next action, not into the position it happens to arrive in.

Practically, that means:

- **Take the touch away from pressure.** If a checker is closing from your left, cushion the puck slightly to your right as you receive it. The reception and the escape are one movement, not two.
- **Take the touch into your shooting position** if you are receiving in the slot. The puck should end up beside your back foot, ready to be released, not in your feet.
- **Take the touch forward** if you are receiving in transition, so your next stride is a stride, not a stop.
- **Take the touch into open ice** if you are receiving in the middle with nothing on. Do not just stop it under your feet and then look up — a puck under your feet is a puck you have to move before you can play it.

The test to apply: **after your first touch, could you pass or shoot immediately?** If the answer is no, that touch was a wasted one, and every wasted touch is time donated to the defence.

One-Touch Passing

Goal	Move the puck faster than a defence can rotate, so it lands in a space that was covered when the pass started
Read	It is on when the pass is flat and catchable, your next target is already open and known, and the lane will still exist
Read	It is off on a bouncing puck, a target you have not located, or with a defender close enough that a miss is an instant turnover
Technique	Identify the next target while the puck is still travelling — this is a decision made early, not a reaction made late
Technique	Angle your blade before contact; the blade face at the moment of contact is the pass, with no follow-through to correct it
Technique	Soft on receive, firm on release — even a one-touch has a tiny cushion in it
Technique	Set your feet, because you need a stable base to redirect a puck accurately at speed

A one-touch pass — sometimes called a first-time pass, and the basis of a *tic-tac-toe* sequence of quick passes — is a pass you redirect on contact, without controlling it first.

Why it beats coverage. Defenders and goaltenders are reacting to where the puck is. Every touch you take gives them time to re-set. A one-touch pass moves the puck faster than a defence can rotate, so the puck arrives in a space that was covered when the pass started and is not covered when it lands. This is exactly why the best power plays are built on one-touch sequences — see Special Teams.

When it is on:

- The pass to you is flat, accurate, and at a pace you can redirect.
- Your next target is already open *and you already know it*.
- The receiving lane you are creating will still exist a moment later.

When it is not on: a bouncing puck, a target you have not yet located, or a defender close enough that a missed one-touch is an immediate turnover. A one-touch attempt that fails usually fails badly, because you have made no attempt to secure the puck.

How to prepare before the puck arrives:

1. **Identify the next target while the puck is still travelling.** One-touch passing is a decision made early, not a reaction made late.
2. **Angle your blade before contact.** The blade face at the moment of contact *is* the pass — there is no follow-through to correct it. Set the angle in advance.
3. **Soft on receive, firm on release.** Even a one-touch has a tiny cushion in it. Pure deflection sends the puck wherever physics wants.
4. **Set your feet.** You need a stable base to redirect a puck accurately at speed.

Timing and Support — A Pass Is a Two-Player Action

Key	The receiver creates the pass as much as the passer does — most "bad passes" are actually bad pairs
Action	As the receiver, move into a lane rather than just moving — find the open line between you and the puck
Read	As the receiver, time your arrival; reaching the open space too soon means a defender arrives with you
Action	As the receiver, give a target blade and a voice, and have a next option — a reception with no exit is a trap
Action	As the passer, deliver it so it can be received in stride, on the side away from pressure, the moment the window opens
Priority	If your team cannot complete passes, look at the players without the puck before you look at the passer

Most "bad passes" are actually bad *pairs*.

The receiver creates the pass as much as the passer does. A passer with the puck and their head up is scanning for someone who is open, in a clean lane, and available *now*. If nobody satisfies all three, there is no pass — and the blame for the resulting turnover usually lands on the player holding the puck.

What the receiver owes the passer:

- **Movement into a lane, not just movement.** Skating hard through an area a defender's stick covers does not help. Find the open line between you and the puck.
- **Timing, not earliness.** Arriving in the open space too soon means a defender arrives with you. Support is about *when* as much as *where*.
- **A target blade and a voice**, as above.
- **A next option.** If your reception has no exit, you are not support, you are a trap.

What the passer owes the receiver:

- **A pass that can be received in stride** — see the lead-judging section above.
- **A pass to the side away from pressure.**
- **The pass at the moment the window opens**, not two seconds later once the receiver has drifted into coverage.

The full treatment of who supports whom, at what distance, and how the shape moves is in Puck Support and Spacing. The relevant summary here: **if your team cannot complete passes, look at the players without the puck before you look at the passer.**

Deception

Technique	Look off a defender — fix your eyes on one option, let them shift toward it, then pass to the other
Technique	Turn your shoulders and hips toward one side to pull the defender's weight that way
Options	A genuine shoulder-check doubles as deception, and a short delay before the pass often beats a fake because there is nothing to read
Read	A no-look is justified only when you have already seen a target unlikely to move, the defender is reading your eyes, and the pass is short
Never	Use a no-look as a default, and never in your own end — every no-look bets that the ice has not changed
Key	Deception is a supplement, not a substitute — selling a look is worthless if the pass that follows is inaccurate

Defenders and goaltenders read your eyes, your shoulders and your blade. Anything you can do with those that does not match where the puck is going buys you a lane.

Looking off a defender. Fix your eyes on one option, let the defender shift toward it, then pass to the other. This is the highest-value and lowest-risk deception in hockey, because your eyes cost you nothing — you have already scanned, so you already know where both options are.

Shoulders and hips. Turning your upper body toward one side pulls a defender's weight that way. A defender who has committed their weight cannot recover in time to take away a pass to the other side.

Shoulder-check as deception. A genuine look over your shoulder is information for you and misinformation for them. It also makes your eventual pass look prepared, which discourages the aggressive stick check.

Delay and change of pace. Holding the puck a beat longer than expected freezes a defender who is timing your release. A short delay before the pass is often more effective than a fake, because there is nothing to read.

No-look passes — and when they are justified. A genuine no-look pass is justified when:

- You have already seen the target and it is unlikely to move (a player parked at the back door, a defenceman stationary at the point).
- The defender you are beating is actively reading your eyes.
- The pass is short enough that your spatial memory is reliable.

It is **not** justified as a default, and it is a bad habit in your own end. The failure mode is that the target has moved since you last looked, and you have thrown the puck to a memory. Every no-look is a bet that the ice has not changed. In the defensive zone, do not take that bet.

Deception is a supplement, not a substitute. Selling a look is worthless if the pass that follows is inaccurate. Get the mechanics reliable first.

Passing Under Pressure

Under pressure, three things change: you have less time to look, the lanes are shorter-lived, and the cost of a mistake is higher because opponents are already close to the puck.

What to do differently:

- **Simplify.** The pass you can definitely complete beats the pass you would like to complete. A rim, a bank off the boards, a short **give-and-go** — you pass to a teammate, immediately skate into open space, and take it straight back — or an area chip all keep possession moving without threading a needle.
- **Decide before you get there.** Know your out while you are still skating to the puck, not after you are pinned. This is the single biggest difference between players who look calm under pressure and players who do not — the calm ones decided earlier, they did not think faster.
- **Use the boards and use the glass.** They are always available and they cannot be intercepted.
- **Take the extra half-second by moving your feet,** not by holding still. A stationary player under pressure has one option and it shrinks. See Body Contact and Battles for protecting the puck while you buy that time.
- **Accept the reset.** Sending the puck back to your defenceman, or off the glass and out, is a completed play — not a failure. It is only a failure if you had a better option and did not see it.

The "never" list

Convention	These three are risk-management defaults rather than laws of hockey — treat them as always-on unless a coach has built a system around the exception
Never	Make a blind pass up the middle in your own zone — if you cannot see the receiver, the pass does not exist
Never	Make a D-to-D pass through the slot; defence-to-defence passes go behind the net or above the tops of the circles
Never	Pass cross-ice in your own end — picked off, it leaves your whole structure on the wrong side of the puck
Key	In your own zone the passing standard is certainty; in the offensive zone it is value

These are **risk-management defaults**, not laws of hockey, and they exist because the failure mode of each one is a high-danger scoring chance against. Treat them as always-on unless a coach has explicitly built a system around the exception.

- **Never make a blind pass up the middle in your own zone.** The middle of your own defensive zone is directly in front of your net. An interception there is a chance against with your goaltender unset. If you cannot see the receiver, the pass does not exist.

- **Never make a D-to-D pass through the slot.** Defence-to-defence passes are normal and useful — but they go *behind the net* or *above the tops of the circles*, not across the front of your own goalmouth. A blocked or deflected slot pass is a tap-in.
- **Never pass cross-ice in your own end.** A cross-ice pass in your defensive zone crosses in front of the danger area and, if it is picked off, leaves your whole structure on the wrong side of the puck.

The unifying principle: in your own zone, mistakes are punished immediately, so the passing standard is *certainty*. In the offensive zone, mistakes cost you possession 180 feet from your net, so the standard is *value*. Adjust your risk tolerance by where you are on the ice. This is the core of Risk Management.

A note on the cardinal exception. Some structured breakouts *do* include a controlled defence-to-defence exchange behind the goal line and a weak-side option — that is a designed play with eyes up, support set and an escape route, and it is a different thing from an improvised cross-ice pass under pressure. These documents assume a **low zone collapse defensive-zone coverage** (everyone sinks toward the net and defends space rather than chasing a man) with a **2-1-2 forecheck** (two forwards pressuring in the opposition end, one supporting behind them, both defencemen up at the blue line) unless stated otherwise; your team's breakout structure may differ. Find out what yours is before deciding which passes are sanctioned — see Breakouts and Defensive Zone Coverage.

How to Practise

Passing improves faster than almost any other hockey skill, because most of it can be practised off the ice on a smooth surface with no equipment beyond a stick and a puck.

Wall passing (solo)

- Action** Face a wall, rebounder or board and pass into it repeatedly — cup, sweep, follow through at a spot
- Key** Receive every return properly — cushion, control, reset; half the value of the drill is on the receiving side
- Action** Alternate forehand and backhand equally; the backhand improves fastest because it starts furthest behind
- Action** Progress to one-touch returns and keep a count
- Action** Mark a small target on the wall and aim at it — accuracy without a target is just repetition
- Action** Pass and receive while shuffling laterally, so the reception happens with your body moving

Face a wall, a rebounder, or a board and pass into it repeatedly.

- Start stationary at a comfortable distance. Cup, sweep, follow through at a spot on the wall.
- **Receive every return properly** — do not just stop it. Cushion it, control it, reset. Half the value of this drill is on the receiving side.
- **Alternate forehand and backhand.** Force yourself to spend equal time on each; the backhand is the side that improves fastest because it starts furthest behind.
- **Progress to one-touch.** Return the puck without stopping it, and keep a count.
- **Add a target.** Mark a small spot on the wall and aim at it. Accuracy without a target is just repetition.
- **Move.** Pass and receive while shuffling laterally, so the reception happens with your body moving.

Partner drills

- Action** Stationary tape-to-tape at increasing distance, both players giving a target blade every single rep
- Action** Skate parallel down the ice passing back and forth, deliberately leading each other into stride
- Action** Give-and-go — pass, burst into space, receive it back
- Action** Saucer over a stick laid flat on the ice, judged by whether it lands flat, not by whether it clears
- Action** Bad-pass practice — have your partner send you rolling, bouncing and behind-you passes deliberately
- Action** Pressure passing with a third player closing on the passer; clean passing in a quiet drill does not transfer on its own

- **Stationary tape-to-tape**, gradually increasing distance. Both players give a target blade every single rep.
- **Moving passes down the ice** — two players skating parallel, passing back and forth, deliberately leading each other into stride. This is the best available drill for learning the lead.
- **Give-and-go**: pass, burst into space, receive it back. This trains the two-player timing that makes a pass work.
- **Saucer practice over an obstacle** — a stick laid flat on the ice between you. Judge success by whether it lands *flat*, not by whether it clears the stick.
- **Bad-pass practice**. Have your partner deliberately send you rolling, bouncing and behind-you passes. Nobody does this, and it is the fastest way to improve your reception of the passes you will actually get in games.
- **Pressure passing**. Add a third player closing on the passer. This is what turns technique into a game skill; clean passing in a quiet drill does not transfer on its own.

Weighted puck training

- Action** Use it for strength and mechanics in short doses — the extra mass forces a full weight transfer and a complete follow-through
- Action** Switch back to a regular puck in the same session, to carry the improved mechanics into normal weight
- Never** Do all your work with it — it changes the timing of your release, so it supplements normal-weight repetition
- Key** The measured benefit is for shooting, not passing — nobody has measured what a weighted puck does to passing at all
- Risk** Treat volume with care and stop if your wrists or elbows complain

A weighted puck (heavier than a standard puck) is a common off-ice training tool.

- **Use it for strength and mechanics, in short doses.** The extra mass forces a full weight transfer and a complete follow-through; you cannot flick a weighted puck with your wrists alone.
- **Switch back to a regular puck in the same session.** A standard puck feels light and quick immediately afterwards, and the point is to carry the improved mechanics into normal weight.
- **Do not do all your work with it.** Weighted-puck practice changes the timing of your release. It is a supplement to normal-weight repetition, not a replacement for it. Treat volume with care and stop if your wrists or elbows complain — see Conditioning and Recovery.
- **The measured benefit is for shooting, not passing.** There is a trial (Novak et al., 2022): sixteen male youth players, mean age 13.6, over twelve weeks. **Every one of them did both halves** — six weeks with a light puck and six weeks with a heavy 260 g one (**the paper is internally inconsistent on the light puck: its abstract says 60 g, its Methods say 90 g**), in a cross-over design where one group took the heavy block first and the other took it second. Across the whole programme shooting speed rose **7.4-13%** (7.4% long-hand snapshot, 8.5% short-hand snapshot, 13% wrist shot), shooting accuracy **14%**, and handgrip strength of the **bottom hand 8.7%**; the heavy puck was clearly the more effective of the two for puck speed.

Three limits, and they matter. There was **no untrained control group** — everyone shot for twelve weeks — so the headline percentages measure twelve weeks of shooting practice,

not the weighted puck on its own; the only clean comparison the study supports is heavy *versus* light. The subjects were thirteen-year-olds. And nobody has measured what a weighted puck does to *passing* at all. So the mechanism is plausible and the tool is accepted — but treat the numbers as belonging to your shot, not your pass, and not as a proven shortcut.

Structuring this into an actual improvement plan is covered in Practice and Development.

Common Mistakes

- **Slapping at the puck instead of sweeping it.** Contact becomes a single instant rather than a guided path, and accuracy collapses. If your passes go wide, this is the first thing to check.
- **Opening the blade face, passing or receiving.** An uncupped blade flips the puck onto its edge when you pass, and lets it ski-jump straight over your stick when you receive. A rolling pass is barely better than no pass, because your teammate cannot play it in one touch. **Cup it both ways** — there is no case where an open face is the answer. See Angle the blade to kill a bounce.
- **Passing with the arms and no weight transfer.** Produces a floater that a defender has time to read and intercept.
- **Following through upward.** The blade should finish low and pointed at the target. Finishing high sends pucks over sticks and into shins.
- **Aiming at a moving teammate's current position.** The pass arrives behind them and they must slow down or turn. You have completed a pass and killed a rush at the same time.
- **Passing to the checker's side of the receiver.** You have handed your teammate a battle instead of a puck.
- **Not giving a target.** Stick off the ice, or waving. The passer guesses, and the pass ends up in your feet — and then you blame the passer.
- **Blocking the pass instead of cushioning it.** A rigid blade bounces the puck a foot or two away, which is exactly the gap a checker needs.
- **Standing still to receive.** You lose a stride every time, and a stationary receiver is the easiest possible target to hit.
- **Receiving with your back to the ice.** You have to turn before you can do anything, and the turn is when the pressure arrives.

- **Taking two touches when one would do.** Every extra touch gives the defence time to re-set.
 - **Drop passes with no trailer, no call, and no speed.** The most over-attempted play in amateur hockey.
 - **Saucering when a flat pass was available.** You added difficulty for no gain.
 - **Only being able to pass on the forehand.** Defenders learn this within one shift and take the forehand side away, and half your options disappear.
 - **Waiting to look until the puck arrives.** By then the information is a second old and a checker is on you. Scan while the puck is travelling.
 - **Blind passes in your own zone.** The one habit on this list with a scoring chance against attached to it almost every time.
-

Key Takeaways

1. **The puck moves faster than any skater.** A team that moves the puck well beats a team of better individual skaters, because you can out-pass five opponents but you cannot out-skate them.
2. **Sweep, do not slap. Cup the blade. Follow through low, pointed at the target.** Those three habits fix most inaccurate passing on their own.
3. **Pass to where your teammate is going, and to the right side of them.** Read their feet and pick a catch-point ahead of them so they receive it in stride — then put it on their forehand where you can, and always away from the checker. When those two conflict, away from the checker wins.
4. **Give a target.** Blade flat on the ice, out in front, held still. If you do not give the passer an aiming point, you do not get to complain about the pass.
5. **Cushion the puck — give with it, do not block it.** Meet it out front, draw the blade back as it lands, loose grip. A blocked pass bounces a foot away, and a foot is all a checker needs.
6. **The first touch determines everything.** A good one buys half a second, a bad one costs you the puck. Receive it into the position your next play needs — after your first touch, you should be able to pass or shoot immediately.
7. **Rim goes onward around the boards; reverse goes back against the flow of pressure.** Choose by the checker's momentum: rim past a checker who has you pinned, reverse behind one who has skated past you.

8. **One-touch passing beats coverage because it moves the puck faster than a defence can rotate** — but only if you chose your next target before the puck arrived.
 9. **A pass is a two-player action.** The receiver's timing and lane create the pass as much as the passer's decision does. When a team cannot complete passes, look at the players without the puck first.
 10. **In your own zone the passing standard is certainty, not value.** No blind pass up the middle, no D-to-D through the slot, no cross-ice in your own end. Those three are risk-management defaults rather than laws of hockey — some breakouts deliberately build in a controlled D-to-D exchange behind the goal line — so treat them as always-on unless your coach has explicitly designed the exception.
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Shooting

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[Offensive Zone Play](#)[Passing and Receiving](#)[Puck Handling](#)[Equipment](#)[Practice and Development](#)[Goaltender](#)[Zone Entries](#)[UK and England Rules](#)

Overview

Shooting is two separate skills that get taught as one. The first is **mechanics** — how you move the puck from your stick to the net. The second is **shot selection** — deciding which shots are worth taking and where to put them. Most players spend all their practice time on the first and none on the second, then wonder why they take eight shots a game and score twice a season.

This document covers both. The short version: a shot the goalie sees clearly, from distance, into a set body, is nearly worthless — NHL goaltenders stop the overwhelming majority of those. A shot from the middle of the ice, taken before the goalie is set, or one they have to move sideways to reach, is worth many times more. Everything below is in service of getting the second kind.

A Note on Language

These terms recur throughout. They are also defined in Rink Map and Glossary, but every document here stands alone.

- **The slot** — the area directly in front of the net, running from the crease out to roughly the top of the faceoff circles, bounded roughly by the two faceoff dots on either side. The most dangerous ice on the rink.
- **The high slot** — the upper part of that area, from the faceoff dots out to the top of the circles.

- **The goalmouth** — the immediate net front, right at the edge of the crease. Not the same as the slot; it is the innermost sliver of it.
 - **The point** — the area near the offensive blue line where defencemen normally stand.
 - **The half-wall** — the boards roughly level with the faceoff dot, between the corner and the point.
 - **Five-hole** — the gap between a goaltender's leg pads. Note that the gap between a goalie's stick arm and their body is a *different* target with its own name, the **six-hole**; see Goaltender for the goalie's own vocabulary.
 - **Release** — the moment the puck leaves your blade, and by extension how long your shooting motion takes from first movement to that moment.
 - **Flex** — how much your stick shaft bends. A bent shaft stores energy and springs it back into the puck, like a drawn bow.
 - **Toe / heel of the blade** — the far end and the near end. Where the puck sits on the blade changes what the shot does.
 - **Cupping the puck** — tilting the blade face slightly over the top of the puck so it cannot slide off.
-

The Shot Types

There are six things you can do to a puck to send it at the net. Learn all six; you will use three of them constantly.

The Wrist Shot — the fundamental

Position	Puck behind your back foot, cupped on the heel-to-middle of the blade
Technique	Pull, don't slap — sweep the puck forward and never let it leave the blade
Technique	Load the flex — push down with the bottom hand while pulling back with the top
Action	Roll the wrists at release as the puck runs heel to toe, so it spins rather than wobbles
Key	Blade face angle at separation sets the height; the follow-through is the cue that produces it
Goal	Accuracy and deception from almost any body position, with the least room of any shot

This is the shot everything else is built from. If you only ever get one shot right, get this one.

Mechanics, in order:

1. **Start the puck behind your back foot**, cupped on the **heel-to-middle** part of the blade. "Back foot" means the foot furthest from the net in your stance — for a right-handed shooter facing the net, that is usually the right foot. Starting the puck back gives you a runway; starting it beside your foot means there is nothing to accelerate through.
2. **Hands comfortably apart on the shaft**. Top hand near the end, bottom hand roughly 30–35 cm (12–14 inches) below it — for most adults that is a little *narrower* than shoulder width, so use the measurement rather than the image. Grip firmly but not tightly — a white-knuckle grip locks your wrists, and the wrists are the whole shot.
3. **Pull, don't slap**. Drag the puck forward along the ice in a sweep, from behind the back foot to in front of the front foot. The puck stays in contact with the blade the entire time. This is the difference between a wrist shot and everything else: nothing ever leaves the ice or leaves the blade.
4. **Transfer your weight** from back foot to front foot as you sweep, the same weight shift as a golf swing or a throw. Power comes from your legs and torso, not your arms. Players who shoot with arms only cap out early and never get past it.
5. **Load the flex**. As you sweep, push down and forward with the bottom hand while pulling back and in with the top hand. Those two opposing forces bend the shaft. That stored bend is the second half of your power.
6. **Roll the wrists at release**. As the puck rolls from heel to toe of the blade, snap your wrists over — the blade face rotates from cupped-over-the-puck to closed-toward-the-target. This is

the "snap" everyone talks about, and it is what puts spin on the puck. A spinning puck flies flat and true; a wobbling puck does whatever it likes.

7. **Follow through at the target.** Finish low, with your blade and hands pointing at the ice-level part of the net, and the puck stays low. Finish high, with hands and blade rising toward the top corner, and the puck rises. You do not aim a wrist shot by aiming your eyes; you aim it with where the follow-through ends up.

How height actually works — read this once and it applies to every shot in this document. The puck leaves on the trajectory the **blade face is pointing when it separates from the blade**. That angle is the physical cause of a high or low shot: an open (tilted-back) face lifts; a square or closed face keeps it down. **This is a mechanical account, reasoned from how a projectile leaves a surface, not a finding quoted from a biomechanics study** — no published study measures blade-face angle against puck launch angle. It is offered because it reconciles two coaching cues that otherwise appear to contradict each other, and it is the reconciliation, not the physics, that is doing the work.

Follow-through is not a second, competing mechanism. It is the **cue that produces the right face angle**, and the reason coaches teach it rather than teaching "open the blade 12 degrees" is that a human being can reliably aim a finish and cannot reliably meter a blade angle. Finishing low keeps the face closed through release; finishing high rolls it open. Where the two ever seem to disagree — a shot that goes high off a low finish, say — the blade face is what happened and the follow-through is what you thought you did.

The practical consequence: **use follow-through as your cue for gross height** (net-front low versus top corner), and use **deliberate face angle as your tool for fine height and for deception** — opening the face as though going high and closing it at the last instant, which is covered under deception below.

When to use it: Almost anywhere you have a beat of time — off the rush, in the slot, off a rebound, from the half-wall. It is the most accurate shot you have and needs the least room.

Trade-offs: Less raw velocity than a slap shot, and it takes marginally longer than a snap shot because of the sweep. In exchange you get accuracy, deception, and the ability to shoot from almost any body position.

The Snap Shot — the most useful shot in modern hockey

Position	Puck beside or just behind your skate, chest facing the net, no wind-up
Technique	Bottom hand at or just above the midpoint — the wind-up, not the grip, separates snap from slap
Action	Drop the blade behind the puck and load the shaft — cocking a spring, not winding up an axe
Action	Transfer weight back to front, short and sharp; flat-footed and arms-only is the fault to fix first
Read	Inside the faceoff dots, or a window that will be shut in half a second — this is your shot
Risk	Less power than a slap shot; you will not beat a goalie from the blue line with it

The snap shot is the compromise between the wrist shot and the slap shot, and the compromise is so good that at higher levels it has quietly become the default. You get most of the power of a slap shot with most of the release speed of a wrist shot.

What makes it different from a wrist shot: there is no long sweep. The puck sits **beside or just behind your skate**, roughly where it would be if you were stickhandling, and you shoot from there. Your chest faces the net rather than your shoulder — you are already in an attacking posture, so nothing about your body tells the goalie a shot is coming.

Mechanics:

1. **Puck to the side of your body**, on the blade, no wind-up.
2. **Bottom hand lower on the shaft than for a wrist shot** — at or just above the midpoint. This position is what lets you bend the shaft hard in a very short motion. **Be aware that this overlaps with the slap-shot grip described below** (midpoint or lower): the two hand positions sit close together and often coincide. The grip is not what distinguishes a snap shot from a slap shot — **the wind-up is**. Snap shot: hand near the middle, no wind-up. Slap shot: hand at the middle or below, with a wind-up.
3. **Drop the blade just behind the puck and load the shaft** by pushing down with the bottom hand while pulling back with the top hand. You are cocking a spring, not winding up an axe.
4. **Transfer weight from your back leg onto your front leg**, exactly as in a wrist shot. The difference is not the *direction* of the transfer, it is the *distance*: because there is no long

sweep, the shift is short, sharp and finished almost as soon as it starts. Failing to transfer at all — shooting off a flat-footed, arms-only motion — is the most common snap shot fault.

An honest disagreement between coaching schools — power versus release.

HockeyShot (<https://hockeyshot.com/blogs/training-academy/four-types-of-shots>) draws a deliberate contrast: for the **snap shot** it says transfer your weight to "*your leg closest to the puck*", and for the most powerful **wrist shot** it says "*the leg opposite the puck*." That is a considered position, not sloppy wording — the claim is that a quick-release shot trades the long back-to-front transfer for a shorter, closer shift that costs some power and buys you time. Most other coaching sources teach back-to-front for both. Better Hockey (<https://www.betterhockey.com/blogs/shooting/four-types-of-hockey-shots>) is one of them, and it *is* a counter-claim, though you have to read the whole article to see it: its snap-shot section gives no weight-transfer instruction at all, and the back-to-front instruction appears in the *wrist shot* section — but the article's own summary generalises it to every shot, "*Every shot is powered by the same engine: weight transfer from your back leg to your front leg and stick flex, not arm strength*." So this is two coaching schools disagreeing, not one source being vague.

What to do with that: if you have a beat of time, transfer back to front — the extra power is real and this document teaches it as the default. If you do not have a beat, do not spend a stride getting your weight onto the "correct" foot; shoot off the one it is already on. That is the same instruction as the deliberate "wrong foot" release under Release Speed Beats Shot Speed, and it is why the default here is "back to front" rather than "back to front, always". The one point every source agrees on is that a flat-footed, arms-only shot with **no** weight shift is the fault worth fixing first.

- 5. Release almost immediately.** The blade face angle at the moment the puck leaves is what sets the height — roll the wrists up to open the face and lift it, keep them flat to keep it down.

When to use it: Quick chances in the slot. Off a pass when a defender is closing. Off a rebound. Any time the window is open now and will be shut in half a second. If you are inside the faceoff dots, this is probably your shot.

Trade-offs: Slightly less power than a full wrist shot with a long runway, and much less than a slap shot. You will not beat a goalie from the blue line with it. You will beat one from twenty feet (about six metres), constantly.

The Slap Shot — powerful, and usually the wrong choice

Technique	Strike the ice two to five centimetres behind the puck, not the puck itself
Technique	Hands wide, bottom hand at the midpoint or below; a three-quarter wind-up is more useful more often
Action	Finish low with the face square — low is what a teammate can tip and what leaves a playable rebound
Read	From the point with a lane and time, on a set one-timer, from the top of an umbrella — roughly that list
Risk	The wind-up flags the shot to goalie and blocker, and a miss from the point clears your own zone
Rule	USA Hockey prohibits slap shots only in Blind Hockey; other bans are local league rules, not NHL or IIHF ones

The slap shot is the hardest shot in hockey and the most overused. Be honest with yourself about this: it takes the longest to set up, it is the least accurate, it is the easiest to read and block, and the situations where it is genuinely the best option are narrow.

Mechanics:

1. **Wind up** by lifting the stick back and up. A full wind-up takes the blade to around shoulder height; a three-quarter wind-up takes it to around waist height and is more useful more often.
2. **Hands wide apart** — bottom hand well down the shaft, at the midpoint or below it. The wider the hands, the more leverage you have to bend the shaft. (As noted under the snap shot, the two grips overlap around mid-shaft; the wind-up, not the hand, is what makes this a slap shot.)
3. **Strike the ice two to five centimetres (an inch or two) behind the puck, not the puck itself.** This is the whole trick and it is counter-intuitive. You are hitting the ice to bend the shaft. The bend loads, the shaft springs forward, and the blade catches the puck as it recoils. Hitting the puck directly gives you an arm-powered slap with none of the stored energy — which is why beginners' slap shots are slower than their wrist shots.
4. **Transfer weight onto the front skate** through the downswing. Same principle as everywhere else: legs and torso, not arms.
5. **Contact the puck near the middle of the blade** as the shaft releases, then roll it toward the toe.

6. **Follow through at the target.** As with every shot in this document, the height is physically set by the blade face angle at the moment the puck separates; the follow-through is the cue that produces that angle (see the blockquote under The Wrist Shot). Finish low and keep the face square — from the point, low is almost always what you want, because that is what a teammate can tip and what produces a playable rebound.

When to use it: From the point, when you have a lane and time and want the puck to arrive at the net front hard and low for a tip. On a one-timer from a set position. On the power play from the top of an umbrella. That is roughly the list.

Trade-offs and the honest assessment: The wind-up is a giant flag telling the goalie a shot is coming and the defender to drop into the lane. The blocked-shot rate is high, the miss rate is high, and a missed slap shot from the point usually goes around the boards and out of the zone — you have just given away possession for nothing. A controlled three-quarter slap shot that hits the net is worth far more than a full wind-up that sails wide. Most of the time, from the point, a low hard **snap** shot is the better play: nearly as heavy, twice as fast to release, far more likely to get through.

Rec, beer-league and youth leagues — and a correction worth making. Slap-shot bans are **local league and association rules, not governing-body playing rules**. They are not in the NHL rulebook, they are not in the IIHF rulebook, and the **USA Hockey playing rules prohibit slap shots in exactly one place: Blind Hockey** ("Slap Shots are prohibited in Blind Hockey"; USA Hockey Playing Rules, verified 27 July 2026). Many individual adult rec leagues and many youth associations do restrict or ban them, often below a certain age — but that is your league's own rule, so read your league's rules rather than a national rulebook before you plan your game around one.

The Backhand — the most neglected shot in hockey

Position	Puck on the back of the blade between middle and heel, on the flat spot rather than the curve
Technique	Hands wider than on a forehand — the extra spread buys the leverage the backhand is short of
Technique	Keep the puck close and sweep in an arc, rolling heel to toe; reaching kills the power
Read	In tight, on breakaways, on rebounds to your off side, or whenever turning to the forehand costs the chance
Key	Goalies calibrate their release read to forehands, so a backhand gives them less to read
Action	Practise it — it is bad because it is under-practised, a pure volume problem with a volume fix

Almost nobody practises the backhand, and almost every goalie finds it harder to stop. Those two facts are related, and they are an opportunity sitting in plain sight.

Mechanics:

1. **Puck on the back side of the blade**, positioned between the middle and the heel — on the flat spot rather than the deepest part of the curve. Most blades have very little useful curve on the backhand side, so the flat area is your friend.
2. **Hands a little wider than for a wrist shot** — top hand at the end of the shaft, bottom hand roughly 40-50 cm (16-20 inches) below it, which is somewhat lower than the 30-35 cm you use on the forehand and well above the halfway point you use for a slap shot. The extra spread buys leverage, which is what the backhand is short of.
3. **Keep the puck close to your body to start.** Backhand power comes from a compact motion, not a long reach. Reaching kills it.
4. **Sweep in an arc**, not a straight line — the blade travels across in front of you rather than straight at the net. Roll the puck heel to toe as it goes.
5. **Push down with the bottom hand to create leverage and bend the shaft**, and pull through. You get much less flex on the backhand than the forehand, which is why the technique matters more.
6. **Transfer weight to the front leg, toward the target.**
7. **Blade angle sets the height**, as on every shot — open the face to lift it, keep it square to keep it low, and follow through pointing at the target so that the face does what you meant.

Why goalies struggle with it: Goaltenders spend the overwhelming majority of their reps facing forehands, so their read on release timing is calibrated to a forehand. A backhand releases from a different point, at a different moment, with less pre-shot telegraph. It also frequently forces a movement across the body — from a shooter cutting to their backhand side, a high backhand is one of the awkward saves in the game.

Why most players neglect it: you grow up taking thousands of forehand reps and a few dozen backhands, so the backhand feels bad, so you avoid it, so it stays bad. It is a pure volume problem with a pure volume fix.

Where it wins: in tight around the net, on breakaways, on rebounds that land on your off side, and any time you are in a compromised body position and turning to your forehand would cost you the chance. In traffic in front of the net, you will get more backhand looks than forehand ones — take them.

The One-Timer — shooting a pass without stopping it

Action	Set your feet before the pass arrives — if you are still skating, you are receiving, not one-timing
Position	Open your body to the passer so the pass reaches your blade without going through your feet
Technique	Start the backswing as the pass is released, not when it arrives, and keep it short
Read	Pass behind you — kill the shot, receive it, and take a snap shot half a second later
Read	Bouncing or rolling puck — abandon the one-timer, cup the blade, give with it and shoot second
Convention	Whether you are the one-timer option is a system choice — a 1-3-1 is built around it, an overload usually is not

A one-timer is shooting a pass directly, without receiving it first. It is the fastest way to move a shot from one side of the ice to the other, which — as the section on the royal road below explains — is exactly the thing goalies most struggle with.

Mechanics:

1. **Set your feet before the pass arrives.** This is the whole skill. Get square to where you want to shoot, feet planted and wide, weight ready to move onto the front leg. If you are still

skating when the pass gets there, you are receiving, not one-timing.

2. **Open your body to the passer** so the pass can reach your blade without going through your feet.
3. **Start the backswing as the pass is released, not when it arrives.** This is the timing point everyone gets wrong. If you wait to see the puck reach you, you are already late. Read the passer's release and begin your wind-up then; the puck and your blade should meet.
4. **Keep the backswing short.** A three-quarter or half wind-up is far more repeatable than a full one and misses the puck far less often. A missed one-timer is worse than no shot at all.
5. **Contact the puck near the middle of the blade** with the blade square to the target and weight moving onto the front leg. Follow through at the net, low.

When the pass is bad — and it usually is. Most one-timer opportunities arrive slightly wrong: too far ahead, behind you, bouncing, or rolling on edge. Have a plan:

- **Pass slightly ahead of you** — extend and take it off the toe of the blade rather than lunging. You will lose power; take the shot anyway if the lane is there.
- **Pass behind you** — do not reach back and swing at it. Kill the shot, receive the puck, and take a snap shot half a second later. A snap shot on target beats a whiffed one-timer every single time.
- **Bouncing or rolling puck** — abandon the one-timer. Settle it first and shoot second: **cup the blade over the puck and give with it**, absorbing the bounce rather than blocking it. ("Soft" means yielding hands, not an open blade face — an uncupped blade is exactly what a bouncing puck rides over. See Passing and Receiving.) Trying to one-time a rolling puck is how you send it into the corner.

The one-timer is a coaching-system play as much as an individual skill. Whether you are the one-timer option depends entirely on your team's offensive-zone setup and power-play formation — a 1-3-1 power play is built around the far-side one-timer, an overload usually is not. See Special Teams and Offensive Zone Play, and find out what your team runs.

Tips and Deflections — changing direction beats adding speed

Position	Blade in the puck's path at the net front, flat on the ice or just above it
Technique	Present an angled face rather than hitting the puck — open it to lift, close it to keep it low
Technique	Soft hands — a rigid stick fires the puck to the corner, a yielding one drops it at your feet
Action	Aim to tip at knee, waist or chest height, and watch the puck all the way in
Rule	A tip contacting your stick above the crossbar is no goal; at or below the bar it counts (NHL Rule 80.3)
Rule	Batting the puck above shoulder height stops play only if your team then gains possession (NHL Rule 80.1)
Key	Changing the puck's direction late is worth far more than adding speed to it

A tip (or deflection) is redirecting a shot from a teammate as it passes you, usually from the net front. It is the single most valuable thing a forward can do without ever possessing the puck, and it is closer to a receiving skill than a shooting one.

Mechanics:

1. **Get your stick blade into the puck's path**, flat on the ice or just above it, at the height you expect the shot.
2. **Blade angle does the work.** Open the face slightly and the puck lifts; close it and the puck stays low or drops. You are not trying to hit the puck — you are presenting an angled surface for it to bounce off.
3. **Soft hands.** Do not brace and do not swing. A rigid stick sends the puck straight back out; a stick held loosely, absorbing slightly on contact, keeps the puck low and controlled. If the tip does not go in, a soft blade drops it at your feet for a rebound rather than firing it to the corner.
4. **Keep the blade on or near the ice** unless you are deliberately going up for a high tip. Most tipped goals are low — and there are two hard ceilings on how high you may tip, which almost no coaching article mentions:
 - **Rule 80.3** disallows the goal "*when an attacking player causes the puck to enter the opponent's goal by contacting the puck above the height of the crossbar.*" The determining factor is stated explicitly: "*where the puck makes contact with the stick.*" Contact at or below crossbar height that then goes in is a good goal.

- **Rule 80.1** sits lower but works differently: *"Batting the puck above the normal height of the shoulders with a stick is prohibited."* The whistle is **conditional**, not automatic — play stops only *"when a puck is struck with a high stick and subsequently comes into the possession and control of a player from the offending team."* So a puck you contact above shoulder height that goes to the opposition, or is recovered by them, is simply played on.
- **The two rules do not stack the way you might expect.** A tip made above your shoulders but *below the crossbar* that goes straight in **is a good goal** — Rule 80.3 says so in terms: *"If the puck makes contact with the stick at or below the level of the crossbar and enters the goal, this goal shall be allowed."* The crossbar is the ceiling for the goal; your shoulders only matter for the possession whistle that follows a non-goal.
- Practically: aim to tip at knee, waist or chest height. That keeps you clear of both rules and is where tippable pucks arrive anyway. Reaching above your shoulders is legal but risks the possession whistle; reaching above the bar loses the goal outright. (NHL Official Rules 2025-2026, Rules 80.1 and 80.3.)

5. **Watch the puck all the way in**, which is hard, because a defenceman is usually trying to move you.

Why it works: a goaltender tracks the puck and sets their body for a known trajectory. A deflection changes the trajectory a few feet in front of them, after they have committed. There is no time to re-read it. This is the principle that runs through this entire document — **changing the puck's direction late is worth far more than adding speed to it.** A modest shot tipped six inches sideways in front of the goalie beats a much harder one they have read from the blue line. (No figures are attached to that claim on purpose. You will see comparisons like "a 60 mph tipped shot beats a 95 mph clean one" quoted around the rink; they are illustrations somebody made up, not measurements of anything.)

A rules point that matters: screening a goalie — standing outside the crease in their sightline without contacting them — is normally legal. **Rule 69.1** is the governing rule: a goal is disallowed only where an attacker *"either by his positioning or by contact, impairs the goalkeeper's ability to move freely within his crease or defend his goal,"* or initiates deliberate contact. Note that **positioning alone can do it** — so a clean screen is legal, but crowding a goalie so he cannot move is not, contact or no contact. **Rule 69.3** covers contact inside the crease, where contact with a goalie in his crease voids the goal, and where establishing a significant vision-obstructing position *inside* the crease voids it too. **Rule 69.4** permits incidental contact *"when the goalkeeper is in the act of playing the puck outside his goal crease, provided the attacking player has made a reasonable effort to avoid such unnecessary contact."* And **Rule 69.7** carves out the net-front case this document keeps sending you into: *"In a rebound situation, or where a goalkeeper and*

attacking player(s) are simultaneously attempting to play a loose puck, whether inside or outside the crease, incidental contact with the goalkeeper will be permitted."

So what may you actually do? Stand outside the blue paint, in the goalie's eyes, without touching them — that is a legal and valuable screen. What you may **not** do is crowd them so they cannot move: standing outside the crease is *not* a safe harbour, because 69.1 disallows the goal on **positioning alone** if it impairs the goalie's ability to move or defend. The qualifier attaches to the *impairment*, not to which side of the paint your skates are on. See Rules Primer.

Which shot, when — the one-line version

Each shot's "when to use it" is given above; the short summary is **inside the dots, snap; with a beat of time or from range, wrist; in tight or on your off side, backhand; at the net front, tip; and slap only from the point with a lane and time**. On a breakaway it is control and deception, not power — see Breakaways and Shootouts.

Release Speed Beats Shot Speed

Here is the insight that reorganises everything else.

Shot speed is how fast the puck travels after it leaves your blade. **Release speed** is how long your shooting motion takes, from first movement to the puck leaving. They are different things, and release speed matters far more.

The reason is that a goaltender does not save a puck by reacting to it. They save it by reading it — watching your body, your hands, your blade, and your weight, then getting their body into the right position *before* the puck is on its way. If your shot arrives after they are set and square, it is a routine save at nearly any velocity. If your shot arrives before they are set, it is a scoring chance at almost any velocity.

One coaching resource puts the trade-off as: a 70 mph shot with a 0.3-second release will beat a goaltender more often than a 90 mph shot with a 0.7-second release, because the second one gives the goalie twice as long to be ready (HockeyMonkey (<https://www.hockeymonkey.com/learn/nhl-scorers-deception-quick-release>)). Treat those specific numbers as an illustration rather than a measurement — they are not from a published study — but the principle behind them is coaching consensus everywhere.

How to actually get a faster release

Action	Stop gathering — shoot off the puck you already have, in the position you are already in
Never	Stop your feet before shooting; learn to release in stride, mid-stride, while still moving
Action	Shoot off the "wrong" foot — it costs velocity and buys a moment the goalie's read says no shot is coming
Action	Change your release point — pull the puck 15-30 cm laterally before releasing
Technique	Open the face as though going high and close it at the last instant; look at one corner, shoot the other
Action	Look off to a teammate in the slot to move the goalie's weight, then shoot into the space that opens

Stop gathering. The most common release-killer is the little pause where you settle the puck, look up, set your feet, and then shoot. Every one of those is a frame of warning. Shoot off the puck you already have, in the position you are already in.

Do not stop your feet. Stopping your skates before shooting is the loudest tell in hockey — every goalie reads it, every defender reads it. Learn to **shoot in stride**, releasing mid-stride while you are still moving. It feels less powerful at first because you cannot plant and load; you get that power back from your momentum, and you get a half-second of surprise on top.

Shoot off the "wrong" foot. The textbook shot releases as your weight arrives on the front foot — for a right-handed shooter, the left foot. Releasing off the *same-side* foot instead is unconventional, which is exactly why it works: it comes at a moment in your stride when the goalie's read says a shot is not coming. It costs some velocity. It is worth it. Practise it deliberately; it will not appear on its own. (Which foot this is *relative to the boards* flips depending on which wing you are on — see Shooting Off the Rush.)

Change your release point. Do not release from the same spot in your stance every time. Pull the puck 15-30 cm (six to twelve inches) laterally — in toward your feet, or out away from your body — before releasing. A goalie who has set their angle for a shot from point A now has a shot coming from point B, and their positioning is wrong by exactly that much. Moving the puck sideways also often opens a shooting lane past a defender's stick.

Use blade and body deception. Open the blade face as though you are going high, then close it at the last instant and go low. Look at one corner and shoot the other. Exaggerate a posture that

suggests a shot to one place and release to another. All of these are cheap, all of them are trainable, and all of them work because the goalie is reading you, not the puck.

Look off, then shoot. A half-beat glance at a teammate in the slot moves a goalie's weight. Shoot into the space that opens.

Accuracy and Shot Selection — where to actually aim

Targets	Five-hole while the goalie is moving, reaching or mid-drop — not into a set butterfly
Targets	The far corner low, in the instant after a cross-ice pass, while they are still moving across
Targets	Low blocker side to generate a rebound; the gaps under the arms and over the pads
Read	Short side high only when the goalie has cheated off their post — not a default
Priority	With bodies at the net, shoot to create — low, hard, at the pads; alone in the slot, pick a target and finish
Convention	"Aim for the corners" is one coaching school and this section follows the other — you are choosing, not correcting

"Aim for the corners" is the standard instruction given to almost every young player, and there is a **coaching school that disagrees with it** — the one this section follows. Its argument: corners are the smallest targets on the net, they are guarded by the goalie's fastest-moving limbs, and missing one means the puck goes wide and out of the zone. Aim where the goalie is *not*, and where a miss still does something useful. Plenty of good coaches still teach corners; know that you are choosing between two schools rather than correcting an error.

The targets that are actually worth having:

- **Five-hole — but time it.** The gap between the pads. Whether this is a big target or a nearly sealed one is **contested**, and the answer is that it depends on what the goalie is doing at the moment of release. Against a butterfly goalie who is already **down and set**, the five-hole is largely closed — that is the entire point of the butterfly, and it is why shooters at every level drift toward shooting high in practice. It **opens** while the goalie is moving: pushing laterally, reaching a skate toward a post on a deke, or in the act of dropping. Modern goalies spend a lot of their time doing one of those, which is what makes it

worth having. Take it when they are in motion or mid-drop; do not fire it into a set butterfly and call it a plan.

- **The far corner off a lateral pass.** When the puck has just crossed the middle of the ice, the goalie is still moving across to square up. Their momentum carries them, and the space they are moving *away from* — the far side, low — opens up. This is the highest-value target in hockey and it exists only in the instant after a cross-ice pass.
- **Low blocker side for a rebound.** The blocker is a flat, hard surface, and pads and blocker kick pucks back into the slot far more often than the glove swallows them. If you have a teammate at the net front, a hard low shot to the blocker side is a rebound-generating machine.
- **Under the arms, over the pads.** The gaps between glove and body, and blocker and body, are second only to five-hole for size and reliability.
- **Short side high**, but only when the goalie has cheated off their post. Not a default.

The most important idea in this section: shooting for a rebound or a tip is often better than shooting for a corner. A shot at a corner either goes in, is saved, or misses. A hard low shot at the pads with a teammate at the net front either goes in, gets tipped in, or produces a rebound in the most dangerous area on the ice — three good outcomes against one. So with bodies at the net, shoot to *create* (low, hard, on net, at the pads) rather than to *finish*; alone in the slot with the goalie beaten, pick a target and finish. Be explicit with yourself about which one you are doing. When NOT to Shoot below turns this into a single pre-shot test.

Shooting Through Traffic

Action	Look for the lane before you shoot — no sight of the net or of net-front sticks means no lane
Action	Change the angle — one or two lateral steps beats the angle their sticks were set for
Technique	Lift the puck a few inches to clear sticks; a foot or more is untippable and easy to catch
Technique	Low and hard for tips — knee height or below, with enough pace that a small deflection still carries
Options	Fake the shot to drop the defender into the lane, or move the puck until a lane exists
Goal	From the point, get it through rather than shoot it hard — the shot is there to make a tip, rebound or scramble
Never	Shoot into a defender's shins — the most commonly wasted play in hockey, and it starts the counter

A shot that hits a shin pad is worse than no shot at all. You have given up possession, you have not tested the goalie, and the block usually starts a counter-attack the other way. **Shooting into a defender's shins is the single most commonly wasted play in hockey**, and it happens because players decide to shoot before they check whether there is a lane.

Getting the puck through, in order of importance:

1. **Look for the lane before you shoot, not after.** You need a clear channel to the net, not a hopeful gap. If you cannot see net or you cannot see your teammates' sticks at the net front, there is no lane.
2. **Change the angle.** Do not shoot from where you received the puck. Take one or two steps laterally along the blue line — toward the middle usually, or toward the boards if that is where the gap is. Defenders' sticks and bodies are set for the angle you had a second ago. Two steps changes everything and costs you almost nothing.
3. **Get it off the ice — a little.** A puck kept flat is easy to block with a stick. A puck lifted a few inches clears sticks. A puck lifted a foot or more is unusable for a tip and easy for the goalie to catch. A few inches is the whole target.
4. **Low and hard for tips.** If you have net-front traffic, the shot you want arrives at knee height or below, hard. Low enough for a teammate to redirect with a blade on the ice, hard enough that a small deflection still has pace on it. High point shots are a tipper's nightmare.

5. **Fake the shot to make them commit.** A shoulder drop and a half wind-up drops the defender into the lane and takes their stick out of it. Then step around and shoot for real.
6. **Consider not shooting.** If there is no lane, the play is to move the puck — D-to-D across the blue line, or down to the half-wall and back — until there is one. See Offensive Zone Play.

A note for defencemen at the point: the goal of a point shot is almost never to score directly. Point shots convert at roughly 1–3% (Hockey's Arsenal (<https://hockeysarsenal.substack.com/p/shot-quantity-or-shot-quality>) — a range read off a shot-location map, not a computed rate; see Where Shots Are Worth Taking). The goal is to produce a tip, a rebound, or a scramble in the slot — all of which require the puck to actually arrive there. That is why "get it through" beats "shoot it hard" every time.

Where Shots Are Worth Taking

This is the part that changes how many goals you score, and it has nothing to do with your hands.

Shot value depends overwhelmingly on location. The exact figures vary by model, but every model agrees on the shape. **These are the numbers to use, and each carries its own qualification with it, because they do not all rest on the same kind of evidence.**

- Shots from the **slot** convert at roughly **10–15%**. Shots from the **perimeter** convert at roughly **2–4%** — a difference of three to seven times (The Coaches Site (<https://members.thecoachesite.com/article/shot-distribution-the-importance-of-getting-shots-from-high-quality-areas-as-illustrated-by-the-4-nations-face-off-championship-game>)). **Qualification: the source attributes these to "data from various hockey analytics sources" and names no dataset**, so treat them as a coaching-level consensus range rather than a measurement you could re-derive.
- Put another way: **point shots produce around 1–3 goals per 100 shots; shots from the "house" — the slot area in front of the net — produce around 5–15** (Hockey's Arsenal (<https://hockeysarsenal.substack.com/p/shot-quantity-or-shot-quality>)). **Qualification: these are Greg Revak's readings off a shot-location map he credits to HockeyViz (Micah Blake McCurdy), given as ranges rather than as computed values** — so they are approximate by construction, but the model behind them is at least named, which the first bullet's is not.
- Over a three-year five-on-five sample, **close to half of all NHL goals came from the inner slot**, and just over a quarter from the outer slot (The Point (<https://www.thepointhockey.com/shot-optimization-how-optimal-shooting-habits-can-improve-individual-goal-scoring-rates/>)). "Inner slot" there means the area closest to the crease; "outer slot" the rest of the slot out to the top of the

circles. **Qualification: this split is computed from Sportlogiq tracking, which is not public** — the same limit that applies to the Kane and Laine figures below, and it applies to this number too. The article's own wording is "*nearly half*" and "*just over a quarter*"; nobody outside Sportlogiq can check it.

What that means when you are standing on the ice with the puck: a shot from the slot is worth several times a shot from the point. Not slightly more — several times. If you can turn a point shot into a slot shot by making one pass, make the pass. If you can turn a perimeter shot into a slot shot by taking two strides toward the middle, take the strides.

The same analysis gave two real NHL examples of what bad shot selection costs, and it names them. **Patrick Kane** — "*Kane takes over 20 percent of his shots from 'the dead zone' above the circles and has scored less than 2 percent of his goals from there.*" In the season before the article (2018-19) he attempted 79 shots from that area, of which "*three of these led to a scoring chance, two produced goals and 38 resulted in a loss of possession.*" **Patrik Laine** managed "*a mere 2 goals on 232 shot attempts from above the circles over his career*" (Mike Kelly, The Point, 26 September 2019 (<https://www.thepointhockey.com/shot-optimization-how-optimal-shooting-habits-can-improve-individual-goal-scoring-rates/>)), using Sportlogiq tracking of the previous three NHL seasons at 5-on-5). **The Sportlogiq tracking underneath is not public**, so the raw counts cannot be re-derived from anywhere else — the figures are quoted exactly as the article gives them, and the 2018-19 dating is inferred from the publication date rather than stated. The pattern is what matters: these are among the best shooters alive, and if they cannot score from above the circles, you cannot either.

The practical rule: get to the middle, or get the puck to someone in the middle.

Everything in Offensive Zone Play about cycling, net drives and finding the bumper exists to manufacture slot shots. That is what the whole offensive system is for.

Screens, Goalie Sightlines and the Royal Road

Location is the first half of shot value. **What the goalie can see, and whether they had to move, is the other half.**

A goaltender who sees the puck the whole way, from a set position, with their angle correct, saves almost everything. Take away either the sight or the set position and the same shot becomes dangerous.

The royal road

Former NHL goaltender Steve Valiquette popularised a concept called the **royal road** — an imaginary line running down the middle of the ice, which a puck crossing forces the goalie to move laterally across. Shots taken immediately after the puck has crossed it, by a pass or by a carrier skating over it, score at a far higher rate than shots that have not, because the goalie cannot be set and square.

Published descriptions of where exactly that line runs do not agree, and the weight of evidence is against the popular version. Most secondary accounts, including OMHA's (https://www.omha.net/news_article/show/486107-the-most-important-line-on-the-ice-you-ve-never-heard-of), describe it as running the length of the ice from the centre of one net to the centre of the other. The two sources closest to Valiquette himself describe something narrower and **zone-limited**:

- Blue Seat Blogs (<https://blueseatblogs.com/2015/01/09/taking-look-steve-valiquettes-royal-road/>): *"The zone is divided in half, vertically from the center bar of the net to the top of the circles, and is bisected by a horizontal line going laterally across the top of the circles. The centerline is Valiquette's 'Royal Road'."*
- NHL.com's own reporting (<https://web.archive.org/web/20150924092445/http://www.nhl.com/ice/news.htm?id=744483>) — the article in which Valiquette gives the 76% figure directly — calls it *"a line that halves the offensive zone in two below the tops of the faceoff circles."*

On that reading the road stops at the top of the circles rather than running the length of the rink, and a lateral pass out at the blue line would not cross it.

This document still uses the **net-centre-to-net-centre** version, because it is the description you will actually meet and because it gives the more conservative coaching instruction — cross the middle earlier and more often than the narrow version requires, and you cannot be wrong. **But be clear that the numbers below are computed against the narrower definition**, and that the narrower definition is the better-attested one. What has never been published is the precise geometry Clear Sight Analytics tracks against — the framework is proprietary — so the last few feet of the disagreement cannot be settled from public sources.

 **One man's word for his own proprietary data — treat with care.** In Valiquette's framework, "green" shots account for roughly **76% of NHL goals**, with "red" shots accounting for the other 24%. Blue Seat Blogs lists seven green categories: possession across the royal road, passes across it, deflections, one-timers on the same side of it, screens, broken plays, and "green rebounds"; red is everything else — shots from outside the designated area, and "red rebounds". So green is not simply "the puck crossed the middle" — the crossing categories are two items in a list of seven, and 30% of goals is the share Valiquette attributed to those two specifically. The

76% is **Valiquette's own figure, stated directly to NHL.com**: "*Valiquette said 76 percent of goals in the NHL this season have been scored off Green Shots, including 30 percent on plays that involved either a pass or possession moving across the Royal Road*" (Kevin Woodley, "Unmasked: Analytics provide new evaluation tools", NHL.com, 18 December 2014 (<https://web.archive.org/web/20150924092445/http://www.nhl.com/ice/news.htm?id=744483>) — "this season" is 2014-15 to that date). That same article also characterises green goals as those "*scored off high-percentage shots, or shots that the goaltender has less than half a second to see*" — Woodley's summary of Valiquette's system rather than a quotation from Valiquette, so read it as the reporter's gloss. Blue Seat Blogs (<https://blueseatblogs.com/2015/01/09/taking-look-steve-valiquettes-royal-road/>), which is where most people meet the number, **cites no source for it at all. What still cannot be checked is the tracking underneath**. Clear Sight Analytics' shot database is proprietary. The green and red *categories* are named, as above, but no sample size, no shot-by-shot counts and no rules for applying the categories have ever been published, and the figure has never been independently replicated. The direction of the finding is coaching consensus; the number is one analyst's claim about data nobody else can see.

Analysts have pushed back that this formalises something coaches already knew rather than revealing something new — and that is fair. It is still the cleanest single way to think about shot value: **make the goalie move sideways, or make sure they cannot see it**. That instruction does not depend on the number or on the exact geometry.

How to create those shots

Action	Pass across the middle before shooting — cross-slot, D-to-D, or low-to-high to the far point
Action	Attack from behind the net and out the other side so the goalie must rotate and re-find the puck
Position	Screen in the sightline, feet just outside the blue paint, stick on the ice for a tip
Rule	Positioning alone can void the goal if it impairs the goalie moving or defending, wherever your skates are (NHL Rule 69.1)
Action	Shoot off a rebound immediately — do not settle it and pick a corner
Key	A shot the goalie must move for, or cannot see, is worth several times the same shot they are set for

- **Pass across the middle before shooting.** A cross-slot pass, a D-to-D pass at the point followed by a shot, a low-to-high play from the corner to the far point — anything that drags the goalie across.

- **Attack from behind the net and out the other side.** The goalie must rotate their whole body and re-find the puck.
- **Screen.** Stand in the sightline between the goalie and the shooter, feet just outside the blue paint, stick on the ice for a tip. A screen turns a routine save into a guess. Legal — but note the test above: it is not "outside the crease is fine." Rule 69.1 disallows the goal where you impair the goalie's ability to move or defend **by positioning alone**, wherever your skates are. Take away their eyes, not their room.
- **Shoot through your own teammates' legs from the point** — deliberately. If your winger is at the net front, the shooting lane past them is also the sightline they are blocking.
- **Shoot off a rebound immediately.** The goalie has just committed to one location and is recovering. Do not settle it and pick a corner; hit it.
- **Vary the shot's origin** — the release-point section above is the individual-player version of the same idea.

The general rule: **a shot the goalie has to move for, or cannot see, is worth several times a shot they are set and square for — from the same spot on the ice.** Two shots from the identical location can differ enormously in value. That is entirely under your team's control.

Shooting Off the Rush

Read	Release as the defender's stick is closing, not after — waiting for a "good spot" shoots into a blocked lane
Action	Release off the foot you do not normally release off; check which foot that is on the wing you play
Key	On your off wing the "outside foot" is already your conventional release, so that cue tells you nothing
Never	Stop your feet — the rush shot is the purest case for shooting in stride
Targets	Far side low on a wide rush; five-hole off a cut to the middle as the goalie pushes across
Options	Delay a beat and feed a trailer into the high slot — it turns a perimeter shot into a slot shot

Rush chances — attacking with speed before the defence is set — are among the best shooting opportunities in the game, and most of them are wasted by shooting a beat too late.

The timing. As you carry the puck wide and drive toward the net, the defender is skating backwards, gap closing, stick out toward the puck. There is a window that opens as you approach and closes when their stick arrives. **Release as their stick is closing, not after.** If you wait until you are "in a good spot," you are shooting into a blocked lane from a bad angle.

Shoot off the "other" foot — and work out which one that is for you, because it depends on your wing. The textbook shot releases as your weight arrives on the **front foot**, which for a right-handed shooter is the left foot. What "front foot" means relative to the ice depends entirely on which side you are coming down:

- **On your strong-side wing** (a left-handed shot on left wing, a right-handed shot on right wing), your front foot is the one nearer the **middle** of the ice. The unconventional release here is off the **outside** foot, nearer the boards.
- **On your off wing** (a left-handed shot on right wing, a right-handed shot on left wing), the reverse is true: your front foot is already the one nearer the **boards**. Being told to "shoot off the outside foot" therefore tells you to do the completely conventional thing while believing you are doing something clever. The unconventional release for you is off the **inside** foot.

The underlying instruction is the one that transfers: **release off the foot you do not normally release off.** It gets the puck away earlier in the stride, keeps it further from the defender's stick, and arrives at a moment the goalie's read says a shot is not coming. It costs some velocity and it is worth it — but check which foot that actually is on the wing you play, because getting the label wrong means practising your existing habit.

Do not stop your feet. The rush shot is the purest case for shooting in stride. Everything you gain from planting, you lose in warning given.

Pick your target based on the goalie's angle. On a wide rush, the goalie is hugging the near post to take away the short side and is exposed far side and low. Off a cut to the middle, five-hole is open as they push across. On a genuine breakaway, deception matters more than power — a backhand-to-forehand, a shoulder fake, a change of speed. Full treatment in Breakaways and Shootouts below.

Know what the second wave is doing. If you have a trailer coming late into the high slot, delaying a beat and passing back to them is often a better chance than your own shot from the wing — because it converts a perimeter shot into a slot shot. See Zone Entries for how rush attacks are structured, and Defending the Rush for the other side of it.

Breakaways and Shootouts — the Shooter's Side

A **breakaway** is you, the puck, the goalie and nobody else — no defender close enough to interfere. A **penalty shot** is a breakaway awarded by the referee, taken from centre ice. A **shootout** is a series of penalty shots used to settle a tied regular-season game. All three are the same skill, and in most rec leagues the shootout decides games, so it is worth practising on purpose rather than improvising.

The goaltender's half of this — what they are trying to do to you — is in Goaltender. Read it.

Knowing what the goalie has been coached to do is most of the advantage available to you, and everything below is written against it.

The one thing that decides it: who moves first

Goal	Make the goalie commit first — every technique here is a way of buying that
Read	A well-coached goalie meets you out, retreats on C-cuts, stays on their feet and watches the puck
Mindset	Their entire plan is to make you commit first; yours is the mirror image
Never	Simply wait them out — if neither of you commits you run out of ice and lose

A well-coached goalie meets you out, retreats with you on C-cuts to keep the angle closed, stays on their feet as long as possible, and watches the puck rather than your body. **Their entire plan is to make you commit first.** Yours is the mirror image: **make them commit first.** Every technique below is a way of buying that.

If neither of you commits, you run out of ice and lose — so you cannot simply wait. You need a way to force the decision.

Approach speed — slower than you think

Action	Arrive at the top of the circles with less speed than you feel like carrying
Risk	Full flight cuts you to one option and hands the goalie their easiest read
Technique	Come in hard to the blue line, ease off through the top of the circles, accelerate into your move
Key	A change of pace beats raw pace — worth more than any hand skill
Read	A deke needs room; you cannot pull the puck across your body once you are past the post

Arrive at the top of the circles with less speed than you feel like carrying. Speed is the enemy of a breakaway for three reasons:

- **It shortens your decision window.** At full flight you get roughly one option; at three-quarter pace you get to see the goalie's depth, change your mind and still execute.
- **It hands the goalie their easiest read.** A shooter flying in on a straight line has told them exactly where they will be in half a second, which is precisely what a retreating goalie needs.
- **A deke needs room to happen in.** You cannot pull the puck across your body and get it back if you are already past the post.

A change of pace beats raw pace. Come in hard to the blue line, then ease off through the top of the circles and accelerate again as you make your move. The deceleration pulls the goalie out of their retreat rhythm; the re-acceleration arrives before they have re-set. That single pattern is worth more than any hand skill.

Deception — take their eyes off the puck

Action	Look where you are not going — head and eyes to one corner, puck to the other
Action	Sell a shot to open the five-hole; sell a deke to get the shot away into the space they open
Technique	Move the puck's position, not just your body — a shoulder dip alone does not force a re-read
Read	Head and shoulder fakes are the cheapest thing to sell and the first thing a good goalie discounts
Never	Decide your move at the blue line, before you can see what the goalie is actually giving you

What the goalie has been told to watch is a genuine coaching split (see Goaltender): one school says watch the puck and treat everything above it as theatre; another says watch the shooter's chest and hips rather than the stick or the eyes. Either way, **head and shoulder fakes are the cheapest thing you can sell and the first thing a good goalie discounts.** Make the deception something they cannot dismiss — the puck's position, or your hips:

- **Look where you are not going.** Head and eyes to one corner, puck to the other. Cheap, and it still works at every level below professional.
- **Sell a shot to open the five-hole.** Drop your bottom hand, load the shaft, and watch what the pads do. A goalie who respects the shot gets bigger and stops moving — which is the moment a deke is on.
- **Sell a deke to get the shot.** Pull the puck wide to your forehand with your head up and they will start the lateral push. Shoot into the space they have just opened.
- **Change the puck's position, not just your body's.** Moving the puck from in front of you to your hip, or from forehand to backhand and back, forces a genuine re-read. A shoulder dip does not.
- **Do not decide before you can see them.** Deciding at the blue line is the commonest breakaway error, because you are then executing a plan against a goalie position you never actually looked at.

The classic moves, and what each one is for

- Read** Aggressive and out of their crease → forehand-backhand, you have room to go around them
- Read** Deep in the net and squared up → backhand-forehand, the shorter move finishes before they slide
- Read** Retreating and not yet square → shoot early, off the wrong foot
- Read** On their feet, big and pushing across → five-hole, because the hole opens mid-push
- Read** Stabbing with the stick or over-committing forward → toe drag inside the poke check, then shoot
- Read** Patient, deep and giving you nothing → delay, almost stop, and force them to move
- Key** One personal go-to executed without thinking beats five you half-know

None of these is a trick. Each solves a specific goalie behaviour, and picking the one that matches what you are seeing is the whole skill.

Move	What it is	Use it when the goalie is
Forehand-backhand (the "deke")	Pull the puck across your body to the backhand and lift it	Aggressive and out of their crease — you have room to go around them
Backhand-forehand	The reverse, finishing on your stronger side	Deep in their net and squared up — the shorter move gets it done before they slide
Shoot off the wrong foot / early release	Fire it a stride before they expect it	Retreating and still setting — they are not square yet
Five-hole	Sell high, shoot low through the legs	On their feet, big, and pushing across (the hole opens mid-push)
Toe drag	Pull the puck back inside their poke check, then shoot	Stabbing with the stick or over-committing forward
Delay / slow it right down	Almost stop, force them to move	Patient, deep and giving you nothing

One personal go-to, executed without thinking, beats five you half-know. Pick one move as your default and drill it until it needs no decision, then add a second that goes the other way.

Where to shoot

- Targets** Blocker side high — the hardest place for a retreating goalie to get a hand to
- Targets** Five-hole while they are pushing sideways, open during the push and not before or after
- Targets** Short side high only if they have over-committed to the middle; far side low if they are still sliding
- Never** Shoot at the middle of their chest — that is where the puck goes when you shoot without looking
- Action** Look at the goalie, not the puck, in the last two strides; you cannot aim at a hole you have not seen

The targets are not the same as on a normal shot, because the goalie is moving and often deep.

- **Blocker side, high** is the classic breakaway target: the hardest place for a goalie to get a hand to while retreating.
- **Five-hole while they are pushing sideways** — the hole is open during the push, not before it and not after.

- **Short side high** when they have over-committed to taking away the middle. Small window; it is there or it is not.
- **Far side low** if you have cut across the middle and they are still sliding.
- **Not the middle of their chest.** That is where the puck goes when you shoot without looking.

Look at the goalie, not at the puck, in the last two strides. You cannot aim at a hole you have not seen.

Shoot or deke?

Read	Goalie out at the top of the crease and coming at you → deke; they cannot recover laterally from there
Read	Goalie deep, square and patient → shoot; a deke just walks you into the post
Read	Goalie retreating and not yet set → shoot early, before you reach your "spot"
Read	Being caught from behind → shoot now, because a backchecker's stick arrives sooner than you think
Convention	At rec level, shoot more than you deke — rec goalies are usually deep, flat-footed and square

The honest answer is that it depends on one read: **how deep is the goalie, and are they moving?**

- **Goalie out at the top of the crease or beyond, coming at you → deke.** They have given you the room and they cannot recover laterally from out there.
- **Goalie deep in the net, square and patient → shoot.** There is no room to go around, and a deke against a deep goalie just walks you into the post.
- **Goalie retreating and not yet set → shoot early.** The best moment on any breakaway is often the one before you get to your "spot".
- **You are being caught from behind → shoot now.** A backchecker's stick arrives sooner than you think. See Puck Handling on why hands are the smallest contributor to beating a defender: if you have a step, use it rather than spending it on a move.

At rec level, shoot more than you deke. Rec goalies are far more likely to be deep, flat-footed and square than out and aggressive, and a deke against a deep goalie has almost nowhere to finish.

The rules you must know before you take one

Rule	Keep the puck moving towards the goal line — no stopping, circling back or curling away to reset (NHL Rule 24)
Rule	No goal on a rebound of any kind, except post or crossbar, then off the goalkeeper, then in (NHL Rule 24)
Rule	The spin-o-rama is not permitted — complete a 360° on the approach and the shot is stopped, no goal (NHL Rule 24)
Rule	The lacrosse-style move is permitted while the puck stays below shoulder height and the crossbar (NHL Rule 24)
Rule	If the goalie leaves the crease before you touch the puck and you do not score, you shoot again (NHL Rule 24)
Rule	Three shooters then sudden death, and nobody shoots twice until everyone eligible has (NHL Rule 84.4)
Rule	ElH and SIHA shootouts are three shooters, not the IIHF's five — NIHL National and the SNL let the same player go again, NIHL 1 and 2 do not; Game Management owns the split (In-House Rules, Appendix 1)
Rule	Neither rule sets a time limit on the approach, so any "you have N seconds" is folklore (NHL Rules 24 and 84.4)
Convention	Rec and youth shootouts often run house rules — ask first, a shorter approach pushes the read toward shooting

Verified against the *NHL Official Rules 2025-2026*, **Rule 24 (Penalty Shot)** and **Rule 84.4 (Shootout)**, which applies Rule 24 to shootout attempts:

- **The puck must be kept in motion towards the opponent's goal line.** You cannot stop, circle back or curl away to reset. Once you shoot, **the play is complete.**
- **No goal can be scored on a rebound of any kind** — with one exception: puck off the post or crossbar, then off the goalkeeper, then directly in. So there is no second chance; the first touch has to be the one.
- **The shot is over the moment the puck crosses the goal line or comes to a complete stop.**
- **The spin-o-rama is not permitted.** If you complete a 360° turn on the approach, the referee stops the shot and it is no goal.
- **The lacrosse-style move is permitted** — picking the puck up on the blade and whipping it — *provided the puck is never raised above shoulder height and is not carried higher than*

the crossbar when released.

- **The goalie must stay in their crease until you touch the puck.** If they leave early and you do not score, you shoot again.
- **In a shootout** each team gets three shooters, then sudden death; **no player may shoot twice until everyone eligible has shot.** Once it starts, the opposing goalie cannot be replaced unless injured, and a substitute gets no warm-up shots. ⚠️ **That is the NHL.** **Under the IIHF — and so in Britain — the goalie rule is the opposite:** Rule 84.4(VI) reads "*The goalkeepers from each team may be changed after each shot.*" On the **number of shooters**, do not carry the IIHF figure into Britain: IIHF Rule 84.4(II) uses **five** shooters, but that provision is scoped to IIHF Championship play, and the England Ice Hockey In-House Rules set **three** for the EIHL and SIHA competitions that hold one — NIHL National, NIHL 1 and 2 ("*Each team selects three (3) shooters to take alternate shots*") and the SNL ("*A best-of-three penalty shot shootout*"). On repeat shooters the British competitions go **opposite ways**, so do not generalise from one to another: NIHL National allows them — "*Any eligible player may take a penalty-shot attempt, and the same player may be used for multiple attempts*" — and the SNL does too, where "*The first three designated shooters may be repeated after every full round of three.*" But NIHL 1 & 2 require that "*All eligible players (except those serving penalties or injured) must shoot before any player can take a second attempt.*" Game Management owns this split. The captains' coin toss decides which team **chooses** whether to shoot first, not who shoots first. See UK and England Rules and Game Management, which owns overtime and shootout formats.
- **There is no clock.** Neither Rule 24 nor Rule 84.4 sets a time limit on the approach, so any "you have N seconds" you hear is folklore. Take the time.

Rec and youth leagues vary. Many run shootouts under house rules — different numbers of shooters, sometimes a start from the blue line or the red line rather than centre. Ask before the game, because a shorter approach changes your move: less run-up means less time to change pace, which pushes the read toward shooting.

How to practise it

- Action** Take breakaways at the end of every practice, against a real goalie, keeping score
- Action** Drill one go-to move until it is automatic, then a second that goes the other way
- Action** Start from your own blue line so you rehearse the change of pace, not only the last ten feet
- Action** Alternate shoot, deke, shoot, deke, so you are not building a habit the goalie can read

- **Take breakaways at the end of every practice, against a real goalie, keeping score.** Shooting on an empty net teaches you nothing about this.
- **Practise your one go-to move until it is automatic, then a second in the opposite direction.**
- **Practise the approach, not just the finish** — start from your own blue line so you rehearse the change of pace, not only the last ten feet.
- **Alternate: shoot, deke, shoot, deke,** so you are not building a habit the goalie can read.

When NOT to Shoot

- Mindset** Shoot-first means taking the good chance immediately; forcing means shooting because you have the puck
- Never** Shoot when there is no lane — a shot into shins is a turnover with extra steps
- Priority** A teammate in the slot when you are not gets the pass, every time
- Read** Goalie set and square, you outside the dots with no traffic → almost no value unless you have bodies to shoot for
- Risk** Shooting as the last player back — a wide shot with nobody covering is how odd-man rushes are born
- Read** If your line is cycling and the other team is pinned and tired, another five seconds of possession beats a bad shot
- Key** Before you shoot, ask what happens if it does not go in — rebound, tip or recovery means shoot

A "shoot-first mentality" is good. Forcing low-percentage shots is not. **Shoot-first** means your default look is the net, you do not need talking into it, and you take the good chance immediately rather than hunting a better one — a genuinely valuable trait most amateurs lack. **Forcing** means you shoot because you have the puck, not because there is a chance; that is a turnover with extra steps.

Do not shoot when:

- **There is no lane.** A shot into shins is a turnover. Move the puck and get a lane.
- **A teammate is in the slot and you are not.** This is the big one. Your perimeter shot converts at 2-4%; their slot shot converts at 10-15%. The pass is worth roughly three to five times your shot. Make it.
- **The goalie is completely set and square and you are outside the dots with no traffic.** This is close to the highest-percentage save in hockey. (A figure of "97-plus percent" circulates for it, from Clear Sight Analytics via secondary reporting — **unverified**, proprietary, and not checkable against a primary source. The point does not need the number: perimeter shots overall convert at 2-4%, which is sourced, and a *clean, set, unscreened* look from out there is the worst subset of that.) Unless you have net-front bodies to shoot *for*, this shot has almost no value.
- **You are the last player back and a miss goes the other way.** See Risk Management. A wide shot from the point with nobody covering is how odd-man rushes get born.
- **The shot would end a possession you are winning.** If your line is cycling and the other team is tired and pinned, a bad shot resets everything. Sometimes the right play is another five seconds of possession.

The test: before you shoot, ask *what happens if this does not go in?* If the answer is "rebound in the slot for my winger" or "tip chance" or "we recover it in the corner," shoot. If the answer is "it goes off a shin pad and they break out," do not.

Equipment Factors

Technique	Roughly right flex feels like the stick loading noticeably in a wrist shot, without feeling like a whip
Risk	Too stiff and the shot is arms-only; too soft and the shaft flaps, wasting energy and accuracy
Options	A deeper curve lifts and helps toe drags; a flatter one gives a better backhand and better low shots
Action	Check your lie — stand naturally in skates and see whether the whole bottom edge of the blade touches
Never	Chase equipment as a substitute for reps — a correct stick removes an obstacle, it does not add a skill

Brief, because the detail lives in Equipment.

- **Flex** — the number on the shaft, roughly the force in pounds needed to bend it a set distance. Flex is how much of your shot's power comes from the stick rather than your arms. **Too stiff** and you cannot bend it at all, so you lose the spring entirely and your shot is arms-only. **Too soft** and the shaft over-bends, energy is wasted flapping the shaft, and accuracy suffers. Roughly right feels like the stick loading noticeably during a wrist shot without feeling like a whip. Smaller and younger players are almost always in sticks that are too stiff for them.
- **Curve** — the bend in the blade. A deeper curve lifts the puck more easily and helps with toe drags and quick elevation, at the cost of backhand control and low-shot accuracy. A flatter curve gives you a better backhand and better control of low shots. A **toe curve** favours quick releases and shots off the toe; a **mid curve** is more forgiving and more accurate on a full sweep.
- **Lie** — the angle between the blade and the shaft, which determines whether the blade sits flat on the ice in your natural stance. If the toe or the heel is off the ice when you are in your stance, your blade contact is wrong on every shot and no amount of technique fixes it. Check yours: stand naturally in skates, look at the blade, and see whether the whole bottom edge is touching.

Do not chase equipment as a substitute for reps. A correctly sized stick removes an obstacle; it does not add a skill.

How to Practise

Priority	Volume builds the motor pattern, deliberate practice builds the skill you will use — do both
Action	Name a target, call the shot out loud before you take it, then score it and keep a count
Action	Practise the release, not the power — set a no-gathering rule, puck arrives, shoot
Never	Shoot from a static, pre-set position — stickhandle, move the puck laterally, then shoot
Action	Practise the backhand every session, and split forehand and backhand 50/50 for a month
Action	Practise the shots you dislike — off-balance, one-handed, pucks arriving behind you
Key	Tips and rebounds cannot be trained on a garage pad; do those on the ice
Action	Fifteen to twenty minutes a day of focused work beats two hours on a Sunday

Shooting is the most trainable skill in hockey because you can practise it almost entirely off the ice, alone, in a garage.

Off-ice setup. A shooting pad (a slick synthetic sheet, typically around 60 cm by 120 cm, or 2 ft by 4 ft), a net or a target board, and a bucket of pucks. Steel-tip protection or an old stick, because concrete will destroy a blade. That is the whole kit and it is inexpensive.

Volume versus deliberate practice. Both matter, and they are not the same:

- **Volume** builds the motor pattern. Hundreds of repetitions of the same shot, until the weight transfer and wrist roll happen without thought. There is no shortcut past this.
- **Deliberate practice** builds the skill you will actually use. That means: a specific target, a specific intention, and feedback on every rep. Ten shots at a named corner, checking each one, beats a hundred shots at the general area of the net.

The failure mode is doing only volume — a thousand comfortable wrist shots from the same spot, at the same speed, at nothing in particular. That makes you very good at one shot you will never take in a game.

What to actually do:

- **Targets.** Hang or prop something in the corners and five-hole. Missing must be visible and audible, or you will not correct it.
- **Call the shot before you take it.** "Low blocker." Then take it. Score it. Keep a count.

- **Practise the release, not the power.** Set a rule: no gathering. Puck arrives, shoot. Have someone pass to you, or bounce it off a rebounder.
- **Move first.** Stickhandle two touches, change the puck's position laterally, then shoot. Never shoot from a static, pre-set position — you will not get one in a game.
- **Practise off both feet**, including the "wrong" one.
- **Practise the backhand every session.** If you split forehand and backhand 50/50 for a month, your backhand will stop being a liability. Almost nobody does this, which is exactly why it works.
- **Practise shots you dislike.** Off-balance, one-handed extensions, pucks arriving behind you. Games are full of those; comfortable reps are not.
- **On-ice, practise tips and rebounds.** These cannot be trained on a garage pad and they produce a large share of real goals.

What improvement looks like. Honest expectations, and these are general coaching guidance rather than measured findings — treat them as a shape, not a schedule:

- **Weeks 1-4:** mechanics start to feel natural; power improves noticeably, mostly because your weight transfer stops being an afterthought.
- **Months 2-3:** release time drops meaningfully; you stop needing to gather. This is the change that shows up in games.
- **Months 4-6:** accuracy tightens; you can call a target and hit it more often than not; the backhand becomes usable.
- **Beyond:** the remaining gains are decision-making, not mechanics — shot selection, deception, and reading the goalie. Those are trained by playing and by watching, not by shooting at a garage door.

Fifteen to twenty minutes a day of focused work beats two hours on a Sunday. See Practice and Development for how to build this into a wider training plan.

Common Mistakes

- **Slapping at the puck instead of sweeping it.** A wrist shot never loses contact with the blade. If you hear a click, you took a bad snap shot by accident.
- **Shooting with arms only.** No weight transfer means no power, and no amount of upper-body strength fixes it. Power comes from legs and torso through a bending stick.

- **Hitting the puck directly on a slap shot.** You are supposed to hit the ice two to five centimetres behind it. Miss that and your slap shot is slower than your wrist shot.
- **Stopping your feet before shooting.** The clearest tell in hockey. Every goalie and every defender reads it.
- **Gathering the puck before every shot.** The settle-look-plant-shoot sequence gives away half a second, which is the entire margin you were working with.
- **Aiming for corners by default.** Small targets, guarded by the fastest-moving parts of the goalie, and a miss produces nothing. Five-hole, low blocker and rebound-creation are worth more.
- **Shooting into shin pads.** The most common wasted play in the game. Look for the lane first; change the angle if there isn't one.
- **Full wind-ups from the point with traffic in the lane.** You have announced the shot and it is getting blocked. Low snap shot, through, every time.
- **Shooting from above the circles because you have the puck.** The two elite shooters this document names — Kane and Laine — scored under 2% of their goals from there. **That is two named players in one analyst's article, drawn from Sportlogiq tracking that is not public**, not a league-wide rate. The direction is the point: you will score fewer.
- **Perimeter shots when a teammate is in the slot.** You are choosing a 2–4% chance over a 10–15% one — a coaching-consensus range whose source names no dataset, so trust the gap rather than the decimals.
- **High point shots when your team is screening for a tip.** Unusable. Knee-height or lower.
- **Never practising the backhand.** It is the shot goalies read worst and the one you are most likely to face in tight, and you have decided to be bad at it.
- **Bracing hard on a tip.** Stiff hands fire the puck to the corner. Soft hands drop it at your feet for a second chance.
- **Blaming the stick.** Get the flex and lie roughly right, then stop thinking about it.

Key Takeaways

1. **Release speed beats shot speed.** A goalie stops what they are set for. Getting the puck away before they are ready is worth more than any amount of velocity.
2. **The snap shot is your best shot in most situations** — nearly slap-shot power with nearly wrist-shot release. If you are inside the dots, it is probably the right choice.

3. **Blade face angle at release sets the height; follow-through is how you control it.** Finish low for a low shot, finish high for a high one — that is the cue that puts the face where you need it. You do not aim with your eyes.
4. **The slap shot is overused.** It is slow to load, easy to read, easy to block, and a missed one from the point hands over possession. Use a three-quarter version or a low snap shot instead.
5. **Location is most of shot value.** One widely cited breakdown puts slot shots at roughly 10–15% and perimeter shots at 2–4%. The exact figures vary by data set; the gap does not. Getting to the middle is worth more than any technical improvement you can make.
6. **Make the goalie move sideways, or take away their sight.** A shot after a pass across the middle, or through a screen, is worth several times the same shot from the same spot with a clear, set goalie. Screening is legal from **outside** the blue paint and without contact — but under Rule 69.1 your positioning alone can void the goal if it stops the goalie moving or defending, wherever your skates are. Take away their eyes, not their room.
7. **Changing direction beats adding speed.** A tipped puck redirected six inches in front of the goalie beats a rocket they read from the blue line.
8. **Shoot to create, not just to finish.** With traffic at the net, a hard low shot at the pads has three good outcomes — goal, tip, rebound. A shot at a corner has one.
9. **Shooting into shin pads is the most common wasted play in hockey.** Find the lane, or change the angle until there is one, or move the puck.
10. **Practise the backhand and practise the release.** Nobody does either, both are pure volume problems, and both directly beat goalies.

VERIFICATION NOTES

Unverified or single-source — each of these is now also flagged inline at the point of use, not only here:

- *The 70 mph / 0.3 s versus 90 mph / 0.7 s release comparison is an illustrative figure from a retailer's coaching article, not a published measurement.*
- *The royal road figures. The 76% green / 24% red split traces to Clear Sight Analytics' proprietary tracking, but the 76% is **Valiquette's own statement, made directly to NHL.com** (Kevin Woodley, 18 December 2014, linked above) rather than a blog's paraphrase — the Blue Seat Blogs article usually cited for it still gives no source at all. The database underneath remains proprietary: no published sample size, no published method, no independent replication. The **"97-plus-percent save" on a clean set look has no primary source at all** — it is not in Clear Sight Analytics' own public glossary (<https://www.csahockey.com/glo>*

ssary), not in InGoal Magazine's guide to CSA's data, and not in the NHL.com reporting, all three checked on 27 July 2026. It stays flagged.

- Published descriptions of the royal road disagree about its geometry, and the disagreement is set out in the body as well as here: OMHA and most secondary accounts describe a net-centre-to-net-centre line, while **both** sources closest to Valiquette describe a zone-limited one — Blue Seat Blogs as running only from the centre bar of the net to the top of the circles within a zone bisected laterally, and NHL.com as "a line that halves the offensive zone in two below the tops of the faceoff circles". Two-to-one against the popular version, so the body says so; the document keeps the net-to-net version only because it is the more conservative coaching instruction.
- The two NHL shot-selection examples in "Where Shots Are Worth Taking" are Patrick Kane and Patrik Laine, both named in The Point's article along with every figure quoted. What cannot be re-checked is the Sportlogiq tracking they rest on, which is not public; and the season for Kane's 79-shot count is inferred from the article's publication date, because the article says only "last season". Both limits are stated where the figures appear. **The same not-public limit applies to the inner-slot / outer-slot split in the same section**, which comes from the same article and the same tracking — it is now labelled at the point of use rather than only here.
- The three shot-location figures in that section do not rest on equally good evidence, and each now carries its own qualification inline: The Coaches Site's 10–15% / 2–4% cites only "data from various hockey analytics sources" and names no dataset; Hockey's Arsenal's 1–3 / 5–15 per hundred shots are ranges read off a HockeyViz map credited to Micah Blake McCurdy; the inner/outer slot split is Sportlogiq tracking that is not public. All three agree on the shape, which is the part worth acting on.
- The improvement timeline in "How to Practise" is general coaching guidance, not a measured finding.
- No number is given for how much a deflection is worth against a clean shot. The "60 mph tipped beats 95 mph clean" comparison that circulates in coaching talk is not sourced from any measurement, so it is not used here.

Rules verified against the local primary text (NHL Official Rules 2025-2026 and USA Hockey Playing Rules) on 27 July 2026: Rule 80.1 (batting the puck above shoulder height), Rule 80.3 (goal disallowed on contact above the crossbar), Rule 69 (goaltender interference), and the USA Hockey slap-shot provision (Blind Hockey only).

Body Contact and Battles

Rule set: Written to NHL rules. Where IIHF, USA Hockey, Hockey Canada or typical rec-league rules differ in a way that changes how you play, it is flagged inline. This document contains more of those flags than any other in this guide, because **whether body checking is legal at all depends entirely on which league you are in. Playing in Britain? The IIHF flags are yours** — every level of UK hockey runs the IIHF book, amended locally; see UK and England Rules, and read "**If you play in Britain**" in §1 before you play a shift.

RELATED

UK and England Rules

Defending the Rush

Skating

Puck Handling

Defender

Risk Management

Equipment

Overview

Most hockey games are not decided by pretty passing plays. They are decided by who wins the scrappy, ugly, three-second contests for a loose puck along the wall, in the corner, and at the front of the net. This document is about winning those, and about staying safe while you do it.

It is also about a distinction almost every amateur player blurs: **body contact and body checking are not the same thing**. One happens in every league on earth. The other is a specific, rule-governed act that many leagues ban outright. Nearly everything in this document — angling, stick checks, body position, board battles, net-front work, shot blocking — is fully legal in a non-contact league. Only one section (Delivering a Legal Body Check) is restricted, and it is clearly marked.

1. Which League Are You Actually In?

Before you read another word, find out which category your league falls into. Getting this wrong is how good players end up in the penalty box, and how careless players hurt someone.

The two categories

- Key** Body contact and body checking are not the same thing — one is legal everywhere, the other is not
- Rule** Hockey Canada defines body contact as incidental contact of two opposing players pursuing the puck in the same direction — no penalty
- Rule** USA Hockey defines a body check as intentional physical contact by a skater to an opponent in control of the puck
- Rule** Hockey Canada's mechanical test for a check — opposite-directional force, leaving your skating lane, or extending an arm, shoulder or hip after angling
- Key** Body contact is legal in every league at every age; body checking is legal only in specific classifications

Body contact is incidental or positional contact between two players who are both playing the puck — leaning on each other, rubbing shoulders as you skate the same direction, boxing someone out at the net front, sealing a player off along the wall. Hockey Canada's rulebook defines body contact as "incidental contact of two opposing players in pursuit of the puck on the ice in the same direction" and states plainly that no penalty is assessed for it. **Body contact is legal in every league, at every age, in every division.**

Body checking is a deliberate act: you use your body to separate an opponent from the puck. USA Hockey defines a body check as "intentional physical contact, from the front, diagonally from the front or straight from the side, by a skater to an opponent who is in control of the puck." Hockey Canada adds the mechanical test — body checking occurs "when a player makes deliberate contact with an opposing player with opposite-directional force, when a player leaves their skating lane to make contact, or when a player extends an arm, shoulder, or hip after angling an opponent." **Body checking is legal only in specific classifications.**

Where body checking is and is not permitted

- Rule** Body checking is banned at 12U and below, in all girls'/women's classifications, and in all non-check adult classifications (USA Hockey Rule 604(a))
- Rule** Hockey Canada bans body checking at U13 and below and throughout female hockey (Hockey Canada Rule 7.3)
- Rule** When a checking team plays a non-checking team, body checking is prohibited outright (USA Hockey Rule 604(b))
- Never** Assume your league permits checking — a local governing body can ban it in any classification, and adult leagues in checking countries very often are non-check
- Key** "Non-check" does not mean "non-contact" — USA Hockey says a Competitive Contact game can be very physical

League / level	Body checking?	Source
NHL	Yes	NHL rulebook
USA Hockey — 14U and older boys'/men's check classifications	Yes	USA Hockey Rule 604(a)
USA Hockey — 12U and below	No	USA Hockey Rule 604(a)
USA Hockey — all Girls'/Women's classifications	No	USA Hockey Rule 604(a)
USA Hockey — all non-check Adult classifications	No	USA Hockey Rule 604(a)
Hockey Canada — U13 and below	No	Hockey Canada Rule 7.3
Hockey Canada — female hockey	No	Hockey Canada Rule 7.3
Hockey Canada — U15 and above (male)	Yes	Hockey Canada Rule 7.3 (rule applies only to the divisions listed above)
IIHF women's international	Restricted — see below	IIHF Rule 101.1
Women's hockey in Britain (EIH / SIHA / BUIHA)	Restricted, same as IIHF	IIHF Rule 101.1, unamended by the In-House Rules
PWHL	Restricted — see below	PWHL Rule 52.1
British junior and men's/mixed hockey	Neither book states an age — see below	IIHF Rule Book and In-House Rules are silent
Most adult rec / beer leagues	Usually no — check your league	—

Three things that catch people out:

- **A local governing body can ban checking in any classification.** USA Hockey's rule says so explicitly and encourages associations to offer non-check options "at all levels of recreational play." An adult men's league in a checking country is very often non-check. Do not assume.
- **When a checking team plays a non-checking team, nobody checks.** USA Hockey Rule 604(b) prohibits body checking outright in that game.
- **"Non-check" does not mean "non-contact."** USA Hockey states it in as many words: "Non-check hockey does not mean no contact and the Competitive Contact Category game

can be very physical."

If you play in Britain

Rule	Your book is the IIHF Rule Book, amended by the In-House Rules — the USA Hockey and Hockey Canada rows above are not yours
Rule	Neither the IIHF Rule Book nor the In-House Rules states an age at which body checking becomes legal — the age bandings above do not transfer
Never	Assume Britain mirrors USA Hockey's 12U or Hockey Canada's U13 — nothing in either British source says so
Action	Get the contact status of your division in writing from your league or club before your first shift
Rule	British junior categories are U19/U16/U14/U12/U10 by birth year and unisex, "not classified as 'Mens' within the UK" (In-House Rules, Rule 200)
Rule	In women's hockey under EIHA, Adult runs from the 14th birthday and Under 16 from the 10th (In-House Rules, Rule 100.1)
Rule	In British women's hockey below Adult, any major penalty carries an automatic game misconduct and ejection (In-House Rules, Rule 101, applying IIHF Rule 201.1)
Key	Read junior hockey the same way at every age, U19 to U10 — In-House Rule 201 scopes the IIHF junior rules to all junior groups without naming 201.1, so treat a major as ending the game

Everything in the table above is North American, and a British reader has no way to map it onto their own game. Here is what maps and what does not.

Your book is the IIHF Rule Book, adopted as the foundation of the game in England and Scotland by England Ice Hockey, the SIHA and the BUIHA, with the **In-House Rules** sitting on top of it as amendments. So the IIHF rows and flags in this document — Rule 43 on checking from behind, Rule 42 on charging, Rule 48 on head contact, Rule 101.1 on women's hockey — are describing your game. The USA Hockey and Hockey Canada rows are not. See UK and England Rules for the full amendment list.

⚠ Neither book states an age at which body checking becomes legal in Britain, and this document will not invent one.

The **IIHF Rule Book** contains no body-checking age restriction at all. It defines a legal body check in its glossary — "*a Player checks an opponent who is in possession of the puck, by using*

their hip or body from the front, diagonally from the front or straight from the side... only with the trunk of the body (hips and shoulders) and must be above the opponent's knees and at or below the shoulders" — and restricts checking in exactly one place: **Rule 101.1**, in women's hockey. Its junior section (**Rules 200–202**) covers age eligibility for the U20 and U18 World Championships, facial protection, and one playing rule — **201.1**, that any major penalty in men's junior also brings an automatic game misconduct. **There is nothing about contact.**

The **In-House Rules** do not add one. Their junior section (**Rules 200–201**) sets the British age categories and then says, in its entirety, that the IIHF junior playing rules "*apply to all junior age groups as defined in Rule 200 of the in-house rules.*" Their women's section (**Rules 100–102**) sets the age boundaries, applies IIHF Rule 201.1 to "*all non-adult age categories of Women's Hockey*", and restricts half visors. **Neither section mentions body checking, body contact, or non-contact play — and nor does any other section of the document.**

So do not assume Britain mirrors USA Hockey's 12U line or Hockey Canada's U13 line. It might in practice, and it might not; the point is that no source this guide has read says so, and guessing on this particular question is how someone gets hurt. **Where the answer actually lives is your competition's own regulations** — the In-House Rules note that EIH and SIHA "*may also issue Rule Bulletins from time to time*", and each league sets its own competition regulations separately from the playing rules. Ask your club or league secretary, and get it in writing.

The age bandings themselves are different, so the North American numbers do not even translate. British junior categories are set by **birth year**, not by the North American banding used elsewhere in this document: **U19, U16, U14, U12 and U10** (In-House Rules, Rule 200). The In-House Rules add a note that matters for anyone reading a USA Hockey "boys'/men's check classification" row and looking for its British equivalent: "*Junior age categories are unisex and are not classified as 'Mens' within the UK.*" There is no British "boys' checking division" to map onto. In women's hockey, **Adult runs from the player's 14th birthday** and Under 16 from the 10th to the 16th (Rule 100.1).

One consequence to plan around: below adult, the penalties are heavier than the IIHF baseline. In British **women's** hockey below Adult, **any foul that draws a major penalty also draws an automatic game misconduct and ejection** — In-House Rule 101 states that cross-reference to IIHF Rule 201.1 explicitly. For **junior** hockey, In-House Rule 201 scopes the IIHF junior playing rules to "*all junior age groups*" without naming 201.1, so read the same consequence across U19 to U10 as this corpus's interpretation rather than the rule's own words. Either way, treat a major for charging, boarding or checking from behind as ending the game, and confirm with your league.

Women's hockey — the nuance that is usually got wrong

Key	"Women's hockey has no hitting" is too blunt — the answer depends on which book you are under
Rule	USA Hockey and Hockey Canada prohibit body checking in all girls'/women's classifications
Rule	IIHF women's rules allow bodychecking where there is clear intention of playing the puck (IIHF Rule 101.1) — two players may push and lean into each other
Rule	The PWHL permits angling with the body to separate an opponent from the puck (PWHL Rule 52.1)
Never	Step or glide into an opponent, or move into a puck carrier trying to avoid you — that is an illegal hit
Rule	IIHF women's rules forbid using the boards to eliminate, push or pin an opponent (IIHF Rule 101.1)
Rule	A stationary player is entitled to their ice, and a puck carrier skating directly at her must avoid contact (IIHF Rule 101.1)
Rule	An illegal hit in women's hockey is a minor, or a major plus an automatic game misconduct (IIHF Rule 101.1)
Rule	In Britain IIHF Rule 101.1 is the operative rule, unamended; women's Adult begins at the 14th birthday (In-House Rules, Rule 100.1)

The common statement "women's hockey has no hitting" is too blunt. What is accurate:

- **USA Hockey and Hockey Canada prohibit body checking in all girls'/women's classifications.** That part is simple and absolute.
- **IIHF women's rules permit a restricted form of bodychecking — and this is the rule women's hockey in Britain plays under.** IIHF Rule 101.1 states that in women's hockey, *"'bodychecking' is allowed when there is a clear intention of playing the puck or attempting to 'gain possession' of the puck"*, with the exception of the situations the rule then describes. Two players in pursuit of the puck *"are reasonably allowed to push and lean into each other provided that 'possession of the puck' remains the sole object of the two Players."* What is banned is the *hit*: *"Any move by a Player to step or glide into an opposing Player will be assessed at least a minor penalty for an 'illegal hit'"*, and the rule provides either a minor **or** a major plus an automatic game misconduct. Three further clauses are worth knowing exactly, because they decide most real contests:
 - **The boards.** Where two or more players are competing for possession, *"they are not allowed to use the boards to make contact with an opponent to eliminate her from the*

play, push her into the boards, or pin her along the boards."

- **Standing your ground is protected.** *"A Player, who is stationary, is entitled to that area of the ice. It is up to the opponent to avoid body contact with such a Player... the opponent is obliged to skate around the stationary Player."* And: *"Players are allowed to 'hold their ground' any time that they have established their position on the ice."* Everything in Section 4 of this document is available to you.
- **The obligation runs both ways.** *"If a Player with the puck is skating directly at an opponent who is stationary, it is the obligation of the puck carrier to 'avoid contact'."* But if the carrier makes every effort to avoid contact and the stationary player moves into her, it is the *defender* who takes at least a minor.
- **The PWHL permits the same restricted form.** PWHL Rule 52.1: "In the PWHL, a form of Bodychecking is permitted. Players may angle their opponent by using their body in order to separate her opponent from the puck." Same-direction contact that dislodges the puck is legal; "opposite-directional force," leaving your skating lane to make contact, or extending an arm, shoulder or hip *after* angling are all illegal hits.

In Britain, Rule 101.1 is your rule as written — the In-House Rules do not amend it.

What they do amend is who counts as an adult and what a major costs: **Adult women's hockey runs from the player's 14th birthday**, Under 16 from the 10th to the 16th, and **below Adult any foul assessed a major penalty also carries an automatic game misconduct and ejection** (In-House Rules, Rules 100.1 and 101). So an illegal hit serious enough to draw the major under 101.1 ends the game of a player under 14. See UK and England Rules.

In practice, the women's-game standard is very close to the standard for **legal angling everywhere** — which is the subject of the next section, and the most useful skill in this document.

What this means for how you read the rest of this document

Key	Everything here applies in every league — angling, stick checks, body position, receiving a hit safely, battles, shot blocking
Priority	The single exception is Section 5, delivering a legal body check, which applies only if your league permits checking
Never	Treat anything here as a licence to hit in a league that does not allow it

Everything here applies in **every league, including yours** — angling, stick checks, body position, receiving a hit safely, board and corner and net-front battles, loose-puck races, shot

blocking and staying out of the box. The single exception is the section on **delivering a legal body check**, which applies only if your league permits checking. Nothing in this document is a licence to hit in a league that does not allow it.

2. Angling — The Most Important Skill Here

Angling is steering an opponent to where you want them by choosing your skating route, not by hitting them. USA Hockey's glossary defines it as "a legal defensive skill used to direct/control the puck carrier to an area that closes the gap and creates an opening that is too small for the puck carrier."

It is legal everywhere. Hockey Canada's own interpretation of its no-checking rule says it outright: "A player may steer or direct an opposing player into the boards, without actually touching or body-checking them. This is acceptable." You are allowed to close off the boards and force a puck carrier to slow down or turn back inside — as long as you do not bump, push or shove them to do it.

This is how good defenders actually take the puck. Not by hitting people.

The four things you are managing

Action	Skate at the ice they want, not at the player — take away their good ice and force them to bad ice
Position	Approach on an angle that leaves your momentum heading back toward your own net, not sideways across the ice
Technique	Arrive under control — slow your feet as the gap shrinks, knees bent so you can still change direction
Never	Cross over as you close — a crossover commits your weight, and a good attacker cuts back against it
Technique	Stick on the ice in a sweeping manner, blade covering the inside lane while your body covers the outside
Goal	A gap too small for the puck carrier to cut inside

1. Your route, not their route. Skate at the ice they want, not at the player. If they are trying to get to the middle, your line takes the middle away and leaves them the wall. Coaches call the

middle **good ice** and the outside **bad ice**; the whole aim is to make bad ice the only ice available. Seth Appert, head coach at USA Hockey's National Team Development Program, frames the objective as "to take away an opponent's good ice and force them to bad ice."

2. Momentum back toward your own net. Approach on an angle that leaves you travelling *back* toward the goal you are defending, not sideways across the ice. Appert: "When you're skating to take away time and space from your opponent, one thing you need to have for the proper angle is momentum back toward your net." The reason is simple — if they get rid of the puck, you are already going the right way and you stay above them (between them and your net). If you angled flat across the ice and they beat you, you are now chasing.

3. Closing speed. Arrive under control. If you close at full speed, one inside cut beats you and you are 20 feet out of the play. Slow your feet as the gap shrinks and keep your knees bent so you can change direction. The gap you are aiming for is small enough that a cut inside is not available — that is what "creates an opening that is too small for the puck carrier" means.

- **Do not cross over as you close.** A crossover commits your weight to one direction, and a good attacker cuts back against a committed defender. Stay on an inside edge through the last few strides so you can still change direction. (Crossovers are for *building* the speed that gets you to the angle, not for arriving on it — see Skating.)

4. Stick on the ice, blade in the passing lane. Appert again: "you want your stick on the ice in a sweeping manner and protecting good ice." Your stick covers the inside — the lane back to the middle — while your body covers the outside. At the moment of contact, "if your opponent still has the puck, you want your stick on the puck."

Where the angle ends

Action	In a non-checking league, end the angle with a seal — take away the last of their space and arrive stick-on-puck
Key	Both leaning, both playing the puck, both going the same direction is legal competitive contact
Action	In a checking league, the same angle ends with a rub-out or a check under the Section 5 rules
Priority	The angle comes first, the contact is the last step
Never	Throw a hit without an angle — a hit from bad position is where most penalties come from

In a **non-checking league**, the angle ends with a seal: your body position takes away the last of their space, you arrive stick-on-puck, and you either take it or force a dump. Contact happens — you are both leaning, both playing the puck, both going the same direction — and that is legal competitive contact.

In a **checking league**, the same angle ends with a rub-out or a check, delivered under the rules in Section 5. Note the order: **the angle comes first, the contact is the last step**. A hit thrown without an angle is a hit thrown from bad position, which is where most penalties come from.

Angling is a skating skill before it is a defensive skill. See Skating for the crossovers, pivots and edge control it demands, and Defending the Rush for how angling combines with gap control on an oncoming attack.

3. Stick Checks — Legal, Effective, and Under-Used

A **stick check** is any attempt to win the puck with your stick rather than your body. All four below are legal in every league. The rule that governs all of them is simple:

Stick on the puck or stick on their stick is legal. Stick on their hands or their body is a penalty.

That comes straight out of the rulebook. NHL Rule 55.1 (Hooking): "When a player is checking another in such a way that there is only stick-to-stick contact, such action is not to be penalized as hooking." And NHL Rule 61.1 (Slashing): "Any forceful or powerful chop with the stick on an opponent's body, the opponent's stick, or on or near the opponent's hands that, in the judgment of the Referee, is not an attempt to play the puck, shall be penalized as slashing."

Read that second one carefully. Chopping *at their stick* is still slashing if it is a chop rather than an attempt to play the puck. The difference is intent and violence, and referees are watching for it.

The poke check

Technique	A short, straight jab of the blade at the puck, one hand or two, from a controlled distance
Read	Use it when you are square to a carrier with the puck out in front — receiving, looking up, or beginning a deke
Technique	Top hand on the knob, extend from the shoulder — do not lunge with your whole body
Action	Poke, recover, stay skating
Never	Poke from too far away — if your blade cannot reach the puck without lunging, you are too far away

What it is: A short, straight jab of the blade at the puck, one hand or two, from a controlled distance.

When it works: When you are square to the puck carrier and they have the puck out in front of them — receiving a pass, looking up, or beginning a deke. It is also the natural finish to an angle, when the carrier has run out of room.

How to do it: Keep your top hand on the knob and extend from the shoulder; do not lunge with your whole body. The moment you commit your feet, a good carrier steps around your stick and you have taken yourself out of the play. Poke, recover, stay skating.

The mistake: Poking from too far away, missing, and being beaten. If your blade cannot reach the puck without you lunging, you are too far away.

The stick lift

Technique	Blade under their shaft low, right above their bottom hand — lift crisply up, not sideways
Action	Step through as their blade comes off the ice and take the puck
Read	Lift late — as they are about to shoot, receive or move the puck, not while they are just carrying it
Position	Works from behind and beside an opponent, at the net front, in a board battle and on a backcheck
Rule	Stick-to-stick contact alone is not to be penalised as hooking (NHL Rule 55.1)
Never	Lift the stick of a player who does not have the puck — that is interference
Never	Lift under the hands, or yank the stick down or across — slashing, roughing, or holding the stick

What it is: You place your blade under the shaft of their stick, near the bottom hand, and lift their blade off the ice — then take the puck out from underneath it.

Why it is the highest-value defensive skill most amateurs never learn:

- It takes the puck **without a penalty risk** in the way a poke check (tripping) or a body check (a dozen possible penalties) does. It is stick-on-stick, which Rule 55.1 explicitly protects.
- It works from **behind and beside** an opponent, where you cannot legally do anything else. You cannot restrain a player from behind — NHL Rule 56.1 says a player behind an opponent "may not use his stick, body or free hand in order to restrain his opponent" — but lifting the stick of a player *who has the puck* is playing the puck, not restraining a player.
- It is the correct tool at the **net front**, in a **board battle**, and on a **backcheck** — the three places where amateurs instead reach, hook, or cross-check and go to the box.
- It leaves you **balanced**. You never leave your feet or lean past your centre of gravity, so if it fails you are still in the play.

How to do it: Get your blade under their shaft *low*, right above their bottom hand where the leverage is. Lift crisply — up, not sideways. As their blade comes off the ice, step through and take the puck with your other hand still on your stick. Do it late: lift as they are about to shoot, receive, or move the puck, not while they are just carrying it.

Where it becomes a penalty: Lifting a stick when the player does **not** have the puck is interference. Lifting under the hands and catching a glove is slashing or roughing. Yanking the stick down or across is holding the stick.

The sweep check

- Technique** A low, wide arc — blade flat, shaft nearly parallel to the ice, sweeping through the puck or the passing lane
- Read** Use it when beaten to the outside, defending a pass across the slot, or covering the pass on a 2-on-1
- Technique** Bottom hand slides down the shaft, get low, sweep through the ice — not through the air
- Never** Sweep at knee or waist height — that is a hook or a slash
- Never** Lean your body after the sweep — sweep with your stick and keep your feet under you

What it is: A low, wide arc of your stick across the ice — blade flat, shaft nearly parallel to the ice — sweeping through the puck or the passing lane.

When it works: When you are beaten to the outside and reaching across, when you are defending a pass across the slot, or when you are down low and want to take away a lane without committing your body. Defencemen use it on a 2-on-1 to cover the pass while the goalie takes the shooter.

How to do it: Bottom hand slides down the shaft, get low, sweep through the ice — not through the air. The blade must stay on the ice; a sweep at knee or waist height is a hook or a slash.

The mistake: Sweeping with your body leaning after it. Sweep with your stick and keep your feet under you.

The press-down (stick press)

- Technique** Lay your blade or shaft on top of their blade, pinning it to the ice so they cannot shoot, pass or move the puck
- Read** Use it in tight — net front, board battles, faceoff scrambles — when you want the whistle or a teammate to arrive
- Key** The lift takes their blade up so you can take the puck; the press takes it down so they cannot use it
- Never** Press with force, chop down repeatedly, or press on their hands — a press is a hold-and-pin, not a chop

What it is: You lay your blade or shaft down on top of their stick blade, pinning it to the ice so they cannot shoot, pass, or move the puck.

When it works: In tight — net front, board battles, faceoff scrambles, and any time the puck is sitting between you and an opponent and you want either the whistle or a teammate to arrive. It is the opposite tool to the lift: the lift takes their blade *up* so you can take the puck; the press takes their blade *down* so they cannot use it.

Where it becomes a penalty: Pressing down with force, repeatedly chopping down, or pressing down on their hands. A press is a hold-and-pin, not a chop.

All four of these work in non-contact leagues. If you play in a beer league and want to become a genuinely better defensive player this season, learn the stick lift. It is the single highest return on investment in this document.

4. Body Position as Defence

You can defend an entire shift without ever making a deliberate hit. The rulebook is on your side here, and the relevant passage is worth reading in full. NHL Rule 56.1 (Interference), under "Body Position":

"A player is allowed the ice he is standing on (body position) and is not required to move in order to let an opponent proceed. A player may 'block' the path of an opponent provided he is in front of his opponent and moving in the same direction. ... A player is always entitled to use his body position to lengthen an opponent's path to the puck, provided his stick is not utilized (to make himself 'bigger'...); his free hand is not used and he does not take advantage of his body position to deliver an otherwise illegal check."

USA Hockey codifies the same idea for non-checking play, listing as legal competitive contact: a skater is entitled to the ice they occupy while maintaining skating speed and body position between an opponent and a loose puck; a skater may stand their ground and is not required to move; a skater may block an opponent when in front and moving in the same direction; and a skater may use body position while holding their skating lane to force an opponent onto a longer route to the puck.

What that gives you

Action	Take away ice — standing in the place your opponent needs to be is a complete defensive act
Technique	Box out — inside shoulder ahead of theirs, hips between them and the puck, and hold
Action	Seal along the wall — occupy the lane out and let the boards do the rest
Rule	A player who has lost position must skate to gain or re-establish it in order to make a check (NHL Rule 56.1)
Never	Use your stick to make yourself wider, or your free hand to hold, pull, tug or grab
Rule	The free hand may fend off an opponent or their stick, but may not hold their stick or body (NHL Rule 56.1)

Taking away ice. Standing in the place your opponent needs to be is a complete defensive act. You do not have to touch them. Making a player skate 15 extra feet is often worth more than a hit, because it buys your teammates time to get back.

Boxing out. Get your inside shoulder ahead of theirs, put your hips between them and the puck, and hold. This is the basketball rebound principle and it is exactly how you defend the net front and how you win a loose puck in a crowd.

Sealing. Along the wall, put your body between the opponent and the ice they want, then let the boards do the rest. You are not pushing them into the boards — you are occupying the lane out.

Skating to re-establish position. The line you must not cross is in the same rule: a player behind an opponent who does not have the puck "must skate in order to gain or reestablish his proper position in order to make a check." If you have lost position, the only legal way to get it back is with your feet. Reaching with your stick is hooking; reaching with your free hand is holding.

The two things that turn legal position into a penalty: using your stick to make yourself wider, and using your free hand to hold, pull, tug or grab. NHL Rule 56.1 permits the free hand to "fend off" an opponent or their stick, but "may not be used to hold an opponent's stick or body."

5. Delivering a Legal Body Check

This section applies only in leagues that permit body checking. If you play 12U or below, girls'/women's hockey under USA Hockey or Hockey Canada, U13 and below in Canada, or a non-check adult league, everything below is a penalty. Skip to Section 6.

In Britain, you cannot answer that question from a rulebook — neither the IIHF Rule Book nor the In-House Rules sets a body-checking age, so ask your league before you read on (see "If you play in Britain" in §1). **Women's hockey in Britain runs IIHF Rule 101.1**, so the restricted standard above is yours and this section is not.

A body check is the last step of a progression, not the first thing you learn

Never	Deliver anything in this section in a league that does not permit checking — everything below is a penalty there
Rule	Body checking is prohibited at 12U and below, in all girls'/women's classifications and in all non-check adult classifications (USA Hockey Rule 604(a))
Rule	In Britain neither the IIHF Rule Book nor the In-House Rules sets a body-checking age — ask your league; women's hockey runs IIHF Rule 101.1
Key	League legality is a floor, not a readiness test
Technique	The progression is skating, angling, stick checks, contact confidence, body blocking, take out/rub out, solid body checks
Priority	If you cannot angle, lift a stick cleanly or stay balanced through contact, the missing skill is the step you skipped
Key	Body play should begin to be taught at 8-and-Under, years before checking is legal
Priority	A body check is the fourth line of defence after angling, stick checks and body blocks — not the first tool to reach for

League legality is a floor, not a readiness test. USA Hockey's *Introduction To Body Contact* sets out body play as an ordered progression, and a solid body check is step seven of seven:

1. **Skating**
2. **Angling**
3. **Stick checks**

4. **Contact confidence** — *"being comfortable with incidental body contact – contact that occurs when competing for a puck"*
5. **Body blocking**
6. **Take out / rub out checks**
7. **Solid body checks**

The manual's own justification for the order: *"It is important that coaches teach this progression of body play skills. This will allow players to enjoy the game more and will also make it a safer sport."* It also notes that body play skills should **begin** to be taught at 8-and-Under, years before checking is legal, precisely because the earlier steps are what make the last one safe.

Two things follow. **For a player:** if you cannot yet angle a puck carrier off the puck, lift a stick cleanly, or stay balanced through incidental contact, the missing skill is not the check — it is the step you skipped, and it is the reason the check will go wrong. Sections 2, 3 and 4 of this document are steps 1–5. **For a coach:** the first four levels of body play, in USA Hockey's own ordering, are angling, stick checks, body blocks and body checks — a body check is the fourth line of defence, not the first one to reach for.

What a legal check is, precisely

Rule	Not legal where checking is barred — USA Hockey 604(a) bans it at 12U and below, all girls'/women's and non-check adult; Hockey Canada 7.3 at U13 and below and in female hockey; IIHF women's play permits only the restricted form of Rule 101.1; Britain publishes no checking age, so ask your league
Goal	To gain possession of the puck — NOT to punish or intimidate an opponent
Targets	An opponent in control of the puck, hit from the front, diagonally from the front, or straight from the side
Technique	Trunk only — hips and shoulders. Hands, forearm, stick and elbow are all illegal
Position	Contact above their knees and at or below their shoulders
Technique	Start with your stick on the puck — the blade of the player delivering the check must be below the knees (USA Hockey)
Rule	An illegal body check is intentional contact using overt hip, shoulder, forearm or torso action (USA Hockey Rule 604, Note 1)
Key	If your stick is up, you are about to commit a cross-check, a high stick or a head-contact penalty

USA Hockey's definition is the most explicit in the sport, so use it as your checklist. Its mirror image is **USA Hockey Rule 604, Note 1**, which defines the illegal version: *"an illegal body check is defined as when a player makes intentional physical contact with the opponent using overt hip, shoulder, forearm or torso action. This includes physically forcing the opponent off the puck and with no effort to legally play the puck."* Everything below is what keeps you on the legal side of that line:

- **Purpose:** to gain possession of the puck — "NOT to punish or intimidate an opponent."
- **Target:** an opponent **in control of the puck**.
- **Direction:** from the front, diagonally from the front, or straight from the side.
- **Your contact surface:** the **trunk only** — hips and shoulders. Hands, forearm, stick and elbow are all illegal.
- **Their contact area:** **above the knees and at or below the shoulders**.
- **Your stick:** "Proper body checking technique starts with stick on puck, therefore the stick blade of the player delivering the check must be below the knees."

The IIHF book defines the same check in its own glossary, and if you play in Britain this is the definition you are actually being officiated against: *"A legal body check is one in which a Player checks an opponent who is in possession of the puck, by using their hip or body from the front, diagonally from the front or straight from the side. Legitimate body checking must be done for the purpose of separating the opponent from the puck, only with the trunk of the body (hips and shoulders) and must be above the opponent's knees and at or below the shoulders."* Note what it does **not** contain: **no stick-below-the-knees clause**. That one is USA Hockey's coaching standard, and it is worth adopting anyway — but it is not a rule you are held to under the IIHF book.

That last point is the one that separates a coached player from an amateur. **The check starts with your stick on the puck**. If your stick is up, you are about to commit a cross-check, a high stick, or a head-contact penalty. If your stick is down on the puck, your hands are down, your elbows are down, and your shoulder arrives where it should.

Technique

Rule	Not legal where checking is barred — USA Hockey 604(a) bans it at 12U and below, all girls'/women's and non-check adult; Hockey Canada 7.3 at U13 and below and in female hockey; IIHF women's play permits only the restricted form of Rule 101.1; Britain publishes no checking age, so ask your league
Technique	Play the body, not the head — the point of contact is the chest or upper body, square
Never	Extend the body upward or outward to reach — NHL Rule 48.1 counts that as evidence head contact was avoidable
Technique	Elbows down, hands down — an extended elbow is elbowing (NHL Rule 45.1) whether or not it injures
Action	Hit through, not at — skate through the contact with your feet moving so you finish standing over the puck
Rule	Charging is judged on distance travelled (NHL Rule 42.1); IIHF Rule 42.1 penalises building speed by "multiple strides", USA Hockey more than two, Hockey Canada two or more
Technique	For an open-ice check the opponent must be one stride away — drive the shoulder into the chest, do not lunge forward
Never	Check a player who has already passed or shot — the NHL allows a check only immediately following loss of possession
Never	Hit a player who is turned toward the boards

Play the body, not the head. The point of contact is the chest or the upper body, square. Do not extend upward or outward to reach — NHL Rule 48.1 lists "unnecessary extension of the body upward or outward" as evidence that head contact was avoidable, and IIHF Rule 48.1 is blunter still: "There is no clean check to the head or neck."

Elbows down, hands down. An extended elbow is elbowing (NHL Rule 45.1) regardless of whether it causes injury. Hands and forearms into a check are roughing or head contact.

Hit through, not at. Skate through the contact with your legs, keeping your feet moving. Stopping at the point of contact and swinging your upper body is how you end up off balance and reaching. Driving *through* on your skates keeps you upright and — the actual point — leaves you standing over the puck when they are not.

Time it, don't chase it. Charging is defined by distance travelled and speed built up. NHL Rule 42.1: "Charging shall mean the actions of a player who, as a result of distance traveled, shall violently check an opponent in any manner." USA Hockey's enforcement standard puts a number

on it — the **Standard of Play and Rule Emphasis - Body Checking** (CHARGING): "A player cannot take more than two strides or travel an excessive distance to accelerate through a body check for the purpose of punishing the opponent." **Rule 607 (Charging)** carries the same test in its own words. **Hockey Canada writes the two-stride test straight into the definition** — Rule 7.4 lists charging as, among other things, when a player "*builds up speed by taking two or more strides immediately prior to making contact*" or "*travels an excessive distance with the sole purpose of delivering a hit*" (wording identical in the 2024-2026 and 2026-2028 Playing Rules). **IIHF Rule 42.1 carries a stride element too, without a number on it:** charging is "*the actions of a Player who either jumps to check an opponent, builds up speed by taking multiple strides immediately prior to making contact and / or travels an excessive distance with the sole purpose of delivering such a hit and / or violently checks an opponent in any manner.*" That is the test a British player is officiated against — closer to Hockey Canada's construction than to the NHL's, but with "multiple" left to the referee rather than a stride count. **If you are winding up from across the ice, you have already committed the penalty.**

For an open-ice check, the working constraint is tighter than either rule. *Introduction To Body Contact* calls the open-ice shoulder check a "*high risk check, possibility of only partial or no body contact with the puck carrier*" and sets the condition for attempting one at all: "*Opponent must be close enough so that only one stride forward is required to make contact (gap control).*" One stride, not two. If you need more than one stride to get there, you do not have the gap — close it with your feet first, or angle instead. The same entry adds: "*drive shoulder into opponent's chest, do not lunge forward.*"

Check the puck carrier, and check them now. A check delivered after the player has passed or shot is a late hit. USA Hockey penalises "delivering a late check to a player who has already relinquished control of the puck by a pass or shot. This is oftentimes referred to as 'finishing' the check." The NHL allows a check "rendered immediately following his loss of possession" — immediately, not a beat later.

Never hit a player who is turned toward the boards. This is not a technique point, it is the line between hockey and a spinal injury. See below.

The four that cause the injuries

- Rule** Not legal where checking is barred — USA Hockey 604(a) bans it at 12U and below, all girls'/women's and non-check adult; Hockey Canada 7.3 at U13 and below and in female hockey; IIHF women's play permits only the restricted form of Rule 101.1; Britain publishes no checking age, so ask your league
- Never** Check from behind — a major with an automatic game misconduct under NHL Rule 43 and IIHF Rule 43; USA Hockey Rule 608 can reach a match penalty
- Key** The onus is always on the checker — "he turned at the last second" is no defence unless the turn was deliberate
- Never** Make contact in the head, face or neck area, regardless of size differential (USA Hockey Rule 620; NHL Rule 48.1)
- Never** Build speed into a check to punish rather than to win the puck — IIHF "multiple strides", USA Hockey more than two, Hockey Canada two or more
- Rule** Boarding is checking or pushing a defenceless opponent so they hit the boards violently or dangerously (NHL Rule 41.1)
- Never** Hit a player playing an obvious icing or offside puck into the boards — the NHL and IIHF Rule 42.1 both class that as boarding
- Never** Arrive as the third man and hit someone already engaged in a battle — USA Hockey deems both players defenceless
- Rule** Under IIHF, a check on an opponent not in possession and not prepared for it is automatically reckless, however clean it would otherwise be (IIHF glossary, "Vulnerable Position")

These are not ordinary penalties. Treat them as things you simply do not do.

Checking from behind. NHL Rule 43.1 defines it as a check "delivered on a player who is not aware of the impending hit, therefore unable to protect or defend himself," with contact on the back part of the body. **There is no minor penalty for it** (NHL Rule 43.2) — it is a major, and a game misconduct is automatic whenever the major is called (43.5). IIHF **Rule 43** matches this: 43.2 states that "this infraction is considered serious and dangerous, therefore there is no option to award a minor penalty," and 43.3 provides a major plus an automatic game misconduct. **USA Hockey Rule 608** assesses minor-plus-misconduct or major-plus-game-misconduct (608(a)), a major plus game misconduct where an opponent is recklessly endangered or sent head first into the boards (608(b)), and a match penalty for reckless endangerment of a vulnerable opponent (608(c)). **The onus is always on the checker.** USA Hockey and Hockey Canada both state it in those words. "He turned at the last second" is not a defence unless the turn was deliberate — NHL

Rule 43.1 waives the penalty only when a player "intentionally turns his body to create contact with his back," and IIHF Rule 43.1 has its own carve-out, in its own words, for a player who "intentionally turns their back towards an opponent and puts themselves in a vulnerable position."

Checking to the head. NHL Rule 48.1 prohibits a hit where the head "was the main point of contact and such contact to the head was avoidable." USA Hockey Rule 620 goes further: any contact to the head, face or neck with any part of the body, equipment or stick, with the onus on the checker. The **Standard of Play and Rule Emphasis - Body Checking** (HEAD CONTACT) spells out how far that onus runs: "The onus is on the player delivering the check, regardless as to size differential, to not make contact in the head/neck area of the opponent."

Charging. Building speed into a check to punish rather than to win the puck, or a running or jumping approach. **The written threshold differs by book and the difference is one stride:** USA Hockey penalises *more than* two strides of acceleration, Hockey Canada penalises *two or more*, the **IIHF** — and so Britain — sets no number either, defining charging as a player who "*builds up speed by taking multiple strides*" (Rule 42.1), and the NHL sets no number at all. Under Hockey Canada, two strides is already charging.

Boarding. NHL Rule 41.1: checking or pushing "a defenseless opponent in such a manner that causes the opponent to hit or impact the boards violently or dangerously." Note the specific case the rule calls out: "Any unnecessary contact with a player playing the puck on an obvious 'icing' or 'off-side' play which results in that player hitting or impacting the boards is 'boarding'." A player skating hard to touch up an icing is not looking for you.

And one more that is easy to commit without realising: USA Hockey states that "when two or more players are physically engaged for control of the puck along the boards, they are considered to be vulnerable or defenseless," and any body check delivered to a player already engaged with another skater "is considered dangerous, careless or reckless (unacceptable) and must be penalized accordingly." **Do not arrive as the third man and hit someone already in a battle.** Take the puck instead.

The IIHF book gets to the same place by a different route, and a British reader should know which one binds them. It has no board-battle clause, but it defines a **Vulnerable Position** in its glossary: "*A skater is considered to be in a vulnerable position when they are no longer in control or possession of the puck and they are either not aware of an impending hit or they are not prepared for the hit. A bodycheck to an opponent who is vulnerable is automatically considered reckless even if that bodycheck would be considered legal to a non-vulnerable opponent.*" A player wrestling for a loose puck with someone else has neither possession nor any preparation for a third arrival, so that hit is reckless under the IIHF book too — arrived at through the state of the player rather than the fact of the battle. **Reckless matters, because**

recklessness is the trigger for the major-and-game-misconduct tier in IIHF Rules 42.4, 43.3 and 48 — and in British women's hockey below Adult any major brings a game misconduct anyway, with junior hockey reading the same way on In-House Rule 201's scoping of the IIHF junior rules.

6. Receiving a Hit Safely

This is the most important section in this document, and it applies in every league — because unexpected contact happens in non-check hockey too, and the boards are just as hard.

Keep your head up. Always. This one rule prevents most of it.

- Never** Skate with your head down — not "look up sometimes", never
- Key** You cannot brace for something you cannot see; a body prepared for contact absorbs it
- Rule** A square check with no upward motion on a player skating head down is not an illegal check to the head (IIHF Rule 48.1)
- Action** Learn to carry the puck without staring at it — it is a stickhandling problem, and it is solved off the ice

Not "look up sometimes." Never skate with your head down. Two separate reasons, both serious:

1. **You cannot brace for something you cannot see.** A body prepared for contact absorbs it. A body that is surprised does not.
2. **The rules protect you less when your head is down.** IIHF Rule 48.1 states that a player who checks an opponent "who is skating with the puck with their head down in the direction of the Player and does not use an upward motion or drive their body up into the opponent, shall not be penalized for an 'illegal check to the head'." The checker is still obliged not to target your head — but a legal, square hit that catches a bent-over player is not the checker's foul.

Learning to carry the puck without staring at it is a stickhandling problem, and it is solved off the ice. See Puck Handling.

Do not turn your back to an oncoming checker near the boards

- Never** Turn your back to an oncoming checker near the boards — it gives them your spine and puts your head first into the wall
- Key** A chin tucked to the chest straightens the cervical spine; the head stops, the body keeps going, and vertebrae fracture
- Risk** It can occur at walking speed — no speed is slow enough to make a head-down collision with the wall safe
- Action** Case 1, best of all — arrive on an angle, not perpendicular
- Action** Case 2, contact coming — skates parallel to the boards, forearm and upper thigh to the wall, knees bent, lean into the impact
- Action** Case 3, already facing the wall — spread the load, stick and gloves up on the glass, arms out as a shock absorber
- Never** Take the wall on the tip of your shoulder, and never crouch or duck to avoid a check
- Key** Head up, chin off your chest — hit the boards with an arm, a leg or anything but your head first

This is the single behaviour most associated with catastrophic injury in hockey, and it is worth understanding why it is so tempting: when contact is coming and you are facing the wall, turning away feels like protecting yourself. It is the opposite. Turning gives the checker your back and your unprotected spine, and puts your head first into the boards.

The standard teaching against it is the **"Heads Up, Don't Duck"** programme, begun in 1995 by Dr Alan Ashare and carried by the Hockey Equipment Certification Council and USA Hockey. Its whole content is one posture: head up, chin off your chest, whatever else is happening.

Two facts from USA Hockey's Heads Up Hockey programme that make the hazard concrete. First, the mechanism: the upper spinal column has a natural curve that gives the head and neck flexibility in a normal heads-up position, but *"when the head is flexed (chin toward the chest), this normal curve is removed, and the cervical spine becomes straight."* In that head-down position, hitting the boards or a post head-on stops the head while the body keeps moving, *"compressing the spine. This force can produce a shock greater than the neck's discs and muscles can cushion, resulting in a fracture or break of one or more vertebrae. And if one breaks, it can cause compression of the spinal cord, resulting in paralysis below the level of the fracture."* Almost all on-ice cervical spine injuries have been due to the head being slightly flexed on head-on contact with the boards or goal post. Second, and this is the part players get wrong: **"A player**

doesn't have to be going at full speed for this to happen — it can occur at walking speed." There is no speed slow enough to make a head-down collision with the wall safe.

Hockey Canada's checking-from-behind rule lists the two scenarios its officials are told to watch for, and both are about a player who has turned or bent: a player who "turns and, as a result, creates contact with the back," and "a player along the boards, with their head down looking for the puck or 'digging the puck out,'" who "is hit from behind and driven head-first into the boards."

What to do instead — USA Hockey's decision rule, in three ranked cases. The full rule is here. Skating → Arriving at the boards teaches Case 1 only, because choosing your angle is a skating decision made several strides out, and its Common Mistakes and Key Takeaways summarise Case 2.

Case 1 — best of all: arrive on an angle, not perpendicular. *"Skating into the boards at an angle means better puck control and less risk of injury... When players skate into the corners at an angle, the risk of hitting the boards with their helmets first is greatly reduced. A leg or side or an arm will absorb most of the impact"* (USA Hockey, *Introduction To Body Contact*, "Angling In"). Even better: **take the puck off the wall before you get there** — see "Get off the wall" below.

Case 2 — contact is coming and you can still choose how you meet the wall: skates parallel to the boards, and take it along your side. The manual's teaching points for a player checked while skating parallel to the boards are *"press your forearm and upper thigh (hip area) against the boards"* and *"keep a low center of gravity with your feet apart and knees bent"*; the angling-in list adds *"lean into the impact"* and *"absorb the shock over the widest possible part of your body."* Your shoulder and hip turn toward the **checker**; your forearm and hip meet the **wall**.

- **Do not take the wall on the point of your shoulder.** USA Hockey says it twice: *"Avoid hitting the boards with the shoulder"* and *"Never hit the boards or glass with the tip of your shoulder – it can cause injury."*

Case 3 — you are already facing the boards and cannot turn: spread the load across everything you have. *"If checked while facing the boards, distribute the force of the impact over as wide a surface as possible, including putting your stick and gloves on the glass to cushion the blow"*; the listed common error is *"not getting your stick and gloves up and spread out on the glass."* The teaching drill has players *"make contact with the boards and glass with their extended arms, forearms, side of body and legs, but with no head contact at all"*, with the arms out forming a *"three-part 'shock absorber'."* **This is damage limitation, not the position you are aiming for** — the manual's own wording is to turn your skates parallel *"if at all possible."*

In every case, and never negotiable: head up, chin off your chest, never your back to the wall, never duck, and *"hit the boards or goal posts with an arm, a leg or anything but your head first"*

(Look Up Line, "Heads Up, Don't Duck"). A tucked head is what turns a hit into a neck injury.

Three pieces of rink-side advice you will hear that the primary coaching material does not support.

"Take the wall on your shoulder." Players and coaches say this constantly. USA Hockey's own material, quoted above, says the opposite — *"never hit the boards or glass with the tip of your shoulder"* — so take it on the forearm and hip. (Your shoulder does face the *checker*; it is the boards it should not meet.)

"Get square to the boards." No coaching material teaches chest-first squaring up as the orientation to aim for. It appears only as the Case 3 fallback for a player who is already facing the wall. The target orientation is **parallel**.

"Get your hands off the boards — forearms, not hands." USA Hockey teaches the opposite: get your **stick and gloves up and spread out on the glass**, and it names failing to do so as the common error. The related warning that *"a locked, straight arm into the boards is how wrists and collarbones break"* is widely repeated but **has no hockey safety authority behind it** — treat it as unverified coaching craft. (*The nearest real evidence is not about hockey at all. In a laboratory study of forward falls onto the hand, Chou and colleagues found that "the elbow mediolateral shear force was 68% larger" when the arm was extended rather than flexed at impact, and that elbow flexion "reduces the first peak impact force value and postpones the maximum peak value" — but they measured no significant difference in axial force at wrist, elbow or shoulder, and a vertical fall onto a floor is not a skater hitting a wall. It is a reason to find the advice plausible, not a source for it.*) The reading that reconciles it with the manual is USA Hockey's own phrase: arms out as a **progressive shock absorber that bends and gives**, spreading load across two gloves and two forearms, rather than one locked strut taking your whole weight through one wrist.

Note the corresponding rule on the other side: you also cannot solve the problem by ducking. IIHF Rule 44.1 (Clipping) states that a player "may not crouch down near the boards to avoid being bodychecked and as a result, causes an opponent to tumble over them."

Being hit from behind is a different problem, and what is taught for it is thinner than for the other cases — but it is not nothing. USA Hockey's *Heads Up Hockey* guide does give a fallback for contact you cannot prepare for: *"if they get in a situation where they can't skate through a check, players should keep their arms up, knees bent and, of course, their heads up"*, with the same checklist as the boards cases — skates parallel, *"arms/legs as shock absorbers"*, *"feet apart, knees bent, low center of gravity"*. No published treatment gives a technique for a hit with **genuinely zero warning**; every one of them assumes you have at least registered that

contact is coming. Beyond that it is handled on the other side of the collision — checking from behind is a major penalty with an automatic game misconduct, set out in Section 5 above — and on your side by awareness: USA Hockey's only instruction is "*check over your shoulder to see where your opponent is.*" Knowing pressure is coming is what converts the situation into Case 1 or Case 2. See Scanning and Anticipation.

Bracing and absorbing

Position	Wide base, knees bent, weight low — an athletic stance rides contact, a stiff upright one gets knocked over
Action	Meet it, don't wait for it — momentum you generate is momentum that does not go into you
Position	Chest and shoulder first, hands and stick in front of your body, not out to the side
Technique	Absorb with your legs — let your knees and hips give rather than taking it all through a locked frame

- **Wide base, knees bent, weight low.** A stiff, upright player gets knocked over. A player in an athletic stance rides the contact.
- **Meet it, don't wait for it.** Skating into contact with your body prepared and your feet moving costs far less than standing still and being hit. Momentum you generate is momentum that does not go into you.
- **Chest and shoulder first, hands in front.** Keep your hands and stick in front of your body, not out to the side. This protects you and keeps you able to play the puck the instant contact ends.
- **Absorb with your legs.** Let your knees and hips give a little rather than taking it all through a locked frame.

Protecting yourself along the wall

Priority	Arrive first if you possibly can — the player who arrives first controls the geometry of the collision
Position	Get low and get wide — a low centre of gravity along the boards is very hard to move
Technique	Forearm and hip to the wall — not the point of your shoulder, and never your back
Never	Stop and admire the puck — standing still, bent over, back to the play is the posture the checking-from-behind rules describe

When you go to the wall for a puck with a checker arriving:

- **Arrive first if you possibly can** — the player who arrives first controls the geometry of the collision.
- **Get low and get wide.** A low centre of gravity along the boards is very hard to move.
- **Put your forearm and hip to the wall — not the point of your shoulder, and never your back.** (Case 2 above.)
- **Do not stop and admire the puck.** Standing still, bent over, back to the play is the exact posture the checking-from-behind rules describe.

Get off the wall

Goal	The best protection is not being pinned — avoid the collision entirely and keep possession
Options	Chip the puck along the boards, kick it to a teammate, or take it off the wall toward open ice before contact arrives
Action	Know what is around you before the puck arrives
Action	Have a plan for the puck before you get there — a chip, a rim, a reverse, or a spin off the wall
Key	Players who arrive at the wall with no plan get pinned; players who arrive with a plan get out

The best protection is not being pinned. If you can chip the puck along the boards, kick it to a teammate, or take it off the wall toward open ice before contact arrives, you avoid the collision entirely and keep possession.

Two habits make this possible: **know what is around you before the puck arrives** (see Scanning and Anticipation), and **have a plan for the puck before you get there** — a chip, a rim, a reverse, or a spin off the wall. Players who arrive at the wall with no plan get pinned. Players who arrive with a plan get out.

Talk

Action	Call loud, immediate and specific for a teammate going back with their head down and pressure coming
Convention	"Time!" means they have space; "Man on!" or their name plus "behind you!" means they do not
Key	This is the most valuable thing anyone says on a hockey rink

If a teammate is going back for a puck with their head down and pressure coming, the correct call is loud, immediate and specific. "Time!" means you have space. "Man on!" or their name plus "behind you!" means you do not. This is the most valuable thing anyone says on a hockey rink. See On-Ice Communication.

If it happens anyway — a suspected neck injury on the ice

Never	Help the player up — it is the most common and most damaging mistake after a spinal impact
Action	Call for immediate medical help first
Read	Symptoms after a spinal impact — pain at the injury, buzzing or tingling in arms or legs, loss of movement, radiating pain
Action	Ensure adequate airway and breathing, observing the ABCs — Airway, Breathing, Circulation
Action	Reassure the player, keep them warm, and instruct and immobilise them so they do not move — head and neck especially
Never	Remove the helmet, or roll or lift the player, unless you are trained and it is required for airway support
Key	Do not wait for symptoms — CRT6 says assume a possible spinal cord injury in all cases of head injury

Everything above is prevention. This is what to do when prevention has failed, and it is short enough to memorise. **The most common and most damaging mistake is helping the player up.**

Symptoms to look for after a spinal impact, per USA Hockey: pain in the area of the injury; buzzing or tingling in the arms and/or legs; loss of movement in the arms or legs; radiating pain in the arms or legs.

If you think a player may have sustained a spinal injury, your immediate role is to get help and keep the player calm and immobile. After calling for immediate medical help, USA Hockey's instructions are:

- **Ensure adequate airway and breathing**, observing the ABCs — Airway, Breathing, Circulation.
- **Reassure the player.**
- **Do not allow the player to move. Instruct the player not to move and immobilize him or her to prevent motion, especially motion of the head and neck.**
- **Keep the player warm.**

Do not remove the helmet, and do not roll or lift the player, unless you are trained to do so and it is required for airway support.

Do not wait for these symptoms to appear before applying the rule. The concussion tool that belongs on your phone, CRT6, says to "*assume a possible spinal cord injury in all cases of head injury*" — neck pain or tenderness is itself a red flag that means an ambulance. The full red-flag list, and what to do in the hours afterwards, is in Conditioning and Recovery → Concussion. Head injury and neck injury are the same call at the rink: nobody moves, somebody phones.

7. Board Battles

A **board battle** is a contest for a puck against the wall, usually between the goal line and the top of the circles. Most possessions in most games start or end with one.

Arrive first — and arrive with position, not just speed

Priority	The player who gets there first decides where the battle happens
Position	Body between the opponent and the puck at the moment of arrival, with the wall on the far side
Key	Arriving first with your body in the wrong place is worse than arriving second with it in the right one

The player who gets there first decides where the battle happens. But arriving first with your body in the wrong place is worse than arriving second with it in the right one. What you want at the moment of arrival is your **body between the opponent and the puck**, with the wall on the far side.

The wide low base

Position	Feet wider than shoulders, knees bent deeply, backside low, chest up
Key	You cannot be knocked off the puck when your centre of gravity is below your opponent's
Technique	Generate force with your legs — that is where leverage lives
Action	Stay mobile — a low wide stance can shuffle, pivot and step out; a stiff-legged stance can only fall over
Convention	Leverage often beats strength — but not always, and not against a large enough strength gap; coaching consensus, not a measured law

This is the whole technique in three words. Feet wider than shoulders, knees bent deeply, backside low, chest up. From that stance:

- You cannot be knocked off the puck, because your centre of gravity is below your opponent's.
- You can generate force with your legs, which is where leverage lives.
- You can move — a low wide stance can shuffle, pivot and step out. A stiff-legged stance can only fall over.

Leverage often beats strength here. A stronger player standing upright will frequently lose to a weaker player who is properly down in their base. **Not always, and a large enough strength gap wins anyway** — the point is that your base is the variable you actually control, and it is the

one most players give away for free. This is good news for smaller players and bad news for anyone relying on being big. **Flagged as partly unverified:** that leverage beats strength is coaching consensus, true often enough to teach, but it is not a measured law, and **nothing in the ice hockey biomechanics literature quantifies it** — there is no study of one-on-one battles, board battles or pushing contests. The nearest quantification comes from **rugby scrummaging**, where it points the same way: Green and colleagues' review of the determinants of scrummaging force reports that "*[s]tatistically significant relationships have been presented between the extensions of the hip ($r=-0.47$), knee ($r=-0.51$) and the ankle ($r=-0.70$) and the individual scrummaging forces*" — negative correlations, meaning the more flexed the joint, the more force produced. **Whose measurement that is matters:** those correlations are **not Green's own finding**. In the review they carry reference [13] — **Wu WL, Chang JJ, Wu JH, et al. (2007), An investigation of rugby scrummaging posture and individual maximum pushing force**, J Strength Cond Res 21(1):251-258. Green's group's own study is titled, flatly, "*A lower body height and wider foot stance are positively associated with the generation of individual scrummaging forces in rugby.*" Three honest caveats: that is a different sport with a braced, bilateral push rather than a skating contest; the same review notes that other researchers "*failed to show relationships between kinematics and scrummaging performance*" and that foot positioning made no significant difference; and the review's **own** summing-up of that whole passage is that "*these findings do not provide conclusive relationships between force development and scrummaging body positions.*" Puck Handling carries the same claim with the same caveat.

Using the wall

Position	Puck between your skates and the wall, your body on the outside of it
Technique	Create a little space between you and the boards and use your body to protect that space
Goal	Halve the directions you can be attacked from — with the wall behind you it is only 180 degrees

The boards are a teammate that never gets tired. Blaine Buterbaugh, assistant hockey director at the Robert Morris University Sports Center, puts it well: "Nobody from outside of the rink is coming to steal your puck... if you can create a little bit of space between you and the boards and use your body to protect that space, you're only worried about 180 degrees, essentially, of people that are trying to steal your puck."

So: put the puck between your skates and the wall, put your body on the outside of it, and you have halved the number of directions you can be attacked from.

Working the puck free with your feet

Key	In a real battle your stick is tied up and your hands are busy — your feet are free
Rule	You may kick the puck in all zones; you just cannot score with a distinct kicking motion (NHL Rule 49.2)
Action	Kick it out with the inside of your skate — back to a supporting teammate, along the wall, or out to your own stick
Action	Trap it — skates wide with the puck under you means nobody else can have it either
Technique	Practise this deliberately — almost no amateur does, and it wins pucks every game

This is the part nobody teaches and everybody needs.

In a real board battle your stick is usually tied up, your hands are busy, and the puck is under a pile of skates. **Your feet are free.** Skates are legal tools for moving the puck — you can kick the puck in all zones (NHL Rule 49.2 permits it; you just cannot score with a distinct kicking motion).

- **Kick it out.** Use the inside of your skate to shovel the puck out of the pile — backward to a supporting teammate, along the wall to open ice, or out to your own stick. This is the highest-percentage way to win a puck that is genuinely stuck.
- **Kick it to your stick.** A short flick of the skate blade to pop the puck onto your own blade is the fastest way to turn a stalemate into a possession.
- **Trap it.** Standing over the puck with your skates wide, with the puck under you, means nobody else can have it either.

Practise this deliberately. Almost no amateur does, and it wins pucks every single game.

When to just pin it

Read	Pin when you are outnumbered, tangled with an equally stuck opponent, or a turnover here is a chance against
Action	Pin the puck against the boards with your skate or your body and let the whistle come
Key	Under pressure, pin it; unpressured, play it — pinning is legal only while the puck is genuinely contested
Rule	Deliberately freezing the puck to cause a stoppage is a delay-of-game minor (NHL Rule 63.2(i); USA Hockey Rule 610(a))
Never	Pin because a change is due or you are protecting a lead — that is the delaying purpose both rules describe
Rule	IIHF women's rules prohibit pinning an opponent along the boards — pin the puck, not the player (IIHF Rule 101.1, and so in British women's hockey)

Sometimes you cannot win the battle and neither can they. If you are outnumbered, if you are tangled up with an opponent who is just as stuck as you are, or if a turnover here is a scoring chance against, **pin the puck against the boards with your skate or your body and let the whistle come.** A defensive-zone faceoff is a far better outcome than a turnover in the slot.

The qualifier is part of the tactic, because the same action without it is a penalty.

Pinning is legal *while the puck is genuinely contested* — an opponent is on it or arriving, and neither of you can free it. That is how most board-battle whistles happen, and referees let it run. Freezing the puck when nobody is actually pressuring you, purely to buy a stoppage, is a minor:

- **NHL Rule 63.2(i)** assesses a minor for delay of game "*On any player, including the goalkeeper, who holds, freezes or plays the puck with his stick, skates or body in such a manner as to deliberately cause a stoppage of play.*"
- **USA Hockey Rule 610(a)** names the intent in plainer terms: "*A minor penalty shall be assessed to any player or goalkeeper who deliberately freezes the puck along the boards or goal frame for the purpose of delaying the game.*"

Under pressure, pin it; unpressured, play it. Note what that rules out as a *motive*: "a change is due" and "we are protecting a lead late" are precisely the delaying purpose both rules describe. They are reasons to get the puck out — rim it, chip it off the glass, or make the safe play up the wall — not reasons to sit on it and fish for a whistle. Pin because you cannot win the puck and cannot afford to lose it, never because you want the clock stopped. See **Game Management** for the legal ways to kill time and change lines.

Pinning is a legitimate tactic and a game-management decision, not a failure. Know the exception: **IIHF women's rules specifically prohibit pinning an opponent along the boards** (Rule 101.1) — there, you may pin the puck, but not the player. **That exception is live in Britain**, because women's hockey under England Ice Hockey and the SIHA runs Rule 101.1 unamended. Defensive Zone Coverage carries the same "pin the puck, not the player" distinction with the same freezing qualifier; the two documents agree.

8. Corner Battles

Corner battles are board battles with two differences that change everything.

They are 2-on-1 by default

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Key | Two players almost always beat one in a corner — the first only has to occupy the opponent, not beat them |
| Action | First man in engages the carrier, takes body position and pins or seals — his job is to make the puck stop moving |
| Action | Second man in stays out of the pile and reads where the puck will squirt — he is the one who recovers it |
| Never | Dive into the same scrum as your teammate — two tangled players and a third opponent skating away with the puck |

The corner is the one place on the ice where support is closest and most reliable. **Two players almost always beat one in a corner** — not because of strength, but because the first player only has to *occupy* the opponent, not beat them. The second player just picks up the loose puck.

This is why the "second man in" is a defined role rather than an accident:

- **First man in** engages the puck carrier, takes body position, and pins or seals them. Their job is to make the puck stop moving, not necessarily to win it.
- **Second man in** stays **out of the pile** and reads where the puck will squirt. They are the one who actually recovers it. If they dive into the same scrum, you have two players tangled up and nobody with the puck.

The commonest amateur error in the corner is two teammates fighting the same opponent for the same puck while a third opponent skates away with it.

You have less room and more escape routes to cover

- Read** Boards on two sides help you seal, but give them the option to spin either way — up the wall or out behind the net
- Action** Angle the carrier so the escape they have is the one you want them to take — toward the wall and up, away from the net
- Never** Leave them an escape back toward the slot

The corner has boards on two sides, which helps you seal a player but also gives them the option to spin either way — up the wall or out behind the net. Angle the puck carrier so that the escape they have is the one you want them to take: **toward the wall and up, away from the net, never back toward the slot.**

Whose corner is it?

- Convention** Whose corner it is is a coaching choice, not a law of hockey — find out which one your team plays
- Convention** Under the house-default low zone collapse, the low corner belongs to the strong-side defenceman with the centre supporting
- Convention** Under a low zone collapse the wingers stay high covering the points and do not come to the corner
- Options** Under man-on-man, a winger follows their check into the corner and you get help low — but the point may be left open
- Key** Two players on different assumptions about who has the corner is the commonest defensive-zone breakdown, and it is not effort
- Key** F1/F2/F3 are roles defined by order of arrival, not by position — the first forward to the puck is F1

This is a coaching choice, not a law of hockey. The house default across these documents is a **low zone collapse** (zone-based defensive-zone coverage) with a **2-1-2 forecheck**. Under a low zone collapse, the low corner belongs to the strong-side defenceman with the centre supporting; the wingers stay high covering the points and do **not** come to the corner. Under **man-on-man** coverage, a winger follows their assigned check into the corner and you will get help low — but the point may be left open.

Find out which one your team plays. Two players operating on different assumptions about who has the corner is the most common defensive-zone breakdown in amateur hockey, and it is not an effort problem. See Defensive Zone Coverage and Forechecking Systems.

F1 / F2 / F3 are roles defined by order of arrival, not by position — the first forward to the puck is F1 whoever they are.

9. Net-Front Battles

The area on top of the crease is where most goals are scored and most penalties are taken. Mike Corbett, head coach at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, put it this way: *"Probably over 70 percent of our goals were scored within two stick-lengths of the net."*

⚠ At NHL level that number does not hold. The NHL play-by-play feed used in §9 records coordinates for goals as well as penalties. **Computed from that feed** over the same 400 games of 2024-25 (2,498 goals with coordinates), and taking two stick-lengths as about **10.5 feet** (NHL Rule 10.1 caps a stick at 63 inches): **26.8% of goals were scored within two stick-lengths of the net**, 30.9% within twelve feet, 51.6% within twenty. You have to go out to roughly **thirty feet** — the top of the circles — before you capture 70% of goals.

So keep the principle and drop the number. Corbett was describing one season at one NCAA programme, hedged it himself with "probably", and was making a coaching point about where his team scored, not publishing a distribution. The point that survives is that the net front is by far the densest scoring area on the ice — a quarter of all goals come from a patch a couple of stick-lengths wide, which is a tiny fraction of the rink. What does not survive is "70% within two stick-lengths"; do not repeat it as a statistic.

Attacking the net front

Mindset	You have to have a commitment to getting there before you can play there
Position	In front of the goalie, not beside them — on the shot lane, taking away the goalie's eyes
Technique	Two hands on your stick, blade on the ice — you are there to tip, to screen and to bury a rebound
Read	Track the puck while feeling the defender — eyes on the puck, body on the player
Rule	Screening from outside the crease without contact is legal, but positioning alone can void a goal if it impairs the goalie (NHL Rule 69.1)

- **Get there.** Corbett's first principle is willingness: "You have to have a commitment to getting there before you can play there."
- **Play in front of the goalie, not beside them.** "If you're going to get to that blue paint, you need to be able to play right in front of the goalie, and be able to take away the goalie's eyes... you need to play on the shot lane, because the goalie is finding that shot lane."
- **Two hands on your stick, blade on the ice.** You are there to tip, to screen, and to bury a rebound. All three require your blade available.
- **Track the puck while feeling the defender.** Eyes on the puck, body on the player.
- **Screening is normally legal.** Standing outside the crease in the goalie's sightline without contact is not goaltender interference. What is illegal is impairing the goalie's ability to make a save inside the crease — and, under Rule 69.1, impairing his ability to move freely or defend the goal "*either by his positioning or by contact*", which means positioning alone can void a goal. See Offensive Zone Play.

Defending the net front

Priority	Body position first — inside shoulder ahead of theirs, hips between them and the puck, box out
Action	Tie sticks, don't cross-check — a stick lift or a light press removes the tip and the rebound and costs you nothing
Technique	Work under their arms — shoulder beneath their armpit, legs driving, walking them out sideways
Convention	Leverage over strength — the lower player usually wins, though not always and not against a large enough strength gap
Read	Eyes on the puck, body on the player — you cannot beat them to a rebound you did not see leave the stick
Never	Back into your own goalie — being pushed into the crease screens your netminder and turns saves into goals

The order of operations, and the order matters:

1. Body position first. Inside shoulder ahead of theirs, hips between them and the puck, box out — the same idea as boxing out for a rebound in basketball. If you are established inside, they have to come through you and the rules let you stand your ground.

2. Stick ties, not cross-checks. Corbett: "I'm more of a guy to take away sticks... You have to be able to, one, control sticks more than anything, and then wait for that shot to come and get physical." A stick lift or a light press on their blade removes the tip and the rebound and costs you nothing. This is the single most valuable skill in this area.

3. Work under their arms. To move someone, get *under* them — your shoulder beneath their armpit, your legs driving, walking them out sideways. Pushing from above only pushes yourself backwards.

4. Leverage over strength. Same principle as the board battle, with the same caveat: the lower player usually wins, though not always and not against a large enough strength gap.

5. Eyes on the puck, body on the player. Feel them; watch the shot. You cannot beat them to a rebound you did not see leave the stick, and a defender who turns to look at the player they are boxing out has stopped defending the dangerous thing.

6. Do not back into your own goalie. Being pushed into the crease screens your own netminder and turns saves into goals — you have done the attacker's job for them. See

Goaltender.

The cross-check problem

- Rule** Cross-checking is using the shaft of the stick between the two hands to forcefully check an opponent (NHL Rule 59.1)
- Never** Believe a blade on the ice makes a shaft shove legal — that wording is USA Hockey Rule 609 only, not NHL, IIHF or Hockey Canada
- Rule** USA Hockey's enforcement standard gives the net-front shaft-and-arms shove to create space as its first example (Rule 609)
- Key** The call data makes cross-checking seventh at the net front and no likelier there than league-wide — the emphasis is real, the frequency ordinary
- Action** Control the stick instead of the body — a stick lift or a tie-up achieves what a cross-check is trying to achieve, legally
- Read** Establish position early and quietly; engage physically when the shot comes, not before

Repeated cross-checking to the back is the penalty officials are specifically told to look for at the net front. USA Hockey's cross-checking enforcement standard — **Rule 609**, which defines cross-checking as "using the shaft of the stick between the two hands to forcefully check an opponent with no portion of the stick on the ice" — gives exactly this scenario as its first example: "When a player in front of the goal uses the shaft of the stick and extension of the arms to contact an opponent in a dangerous manner to create space."

What the call data actually shows. The NHL's public play-by-play feed records every penalty with both its infraction type and its rink coordinates, so this is checkable. **Computed from** `api-web.nhle.com/v1/gamecenter/{id}/play-by-play`, games 2024020001–2024020400 of the 2024–25 regular season: **2,967 penalties**, of which **265** fall inside a net-front box 10 to 25 feet out from the goal line and within 10 feet either side of centre.

Infraction	Share of net-front calls	League-wide share	Enrichment
Hooking	25.3%	12.1%	2.10×
Slashing	15.1%	8.6%	1.76×
Interference	10.6%	8.3%	1.27×
Tripping	10.2%	16.6%	0.61×
Roughing	8.3%	12.0%	0.69×
Holding	7.2%	8.6%	0.83×
Cross-checking	5.7%	5.2%	1.08×

Two things follow, and neither is the folklore. First, **cross-checking is not the most-called penalty at the net front** — it is seventh. Second, and less comfortably for the claim above, **it is not meaningfully over-represented there either**: at 1.08× it is called in that box at almost exactly its league-wide rate. The penalties that actually concentrate at the net front are **hooking and slashing** — stick fouls on a player trying to get to a puck — not cross-checking, and not roughing (0.69×, which is a post-whistle penalty spread all over the ice rather than a net-front one).

So treat "the penalty officials are told to look for at the net front" as exactly what USA Hockey's Standard of Play makes it — **an enforcement emphasis, an instruction to officials about what to watch for** — and not as a claim about how often it is actually called. The rule below is still worth knowing precisely, because the emphasis is real even where the frequency is ordinary.

The rule itself is narrow and easy to break by accident. NHL Rule 59.1: "*The action of using the shaft of the stick between the two hands to forcefully check an opponent.*" That is the whole definition — **there is no blade-on-ice element in it.**

A common and costly misconception. You will hear that keeping your blade on the ice means it cannot be a cross-check. That is **not** the NHL rule, nor the IIHF rule (Rule 59) nor Hockey Canada's — under all three, a two-handed shaft shove is a cross-check whatever your blade is doing. The blade-on-ice phrasing comes from **USA Hockey Rule 609 and its Standard of Play emphasis material**, where it is an officiating cue for one association, not a definition of the offence. If you play under NHL, IIHF or Hockey Canada rules and you shove with the shaft, you are exposed regardless of your blade.

The real defence is not a stick position, it's a different action: **control the stick instead of the body**. A stick lift or a tie-up achieves what a cross-check is trying to achieve and is entirely legal.

Corbett's warning about timing is worth repeating: "if you get physical before the puck is on its way, you're going to get a penalty." Establish position early and quietly; engage physically when the shot comes, not before.

10. Loose Puck Races and 50-50 Pucks

A **50-50 puck** is any puck that neither team possesses and both can reach — a rim around the boards, a dump-in, a rebound, a puck flipped out of the zone.

Arrive with body position, not just with speed

Position	Skate the inside lane, between the opponent and the puck — half a step behind but inside usually wins it
Rule	You are entitled to the ice you occupy while maintaining skating speed and body position (USA Hockey; NHL Rule 56.1)
Technique	Approach on an arc so you arrive already turned, and turn your hips so your backside is between opponent and puck
Position	Get low and wide, feet outside your shoulders, and keep your feet moving — a stationary player on the wall gets pinned
Never	Use a stick, arm, hand or skates to hold or obstruct — the free hand may fend off, never hold, pull, tug or grab

Winning the race is not the same as winning the puck. The player who arrives half a step behind but *on the inside*, between the opponent and the puck, usually ends up with it.

The rules are explicit that this is legal. USA Hockey: "A skater is entitled to the ice they occupy so long as they maintain their skating speed and body position between an opponent and the loose puck," and "A skater can use their body position while maintaining their skating lane, to force an opponent to take a less direct route to the puck, so long as they do not use a hand or arm to hold or block the opponent." The NHL's interference rule says the same thing in different words: you are "always entitled to use [your] body position to lengthen an opponent's path to the puck."

USA Hockey also notes the limit for non-checking play: "Two skaters who use competitive contact for position as they skate to a loose puck are within their rights to do so, unless one uses their stick, arm, or skates to obstruct the opponent's ability to skate to the puck."

So: skate the inside lane. Make them go the long way round. Do not use your hands.

The mechanics of the arrival itself, in the order they happen: **approach on an arc**, not straight at the puck, so that you get there already turned; **turn your hips** so your backside is between the opponent and the puck rather than arriving square; **get low and wide**, feet outside your shoulders; **keep your feet moving**, because a stationary player on the wall gets pinned while one with momentum can escape along the boards or spin out to the middle; and **fend with the free hand, never hold** — NHL Rule 56.1 permits the free hand to "fend off" an opponent or their stick but not to hold, pull, tug or grab (§4 above).

First to arrive, last to commit

Convention	Get there early, then decide late — a coaching heuristic in common use, not a law, with no named originator
Action	Arrive early, slow into a wide balanced stance, then read the pressure and chip, reverse, protect or turn up ice
Never	Arrive at speed already committed — a full-speed reach, a spin or a blind bank gives away all your options
Risk	Winning the race and immediately swinging at the puck turns a won race into a turnover
Read	The limit — in your own slot, or with an opponent bearing down on you, there is no beat to wait; get it out
Key	Upright, balanced and looking around is far harder to hurt than stretched out at full extension with your head down

The idea is this: **get there early, then decide late**. A player who arrives at speed with their body already committed to one play — a full-speed reach for the puck, a spin, a blind bank — has given away all their options and is easy to defend. A player who arrives early, slows into a wide balanced stance, and *then* reads the pressure can chip, reverse, protect, or turn up ice as the situation dictates.

The failure it is designed to prevent is specific: a player wins the race, immediately swings at the puck, misses it or shoots it into a shin pad, and turns a won race into a turnover. Arriving early and then taking body position and **waiting a beat** is very often the better play, because your support

is still arriving and every tenth of a second improves your options. Its limit is equally specific: in your own slot, or with an opponent bearing down on you, there is no beat to wait. Get it out.

This is also the safest way to arrive. A player who is upright, balanced and looking around is far harder to hurt than one stretched out at full extension with their head down.

Offered as a coaching heuristic, not as a law — the phrase is in common use, with no named originator behind it.

Protecting yourself on the boards

Action	Decide before you get there whether you are taking the puck off the wall, chipping it along, or protecting it
Never	Arrive bent over with your back to the play — get side-on
Rule	Unnecessary contact into the boards with a player playing an obvious icing or offside puck is boarding (NHL)
Technique	Do not rely on that protection — get your skates parallel to the wall and take the contact on your forearm and hip

Everything in Section 6 applies at exactly this moment, because puck races to the wall are where checking-from-behind and boarding injuries happen. The specific points:

- **Decide before you get there** whether you are taking the puck off the wall, chipping it along, or protecting it. Arrive with the decision made.
- **Never arrive bent over with your back to the play.** Get side-on.
- **Remember the icing rule protection.** The NHL specifically classes unnecessary contact with a player playing an obvious icing or offside puck, resulting in impact with the boards, as **boarding**. That protects you — but do not rely on it. Get your skates parallel to the wall and take the contact on your forearm and hip.

Chipping and the escape

Technique	The one-touch — arrive and immediately put the puck somewhere useful
Options	Chip it past the defender to your own speed, bank it off the wall to a teammate, or rim it around
Goal	Convert a coin flip into a possession, and take yourself out of the collision
Read	Rim when a checker is sealing you against the wall; reverse when one has over-committed and skated past you
Action	Pick by the checker's momentum, and pick before you arrive

The highest-value skill in a 50-50 race is the one-touch: arriving and immediately putting the puck somewhere useful — chipped past the defender to your own speed, banked off the wall to a teammate, or rimmed around. It converts a coin flip into a possession, and it takes you out of the collision.

Rim and reverse are opposite plays and they are chosen by where the pressure is, so do not treat them as the same escape. A **rim** sends the puck *onward* around the boards, with the flow of play, and beats a checker who is sealing you against the wall. A **reverse** sends it *back against* the flow, into the ice the checker has just left, and beats one who has over-committed and skated past you. Pick by the checker's momentum, and pick before you arrive.

11. Shot Blocking

Blocking shots is genuinely useful and genuinely dangerous. Both facts matter.

Technique

Position	Get close — the closer to the shooter, the more net you take away and the less the puck can accelerate or deviate
Technique	Stay on your feet where you can — a standing block leaves you in the play
Technique	Present your padded surfaces — shin guards front-on, thigh, hip, body square to the puck
Position	Head up and out of the shot lane, hands tucked behind your shin pads with the backs of the gloves out, feet on the ice
Never	Turn your back, turn sideways, or lift a leg — all three expose what armour does not cover and blind you to the puck
Never	Lead with your stick — a puck deflected off an outstretched blade goes upward, often into your own face
Never	Lunge — close with your feet, because a slide that misses is a defender out of the play

Get close. The closer you are to the shooter, the more net you take away and the less time the puck has to accelerate or change direction. Blocking from ten feet away is far safer and more effective than blocking from three feet in front of your own goalie, where a deflection is a goal.

Stay on your feet where you can. A standing block leaves you in the play, and a puck blocked on your feet often becomes a breakaway going the other way. A dropped block takes you out of the play whether it works or not, and if you miss, the shooter walks around you into a 2-on-1.

Present your padded surfaces. Shin guards front-on, thigh, hip. Keep your body square to the puck.

Protect what is not padded. Keep your head up and out of the shot lane, keep your hands behind your body or tucked in behind your shin pads with the backs of the gloves out, and keep your feet on the ice. Never turn your back, never turn sideways, never lift a leg — all three expose the parts of you that armour does not cover, and turning away means you cannot see the puck.

Do not lead with your stick. A puck deflected off an outstretched blade goes upward, often into your own face. Take your stick out of the lane or keep it flat on the ice beside you.

Close with your feet, not by lunging. A lunge is a slide, and a slide that misses is a defender out of the play with no way to recover.

When *not* to block

Never	Block on a 2-on-1 — your job as the lone defender is the pass, and the goalie has the shooter
Never	Block from a screening position — a deflection off a body the goalie could not see is how soft goals are conceded
Priority	Either commit fully and take the shot, or get out of the lane — never stand half in the way with your eyes closed
Never	Dive to block a low-danger point shot while an unmarked opponent stands at the goalmouth
Read	Stay on your feet until the puck is actually released — committing early is what a shot fake is designed to draw
Convention	How much your team blocks is a coaching choice — find out which yours plays, and ask your goalie what they want
Key	Equipment matters here more than anywhere — shin guards that cover shin and ankle, gloves not worn through in the palm

This is the part that gets skipped, and it is where blocking costs goals.

- **On a 2-on-1.** Your job as the lone defender is the pass, not the shot — the goalie has the shooter. Sliding to block on a 2-on-1 takes you out of the passing lane and turns a manageable situation into a tap-in. See Defending the Rush.
- **When you are screening your own goalie.** If your goalie cannot see the puck because you are in front of it, do not add a deflection to the problem. A blocked shot that changes direction off a defender the goalie could not see is one of the most common ways soft goals are conceded. Either commit fully and take the shot, or get out of the lane and let your goalie see it — **the one thing you cannot do is stand half in the way with your eyes closed.**
- **When you would leave a better scoring chance unguarded.** Diving to block a low-danger point shot while an unmarked opponent stands at the goalmouth is a losing trade.
- **When the shooter is faking.** Committing early to a block is exactly what a shot fake is designed to draw. Stay on your feet until the puck is actually released.

How much your team blocks shots is a coaching choice. Some systems ask defenders to block aggressively and collapse in front of the goalie; others ask them to take away the lane while staying on their feet and let the goalie see everything. Neither is right in the abstract. Find out

which your team plays and, in particular, ask your goalie what they want — see Goaltender and On-Ice Communication.

Equipment matters here more than anywhere else on the ice. Shot blockers should have shin guards that actually cover the shin and ankle, and gloves that are not worn through in the palm. See Equipment.

12. Playing Physical Without Taking Penalties

The discipline point

Key	Most amateur penalties are not dirty — they are late, frustrated or lazy
Rule	Illegal means are acts that establish, maintain or restore body position other than by skating (NHL Rule 56.1)
Action	If you lost position, the only legal fix is your feet — skate more, reach less
Never	Retaliate after the whistle — retaliating converts one penalty into two
Rule	A player who does not retaliate after being struck shall not be penalised for fighting (USA Hockey Rule 615(a))
Convention	That the retaliator is the one who gets caught is dressing-room lore — the written standard aims the extra penalty at the instigator

Here is the uncomfortable truth about amateur penalties: **most of them are not dirty, they are late, frustrated or lazy.**

- **Late** — you were beaten, so you reached. Hooking, holding, tripping, and interference are overwhelmingly penalties of a player who has lost position. NHL Rule 56.1 names the mechanism precisely: "Illegal means are acts which allow a player or goalkeeper to establish, maintain or restore body position other than by skating." If you lost position, the only legal fix is your feet.
- **Frustrated** — the retaliation after the whistle, the extra cross-check in the scrum, the shove back. USA Hockey instructs officials that "any avoidable contact after the whistle shall be penalized strictly, including scrum situations around the goal or along the boards," with an **additional** penalty for whoever instigates. Note which way that cuts: the written standard targets the *instigator* for the extra penalty, and USA Hockey Rule 615(a) says in terms that *"a player who does not retaliate after being struck shall not be assessed a penalty for*

fighting under this rule." The folk wisdom that the retaliator is the one who gets caught is **not** what the rulebook says, and there is no published call data either way — so treat it as dressing-room lore, not a rule. What is certain is that retaliating converts one penalty into two.

- **Lazy** — the stick that stays on an opponent's hip because you cannot be bothered to skate.

The fix is unglamorous and entirely within your control: **skate more, reach less**. The coaching claim that goes with it — that better conditioning reduces your penalty minutes, because a tired player reaches — is **reasoning, not a measured effect**; no study links conditioning to penalties taken. See Conditioning and Recovery and Mental Game.

What actually gets called

- Rule** Stick-to-stick contact alone is not hooking; the shaft above your upper hand used to hold or hook is an automatic minor (NHL Rule 55.1)
- Rule** Slashing is a forceful chop on the body, on their stick, or near their hands that is not an attempt to play the puck (NHL Rule 61.1)
- Rule** Holding is using the free hand to hold, pull, tug or grab — you may fend off, but not hold their stick or body (NHL Rule 56.1)
- Rule** Cross-checking has no blade-on-ice element outside USA Hockey Rule 609 — it is absent from NHL and IIHF Rule 59.1
- Rule** High-sticking tests contact above the shoulders, provided the shoulders are at waist level or higher (NHL Rule 60.1, rewritten 2025-26)
- Rule** Tripping requires no fall under any book — NHL Rule 57.1 and USA Hockey Rule 639 both reach the act itself
- Rule** Charging thresholds differ — IIHF "multiple strides" (Rule 42.1), USA Hockey more than two, Hockey Canada two or more, the NHL no stated number

Infraction	The test the official applies
Hooking	Using the stick to restrain. Stick-to-stick contact alone is not hooking (NHL 55.1). Using the shaft above your upper hand to hold or hook is an automatic minor.
Slashing	A forceful chop on the body, on their stick, or on or near their hands that is not an attempt to play the puck. Non-aggressive contact to the pants or front of the shin pads is not called (NHL 61.1).
Holding	Using the free hand to hold, pull, tug or grab. You may "fend off" an opponent or their stick with the free hand; you may not hold their stick or body (NHL 56.1).
Interference	Impeding an opponent who does not have the puck; checking a player who has already released the puck; a "pick" on a player unaware of the hit.
Cross-checking	The shaft between two hands used forcefully to check an opponent (NHL Rule 59.1). No blade-on-ice element — that wording is in USA Hockey's playing rule (609 Note: "with no portion of the stick on the ice"), but absent from NHL 59.1 and IIHF 59.1.
Roughing	A punching or slamming motion, normally at the head or face; also, in USA Hockey, using hands, stick or extended arms to body check, and late checks on a player no longer controlling the puck.
High-sticking	A stick that contacts an opponent above the shoulders, provided their shoulders are at waist level or higher (NHL Rule 60.1, rewritten for 2025-26 — the test is now <i>contact</i> , not how you carry the stick, and a player bent below waist height is not protected). Accidental contact on a normal windup or follow-through is permitted; a wild swing at a bouncing puck is not.
Tripping	Using a stick, knee, foot, arm, hand or elbow to cause an opponent to fall or lose their footing. No fall is required under any book — NHL 57.1 and USA Hockey 639 both reach the act, and USA Hockey's wording is " <i>lose balance or fall</i> ". No penalty if you clearly played the puck first. This is the most-called penalty in the NHL — 16.6% of all calls in the 400-game sample used in §9.
Charging	Distance travelled and speed built up into a check, or jumping into an opponent. Written thresholds differ: IIHF Rule 42.1 "multiple strides" (the British test), USA Hockey <i>more than two strides</i> , Hockey Canada <i>two or more</i> , NHL no stated number (judged on "distance traveled").

The habits that keep you out of the box

Action	Stick on the ice, blade on the puck — almost every stick penalty starts with the blade off the ice
Action	Move your feet instead of reaching — the single biggest driver of penalty minutes in amateur hockey
Priority	Take the puck, not the player — if your first thought is the body, your stick is somewhere it should not be
Never	Stay in a scrum — play the whistle, then stop; retaliating turns their penalty into two
Never	Take a penalty out of frustration at a referee — it is the cheapest goal you will ever give up
Action	Know your league's standard — watch how the first five minutes are being called and adjust

- **Stick on the ice, blade on the puck.** Almost every stick penalty starts with the blade off the ice.
- **Move your feet instead of reaching.** The single biggest driver of penalty minutes in amateur hockey.
- **Take the puck, not the player.** In a battle, aim for the puck. If your first thought is the body, your stick is somewhere it should not be.
- **Play the whistle, then stop.** Nothing good happens in a scrum. Both the instigator and the retaliator can be penalised — and USA Hockey's standard actually directs the *extra* penalty at the instigator, with Rule 615(a) protecting a player who does not retaliate. The common claim that the retaliator is called more often is unsourced; what is not in doubt is that retaliating turns their penalty into two.
- **Never take a penalty out of frustration at a referee.** It is the cheapest goal you will ever give up.
- **Know your league's standard.** Beer leagues, youth associations and international play call the same rulebook very differently. Watch how the first five minutes are being called and adjust.

Fighting — and why the amateur rules are much harsher than the NHL's

- Rule** Fighting in the NHL is a five-minute major (Rule 46.14), with an instigator minor (46.11) or an aggressor major plus game misconduct (46.2)
- Rule** The third man into an altercation faces a game misconduct at the referee's discretion (NHL Rule 46.16)
- Rule** USA Hockey counts an attempted punch, contact or not, as fighting — a major plus a game misconduct (Rule 615)
- Rule** A player who does not retaliate after being struck shall not be penalised for fighting under USA Hockey Rule 615(a) — but the IIHF book carries no such protection, and retaliating to a punch takes at least a minor for roughing (IIHF Rule 46)
- Never** Drop your stick or remove your gloves in an altercation you were not part of — a minor under USA Hockey
- Rule** Under IIHF Rule 46, an instigator takes 2+5+game misconduct and the third player in a game misconduct (46.3, 46.7)
- Rule** In NIHL (all leagues), SNL and BUIHA Varsity, fighting is a five-minute major — and in NIHL, NIHL1 and NIHL2 a fighting major in the last five minutes of regulation or in overtime also carries an automatic game misconduct (In-House Rules, Section 6)
- Rule** In British women's hockey below Adult, any major is an automatic game misconduct — a fighting major ends your game (In-House Rules, Rule 101)
- Key** Junior hockey at every age reads the same way, on In-House Rule 201's scoping of the IIHF junior rules — treat a fighting major as ending your game
- Key** Rec and beer leagues are commonly harsher again — read your own league's sheet, the only version that binds you
- Action** If a scrum starts, hands down, gloves on — skate away and let the officials sort it out

This document is about legal contact, and fighting is not it. But it belongs here, because the moment a battle turns into a shove-fest the rules that apply are ones most players know only from watching the NHL — and **they are not the rules you play under.**

- **NHL (Rule 46).** Fighting is a **five-minute major** — 46.14 reads simply, "*A major penalty shall be imposed on any player who fights.*" A player judged to have started it takes an extra **instigator** minor (46.11); an **aggressor** — one who "*continues throwing and landing punches*" at an opponent "*no longer in a position to defend himself*" — "*shall be assessed a major penalty for fighting and a game misconduct*" (46.2); and the **third man into an altercation** faces a game misconduct "*at the discretion of the Referee*" (46.16), which also

catches "subsequent players who elect to intervene". That last one is the trap — stepping in to help a teammate can end your night.

- **USA Hockey (Rule 615) is far stricter, and the threshold is much lower.** Its Note defines fighting as "*a punch, **or an attempted punch**, thrown by any player in the direction of an opponent, **regardless as to whether contact is made**.*" You do not have to connect. And 615(a) assesses "*a major plus a game misconduct penalty... to any player who engages in fighting*" — so under USA Hockey a thrown punch is not five minutes, it is **an ejection**, plus a further minor if you instigated it, plus the progressive suspensions that follow a game misconduct. There is also a minor for any player who "*drops their stick and/or removes their glove(s) during an altercation and is not a participant in the original altercation*" — i.e. for the third man arriving hot.
- **615(a) also protects you for doing nothing:** "*a player who does not retaliate after being struck shall not be assessed a penalty for fighting under this rule.*" That clause is worth knowing by heart, because it means the disciplined response is also the one the rulebook rewards.
- **IIHF (Rule 46) — the British base.** The book opens the rule by saying that "*'Fighting' is not part of international ice hockey's DNA.*" An **instigator** takes "*a minor penalty (Instigator / Initiator) plus a major penalty ('Fighting') and an automatic game misconduct penalty (2'+5'+GMP)*" (46.3); an **aggressor** the same 2'+5'+GMP (46.4); the **third player in a game misconduct** at the referee's discretion, which also catches "*subsequent Players who elect to intervene*" (46.7). A player who "*retaliates to being punched will be assessed at least a minor penalty ('Roughing') or a major penalty ('Fighting')*" — note the difference from USA Hockey, which protects a non-retaliating player explicitly and does not.
- **England Ice Hockey and the SIHA amend it.** In **NIHL (all leagues), SNL and BUIHA Varsity**, "*fighting shall be penalised with a 5-minute Major Penalty.*" And in **NIHL, NIHL1 and NIHL2** there is an additional provision: "*Any fighting major assessed in the last 5 minutes of regulation time (including overtime) will also carry an automatic Game Misconduct.*" A further British consequence follows from elsewhere in the In-House Rules: in **women's hockey below Adult**, any major penalty already brings an automatic game misconduct and ejection (Rule 101, which states that cross-reference to IIHF Rule 201.1 explicitly) — so there, a fighting major *is* an ejection. **Read junior hockey the same way at every age group**, on In-House Rule 201's scoping of the IIHF junior playing rules to "*all junior age groups*" — though note that Rule 201 does not name 201.1, so that reading is this corpus's rather than the rule's own words. See UK and England Rules.
- **Rec and beer leagues are commonly harsher again** — many eject and suspend for any fight regardless of who started it. (*That is a general observation about how such leagues are*

run rather than a sourced survey; there is no league-wide census of rec-league fighting policy. Read your own league's sheet, which is the only version that binds you.)

The practical version: in every book that governs amateur hockey, throwing a punch — or even winding up to — ends your game. If a scrum starts, your hands stay down and your gloves stay on. Skate away and let the officials sort it out; that is not passivity, it is the only outcome that leaves you on the ice.

A team that plays hard, wins battles and takes no penalties is far more physically dominant than a team that hits everything and spends nine minutes a game shorthanded. See Risk Management.

Common Mistakes

- **Assuming your league's contact rules instead of checking them.** The same age group can be checking in one association and non-checking in the next town. And a checking team playing a non-checking team means nobody checks. **In Britain this is not answerable from a rulebook at all** — neither the IIHF Rule Book nor the In-House Rules sets a body-checking age, and assuming Britain copies USA Hockey's 12U line or Hockey Canada's U13 line is a guess. Ask your league.
- **Thinking "non-contact" means nobody touches you.** It does not. Every non-check rulebook explicitly permits leaning, sealing, boxing out and angling. Players who expect a bubble get knocked off the puck all night.
- **Skating with your head down.** The most dangerous habit in hockey, and the one that removes most of the rulebook's protection from you.
- **Finishing a check into a player who is facing the wall, or hitting anyone from behind.** There is **no minor-penalty option** for checking from behind in the NHL or IIHF — it is a major with an automatic game misconduct, anywhere on the ice — and **the onus is always on the checker**. "He turned at the last second" is not a defence unless the turn was deliberate. Take the puck, take the ice, or angle them off it.
- **Turning your back to the boards when contact is coming.** It feels protective. It is how spinal injuries happen. **Get skates parallel to the wall and take it on the forearm and hip** — that is the target orientation. Squaring your chest to the boards is the Case 3 fallback for when you cannot turn, not something to aim for.
- **Arriving at the boards perpendicular, or on the point of your shoulder.** Go in on an angle and get your skates parallel; USA Hockey names the shoulder tip specifically as an

injury mechanism. If you are stuck facing the wall, get your gloves and stick up and spread out on the glass rather than taking it on one arm.

- **Angling at the player instead of at the ice.** If you skate at the body, a good carrier changes the puck to their far side and goes around you. Skate at the space.
- **Angling flat across the ice.** Without momentum back toward your own net, one pass leaves you facing the wrong way.
- **Committing your feet on a poke check.** A missed poke with your weight forward means you are out of the play.
- **Never learning the stick lift.** The highest-value, lowest-risk defensive skill in the game, and most amateurs have simply never been shown it.
- **Cross-checking at the net front to create space.** An enforcement emphasis officials are specifically told to watch for — but not, as the folklore has it, the most-called penalty there. In 400 tracked games it ranks **seventh** in the net-front box at 5.7% of calls, essentially its league-wide rate (see §9). The stick fouls that really concentrate there are hooking and slashing. Tie the stick instead. And don't rely on the "blade on the ice" folklore — that isn't in the NHL, IIHF or Hockey Canada definition.
- **Standing up in a board battle.** The lower player usually wins — not always, and a big enough strength gap still wins, but your base is the part you control and standing tall throws it away.
- **Forgetting your feet exist.** In a real battle your stick is tied up and your skates are free. Kick the puck out.
- **Second man diving into the pile.** Two teammates tangled with one opponent while a third opponent takes the puck.
- **Blocking a shot on a 2-on-1.** Your job is the pass. Let the goalie have the shooter.
- **Blocking a shot from a screening position.** A deflection off a body the goalie could not see is a goal.
- **Turning sideways or lifting a leg to block.** Exposes the unpadded parts of you and blinds you to the puck.
- **Winding up from across the ice to deliver a check.** Both **USA Hockey** and **Hockey Canada** put a stride count in writing, and **they are not the same count** — USA Hockey (Standard of Play — Body Checking, and Rule 607) penalises taking "*more than two strides*", while Hockey Canada (Rule 7.4) defines charging as building up speed by taking "*two or more strides*". So the two strides that are your ceiling under USA Hockey are already the offence under Hockey Canada. **IIHF Rule 42.1 — the British test** — names the same act without a count, penalising a player who "*builds up speed by taking multiple strides immediately prior to making contact.*" The NHL's Rule 42.1 sets no number at all and judges

charging on "distance traveled" instead. Anything more than a couple of strides of build-up is charging in any book. And for an **open-ice** check USA Hockey's own coaching manual is tighter still — one stride, or you do not have the gap.

- **Checking a player who is already in a battle with a teammate. USA Hockey defines them as defenceless** in so many words — "*when two or more players are physically engaged for control of the puck along the boards, they are considered to be vulnerable or defenseless*" — and says the check "must be penalized". **The IIHF book has no board-battle clause but reaches the same hit by another route:** its glossary makes a player who has neither possession nor preparation for the hit "*vulnerable*", and "*a bodycheck to an opponent who is vulnerable is automatically considered reckless even if that bodycheck would be considered legal to a non-vulnerable opponent*" — and reckless is the trigger for the major-and-game-misconduct tier. So under the British book it is not a free hit either. Only the **NHL** rulebook leaves it purely to boarding or roughing at the referee's judgement.
- **Retaliating after the whistle.** You cannot count on the officials having seen the first one, and USA Hockey rewards *not* retaliating explicitly (Rule 615(a)). Take the hit and skate away.
- **Helping up a player who may have hurt their neck.** The most common and most damaging mistake made after a spinal impact. Do not move them and do not let them move: call for medical help, check airway and breathing, reassure them, keep them warm and immobile — head and neck especially — and leave the helmet on. See the on-ice spinal-injury response above, which is the most important section in this document.

Key Takeaways

1. **Find out whether your league permits body checking before you play a shift.** Body checking is banned in USA Hockey's 12U-and-below, all girls'/women's classifications and all non-check adult divisions; in Hockey Canada's U13-and-below and all female hockey; and in most adult rec leagues. Body *contact* is legal everywhere. **In Britain you cannot look this up** — your book is the IIHF's, amended by the In-House Rules, and **neither states a body-checking age**. Do not assume Britain copies the North American lines; ask your league, and note that British junior categories are U19/U16/U14/U12/U10 by birth year and unisex. Women's hockey in Britain runs **IIHF Rule 101.1**, where a restricted form of bodychecking is permitted and Adult begins at the 14th birthday. See UK and England Rules.
2. **Angling is the most valuable skill in this document and it is legal in every league.** Steer opponents with your route, not your body: take away the middle, keep your

momentum heading back toward your own net, close under control, and arrive stick-on-puck.

3. **Stick on the puck or stick on their stick is legal; stick on their hands or body is a penalty — and the stick lift is the best application of it.** That one sentence covers hooking, slashing and cross-checking (with the caveat that a violent chop at their stick is still slashing). The stick lift wins pucks from behind, beside and in front of an opponent, carries almost no penalty risk, never takes you out of the play, and almost no amateur has been taught it.
4. **You are entitled to the ice you are standing on.** You can block a path, stand your ground, box out and lengthen an opponent's route to the puck — as long as you do not use your stick to make yourself wider or your free hand to hold.
5. **A legal check is trunk on trunk, above their knees and below their shoulders, on a player who has the puck, to win the puck.** That much is common to every rulebook. The extra clause worth adopting is **USA Hockey's**, and it is a written enforcement standard rather than a law of hockey everywhere: "*proper body checking technique starts with stick on puck, therefore the stick blade of the player delivering the check must be below the knees*" (Standard of Play — Body Checking). The **NHL and IIHF rulebooks contain no such requirement** — the IIHF glossary defines the legal check in almost the same words as USA Hockey but stops at "trunk of the body... above the knees and at or below the shoulders" — but treat it as your checklist anyway: a stick that is down means hands, elbows and shoulder all arrive where they should. Same story on the wind-up — **two strides** is USA Hockey's and Hockey Canada's written number, **IIHF Rule 42.1 says "multiple strides" without counting them**, NHL Rule 42.1 judges charging on "distance traveled" with no figure attached, and USA Hockey's own coaching manual cuts it to **one stride for an open-ice check**.
6. **Both sides of the collision have a non-negotiable rule.** Giving it: never hit a player from behind, near the head, or turned toward the boards — checking from behind has no minor-penalty option in the NHL or IIHF, it is a major with an automatic game misconduct, and the onus is always on you. Taking it: keep your head up, chin off your chest, and never turn your back to the wall.
7. **If a player may have hurt their neck, nobody moves and somebody phones — and this is the most important paragraph in the document.** Do not help them up. Call for immediate medical help, observe the ABCs, reassure them, keep them warm, and instruct and immobilise them so they do not move — head and neck especially. Leave the helmet on. Assume a possible spinal injury in every head injury: neck pain or tenderness is itself an ambulance. Full response in If it happens anyway.

8. **Go into the boards on an angle, skates parallel, and take it on your forearm and hip** — not the point of your shoulder. If you are already facing the wall and cannot turn, get your gloves and stick up and spread out on the glass; that is damage limitation, not the position you were aiming for.
9. **Board and corner battles are usually won by the lower player, not the stronger one, and by the second man staying out of the pile.** Wide base, bent knees, body between opponent and puck, wall on the far side; use your skates to kick the puck free when your stick is tied up. In the corner, first man engages and stops the puck, second man reads where it squirts. Whose corner it is in your own end is a coaching choice — under low zone collapse it is the strong-side D and centre, under man-on-man a winger comes down. Find out which you play.
10. **At the net front, control sticks before you get physical.** A stick lift achieves what a cross-check does, without the two minutes. Note that keeping your blade on the ice does **not** make a shaft shove legal outside USA Hockey — that's a widespread myth.
11. **Block shots close, on your feet, hands tucked, head out of the lane — and don't block on a 2-on-1 or from in front of your own goalie's eyes.** Most amateur penalties, meanwhile, are late, frustrated or lazy rather than dirty: if you lost position, the only legal way to get it back is with your feet. Skate more, reach less.

VERIFICATION NOTES

*Unverified or single-source, flagged inline: the warning that bracing a locked, straight arm against the boards breaks wrists and collarbones appears in no USA Hockey, HECC or Look Up Line document, and USA Hockey positively teaches spreading your stick and gloves onto the glass; it is retained in §6 as labelled coaching craft. The nearest evidence is fall biomechanics rather than hockey: Chou and colleagues measured elbow mediolateral shear 68% higher in extension than flexion during forward falls onto the hand, but found no axial-force difference, and no study has applied that to board collisions. **On being hit from behind**, USA Hockey does publish a receiving-player body position for being checked while facing the boards, and its Heads Up Hockey guide tells a player who "can't skate through a check" to keep "arms up, knees bent and, of course, their heads up." No published treatment gives a technique premised on genuinely zero warning; beyond that the hazard is addressed through the checker's obligations and the victim's awareness. **The strong form of the cross-checking claim is not supported by the call data:** over 400 games of the 2024-25 season, cross-checking is the **seventh** most-called penalty at the net front rather than the first, and at **1.08x** it is called there at essentially its league-wide rate rather than being concentrated there at all; the penalties that genuinely concentrate in that box are hooking (2.10x) and slashing (1.76x). Those figures and the full method are set out in §9. USA Hockey's Standard of Play naming the net-front cross-check as its leading example remains an enforcement emphasis, which is how it is presented. The "over 70 per cent of goals scored within two stick-lengths of the net" figure is a single*

coach's account of one season at one NCAA programme, not a league-wide statistic — and the same play-by-play feed contradicts it at NHL level: over 400 games of 2024-25 the true share within two stick-lengths is **26.8%**, with 70% reached only at about thirty feet. It is retained in §7 as a quotation with the contradiction stated beside it, rather than deleted, and is no longer offered as a statistic. Hockey Canada's checking-skills coaching resources (as distinct from its rulebook) are not publicly available, so all Hockey Canada claims here are sourced to the Playing Rules — and **Rule 7.4 does carry the two-stride charging test** in both the 2024-2026 and 2026-2028 editions. NHL rule numbering and wording here are taken from the NHL Official Rules 2025-2026. **The British body-checking age is stated here as unknown, deliberately.** The IIHF Rule Book 2025/26 was searched in full for any age or category restriction on body checking and contains none outside women's Rule 101.1; its junior section (Rules 200–202) covers age eligibility, facial protection and one penalty rule and says nothing about contact. The In-House Rules 2025-26 Rev 1 were read in full and contain no reference to body checking, body contact or non-contact play in any section. This guide therefore does **not** state a British threshold and does **not** assume the USA Hockey 12U or Hockey Canada U13 line transfers; the answer lives in individual competition regulations and Rule Bulletins, which this corpus has not obtained. The **EIHL Casebook** has not been read and nothing here describes Elite League interpretation.