

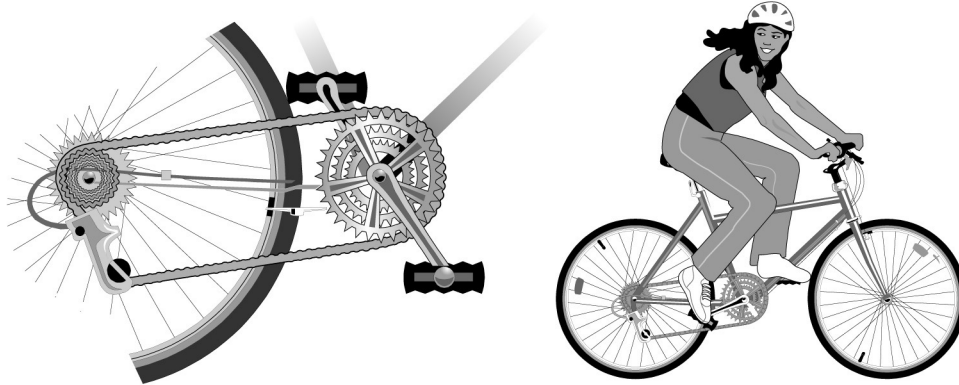


## 7.1 Bicycle Gear Ratios Project

**READ**

### How many gears does your bicycle really have?

Bicycle manufacturers describe any bicycle with two gears in the front and five in the back as a ten-speed. But do you really get ten different speeds? In this project, you will determine and record the gear ratio for each speed of your bicycle. You will then write up an explanation of the importance (or lack of, in some cases) of each speed. You will explain what the rider experiences due to the physics of the gear ratio, and in what situation the rider would take advantage of that particular speed.



#### To complete this project, you will need:

- Multi-speed bicycle
- Simple calculator
- Access to a library or the Internet for research
- Access to a computer for work with a spreadsheet (optional)

**PRACTICE**

On a multi-speed bicycle, there are two groups of gears: the front group and the rear group. You may want to carefully place your bicycle upside down on the floor to better work with the gears. The seat and handlebars will keep the bicycle balanced.

1. Draw a schematic diagram to show how the gears are set up on your bicycle.
2. Now, count the number of teeth on each gear in each group. Record your data in a table on paper or in a computer spreadsheet. Use these questions to guide you.
  - a. How many gears are in the front group?
  - b. How many teeth on each gear in the front group?
  - c. How many gears are in the rear group?
  - d. How many teeth on each gear in the rear group?



3. Now, calculate the gear ratio for each front/rear combination of gears.  
Use the formula: front gear  $\div$  rear gear.  
Organize the results of your calculations into a new table either on paper or in a computer spreadsheet.  
How many different gear ratios do you actually have?
4. Use your library or the Internet to research the development of the multi-speed bicycle. Take careful notes while you do your research as you will use the information you find to write a report (see step 7). In your research, find the answers to the following questions.
  - a. In what circumstances would a low gear ratio be helpful? Why?
  - b. In what circumstances would a high gear ratio be helpful? Why?
5. Write up your findings and results according to the guidelines below.

**Your final project should include:**

- **A brief (one page) report** that discusses the evolution of the bicycle. What was the first bicycle like? How did we end up with the modern bicycle? Why was the multi-speed bicycle an important invention?
- **A schematic diagram** of your bicycle's gears. Include labels.
- **An organized, professional data table** showing the gear ratios of your bicycle.
- **A summary report** (one page) in which you interpret your findings and explain the trade-off between force and distance when pedaling a bicycle in each of the different speeds. Include answers to questions 4(a) and 4(b). In your research, you should make a surprising discovery about the speeds—what is it?
- **Reflection:** Finish the report with one or two paragraphs that express your reflections on this project.