

A woman with long braids, wearing a black helmet, sunglasses, and full protective gear (knee pads, elbow pads, wrist guards), is crouching on a roller skate on a concrete skate ramp. She is looking directly at the camera. The background shows a clear blue sky and some trees. The text 'aggressive roller skating 101' is overlaid in the upper right corner in a white, outlined font. The website 'www.rollergirl.ca' is in the bottom left corner.

# aggressive roller skating 101

[www.rollergirl.ca](http://www.rollergirl.ca)

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# Part 1 - Introduction to Aggressive Roller Skating

## Welcome to RollerGirl.ca's Aggressive Roller Skating 101

My name is Lisa Suggitt and I will be your guide as you learn some basic aggressive roller skating skills. I am an avid roller skater and have been skating aggressively for nearly a decade. Over the years, I have introduced many skaters to the joys (and pains) of ramp roller skating.

This guide has been a dream of mine for ages and I am really excited that it has finally come to fruition. With it, I hope to make skateparks more accessible and less intimidating to the beginner aggressive skater and to introduce the basic skills that are the foundations of all ramp skating.

Most of all, I hope to share with you some of my passion and love for the sport.

### A) Protective Gear

Please wear protective gear. While some skateboarders don't, even though they should, roller skaters don't have a choice, it's a necessity. Skateboarders can jump off their boards if something goes wrong. You can't. Your knees, wrists and elbows are going to hit the ground often, protect them.

I feel compelled to add that if it wasn't for the fact that I always wear a helmet when I skate, I would not be alive today to write this guide. Please wear your lid!

This guide was written with the assumption that you will wear the following protective gear:

#### **Mandatory**

- Helmet
- Good Quality Knee Pads \*
- Elbow Pads
- Wrist Guards

#### **Optional**

- Mouth Guard
- Padded shorts

\* The cheap, flimsy kneepads designed for recreational in-line skating do not qualify as good quality kneepads. You are looking for at least an inch and a half of padding, a good snug fit, and a big flat plastic cap. Do not compromise, you **will** fall on your knees. Lots. Hard.



### B) Skates

It isn't necessary to buy expensive aggressive skates to start skating aggressively. You simply need a pair of good quality skates that you feel comfortable in. Ramp skating is extremely rough on your skates so avoid using cheaply-made products with very low quality materials; They simply will not last. If you only have \$100 to spend on skates, buy a pair of good quality second-hand skates - any new skates in this range are likely to be too flimsy for this kind of abuse.

#### **Boots**

- Any boots will work for the beginner skills mentioned in this guide.
- Short boots are more appropriate than high boots (because of the shorter heel).
- Hockey boots are a common choice for those who prefer stiffer ankle support.

## **Plates**

- Any plates will work for the beginner skills mentioned in this guide.
- Sure-Grip plates are a great choice because most of them are compatible with the Supreme Roller ramp trucks and RollerGirl slide bars.

## **Trucks**

- Any trucks will work for the beginner skills mentioned in this guide.
- In order to perform more advanced tricks that involve grinding (not included in this guide) you will need wide trucks like the Supreme Rollers.

## **Wheels**

- Beginners often prefer really soft wheels for extra grip and control (outdoor wheels or soft indoor wheels 93A durometer or softer).
- More advanced skaters typically prefer harder wheels that provide better speed and performance (94A - 100A).
- Smaller wheels (57-60mm) are best for skaters with slide bars or wide trucks.
- If you don't have slide bars or wide trucks, wheels up to 65mm are fine. Avoid wheels larger than 65mm as they tend to be too heavy and clumsy for ramp skating.

## **Toe Protectors and/or Tape**

I strongly recommend the use of toe protectors and tape to extend the life of your boots. I tape the entire front of my boots with hockey tape, and then install toe protectors over top. Hockey tape, duct tape and gaffers tape will all work. Knee sliding in concrete bowls will destroy your boots if they are left unprotected.

## **C) Know your limits, skate within them**

Aggressive skating is not easy. In fact, it is difficult and downright dangerous at times. If you skate within your comfort zone, the risk of serious injury is greatly reduced. Do not attempt to skate at a skatepark until you are a very confident and competent flat-ground skater with excellent balance and control. Take small steps, pushing your limits a little at a time. Don't throw yourself into situations that are way above your head. No back-flips, okay? At least not yet.

## **D) Park Etiquette**

Skateparks are busy, hazardous places. Moreover, the culture at a skatepark has its own rules of etiquette that you should be aware of. If you've never been to a skatepark before, I suggest going one time just to observe what goes on. Here are some tips that will keep you safe and on good terms with other skaters.

**1) Identify the lines of the park.** The first time you visit an unfamiliar park, sit back and watch for a few minutes before you start skating. Try to identify:

- What are the common paths that skaters are taking through the park?
- Where do they frequently drop in?
- Where do they land?
- Where do people feel comfortable skating more than one person at a time?
- Where is it imperative that only one skater skates at a time?

Keep your eyes open for skaters who roll-in drop-in, they will wait for their turn far away from the coping and you may not see them coming.

**2) Be aware of the other skaters.** Take a look at the people you're about to skate with:

- Who is likely to drop in, out of turn, without looking?
- Who is too timid to take their turn?
- Who is inexperienced and unpredictable?
- Who is reckless and dangerous?

Keep an eye on the whereabouts of turn-jumpers before you drop in to make sure they are not about to "snake" your turn again. Watch for beginners and kids. These people can be very unpredictable and their boards/scooters/dogs can show up in the bowl at any time.

**3) How to take your turn.** This is a bit subtle, but you will get the hang of it.

Here is what taking your first turn might look like:

- If everyone else has had a turn, you can generally take the opportunity to go.
- As the current skater leaves the bowl, step up to the coping.
- Stop, look around and make eye contact with the other skaters who are standing near the coping. This says, "It's my turn, I'm going in".
- If someone else moves to go before you, you'll have to step back.
- If not, don't hesitate. Simply drop or climb into the bowl.

Skate for a little while then climb out. Don't linger endlessly in the bowl but don't feel pressured either. Take your space and skate when you have the chance, just be aware that other people want to skate too.

About climbing out: Sometimes you can't just skate out of the bowl, you must climb out. Find the shallowest place in the bowl. Skate as fast as you can toward the coping. As you start to rise up the transition, throw yourself at the coping and try to land with your hands on it and your upper body just slightly above. Pull yourself out. It doesn't look very graceful but it works. Like everything else, with practice you will eventually get good at it.

**4) Don't be in the way.** Don't stand near the coping unless you're getting ready to drop-in. Someone might want to grind, air out or roll-in at that spot. Be aware of, and avoid standing in, the popular roll-in and landing spots.

**5) "BOOOOOAAAAAARD!!!!"** That's what you'll hear if a stray skateboard falls into the ramp/bowl while someone's riding. It means "There is an immediate hazard. Be aware right now!". Similarly, if you see a skateboard or any foreign object enter the ramp/bowl/street line while someone is riding it, feel free to shout "BOARD!" to get the skater to pay attention.

## E) Your first time

Go to the skatepark very early in the day if you can. Most parks tend to be less busy in the mornings so you will get more time to practice.

The first time you go out, simply climb to the bottom of the bowl/ramp and skate around. Get used to the feeling of skating on a slightly curved surface. It feels very different from flat-ground and even hill skating. Take some time to just play around and have fun.

### **Aggressive skating posture**

- lean forward
- bend at the hips & knees
- relax your muscles
- put your lead foot slightly forward, back foot slightly back

You should look like you are sitting in an invisible chair, but tilted forward. By maintaining a forward stance you will reduce the risk of falling backwards.



## F) Falling Safely

Skating aggressively involves falling. A lot. Some say it's half the fun. If you don't fall, it means you aren't trying very hard! Before you even consider trying to skate the ramps, you should know how to skate **and** how to fall. Practice the following skills until they come naturally.

### One Knee Slides

- skate at a medium speed
- drop one kneepad to the ground.
- slide in a straight line to a stop or near stop
- stand back up again
- repeat with the other knee



## **Two Knee Slides**

- skate at a medium speed
- lower yourself slowly and drop to a slide onto both kneepads
- don't throw yourself at the ground, focus on controlled lowering
- make sure to lean backwards as you slide



## Part 2 - Transition

### A) Introduction

One of the fundamental elements of aggressive skating is skating on surfaces that are not flat. The surfaces in a ramp transition smoothly from flat to vertical. This feels very disconcerting for the beginner aggressive skater, but don't worry with time you will learn to love it!

The ideal place to learn to deal with transition is in a medium size (5' or 6' high) half pipe. Don't worry about dropping in for now. Start from the bottom of the ramp.

### B) Turning in a transition

There are a number of techniques for turning inside a transition. All of them will seem difficult at first but will become fluid and natural with just a bit of practice. In this guide we will cover Jump turns and Pivot turns.

See next page.



## Jump Turn

- skate toward the transition (keep your body loose and flexible)
- bend your knees and let your feet raise up in front of you
- keep one foot in front of the other for extra balance
- as you reach the apex of your forward momentum jump just enough to lift your skates off the ramp
- rotate your upper body 180 degrees so that you are facing where you want to go (down the ramp)
- swinging your arms helps you rotate quicker, the rest of your body will follow through in the rotation
- land on your skates and roll forward down the ramp and up the transition on the other side
- repeat



## Pivot Turns

Pivot turns are very similar to jump turns, but instead of jumping in the transition, you pivot on the back wheels of your inside foot.

- skate up the transition (keep your body loose and flexible)
- bend your knees and let your feet raise up in front of you
- keep one foot in front of the other for extra balance
- as you reach the apex, lift your weight and pivot on the back wheels of your inside foot as you rotate your upper body 180 degrees so that you are facing where you want to go (down the ramp)
- swinging your arms helps you rotate quicker, the rest of your body will follow through in the rotation
- as you complete the rotation, drop your weight
- finish the turn facing the upcoming transition
- repeat

You will eventually be able to gain a lot of speed by using pivot turns. Keep practising!



## C) Fakie - skating backwards in transition

When skating fakie in a half -pipe you can build speed and negotiate the transition by alternating between forward and backward skating. It's kind of scary at first, but some people find it easy to learn because you don't have to rotate your body like you do with a turn.

### Regular up, fakie down

- stand in the flat bottom of the half-pipe facing the transition
- skate up the transition (keep your body loose and flexible)
- bend your knees and let your feet raise up in front of you
- keep one foot in front of the other for extra balance
- as you reach the apex of your forward momentum you will lose all your speed and start to roll backwards
- roll down the transition into the flat bottom



## **Fakie up, regular down**

- roll backwards up the transition behind you (this the scary part)
- bend your knees as you ride up the transition, you should look like you are sitting on your skates
- reach the apex of the transition
- roll forward to the flat bottom
- repeat

With practice, you will eventually be able to gain a lot of speed by skating fakie in the transition.



## Part 3 - Dropping In

### A) Introduction

Until now we have instructed you to climb into the bowl/ramp and start skating from the bottom of the ramp. Now we are going to discuss starting from the top of the ramp by using a technique called dropping in.

Before considering dropping in for the first time, you should be able to gain speed in the transition and perform jump turns or pivot turns all the way up to the coping.

There are a number of techniques for dropping in but we will only be discussing three: toe stopper drop, slide bar drop and roll in drop.

### B) Overcoming Fear

Dropping in for the first time is one of the scariest things that you will ever do. The hardest part about it is getting over the mental block. Adrenaline starts coursing through your veins and every cell in your body screams loudly, as if you were in a life or death situation. It's funny how a little 4 foot ramp can seem 100 feet tall the first time you drop in. You will be scared but you have to just do it anyway.

It is really important that you don't back down repetitively. If you step up to the ramp, intent on dropping in, then you have to do it. Fear and apprehension grow over time and if you back down too often you may never end up doing it at all. It may help to visualize how you're going to do it, how it's going to feel and how your going to be successful. When you're ready, step up to the ramp, take a deep breath, count to 3 and just do it.

The technique itself is not that difficult, you just need to stay relaxed and follow a few basic guidelines.

Note - On roller skates, unlike on a skateboard, it's actually easier to drop into a medium sized ramp, (about 4-6 feet tall) than it is to drop into anything smaller. Some parks have half pipes as small as 2 feet, the transition is so tight and small that they tend to be quite difficult to learn on.

### C) Lean Forward!

Dropping in can be dangerous. In the worst case scenario you could fall backwards and hit your head on the coping (you're wearing your helmet, right?). The key is to lean forward no matter what happens. If you are leaning forward with your shoulders parallel to your knees it makes it nearly impossible to fall backwards. Keep your hands in front of you and be ready to fall forward should you need to.

## D) Toe Stopper Drop

This is a technique for dropping in without grind/slide bars.

- stand close to the coping with your skates shoulder width apart
- steady yourself by leaning on the stopper of your non-lead foot
- lock your body into a leaning forward position and keep this position until you have safely landed in the ramp
- while pushing on the stopper, step forward into the ramp with your lead foot
- follow through with the non-lead foot

The movement is a stepping jump into the ramp. Step with your lead foot and then follow through with the non-lead foot (stopper foot). Go “step step” into the ramp. The key is to keep leaning forward. You want to keep your upper body locked leaning forward at the hips. Consciously tense up your back muscles and focus on keeping this forward angle. Don't lock your knees, keep them loose as they will act as your shocks. Once you have landed safely in the ramp and are approaching the bottom of the transition relax and allow your body to regain a more natural vertical position.



## E) Slide Bar Drop

This is the easiest and most stylish of the techniques in this guide. In order to perform this drop in, you must have slide bars on your skates.

- stand close to the coping with your skates shoulder width apart
- lock your body into a leaning forward position and keep this position until you have safely landed in the ramp
- step forward onto the coping with your non-lead foot (this skate should be perpendicular with the coping resting on the slide bar)
- step forward into the ramp with your lead foot

Again, it is key to stay in a leaning forward position. You want to keep your upper body locked leaning forward at the hips. Consciously tense up your back muscles and focus on keeping this forward angle. Don't lock your knees, keep them loose as they will act as your shocks. Once you have landed safely in the ramp and are approaching the bottom of the transition relax and allow your body to regain a more natural vertical position.



## F) Roll In Drop

Rolling-in is a scary but fun way to drop in, it's also the most efficient way to get good speed. It does require some space at the top of the ramp to pick up speed so its not always the method of choice.

- stand at least six feet away from the edge of the ramp/bowl
- skate towards the edge of the ramp at a medium speed
- when you reach the edge of the ramp, lift your weight so as not to hang up on the coping and drop it into the ramp, leaning forward

The idea is to hop (not jump) over the coping and into the ramp, landing as high on the transition as possible in that locked forward “charging” position. It's essential to lift your weight and drop it into the ramp as opposed to flying in and landing in the flat of the ramp. It is a good idea to master dropping in using the other methods first.

Also, the “roll in drop in” isn't as hard as it sounds, but it is really scary the first couple of times! It's actually easier at higher speeds; if you go too slow you risk hanging up on the coping or falling backwards when you hit the ramp. Like all other drop ins, the most important thing is to lean forward and commit. Once you have landed safely in the ramp and are approaching the bottom of the transition relax and allow your body to regain a more natural vertical position.





## Part 4 - Stalls

### A) Introduction

As their name suggests, stalls are simply moments when you are standing, stalled, on an obstacle. They are one of the basic building blocks of aggressive skating tricks and. In the ramp they are used as punctuation within your runs and as a way to regain your focus or to set up for the next trick.

See next page.

## B) Beginner Backside Stalls

The beginner back-side stall is an intermediate step to learning the true backside stall. You should be comfortable with pivot turns and jump turns before attempting this technique. It's easier to perform while skating just fast enough to get to the coping.

- skate at the coping head on
- get ready to do a jump turn but slightly higher on the ramp than usual
- as you are performing the jump turn, try to put the back wheels of both skates over the coping but keep your weight in the ramp, leaning forward ready to ride down the transition
- immediately lift your weight, to unhook from the coping, and pump down the transition as you would normally

Repeat this technique over and over again. At first aim simply at passing the back wheels ever so briefly over the coping. Once you feel comfortable with this, try pushing on your heels to get your skates on top of the coping. Practice leaning on your heels, standing straighter and straighter. Over time (and with a lot of repetition) you will eventually be able to stand with all of your weight on the coping.



## C) Backside Stalls

This is the real version of a backside stall. The big difference between the beginner backside stall and the real backside stall is that one is done inside the ramp, the other outside. With the beginner backside stall, your body stays inside the ramp below the coping while your skates reach up and tap the coping. With the real backside stall, your entire body comes out of the ramp and you stand tall on the coping. Obviously we recommend you start with the beginner backside stall and progressively develop it into a real backside stall.

- skate at the coping head on with good speed
- get ready to jump turn but do it at the coping or even slightly higher than the coping
- as you reach the coping lift your weight and swing your arms to rotate your upper body 180 degrees, the rest of your body will follow in the rotation
- extend your legs, plant your heels and stand up as your feet land onto the coping
- hold the stall a moment
- drop back in



## D) Frontside Stalls

Front side stalls are slightly harder because you have to either 180 back into the ramp or go back fakie (backwards), the former being the easiest of the two.

If the idea of jumping 180 degrees back into the ramp scares you, practice it first on a street curb. Step up on the curb into a frontside stall and then jump turn 180 degrees back onto the street. The 180 degree turn is really quite easy once you get the hang of it. You should feel confident with jump turns, knee slides and dropping in before you attempt this.

- skate at the coping with enough speed to carry you up and over the coping
- as you reach the coping lift your weight and plant both feet on the coping, front wheels over the coping, back wheels in the ramp
- look over your shoulder and spot your landing in the ramp
- rotate your torso, hop and swing your arms to rotate your upper body 180 degrees
- look where you want to go (back into the ramp skating forward)
- the rest of your body will follow in the rotation back into the ramp
- try to land back into the ramp as high on the transition as possible but under the coping, lean forward and skate away



## Part 5 - Terminology

**coping** - a rounded lip at the top of the transition of a ramp or obstacle, usually made of metal, granite, marble or tiles

**transition (tranny)** - the rounded portion of the ramp that transitions from the horizontal floor to the vertical or almost vertical wall. It also refers to the actual skill of skating on this type of skatepark feature (transition skills).

**spine** - the peak where two quarter pipes meet at the coping, back to back.

**lines (speed lines)** - the paths that skaters follow through a bowl or skatepark.

**air** - whenever your skates don't touch the ground.

**truck grind** - to skate an obstacle riding on the metal of your trucks instead of the wheels.

**slide** - to skate an obstacle sideways riding on your slide bars instead of the wheels.

**full pipe** - an O shaped ramp that is basically a large pipe, no coping.

**half pipe** - U-shaped ramp.

**quarter pipe** - a ramp with only one transition, half of a half pipe.

**bowls** - basin shaped arrangements of straight and curved quarter-pipes and half-pipes (and sometimes full pipes and spines) with rounded corners and smooth flowing lines.

**fakie** - to skate or execute a trick while going backwards.

**flat bottom** - the flat section at the bottom of the ramp.

**vert** - the vertical portion of the transition just under the coping. Not all transitions have vert.

**vert ramp** - large half-pipe, usually at least 8 feet tall, with steep sides that are perfectly vertical near the top. These ramps allow for large air tricks.

**lead foot** - dominant foot (left foot for most right handed people. If someone pushes you from behind, which foot will automatically go forward to catch you ?)

**street** - freestyle skating that incorporates all of the elements found in urban settings. Includes skating on and over steps, banks, curbs, rails, benches, fun boxes, pyramids etc. Also applies to skating street-style skateparks.

**carving** - leaning deeply into your turns, forming S shaped paths to control speed but mostly for fun.

**grab** - grabbing a part of your skates while performing a trick.

**backside** - when a trick is executed with the body facing the coping/obstacle.

**frontside** - when a trick is executed with the body facing away from the coping/obstacle.