

Pedestrian FAQs: Sharing the Road

What does “pedestrians have the right-of-way” mean? Right-of-way is a technical term that basically determines who gets to go first. Pedestrians always have right of way and other people on the road or sidewalk should slow down, be courteous, and let them go first.

Is it OK for pedestrians to use earbuds or headphones? There is no law prohibiting people on foot from using earbuds or headphones, but pedestrians would be wise to keep the volume low enough that they can still hear what’s going on around them. Pedestrians should remain alert to other road users: be aware of bikers and runners and especially drivers if you are entering the roadway.

Where should I cross the street?

Cross at corners and/or crosswalks, where drivers are expecting you. Stay alert and look all ways before crossing. Be aware that drivers wanting to make a turn may not be watching for you, so make eye contact with drivers to be sure they see you before you cross.



Where should I walk if there is no sidewalk? If there is no sidewalk and you must walk on the side of the road, choose the side where you are facing oncoming traffic, which allows you to see and be seen. This may be confusing because the opposite rule is true for cyclists, who should always ride in the same direction as the traffic flow.

Do I need to wear bright colors or carry a flashlight at night? While it’s true that pedestrians have the right-of-way, drivers and bicyclists can’t yield to you if they can’t see you. Be mindful at night to make sure you are seen before crossing a street. Be just as cautious in the mornings or evenings when sun glare blindness may cause drivers to have limited visibility because the setting or rising sun directly in their eyes.



For more information please visit www.cityofpaloalto.org/saferoutes or contact SafeRoutes@CityofPaloAlto.org.