

LEARNING MADE EASY



Skateboarding

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Learn the basics

Discover the fun and freedom
of skateboarding

How to shop for
gear and other essentials

Daewon Song

Hall of Famer, 32 years pro
2006 *Thrasher* magazine
"Skater of the Year"



Skateboarding

by Daewon Song

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dummies[®]
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Skateboarding For Dummies®

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Introduction

Something drew your interest to skateboarding. Maybe you noticed kids in your neighborhood weaving through the streets, launching themselves and their boards over trash cans or picnic tables, or gliding down 20-foot handrails and having a blast doing it. Maybe you watched some amazing young skater in the Summer Olympics doing aerial acrobatics on a board, and you dream of doing that yourself someday. Maybe you saw a video of incredible skateboard moves online or in a film. Perhaps you're just looking for a fun physical activity that'll give you washboard abs and help you build balance, confidence, and grace.

Whether you've never set foot on a skateboard, you just need some tips on how to progress and maybe even pursue a career as a professional skateboarder, or you're fascinated with the history and culture of skateboarding, you've come to the right place.

From the first time you step foot on a skateboard throughout your progression, you're on a journey of discovery. For me, that journey started when I received my first board at the age of 13, and it continues to this day. It has engaged me in an ongoing process of self-discovery and self-development, taken me around the world, enabled me to forge lifelong friendships, given me a fun and rewarding career, and enriched my life in more ways than I ever could've imagined in my youth. Along the way, I've been amazed to discover what's physically possible on a skateboard, and I continue to be astonished watching each subsequent generation of talented skaters raise the bar.

I'm grateful for my journey and for everything skateboarding has brought into my life. Now that journey has led me here to accompany you on the first steps of what I hope becomes your own thrilling adventure. In this book, I serve as your guide as you enter the wonderful world of skateboarding.

About This Book

Skateboarding For Dummies is your insider's guide to everything about skateboarding, including the growing global industry it has built and the vibrant subculture that surrounds it. Here, you gain insight into the lifestyle and its rich history and

culture while developing fundamental skills and discovering what it takes to go pro.

In this book, I share the knowledge and insight I've gained over the course of my 30-plus years in skateboarding. I cover everything from riding a skateboard and performing basic tricks to the different styles of skateboarding to the culture and lifestyle surrounding it. I explain skateboard anatomy and lead you through the process of building your own board from scratch. And I offer sage advice on how to go pro, including how to get sponsored and not screw up the golden opportunities that may come your way. As a bonus, I share my top ten skate videos of all time and ten of my skateboard heroes — the people I aspired to skate like when I was just getting started. (I had a hard time whittling down my list to only ten!)

I've written this book so you can read it from cover-to-cover, and I hope you do. However, I present the information in a way that allows you to skip around and read whatever interests you on-demand and at your own pace. Feel free to skip the sidebars (anything in a shaded box) and paragraphs marked with a Technical Stuff icon; although they may contain information that's too fascinating to ignore, this material isn't required reading.

Foolish Assumptions

As a skateboarder, I'm accustomed to making foolish assumptions, such as grinding down a handrail assuming that I'll land safely at the end. In writing this book, I've made the following foolish assumptions about you:

- » **You're patient and persistent, or at least willing to improve in those areas.** Riding a skateboard is a continuous process of trying, failing, and getting back on your board to try again. The good news is that if you can stick with it, skateboarding can help you build patience and persistence over time.
- » **You have some degree of risk tolerance.** Skateboarding is risky. You will get hurt. You don't need to be an adrenaline junkie, but you do need to be willing to risk injury to do something that's a whole lot of fun. (Of course, you can mitigate the risk with safety gear and proper techniques, which I cover in this book.)
- » **You're open-minded.** Skateboarding has a culture that's open to everyone except close-minded, intolerant people (that is, jerks). It's one of the few popular sports that has no rules, and that aspect carries over to the culture.

Things I haven't assumed about you: your skateboarding experience level, your age, your gender, your socioeconomic background — doesn't matter; nobody cares. All that matters is your interest in skateboarding and your willingness to find out more about it and have fun doing it.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, icons in the margins highlight certain types of valuable information that call out for some special attention. Here are the icons I use and a brief description of each.



REMEMBER

I want you to remember everything you read in this book, but if you can't quite do that, then remember the important points flagged with this icon.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Sometimes, I add a bit more info than you really *need* to know, but it's still interesting or helpful in some way. If you want to skip these paragraphs, though, you'll be just fine.



TIP

Tips are tidbits of information and insight that I've gathered from my many years of skateboarding and distilled to save you time and effort.



WARNING

"Whoa!" Before you take another step, read these warnings. I provide this cautionary content to help you avoid the common pitfalls that are otherwise likely to trip you up and may get you seriously injured . . . or worse.

Beyond the Book

If you're looking for some bonus content, check out this book's online Cheat Sheet. This Cheat Sheet includes a handy list of tips for beginners, ways to adjust the trucks on your skateboard, how to stop a runaway skateboard, steps to getting sponsored and going pro, and skateboarding terms complete with definitions! To access this Cheat Sheet, go to dummies.com and type **Skateboarding For Dummies Cheat Sheet** in the search box.

When it comes to skateboarding, reading gets you only so far, which isn't far at all. You need to do it. Build, buy, or borrow a skateboard, and follow my instructions to starting riding and performing basic tricks. (I would tell you to steal a

skateboard if you have to, but my first skateboard was stolen from me, and I'd hate for that to happen to anyone else.)

This book covers only the basics, and although I include plenty of photos to illustrate techniques, they're no substitute for video or in-person instruction. I encourage you to watch skateboarding videos. You can find free skateboarding videos online on platforms like YouTube and TikTok. Some provide detailed instructions, while others demonstrate maneuvers and tricks. Some are more for entertainment purposes but are still educational to some degree. They can all help accelerate your progression and fuel your passion for skateboarding.

Beyond videos, visit skate parks near you and watch local skaters. Attend skateboarding competitions. Follow the skaters you like best. Maybe you'll get a chance to meet them or, even more amazing, skate with them!

Where to Go from Here

This book introduces you to everything you need to know about skateboarding, but that doesn't mean you need to know it all at once. For example, if you're eager to start skating, flip through Parts 1 and 2 first. If you're already a superstar and are eager to go pro, skip the basics and check out Chapters 9 through 11 to read more about your options. Use the table of contents and index to help you find the topics you're most interested in.

Wherever you decide to go from here, do it with gusto and keep it fun!

1

Getting Ready to Shred

IN THIS PART . . .

Go behind the scenes to discover everything that makes skateboarding such an awesome sport and makes life as a skateboarder so enjoyable and fulfilling.

Get up to speed on the parts of a skateboard, from the deck and the trucks to the wheels and bearings. Choose (or build) a skateboard that's right for you based not only on your age, height, and weight but also on your preferred style of skating and how you feel on it.

Familiarize yourself with different styles of skateboarding.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Getting up to speed on the benefits of skateboarding
- » Preparing to become a member of diverse community
- » Understanding the less conventional parts of skateboarding culture
- » Picking up some skateboard-ese

Chapter **1**

Living Large: Adopting a Skateboarder's Mindset and Lifestyle

Skateboarding is more than a mode of transportation, a recreational activity, a competitive sport, and a multibillion-dollar global market. It's a mindset and a way of life. I believe it's the best life. It's fun, healthy (mentally and physically), and affordable. It can even be profitable, if that's one of the things you're looking to get out of it. It stimulates the mind, nurtures creativity, and can be a catalyst to bring people together and build community. It kept me out of trouble when I was growing up, provided me with a constructive emotional outlet, and set me on a path to a rewarding and fulfilling career.

As you enter the world of skateboarding, I encourage you to explore and experience everything it has to offer. As you progress, I hope you start to adopt a skateboarder's mindset and lifestyle. In this chapter, I bring you up to speed on the benefits of skateboarding and increase your awareness and understanding of the culture and spirit of skateboarding.

Recognizing the Positive Impact Skateboarding Can Have on Your Life

Skateboarding can be physically, mentally, and emotionally transformational. I know because of the positive impact it has had on my life. The experiences I've had, what I've gained, and what I've learned to let go of to move forward have all contributed to providing me with a much richer and more fulfilling life than I believe I would've had without it.

Skateboarding got me out of a small gang and activities that would probably have led me down a different (likely self-destructive) path. Skateboarding boosted my self-esteem. The more I practiced and accomplished on my board, the more confident I became in many areas of my life. With each goal I met, milestone I reached, person I met, and new experience I had, I became more of the person I was becoming and grew more comfortable with myself.

In the following sections, I explore the aspects of skateboarding that I think have had the greatest impact on my life and may also have an impact on yours. I owe a lot to the industry and the supportive community of skaters for giving me an opportunity to make a living out of skateboarding. Without these brands; communities; committees; skate shops; and many dedicated, generous individuals, I wouldn't be where I am today.

Reaping the physical and psychological benefits of skateboarding

Everyone knows that physical activity benefits both body and mind, regardless of age. Of course, skateboarding can be risky, but inactivity is certain to result in muscle loss and cognitive decline. Many people find that skateboarding is so much fun that they don't even realize the many ways skateboarding is improving their health and well-being, such as the following:

- » **Builds strength, balance, and awareness of your surroundings:** All these factors can reduce your risk of falls and injuries and help you maintain independence as you age. (Of course, being on a skateboard exposes you to a greater risk of falling than when you're just walking across a room or sitting in a chair, but how much fun is that?)

- » **May increase energy and reduce fatigue:** At least that's the effect it has on me.
- » **Improves sleep:** This point is especially true if you're riding enough to wear yourself out.
- » **Reduces stress and anxiety:** It also improves your mood, especially when you reach a milestone or just have a good skate day.
- » **Helps you maintain a healthy weight and reduce the risk of excessive weight gain.**
- » **Improves or preserves cognitive function:** Skateboarding forces your mind to shift quickly and often between performing a task and making split-second decisions.
- » **Provides a constructive outlet for socializing:** Many studies show the benefits of maintaining an active social life. When you're skateboarding with others, you're all motivating and inspiring one another and sharing smiles, laughs, frustrations, and accomplishments, which brings everyone closer every session.
- » **Builds self-esteem, especially if you take time to celebrate your accomplishments:** Skateboarding empowers you to feel more confident and in control of your own destiny. Achievement awards, trophies, sponsorships, viral videos and social media posts, and praise from your peers and the entire world of skateboarding all nurture self-respect.
- » **Enriches your life with new friends, new experiences, and the life lessons you learn on and off the board.**
- » **Gives you membership in a community (a skate army) and culture:** You speak a language that only skateboarders understand and clown around while communicating intuitively through tricks, movements, and eye contact.
- » **Cultivates persistence and patience:** Building balance and skills is a process of learning by trial and error. Repeating this process over and over again with every trick you learn and every obstacle you land builds persistence and patience.



TIP

Pace yourself to perfection. Although wanting to progress quickly is normal, especially when you're young, remember that everyone progresses at a different pace. Letting it happen naturally is best. Whenever you're trying to do something new on your board, let your mind and body develop organically together to figure out the methods and movements to make it happen.

MY JOURNEY IN SKATEBOARDING

My mom bought me my first board in 1988. I was 13 years old. Within two weeks, that board was stolen from a donut shop I frequented at the time, and my parents were done buying boards. Getting my next board required more effort and creativity. I begged people for their old equipment and then had to raise money to buy the remaining parts I needed. I picked flowers from an undisclosed location and sold them door-to-door. I starved myself to save every penny. And I cobbled together a board that served its purpose well.

In late 1989, I picked up a small shop sponsor and started getting discounts on *blank boards* — standard boards (*decks*) without graphics, \$19 each with *grip tape* (which gives you better traction on the board and improves your control). These discounts were huge for me at the time. I was running out of flowers to sell and was about to resort to more drastic measures.

Fortunately, my hero, Rodney Mullen, watched me skate for a while one day and said he wanted to send me free product! Wow!

Soon after, I was getting free stuff — huge boxes delivered to my house packed with decks, stickers, T-shirts, and so much more. Going pro in 1991 was even better. At the age of 16, I was traveling the world, meeting amazing people, and skateboarding with the most awesome skaters on the planet. I was filming one video project after another, year after year, and was being acknowledged by the community I loved and admired for all the fun and hard work I put into those videos. My first company video part, which was my introduction to the world, was in *Love Child* in 1991. Over time, Rodney became my mentor and gave me some amazing guidance. We traveled the country and the world together. I wouldn't be anywhere if it wasn't for him taking a chance with me.

I can't express in words how grateful I feel to skateboarding and all the people and places and experiences it has brought into my life. Over the years, I was showered with even more blessings, including the following:

- 2004 *TransWorld SKATEboarding* magazine's Street Skater of the Year
- 2005 *TransWorld SKATEboarding* magazine's Video Part of the Year
- 2006 *Thrasher* magazine's Skater of the Year
- 2014 *The Berrics* Populist Award
- X Games Bronze 2014 Real Street
- Over 250 pro model decks
- Numerous sponsors and more than 30 company video parts

- 2017 Hall of Fame inductee
- 2019 *TransWorld SKATEboarding* magazine's Legend Award

None of this was planned. It just happened. And skateboarding made it happen. It shaped the person I am today. It's been a very therapeutic exercise; it really helped me escape the painful side of my mind in a healthy, positive, and creative way.

Appreciating the universal appeal of skateboarding

Since its birth, skateboarding's popularity has waxed and waned. As I write this, it seems to be trending up, especially among teenagers but also among older and younger generations. I don't fully understand why skateboarding appeals to such a broad demographic, but I think it has something to do with the fact that you don't have to be an athlete to get started and that there's always room for improvement. Even the best can get better.

Changing popular perception

Skateboarding wasn't always popular, or even acceptable. Many considered it antisocial. As they saw it, skateboarders were swerving and disturbing the peace on streets and sidewalks with little regard for people's space. Skateboarders scared some pedestrians and made the jobs of police and security guards, who were pressured to keep skateboarders off the property, harder.

Fortunately, most people have come around. Society still has its haters, but much of the world accepts and even embraces skateboarding. I'm encouraged to see more communities passing friendlier legislation and funding new skate parks and organizations raising money to support young skateboarders. More and more people and communities are treating skateboarding with the same respect they feel for other legitimate sports.

Supporting the subculture

Skateboarding has always had a subculture of its own, but it's spread more widely now. Punk rock and fashion have made it one of the more popular subcultures; at one point, it dwarfed the surf culture from which it was born.

People seem to love the lifestyle, the look, the attitude, and the freedom, and many people outside the culture are starting to embrace it, even when they don't fully understand or appreciate its cultural heritage. Now big-name celebrities

commonly dress like skateboarders or wear clothing with the logos of popular skateboarding brands.



REMEMBER

Some in the skateboarding world interpret this behavior as a form of cultural appropriation and see it as a threat to skateboarding's subculture. Many in the skateboarding community have an emotional connection to the past and to specific brands, and some get upset when they see people who don't skateboard take a brand or a reissued graphic for granted because it looks cool or is trending.

For example, some people in the skateboarding community became very upset to see non-skating celebrities wearing a sweater with a *Thrasher* magazine logo on it. They didn't consider those people worthy of representing the culture wearing such an iconic brand. But who was it bad for? Not *Thrasher*. It sent those sweaters flying off the shelves!

I don't see that kind of behavior as disrespectful. I've worn a Harley Davidson shirt even though I don't have a deep and authentic connection with the biker culture. I think people need to realize that you can like something without being a culture culture.

Welcoming everyone

Fortunately, the skateboarding culture as a whole is very tolerant, especially the new generation of skateboarders; they're very open minded and appreciate the openness and support. Skateboarding provides a safe haven, and a large majority of skaters demonstrate the genuine love they feel. As for the minority — some of the older skaters who tend to be grumpy and about seeing their beloved subculture becoming more mainstream — the skateboarding community needs them, too. Having conflicting perspectives can keep things interesting.



REMEMBER

Skateboarding is an open campus! Come in and enjoy. No one is here for your opinion or your politics! They're here to be inspired, to progress, and to be part of something bigger. The culture has always been, and I believe will always be, centered on a commitment to no rules, including any rules intended to make skateboarding exclusive. Skateboarding is always evolving. It's a community that accepts beginners of all ages, genders, races, ethnicities, interests, and skill levels, no membership required.

Embracing the "Skate or die" mentality

"Skate or die" is a saying that's emblematic of the skateboarder mindset. It's about being so focused on landing a trick that you lose your sense of self. I used to love jumping from one building to the next or hopping gaps between shipping containers (see Figure 1-1). It made me feel bold and daring. Skate or die!



FIGURE 1-1:
Skate or
die . . . maybe
more like skate
and die.

Photo by Seu Trinh

You risk it all sometimes for the pure satisfaction of rolling away on the other side! I see skateboarders now who fly off 20 stairs easy and grind 30-stair rails — a death-defying feat — just to roll away and say they did it. (Well, usually it's to capture themselves doing it on video so they can share their clip.) Skaters do get a huge satisfaction from building up the nerves to try something that may kill them. But skateboarding gives you that confidence and connection to want to do it just for yourself regardless of the consequences.



REMEMBER

“Skate or die” can be supportive or derogatory depending on the context. If you scream it out your car window at a skater in passing, they’re probably going to take it as mockery. It’s like throwing up a *shaka* (a “hang loose” hand gesture) at a surfer and saying “surf’s up, dude!” However, saying “skate or die” when you’re leaving a skate park or spot is like saying “see ya later” or “have a good day” in the cheesiest way possible.

So I say to you, “*Skate or die!*” And I’m not shouting it at you through a car window. I sincerely mean it in the most supportive and affectionate tone possible.

Staying committed

To reap the full benefits of skateboarding, stay committed to it. That’s usually easy if you love skating and are passionate about it, but even then, a person’s level

of commitment can fluctuate. A lot of commitment issues can revolve around your enjoyment or level of involvement and the opportunities and benefits you may be getting.

- » **External:** For some people, the opportunities and benefits are *extrinsic* (external) — money, sponsorships, followers on social media platforms, validation, emotional support. Competing in events and pursuing sponsorships can keep them motivated and committed to a goal.
- » **Internal:** For others, the benefits are more *intrinsic* (internal) — fun, pleasure, satisfaction. For these people, skateboarding is a reward in and of itself.



TIP

I recommend starting with the intrinsic benefits of skateboarding. Make sure you're enjoying it and having fun first and foremost. You'll skate better when you're having fun at it, and you'll want to keep that party going. If you're not having fun, that'll come out in the quality of your skating and make you struggle with your level of commitment. If opportunities arise to get more involved in the skate world and pursue potential extrinsic opportunities, go for it. If they don't, no big deal; you still got something valuable from it.

One of the most effective extrinsic benefits of skateboarding is social support. Encouragement from others can have a tremendous positive impact on your mind and soul. It can really boost your ego.



WARNING

A couple of caveats about extrinsic benefits:

- » **Don't invest your time, energy, effort, and money into skateboarding with the mindset that it entitles you to getting something back in return — that you're owed something in exchange.** It'll pay off in some way, but maybe not in the ways you expect.
- » **Don't let the expectations of others limit who you are or how you express yourself.** If you eventually get sponsored, turn pro, or become your hometown hero, you may start to feel obligated to your sponsors, fans, or even your friends. These feelings are natural, but don't let them limit your creativity and commitment to what you're striving to be and to accomplish.



REMEMBER

Staying committed applies to the relationships you build along the way. Whenever you're in the presence of someone you want to get to know better, your commitment to get their attention is high — often high enough to force you out of your shell just to get noticed. After you've achieved that goal and you hit it off, maintaining that level of commitment often requires even more effort. Take the same approach when you get an opportunity to represent a sponsor. Your mutual commitment to one another will keep you both happy and grow into a productive, fulfilling relationship that can last a lifetime.

PARENTS, DON'T LET YOUR KIDS GROW UP TO BE SKATERS

Have you ever heard the song “Mammas, Don't Let Your Babies Grow up to Be Cowboys”? Historically, the same advice has applied to raising skateboarders, although the reasons are different.

- In the movies and on TV, skaters are often depicted as deadbeats, criminals, and vandals who paint graffiti on buildings and harass shoppers in strip malls. These depictions are based on an element of truth, but they're exaggerated into stereotypes, and, to some extent, the antisocial behaviors are manufactured by the people most upset by them. If you prohibit healthy outlets, youth will rebel.
- The risk of injuries can also scare off parents, but gradual progression, skating in safer places, and using proper safety equipment can significantly mitigate the risk.

Every sport has some raw personalities with bad attitudes that parents don't want influencing their children, but I've seen a huge change in skateboarding since the 2010s as much of the world has chosen to embrace it. More communities have skate parks or are at least more permissive, and high-profile contests, events, and sponsors have popularized and legitimized skateboarding. Kids these days don't have as many restrictions and overbearing authority figures to push against. It didn't change overnight, and it wasn't easy. It took a lot of work and positive role models such as Tony Hawk and Rodney Mullen to open the eyes of millions about all that's positive in skateboarding and the culture that permeates it.

Being Part of a Diverse Community

As you enter the world of skateboarding, be prepared for the diversity you encounter. Skateboarding crosses all boundaries: geographic, demographic, you name it. In this section, I shine the spotlight on a couple areas that are emblematic of the growing diversity in skateboarding.

Shredding barriers: Girls in skate

Skateboarding has been a male-dominated activity since its inception. In the early days, women did have a much tougher time than men breaking into it. Getting motivated is tough when you feel intimidated and uncomfortable. Some iconic woman skaters through the years include Patti McGee, who graced the cover of *LIFE* magazine in 1965, and Elissa Steamer, who shocked the skate world with a solid street part for *Toy Machine* in 1996 and made many realize that women in

skating weren't going anywhere but up! Fast forward to Momiji Nishiya winning the women's street gold medal at skateboarding's debut in the 2020 Olympics (held in 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic).

The growing acceptance of women in skateboarding has paid dividends. According to at least one study, 40 percent of new skateboarders are women. The world can now witness girls as young as nine flying off ramps and across gaps doing flip tricks, grabs, and huge kickflips, plus sliding massive street and skate park rails. Meanwhile, grown men (including me) watch from the stands wishing they had just a tiny bit of the control these young women are bringing.

Since the 2010s, women have been dominating the skate industry with style and attitude that have been contagious. The Olympics, Street League, and X Games all have women's divisions, so everyone can watch these amazing girls and women compete and change the course of skateboarding's history.

Extending skateboarding's reach

The skateboarding community has always been diverse but relatively small — a subculture distinct and separate from mainstream popular culture — but that's changing. Skateboarding is extending its reach into and throughout the mainstream and increasing in diversity as a result.

According to some estimates, skateboarding is now the third most popular sport in the United States behind football and basketball. Thanks to the efforts of past generations of high-profile skateboarders and events such as the Olympics and X Games, skateboarding has benefited from a slow and steady acceleration of positive exposure that has extended and deepened its influence, inspiring more and more people to hop on a board and take to the streets.

Riding on the coattails of this huge growth spurt, many big fashion brands are translating the unique way some skateboarders dress into fashion trends. Many advertisements now incorporate skateboarding as a marketing tool to make their products look sassy and sexy. In the process, they attract even more people to skateboarding.

Increasing exposure in advertising is just one sign of skateboarding's commercial success. Although the skateboarding industry has been through some tough financial times, in 2017 and 2018 it was valued close to \$1.9 billion worldwide and is expected to grow into a 2.3-billion-dollar industry by 2025, with teenagers responsible for most of that growth. At one point, teens between the ages of 13 and 18 accounted for 44 percent of the total skateboarding industry revenue.