

Defensive Driving

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Advanced driving or **defensive driving** is a form of training for motor vehicle drivers that goes beyond mastery of the rules of the road and the basic mechanics of [driving](#). Its aim is to reduce the [risk of driving](#) by anticipating dangerous situations, despite adverse conditions or the mistakes of others. This can be achieved through adherence to a variety of general rules, as well as the practice of specific driving techniques.

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Choose good equipment

- Bland colors (gray, silver, tan) are urban camouflage. Dark colors, including red (thus the newer non-red fire engines) are difficult to see in dim light.
- Have a low [center of gravity](#).
- Have an [all wheel drive](#) system with a center [differential](#) to balance forces between front and rear.
- Avoid tinted windows.

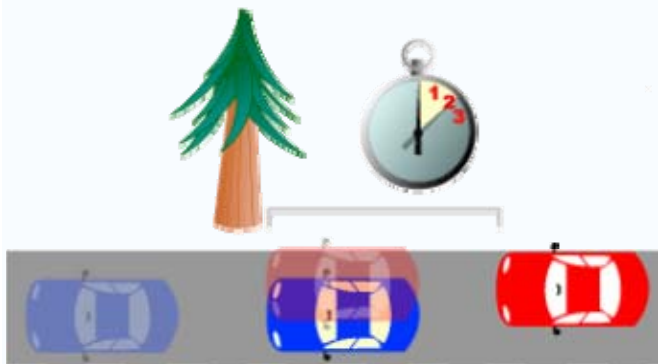
Before you drive

- Check tire pressure, tread, and condition.
- Check oil, gas, and water levels before taking long trips.
- Check that mirrors, seat, and steering column are suitably positioned.
- Ensure all seatbelts are locked and children are secure.
- Check gauges after starting the engine.
- Secure all loose objects inside the vehicle or move them into the trunk.
- Indicate and check for traffic before moving away from the road shoulder.
- Keep all car documents updated and reachable.
- Be prepared for variable traffic and weather conditions.
- Be courteous to other drivers.
- Avoid [road rage](#).
- Know if the car has [antilock brakes](#) or not, and how you should respond to braking difficulty.

See and be seen

- Always take the long view and be well aware of what is far down the road.
- Use [headlights](#) at all times, even during the day.
- Keep windows [clean](#), especially when driving at night.
- Adjust rear-view mirrors correctly.
- Keep your distance when driving behind large vehicles, to keep your line of sight clear.
- Keep windows clear and transparent. Avoid [tinting](#), stick-on toys, light shades, dangling fuzzy cubes, and the like.
- Do not drive in the [blind spot](#) of other vehicles.
- Always use your [turn signals](#) whenever making a turn or lane change.
- Activate your hazard warning lights on approach to a crash scene or unexpected on-road obstruction, to alert other traffic of the hazard. (*See also "Crash Scene" text below*). (However, only use your hazard/4-way lights if coming to a stop, as they signal such an action to other drivers.)
- Use a vehicle's rear fog light when driving in hazardous weather conditions causing seriously reduced visibility, such as heavy fog, torrential rain, blizzards and when driving in dust storms. Switch off the rear fog light the moment visibility improves.
- Actively search and anticipate the movements of [pedestrians](#), [bicycles](#), [motorcycles](#), animals, and be aware of signs, objects on the road, and potholes.
- Drive so that you can safely stop in the visible amount of road ahead, using at least the 2-second rule and preferably more. Anything can be around the next corner.

The [two-second rule](#) tells a defensive driver the *minimum* distance to avoid collision in ideal driving conditions. In the below picture, the red car's driver picks a tree to judge a two-second safety buffer.



- Watch the vehicle that is two vehicles ahead of you. This will help you predict the movement or braking of the vehicle immediately ahead of you to give you more reaction time. If you are routinely using this rule you will become uncomfortable when it is impossible to follow it because the vehicle immediately ahead of you is a large truck or SUV, especially if you are in a lower vehicle. This better visibility may help explain some of the attraction to SUVs, since their drivers can at least see through the windows of other SUVs, unless they are tinted windows.

Assume the worst in others

- Expect that a vehicle indicating that it is about to turn will not.
- Similarly, expect a vehicle that is apparently not turning to turn.
- Assume that stop signals will be ignored by others and be prepared for it.
- Expect that a red traffic light will be "run" (so don't take off too quickly on your green light).
- Assume that any and all other drivers have NOT seen your vehicle.
- Assume that any and all other drivers are not capable of preventing an accident.

Maintain an exit route

- Keep the space on either side of your car free.
- Drive in the outer lane on [freeways](#). In case of a problem, you won't have to cross a lane of traffic to get to the [breakdown lane](#).
- Keep wheels straight when waiting to turn across oncoming traffic. If your car is rear-ended, it won't be pushed into the opposite lane.

Avoid danger

- Do not drive next to large vehicles longer than necessary. The driver may not see you, and a turning [truck](#) can suddenly cut off all exit routes.
- Maintain a three second following distance behind other vehicles. Increase that to five seconds in fog, rain, or other adverse conditions. It takes most people at least half a second to [react](#) to an emergency condition. Following a car closer than one second effectively guarantees an accident if the leading car brakes unexpectedly.
- Conversely, change lanes or pull over if tailgated. If that is not possible, slow down, and / or maintain extra distance to the car in front, to allow for both yourself and the tailgater to stop safely.
- Avoid visibly damaged or defective cars. A history of accidents indicates that the owner has poor driving skills.
- Avoid cars that weave, do not stay in lane, or brake too late at intersections, as their drivers may be [intoxicated](#) or distracted.
- Never drive over any object on the road that can be safely avoided -- a plastic bag can conceal more dangerous items, ropes can wrap around axles, and even mundane objects like sticks can puncture a tire or the fuel tank.
- On roads of 3 or more lanes, take care not to change lanes as another vehicle in the next one over moves into that lane. Vehicles in the left lane and the right lane can collide if they try to change to the centre lane simultaneously. *In some jurisdictions, you are required on motorway category roads to be in the outside lane IF it is clear of traffic - regardless of speed, only merging then to the middle lane or lanes, and/or the inner (central median area) lane to overtake. You must then return to the outside lane once you have passed traffic, if it is clear and safe to do so.*

Crash and vehicle break-down scenes

Approach a broken-down vehicle or crash scene with caution, but do not be distracted by it. Watch for pedestrians and wandering animals at the scene.

If your vehicle develops engine trouble and begins to slow, move to the side of the road as far as possible from traffic. If your vehicle breaks down on the road in an exposed position, or for crashed vehicles blocking the road:

- Activate the hazard warning lights immediately.
- Switch off the ignition of immobilized crashed vehicles to reduce risk of fire.
- Have passengers leave the vehicle if and when it is safe to do so, and keep them well clear of traffic.
- Wear a bright, reflective safety vest or shirt when attending to urgent traffic control duty. (*UN Transport Division social policy item for all road users. A low cost, cheap life insurance item*).
- Carefully place a **hazard warning triangle** to the side of the road, or side of an affected traffic lane to alert approaching vehicles of potential danger. **Within 'built-up areas' and on low-speed roads, place the triangle up to 50 metres away. Outside built-up areas and on high-speed roads place the triangle 100-150 metres away.** When walking to place the triangle, hold it in front of you to alert drivers to the hazard. Hold it behind you when you collect it and return to your vehicle. In some countries, heavy vehicles are required to carry a set of three warning triangles and these are placed within the range 50-150 metres as appropriate and legislated. (*Buy only a good quality triangle such as one complying with UN/ECE Regulation 27 in Transport*).
- Where legal to use; during an on-road emergency use a CB radio recognised 'road channel' to alert approaching traffic of danger. Some countries have dedicated CB radio emergency channels that might be useful for raising help should other methods fail.
- Avoid working on the traffic side of your vehicle.
- Avoid any naked flames or electrical items where the potential risk of a spark exists. Example; that caused by the momentary separation of battery from its device near flammable petroleum products!
- Watch carefully all approaching traffic for potential loss of vehicular control.