

CHAPTER 4

THE DRIVING TASK



When you slide in behind the wheel of a motor vehicle, you take responsibility for the lives of people around you. To be a safe driver you must know the rules of the road and respect them. You also must know and follow proper driving procedures. Just as importantly, you must have a good attitude. Courtesy and consideration are essential to good driving.

Professional drivers will tell you it takes more than basic skills to make a good driver. After mastering those skills, a driver still must learn the fine points of good driving—including the mental and physical conditions that affect performance on the road.

Driver error causes more than 90% of highway crashes. Your ability to drive safely depends not only on what you know, but how you feel and what you were doing before you sat behind the wheel.

Your Mood Effects Your Driving

You should be aware of how getting behind the wheel can affect your behavior. Taking control of the power and speed of a car often reveals a person's character. You soon see whether you're inclined to be a bully, a thoughtless lawbreaker, or a reliable and courteous driver. To drive safely, you must find the maturity to share the road and help your fellow travelers.

If you're worried or distracted, you can't count on being alert enough to drive safely. Quarrels, misunderstandings, financial problems, illness in the family, personal fears or over-confidence make you far more likely to have an accident. If you're upset, let someone else drive.

Concentration is vital to safe driving. The driver's seat is no place for daydreaming, window shopping, intense conversation, or looking at scenery. There have been too many crashes after which the surviving driver said "*I don't know what happened.*"

Distracted Driving (Not Paying Attention)

If you do not give your full attention to driving a vehicle, bad things can happen very quickly. Seeing and reacting safely to sudden changes can keep you from having an accident. To drive safely, you must pay full attention at all times. That will give you enough time to react. People's lives are in your hands.

Things That Can Distract Your Attention

Anything that draws your attention away from the road can distract you. Distractions like the ones below can cause accidents:

- Eating
- Drinking
- Reading
- Writing
- Lighting a cigarette
- Changing a CD or radio station
- Looking for things inside your vehicle
- Dealing with children or pets
- Applying makeup
- Shaving

If something distracts you, even for a few seconds, you may not see a hazard ahead that can cause an accident. Think how quickly a small child can run into your traffic lane from between parked cars. Think how fast a bicycle rider can zoom into your path. They need you to see them before it is too late.

Ways To Keep From Getting Distracted

- Pre-set your favorite radio stations before you begin to drive.
- Load your tapes or CDs before you begin to drive.
- Keep the stereo volume low enough so that you can still hear things outside your car. You must be able to hear emergency sirens, car horns, screeching tires, and other sounds outside your car. They can alert you to danger and keep you from getting in an accident.
- Have someone in the front seat act as your co-pilot. They can look at maps and tell you where to turn or what to look for ahead. If you are driving alone, make sure you know the route you want to drive "before" you get in the car.

- Do not eat while driving.
- Teach children to behave well while in a car. It's hard to pay attention to the road while tending to children.
- Place pets in a pet carrier to make sure they do not cause problems while you are driving.
- If you are lost in thought and not paying attention, pull the car to the side of the road and stop. Taking a short break can make your drive safer and much more enjoyable. This is the reason rest areas are placed along highways.

Cell Phones

Using a cell phone while driving is dangerous. It's against the law in some states. Many accidents are caused by people who try to use or dial cell phones while driving.

If you must use a cell phone, park in a safe place before making the call.

Fatigue and Highway Hypnosis

Stop driving when you feel drowsy. Pull off the highway at the first rest stop or service area. A cup of coffee and a bit of stretching may be enough to wake you. If you're really sleepy, get off the road and take a nap. Drowsiness is one of the greatest killers in interstate highway driving. Don't rely on "stay awake" drugs. They can make your driving even more dangerous. On long trips, exercise your eyes as you drive. Freeway drivers often suffer highway hypnosis—drowsiness brought on by monotony and the drone of wind and tires. Keep shifting your eyes from one area of the roadway to another and focus them on various objects—near and far, left and right. Even reading road signs can help you stay awake.

Good Habits

Developing good driving habits is as easy as falling into bad ones. Start out by establishing sound habits and you can drive safely all your life. Below are some tips on how to cultivate a safe-driving routine.

Starting Out

Before you get into your vehicle, always look in front and back of it to see if there is a child or obstacle you might run over. Once inside, take a moment to get ready for driving. Adjust your seat and mirrors, buckle your safety belt, and check to see passengers are properly seated so they won't interfere with your driving.

Develop a routine for starting your car, too. With the hand brake set, shift to park or neutral and start the engine. Holding the foot brake (and clutch if you have one), shift to the proper gear. Then release the parking brake and prepare to pull out.

There is an important, five-step procedure to follow when you start from the curb, pull into a parking space or change lanes. Always:

- Check mirrors.
- Signal for the required five seconds or 100 feet before moving your vehicle.
- Glance over your shoulder in the direction you're going to move.
- When it is safe to do so, make your move gradually and smoothly.
- Cancel the turn signal.

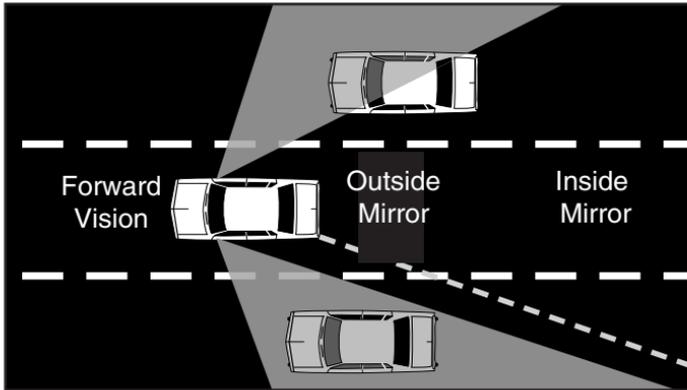
Defensive Driving

Most accidents are caused by driver error. Be prepared to react promptly to emergencies by driving with both hands placed on opposite sides of the steering wheel at approximately the nine o'clock and three o'clock positions. Check your owners manual for proper hand placement if your vehicle is equipped with airbags.

You can reduce your chances of an accident by knowing and using the standard accident prevention formula:

- **Scanning:** To be a defensive driver, you have to see what is going on. Avoid a fixed, straight-ahead stare that may let you drift off in daydreams. Keep your eyes moving and learn to read the road.
- **Look Ahead:** Good drivers keep an eye on what's happening about ten to 15 seconds ahead. That's about a block in city driving. By doing this, you'll avoid the kind of last minute lane changes, turns, and stops that often cause accidents.
- **Look To The Sides:** As you approach any place where other cars, people or animals may cross your path, look to both sides. Don't rely on traffic lights or stop signs. Always watch out for other drivers—they may run the light.
- **Look Behind:** Check the traffic behind you frequently—several times a minute—so you'll know if somebody is tailgating, coming up too fast or trying to pass. Most rear-end collisions are caused by vehicles following too closely.
- **Blind Spots:** These are areas near the left and right rear corners of your vehicle that are not visible in your mirrors. If your vehicle does not have a right side view mirror, the right blind spot will be larger than the one on the left. Never rely on your mirrors alone. Before you make any move to the side, quickly turn your head to see if your blind spot is clear. Also avoid driving in someone else's blind spot. It's as important for other drivers to see you as for you to see them.
- **Identify:** Scan the road ahead for potential hazards such as a vehicle, pedestrian, animal or situation that could force you to slow down, speed up or turn.

- **Predict:** After spotting a potential hazard, predict what will happen. Generally, it's safest to predict the worst. For example, if you see children playing on a street corner, prepare for one of them to run in front of you.
- **Decide What To Do:** The key to defensive driving is making a sound decision ahead of time rather than reacting to danger at the last second.
- **Execute:** The final step is to execute your decision in a smooth, predictable manner—in time to avoid an accident.



Light-gray areas in illustration indicate driver's blind spots.

Make Things Easy for Other Drivers

“Talk” to other drivers with all the signals you can. Be in the lane that shows where you intend to turn. Use turn signals to tell the other driver what you’re going to do. Pump your brakes so your brake lights show you’re slowing down or stopping.

Also get in the habit of catching the other driver’s eye. Some times, you must use your horn to warn them of your location.

Most important, be patient. Try not to let heavy traffic get on your nerves. Never change your mind at the last minute or act too quickly. Don’t rely on warnings or signals from other drivers. Depend on your own alertness, not theirs.

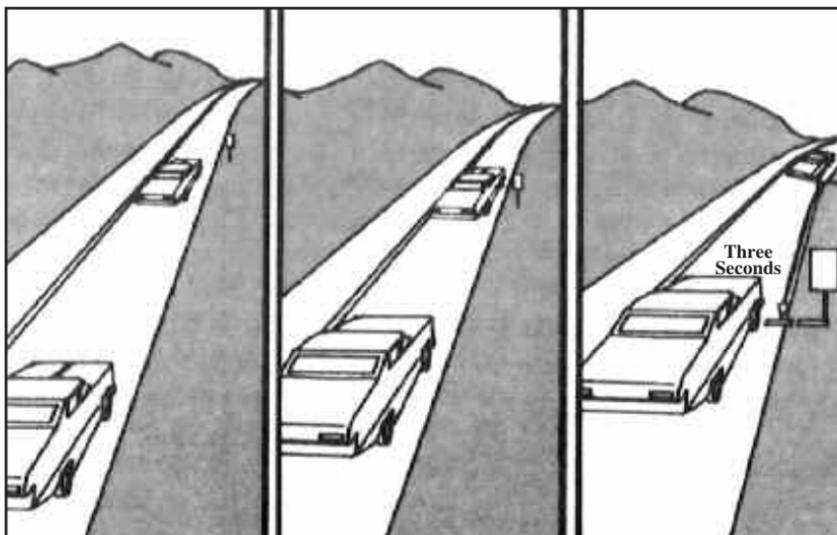
Keep a Space Cushion

To avoid a collision you need time to react to danger. Try to keep plenty of space between your car and others on all sides. Stay in the middle of your lane and always make sure there is enough room ahead to stop or pass safely. If a car follows too closely, slow down and let it pass.

Following Distances

“Tailgating” (driving too close to the car ahead) is a common cause of accidents. When following another car, you must leave yourself enough space to stop in any situation. You must also be sure your brakes are in good shape. Know how quickly they will stop you under any conditions. Test them often, particularly when the road is wet, icy or snowy.

There is no perfect formula for following distance, but the three-second following distance rule is the minimum recommended safest procedure to use. At high speeds or in bad weather you will need to increase your following distance.



The three-second rule is explained in the illustration above. It works like this:

- Choose a fixed object such as a sign or tree ahead of the car in front of you.
- As the car ahead passes the object, count off three seconds (one-thousand-one, one-thousand-two, one-thousand-three).
- If it takes at least three seconds before you pass the object, you have enough distance for a sudden stop.
- In bad weather, the three seconds should be increased several times to give an extra margin of safety.

Stopping Behind a Vehicle

When stopping behind another vehicle, a safe driving habit is to leave enough distance between the vehicles to see the rear tires (where they touch the ground) of the vehicle in front of you. This may keep you from hitting

the vehicle in front of you if someone crashes into the rear of your vehicle or allow you room to go around a stalled vehicle without backing and causing a traffic hazard.

Backing

Backing requires extra caution because it is difficult for drivers to see behind their vehicles. Here are some rules you should follow whenever you have to back up:

- Check behind the vehicle before you get in. Children or small objects are hard to see from the driver's seat.
- Put your right arm on the back of the seat and look over your shoulder directly through the rear window. Don't rely on your mirrors.
- Back slowly. Your vehicle is more difficult to control while backing. Continue looking back until you come to a complete stop.

Whenever possible, avoid backing in traffic. If you have passed your exit on an interstate, never back or try to turn around. Go on to the next exit.

If You Have Car Trouble

When your car breaks down on the highway, make sure other drivers can see it. Many accidents occur because a driver didn't see a stalled vehicle.

When your car stalls, follow these rules:

- If possible, pull all the way off the road.
- Turn on emergency flashers.
- Lift the hood to let others know you have a problem.
- If you can't get off the road, stop where people have a clear view of you and your car from behind. Don't stop just over a hill or around a curve.
- If you have emergency flares, place them 200 to 300 feet behind your car to give others lots of warning.
- If you don't have flares, stand by the side of the road and wave traffic around. Use a white cloth or flag if you have it. Stay off the roadway.

Unattended Vehicles

Unattended vehicles on the traveled portion of a highway at any time create a potential danger to public safety and are subject to immediate removal (towing).

Unattended vehicles that are off the traveled portion but are on the paved portion of a highway create a potential danger to public safety during darkness (especially if the vehicle has no lights on or lit warning devices nearby). Vehicles, if left unattended, must be removed prior to darkness or be subject to towing at the owner's expense.

Watch for Problem Drivers

Give a lot of room to drivers who may not see you. These include:

- Drivers entering from intersections or driveways where the view is blocked by buildings, fences, trees, or other cars.
- Drivers backing out of driveways or parking spaces.
- Drivers whose windows are covered with ice or snow.

Allow extra room for people who may be distracted by something they're doing. For example:

- Delivery men.
- Construction workers.
- Children playing.
- Drivers who are talking, tending children, or looking at maps.
- Tourists trying to figure out a complicated intersection.
- Drivers looking for a house number.

Sometimes you also must give extra room to a driver who gets in trouble. If other drivers make mistakes, help them out. Watch out for:

- Drivers who pass as you approach a curve, hill, or an oncoming car. Slow down and let them back into your lane quickly.
- Make room for any driver who is about to be forced into your lane by a car, pedestrian, bicyclist, obstacle, or a reduction in the number of lanes.

Handling Emergencies

Emergencies appear suddenly, and you may have only a fraction of a second to make the right move. Lives may depend on your ability to react quickly. Be prepared for hazards and know what to do when they show up. Think before you act. Often, an instinctive reaction, such as slamming on your brakes while skidding, may be the wrong thing to do.

Below are some tips on common driving emergencies.

Stopping Quickly

Many newer vehicles have an anti-lock braking system (ABS). Be sure to read the vehicle owner's manual on how to use the ABS. The ABS may allow you to stop without skidding. In general, observe the following if you need to stop quickly without ABS:

- Press on the brake pedal as hard as you can without locking the brakes and bring the vehicle to a quick, safe stop. (You may lock the brakes and cause the vehicle to skid if you brake too hard.)

- If the brakes lock, you will feel the vehicle begin to skid. Quickly let up on the brake pedal.
- As soon as the vehicle stops skidding, press down on the brake pedal again until the vehicle has stopped.

Skidding

Prevention: Be alert to slick road conditions that may cause skidding, especially during the winter. When you must stop, slow down in advance. Never hit the brakes so hard you lock the wheels or you could lose control of your car.

In most skids, the rear wheels lose their grip on the pavement and slide left or right. Skidding occurs most often on ice or packed snow. It can also happen on wet pavement or even on dry pavement when traveling at high speeds or stopping quickly.

Recovery: When a skid starts, don't panic and don't hit the brake. Immediately take your foot off the gas pedal, then steer in the direction of the skid. For example, if your rear wheels slide to the right, turn your front wheels toward the right.

Before traveling on ice or snow, prepare for trouble by practicing stops and skid recovery in a safe place, preferably on private property.

Tire Blowouts

Blowouts are usually unexpected and the driver's natural response is to hit the brakes hard. Instead of stomping on the brakes:

- Hold the steering wheel tightly and keep the car headed straight down the road.
- Ease your foot off the gas pedal, but do not apply the brakes until you have complete control.
- When the car is under control, brake gently and pull off the road at the nearest spot where it's safe.

Gas Pedal Sticks

When your gas pedal sticks causing your engine to run too fast:

- Keep your eyes on the road.
- If you have time, lightly tap the accelerator pedal a few times to see if your engine speed returns to normal.

- If tapping fails, try prying it up with your toe. If you don't have time, push the clutch in on a manual transmission or push the gear shift lever of an automatic transmission into neutral and brake to a safe stop. Then turn the ignition off. If you must turn the ignition off before you can stop, **DO NOT** turn the key to lock, because the steering will lock and you will not be able to steer the vehicle. Also remember that power steering assist and power brake assist do not work when the engine dies—so get a firm grip on the wheel because steering will be harder and it will take more pressure on the brake pedal to stop.

Running off the road

Know what to do if the wheels drop off the pavement.

- Grip the wheel tightly and steer straight ahead. Stay on the shoulder if there are no immediate obstacles.
- Take your foot off the accelerator and apply the brakes gently.
- Once you've slowed down, check traffic for an opening and then, when it is safe, steer onto the pavement. Be careful not to oversteer and shoot out across the center line.

Brake Failure

If your brakes fail:

- Pump the brake pedal hard and fast. This may activate the brakes enough to slow you down or stop you.
- Shift to a lower gear.
- Apply the emergency brake gradually, but be ready to release it if you go into a skid.
- If none of the above work, look for something such as an embankment or ditch against which you can slow down. Also look for an escape route across open ground.
- Don't drive your vehicle again until the brakes are fixed.

Avoiding Collisions

To avoid a collision, you have two choices, (1) change direction by steering, or (2) change speed by braking or accelerating.

Steering: If you don't think you can stop in time, try to turn out of the way. If possible, stay off the brakes while you turn—you'll have more control.

Braking: Many drivers slam on the brakes to avoid a collision. Don't, unless you have anti-lock brakes. Locking your brakes may throw you into a skid and make things worse. Instead, you should pump your brakes hard and fast. You'll have more control and stop faster.

Acceleration: When another car is about to hit you from the side or rear, accelerating may soften the impact or prevent the collision.

Oncoming Car in Your Lane

If you're threatened with a head-on collision and have some time:

- Slow down and try to warn the other driver by flashing your lights and honking your horn.
- Pull to the right as far as possible. Don't go left. The other driver may recover and hit you broadside.

If you can't avoid a collision, steer so the cars will hit at an angle and avoid a head-on crash.

Protecting Yourself in a Collision

If you can't avoid a collision, try to protect yourself in the following ways:

- The best protection is to buckle your seat belt or shoulder harness BEFORE you start your trip. Your chance of avoiding serious injury or death is better if you are wearing your seat and/or shoulder harness properly.
- If you're about to be hit from the rear and have a headrest, press the back of your head against it. Be ready to brake to avoid hitting cars ahead of you.
- If you're about to be hit from the side, be prepared to steer to recover from the impact.
- If you're about to be hit from the front and you're wearing a seat belt and shoulder harness, use your arms and hands to protect your face. If you're not wearing a seat belt or harness, throw yourself across the seat to avoid hitting the steering wheel or windshield. This is one of many good reasons to always wear your seatbelt.

Accidents and the Law

No matter how safely you drive, chances are someday you may be in an accident. Even if you're not at fault, you must know what to do. If you're involved in an accident, you are required to:

- Stop as near to the scene as possible without blocking traffic. You may move vehicles that pose a traffic hazard before the police arrive.
- Give any help you can if someone is injured. Idaho's Good Samaritan Law protects you from civil liability if you act in good faith. However don't try to move an injured person from a wrecked vehicle unless you have the necessary medical training or there is an immediate danger, such as fire.

- Call for police and medical help as soon as possible. You must report to police any motor vehicle accident in which someone is injured or property damage is more than \$750. Effective January 1, 2006, the property damage amount becomes \$1,500. Exchange information at the scene with other people involved in the accident, including names, addresses, and driver's license numbers of other drivers; names and addresses of any people injured; names and addresses of any witnesses; and names, addresses, and insurance policy numbers of the other vehicle owners. If you provide false information you may be guilty of a misdemeanor. A police officer, when present, will help you exchange information with the other driver.

At the Scene of the Accident

Someday you may come upon a traffic accident where there are serious injuries and people need help. If police or medical help is already there, don't stop. Move on as officers direct.

If you're the first one to arrive, you should stop and try to do everything you can to help the victims. Even if you know nothing of first aid, you can still be of assistance by warning other traffic and sending for medical help. Do what you can, then wait for qualified help to arrive.

Accident With an Uninsured Driver

If you have recently been in an accident with an uninsured driver and have been unsuccessful in collecting damages, you may request that the driving privileges of the uninsured driver be suspended. After a court judgment has been entered, the department may suspend the driving privileges of the uninsured driver until you have been paid, or for up to six years. For more information, contact any city, county, or state law enforcement agency, or the Idaho Transportation Department.

If You Hit an Unattended Vehicle

You must make a reasonable effort to find the owner of an unattended vehicle or other property damaged in an accident in which you are involved. If the owner cannot be located, leave a note telling about the accident, your name, address, and license plate number. You must also notify police if the damage was more than \$1,500 or someone was injured.

Study Questions

1. What is the rule for determining a safe following distance between your car and the car in front of you?
2. What motor vehicle accidents must be reported to police?
3. What is the correct procedure for maneuvering your car out of a skid?
4. What is the correct arm signal for a left turn? A right turn? A stop?
5. What should you do before changing lanes or turning?
6. Is keeping your eyes straight ahead a defensive driving practice?
7. What should you do if one of your tires blows out while you're driving?
8. What are the proper actions to take if your wheels drift off of the pavement onto a soft shoulder?