



be a better driver



The driver

Without a doubt, the most important factor in road safety is the driver. All other considerations like the roadworthiness of the vehicle, speed of travel and so on, are the driver's responsibilities and within his or her control.

The make up of a good driver is determined by permanent physical and psychological characteristics and certain temporary influences which limit ability to drive safely.

Are you fit to drive?

Your physical fitness plays an important role when driving, in the continuous process of observation, making judgments and putting decisions into effect. Obviously there is a limit to the brain's capacity to perform this function, so the greater the speed the fewer the observations that can be processed per kilometre.

Had your eyesight tested lately?

When you first obtained your licence you were given a simple vision test. Has your eyesight ever been tested since?

Even if you are satisfied that your straight ahead vision is up to the required standard – what about your side vision?

You can test this by stretching your arms out on either side at shoulder height with both thumbs up. Move your hands forward about 15cm; if you cannot see both thumbs while you are looking straight ahead, then your side vision is restricted.

If you are in any doubt as to your standard of vision, have your eyes tested, or retested, NOW. Don't risk eyesight failure when driving.

Stop if you feel drowsy

Many serious accidents are caused by drivers falling asleep at the wheel of the car. Fatigue plays a large part in the road accident picture, because ability to drive can be seriously impaired long before a driver actually becomes drowsy.

Your trips should be planned to avoid long periods of driving, particularly if your journey continues after daylight begins to fade.

To delay the onset of drowsiness, bring in plenty of fresh air by opening windows or vents. Never try to overcome drowsiness whilst still driving – stop, walk around and, if you can, have a drink of hot tea or coffee. Fatigue can only be combated by rest. Alcoholic drinks must be avoided.

Always use your seat belt

Your seat belt when properly adjusted provides both safety and comfort.

Make sure the straps aren't twisted.

Adjust the belt to fit as tightly as possible allowing for comfort.

Try to get the belt below your stomach and the buckle right at the side of or below your hip joint.

How fast are your reactions?

The average driver takes three-quarters of a second to start to carry out the action necessary to avoid any hazard, once seen. In this time, even at 60km/h your vehicle will travel a distance of 12 metres.

Reaction time, and the distance travelled before stopping, is increased by inattention, illness, fatigue, worry, tension, alcohol, drugs and all the other factors which affect mental alertness.

Watch out at all times

Unfavourable conditions can affect driving in various ways. In most cases the problem arises from two basic causes – either restricted visibility or reduced grip between tyres and road surface. It is advisable to avoid driving under extreme conditions, but if it is necessary to travel when conditions are unfavourable, it is as well to know what special precautions should be taken.

When on the open road be alert and prepared to assess what you see in the road scene and to take the appropriate action to overcome any adverse conditions you may encounter.

Expect the unexpected

In country driving keep an alert watch for:

- ◆ bad surfaces
- ◆ inadequately signed roadworks
- ◆ vehicles emerging from farm lanes
- ◆ slow-moving farm implements
- ◆ wandering animals
- ◆ narrow bridges
- ◆ bridges and culverts in poor condition

Reduce speed in wet weather

Wet weather reduces both visibility and traction. This means that speed must be reduced too. Dirty windows and inside condensation can multiply the difficulties. Your windscreen wipers, washers and demisters must, of course, be in first class working order. You should also maintain adequate ventilation.

In heavy rain switch on your headlights to low beam in order to be visible from in front and from behind.

After a long dry spell the first rain can make conditions particularly hazardous with a fine slippery mixture of dust and oil film on the road.

Under these conditions remember to avoid:

- ◆ sudden changes of direction
- ◆ unnecessarily sharp application of the brakes
- ◆ sudden bursts of acceleration

(The ABC of good driving – Accelerate gently, Brake gently, Corner gently.)

The use of brakes can be minimised by slowing down under engine power, which is far less likely to induce a skid.

Never overtake in thick dust

In dusty conditions common sense dictates that speed must be reduced and following distances increased. Head and tail lights should also be switched on.

Never overtake in heavy dust. Visibility is reduced too much and the dust may conceal any hazard.

In the heat of the summer, when there is a lot of dust about, the best method of getting air without dust is to close both front windows and to lower the back windows a few centimetres.

After driving on dusty roads your windscreen should be washed clean.

After sundown

When the sun goes down the number of traffic accidents goes up. At dusk it becomes more difficult to spot shadowy hazards and to estimate safe stopping distances.

Don't try to keep up your daylight schedule, but let the dangerous conditions of dusk and darkness govern your speed.

Turn on your headlights, not just your parking lights. Leave a greater space between you and the car ahead, and if you have to pass do so with extra care.

Remember to get off the road at the first sign of drowsiness.

Sunglasses protect your eyes from the sun's glare but they are not designed to protect against headlight glare at night and seriously reduce your vision. If glare bothers you at night, keep your eyes on the left edge of the road until the headlights pass you.

Fog

Driving in fog is dangerous, especially for people who are not used to it. Dipped headlights may give better visibility. Full beam gives a better warning to other drivers; this is particularly important when you have to go onto the wrong side of the road to pass obstacles. Keep checking your windscreen for condensation. As in every other driving situation, adjust your speed to suit the conditions. If you stop, park well off the road.

Ice

It can be hard to see ice on the road. If there is a chance that ice will be present, test the surface by braking from time to time. The glassy surface makes skidding likely.

Snow

Soft snow makes it likely that your car will get bogged. Crashes are likely if snow is still falling.

Hard snow can be in deep ruts or in ridges across the road, making steering a battle. Make sure your headlights are not covered with packed snow.

Mountain driving

If you are going to tackle mountains for the first time be prepared for sharp grades, drop-offs and curves.

Remember, when climbing, that your car has less acceleration and passing another car usually takes longer.

When being passed, slow down for your own safety. Most mishaps going down a mountain occur through misjudgment of speed. Use a lower gear for steep descents. Keep your car in gear for control and never coast. Apply brakes intermittently.

If you wish to stop, pull off the road at a shoulder or observation area.

Dangerous road surfaces

Whatever the road surface, traction decreases as speed increases, and even on good dry roads it is not safe to 'slam on' your brakes. If you must make a quick stop or slow down suddenly, use your brakes with caution.

Rough surfaces

Any rough or bumpy surface can throw a vehicle out of control, particularly at curves where tops of stones become polished. Your speed must be reduced before reaching such areas whether the road is dry or wet. A seat belt helps keep you in your seat and in control of your vehicle when driving on rough surfaces.

The soft shoulder grip

Wherever possible keep all the wheels of your car on the paved surface. If you do have to move over don't try to get back on the road at high speed – drive straight ahead with the left wheels off the pavement and slow down gradually until you can safely cut back onto the pavement.

Be aware of another danger in soft road shoulders – they tend to drag your car off the road because the wheels on one side are still on good surface. If you find yourself on a soft shoulder, grip the steering wheel strongly and firmly, reducing speed before moving back onto the road.

Bitumen

Bitumen roads are constructed to provide maximum adhesion between tyres and road surface, but can, after a number of years, become polished by the passage of traffic. Be wary of any older road surface with a shiny or polished appearance.

Concrete

Concrete road surfaces are artificially roughened during construction to provide maximum skid resistance, but may also become smoother after years of traffic wear.

Gravel

Patches of dry sand or gravel on a hard surfaced road can be very treacherous and should be treated with the utmost caution.

Gravel roads provide good motoring when there is enough dirt and moisture to keep them packed down hard with an even surface. Otherwise they may become rough and rutted with loose gravel lying in the ruts and over the road surface. In such conditions even 50km/h can be dangerous.

On good gravel roads be alert for unexpected stretches of loose, rutted gravel.

Keep well to the rear of other vehicles over stony surfaces and remember that cars going in either direction can throw up stones with sufficient force to break your windscreen. It is advisable on stony stretches to slow down and pass carefully.

Speed

Suit your speed to the road conditions. Safety in relation to speed depends on three factors:

1. Prevailing conditions.
2. The skill and concentration of the driver.
3. The efficiency of the vehicle

In some instances, such as when overtaking, too slow a speed can actually be dangerous. Generally, however, too many drivers drive faster than the above factors justify, without reaping any real advantage.

- ◆ The faster you drive, the greater the need for concentration and anticipation.
- ◆ Concentration over long periods is tiring and a tired driver cannot concentrate. Take regular rest periods.
- ◆ If the vehicle in front is travelling at approximately the same speed there is no point in overtaking.
- ◆ In built-up areas, the 50km/h or 60km/h speed limits are intended for the safety of all road users. Do not take pedestrians by surprise because they rely for their safety on judging the speed of your approach.
- ◆ If you have been driving fast for some distance your sense of speed will be dangerously deceived. Remember to check your speed with the speedometer before you reach a more restricted road.
- ◆ At night your range of visibility will be greatly reduced – and your speed should be, too.
- ◆ Look out for, and obey, all signs giving warning of conditions and dangers ahead.

Change lanes with caution

The essence of good lane discipline is that no action by any driver should cause another driver to alter course or speed suddenly.

The simple, safe formula is to drive in one lane except when passing, and to refuse to change lanes unless you are certain it is safe to do so.

It is important to remember that the onus is on the person changing lanes to do so with safety.

- ◆ Plan your route ahead and select well in advance the correct lane for turning at intersections.
- ◆ When deciding to change your lane make a special point of checking in the rear vision mirror and glancing over the shoulder to be sure there is not another vehicle in the 'blind spot'.
- ◆ Always give good warning of an intending lane change by signalling clearly and in good time.
- ◆ Always try to stay in one lane and move with the general traffic flow.

Compulsive lane changers save little time, if any, but cause themselves unnecessary tension and often contribute to accidents.

Take extra care on freeways and expressways

While no special road laws – except in some cases, posted speed limits – apply to the driving of vehicles on freeways and expressways anywhere in Australia, the increased rate of movement demands much more careful driving. The following points should be kept in mind:

- ◆ Keep at least twice the distance from the tail of the vehicle in front – with an even greater distance in wet weather – than you would normally observe on an ordinary road.
- ◆ Read all roadway information carefully and well ahead of the passing point. When entering an expressway watch particularly for signs which will warn you to 'Go Back'. These signs are posted to ensure that you do not enter lanes of traffic moving in the opposite direction.
- ◆ Signal well ahead your intention to change lanes or diverge from the expressway. If you miss your exit, travel on and take the next one. Avoid making sudden, unexpected movements.
- ◆ Don't change lanes unless you signal for a safe period of time. Don't rely on your rear vision mirror alone to show a fast travelling car close to the rear of your vehicle. Glance over your shoulder.
- ◆ Avoid using high beam headlights on a divided highway where traffic is moving in the opposite direction on the other side of the median strip. Don't use high beam when following other traffic.
- ◆ When entering an expressway watch for 'give way' signs and obey them. Keep to the left-hand lane until you are sure it is safe to move into a centre or right-hand lane.
- ◆ When you see traffic stopped ahead, apply your brakes – and so show your brake lights – well before you intend to stop.
- ◆ If you must travel slowly, keep to the extreme left-hand lane.
- ◆ Always ease down speed when leaving an expressway. Keep your car well within control while you adjust to the changed driving conditions which can create traffic hazards.
- ◆ Don't adopt the attitude that you can keep up with the fastest travelling car on an expressway. As on all other roads, drive so that you can safely react to a sudden change in the traffic situation.

When in doubt don't overtake

Overtaking is a manoeuvre that needs planning and the developed ability to judge when it is safe to overtake. If there is any doubt – don't attempt to overtake.

Stay well back from the car ahead and watch the oncoming traffic for a suitable passing opportunity.

Check the rear vision mirror, glance over the shoulder to make sure you are not being overtaken, signal clearly, diverge right and accelerate.

Overtake as quickly as possible, consistent with safety. Then, without cutting in, signal and return to the left-hand side of the road when the vehicle overtaken is visible in your rear view mirror. Don't forget to cancel your signal indicator.







Do not overtake at, or when coming to:

- ◆ A pedestrian crossing;
- ◆ Any road junction;
- ◆ A corner or bend;
- ◆ A humpback bridge;
- ◆ The brow of a hill;
- ◆ Any level crossing;
- ◆ Where the road narrows;
- ◆ Double white lines where you could not overtake without crossing them.

Keep a safe distance from the car in front

Following distances

These distances are for average cars on ordinary surfaces. If brakes, tyres and road surface are not good the distances must be increased.

km/h	FOLLOWING DISTANCES	
105		35m
90		30m
75		25m
60		20m
45		15m
30		10m

Always give yourself room to brake with safety

One car length for every 15km/h

Remember your stopping distance

km/h	MINIMUM STOPPING DISTANCES IN METRES		
	AVERAGE REACTION TIME (0.75 SEC)	VEHICLE BRAKING DISTANCE	TOTAL
105	21	66	87
90	18	49	67
75	15	34	49
60	12	22	34
45	9	12	21
30	6	6	12

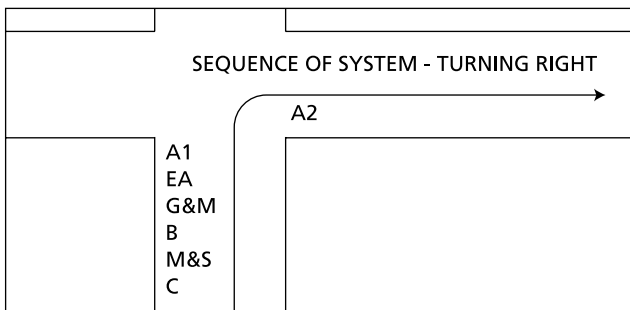


The system of car control

The system uses a set routine of six steps applied to every driving hazard, that is, in any circumstances which could cause a driver to change speed or direction.

Here are the six steps and the diagram below shows the sequence used when making a right-hand turn:

- 1. Course (C)**
Decided and selected well in advance to ensure that the car is in the correct position.
- 2. Mirror and signals (M & S)**
Check to the rear and give a clear signal indicating your intention.
- 3. Brakes (B)**
Slow vehicle down to safe approach speed.
- 4. Gears and Mirror (G & M)**
Select suitable gear for speed and flexibility. Check to the rear again.
- 5. Evasive action (EA)**
To prevent any mishap.
- 6. Acceleration (A1 and A2)**
Proceed through the hazard under steady acceleration, having regard to the road and traffic conditions.



You are the most important factor in road safety

Don't drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Don't drive unless your vision is up to the required standard.

Don't drive if you are drowsy or unwell.

Do behave courteously and responsibly on the road.

Do fasten your seat belt.

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