

How to Drive a Car Safely

Driving safely is so important -- for you and for other drivers on the road. Start from below for some helpful advice on how you can drive responsibly and avoid accidents.

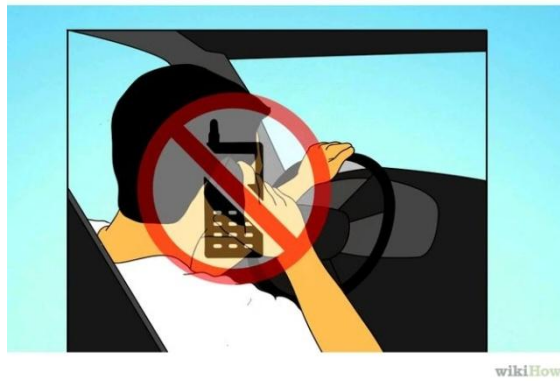


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Never drink and drive

Everyone knows that they shouldn't drive after drinking, but it's worth repeating. At minimum, drinking impairs your judgement and slows your reaction time. At worst, it causes blurred vision and loss of consciousness.

- According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), in the year 2012 31 percent of all fatal traffic accidents in the United States involved an alcohol-impaired driver.
- Any driver with a blood alcohol level of 0.08 or higher is considered to be alcohol-impaired in the eyes of the law and if you are caught, you may be arrested, forced to pay a fine, charged with a DUI and/or sentenced to jail time.
- You can easily avoid drunk driving by arranging to get a ride home with a designated driver, getting a cab, or arranging to stay at someone else's house. Drink driving is never worth the risk.



Avoid distractions.

Being distracted while driving is a bad idea, as you can't give your full attention to the road and your reaction time becomes slower as a result.

- Using cell phones while driving -- whether you're making a call, texting or doing something else -- is seriously detrimental in terms of its effect on your attention to driving. If you need to make a call, pull over and stop the car first.
- Aside from using cell phones, a distraction counts as anything that takes your full attention off the road, whether it's fiddling with the radio, checking or applying make-up, or eating food. All of these things should be avoided.
- Also be careful when driving with children and pets, as they can be a potential distraction. Make sure children are secured with seat belts and pets are contained in a pet carrier.



Avoid drowsiness.

Feeling sleepy behind the wheel is almost, if not just as dangerous as driving while under the influence of alcohol, especially at night. In fact According to a study by Virginia Tech, drowsy drivers are four times more likely to be involved in a crash or near-crash.

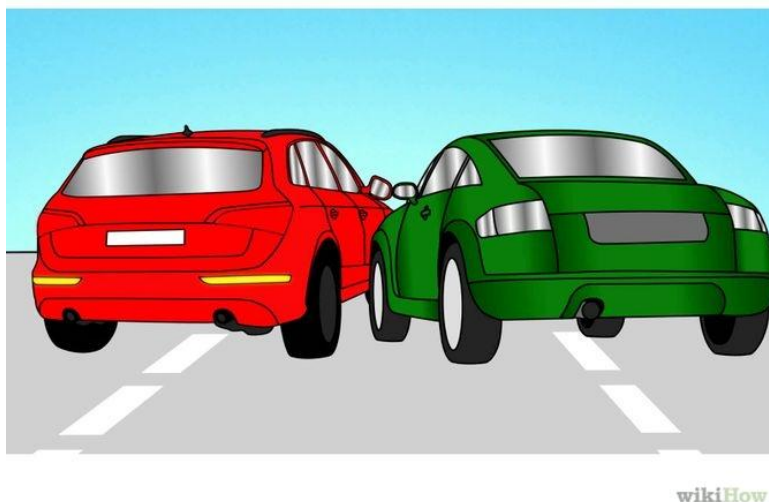
- Driver drowsiness does not necessarily mean falling asleep behind the wheel (though this is highly dangerous), it can also refer to a driver zoning out for just a moment or two -- enough time to cause a serious accident.
- You can avoid potential drowsiness behind the wheel by always getting a good night's sleep -- eight hours per night, if possible. You should also take frequent breaks while driving (especially if you feel yourself getting tired) to get some fresh air or drink a coffee. Share the driving responsibilities with another driver, if possible.
- You also need to be very cautious about taking medications which may cause drowsiness. If you are taking a cold medication or antihistamine, always read the warnings on the label.



Always wear a seat belt

Wearing a seat belt while driving is essential -- according to the NHTSA, wearing a seat belt can the reduce the risk of fatal injury to passengers aged 5 and above by 45%, and reduce the rate of moderate to serious injury by 50%.

- Wearing a seat belt prevents the occupants of a car from being thrown around the vehicle or being propelled through the windshield during a crash, thus helping to prevent broken bones, severe head trauma, lacerations and the possibility of being run over by another vehicle.
- Although you sometimes hear frightening stories about people who become trapped in their car as a result of wearing their seat belt, this is an anomaly and only counts for a tiny percentage of accidents. In the vast majority of accidents, the seat belt will work in your favor.



Stay calm

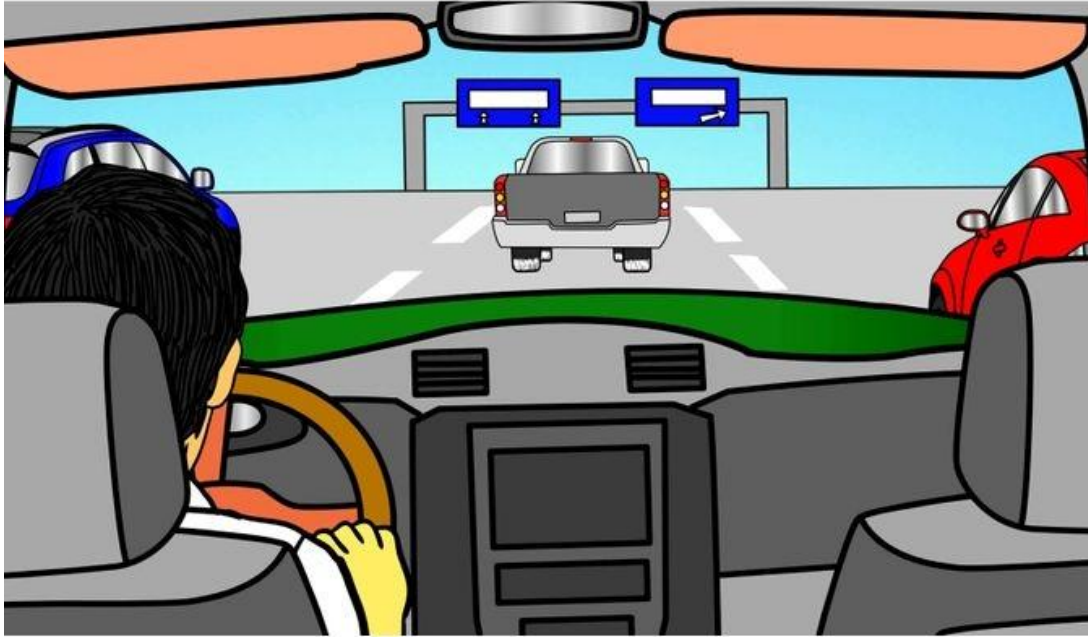
Even though sitting in a traffic jam or dealing with another driver's bad behavior can be extremely frustrating, it's important to stay calm while driving. Getting angry or upset will only distract you and make you more likely to do something dangerous.

- Avoid doing anything that could aggravate other drivers, like flashing your headlights, beeping your horn, or making rude hand gestures. This kind of behavior can distract other drivers and potentially cause an accident.
- If another driver does something dangerous or acts aggressively towards you, keep your cool and yield to the other driver, or let them pass you by. The sooner their out of your way, the better.

Observe the speed limit

It may seem obvious, but observing the speed limit is a vital part of safe driving. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration "speeding was a contributing factor in 30 percent of all fatal crashes" in the year 2011.

- Remember that the higher the speed, the less time you have to react to the traffic around you, and collisions are far more likely to be serious if they occur at speed.
- For shorter trips, speeding is only going to save you a couple of minutes of time, but it greatly increases the risk of a serious accident. If you need to be someone on time, just leave earlier.



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Follow the three second rule

It's very important to avoid following another car too closely, as this gives you less time to react if the driver in front of you decides to break or turn suddenly. For safety, drivers are advised to maintain a distance of three seconds between their car and the car in front of them.

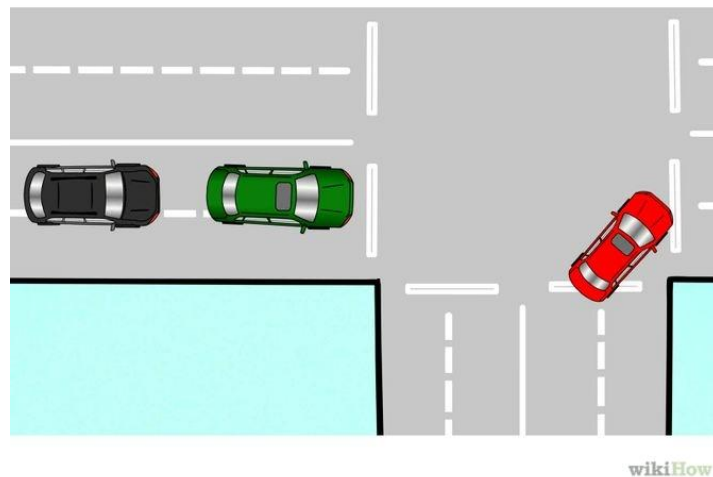
- The distance is measured in time rather than feet (or other units of measurement) as it can be difficult to judge distances while driving, and what counts as a safe distance varies depending on speed.
- To judge the minimum safe distance according to the three second rule, pick a stationary object on the side of the road like a lamppost or mailbox. When the car in front of you passes this object, begin to count the seconds -- at least three seconds should pass before you pass the same



Be extra careful in poor driving conditions

Being a good driver involves tailoring your driving to the surrounding conditions -- whether you're faced with bad weather, poor visibility, or simply driving at night.

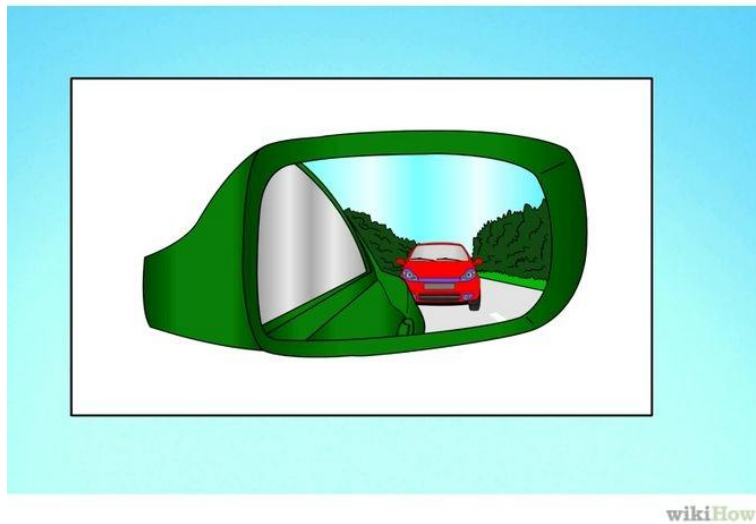
- Driving in poor conditions requires you to be even more cautious than you normally would -- you should drive *slower* than the speed limit, maintain additional space between your car and the car in front of you and be very careful around twists and bends.
- If it's dark, foggy or raining, you should also remember to turn on your lights -- you need to be seen if you want to avoid getting hit!
- Remember to stop and clean off fogged or iced windows to improve visibility. A surface treatment (such as "Rain-X") can help to improve visibility through rained-on glass.
- Of course, the safest thing to do is to avoid driving in poor weather conditions altogether. If there's very bad rain, snow or ice on the road, you should consider staying at home if possible.



Be wary of other drivers

When driving, you should never assume that everyone else on the road will act in a safe, responsible manner, or that they will react to a situation in the same way as you.

- As a result, you need to be alert and aware of your surroundings at all times, and be ready to react instantly to what's going on around you. This is known as driving defensively.
- Some specific bad driving practices to watch out for include: failing to use the turn signal, changing lanes unexpectedly, stopping suddenly, speeding, swerving and tail-gating.



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Use your mirrors and check blind spots

Don't just pay attention to the cars and road in front of you -- you should be scanning more-or-less constantly, using your mirrors to watch the cars on either side and behind you.

- However, every vehicle has blind spots -- so know where yours are, and make allowances for those of other vehicles. Always check your blind spot by looking over your shoulder before turning or changing lanes.
- You could also consider getting a blind-spot mirror, but be aware that anything in it is much smaller than it appears.

Don't block your vision -- avoid putting decals on your windows or hanging dangling objects (like furry dice) from your rear-view mirror.

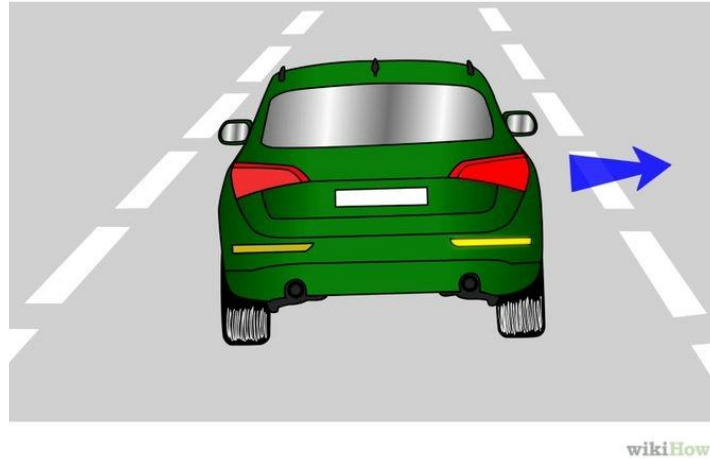


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Be extra careful when driving on ice

Driving on ice requires special care, so here are some pointers:

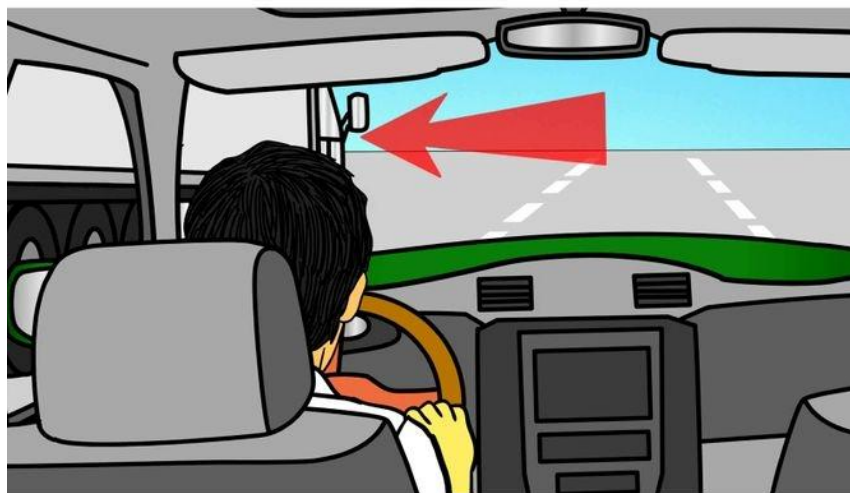
- If you find yourself suddenly on ice (or black ice) do not slam on the brakes; you could lose all control. If you must slow down, put your vehicle in a lower gear and/or apply brakes lightly and steer straight.
- When driving on ice, do not turn your steering wheel. Serious accidents often occur in winter, when drivers turn their wheels on ice. Turning the wheel has little or no effect, until the car passes the ice and the tires suddenly regain their traction. Once the tires regain traction, the vehicle will steer violently to the side, potentially causing an accident.



Use your indicators when turning

Always, *always* use your turn signals to indicate where and when you're going to turn. This gives other drivers time to react -- making it both the safest and most courteous thing to do.

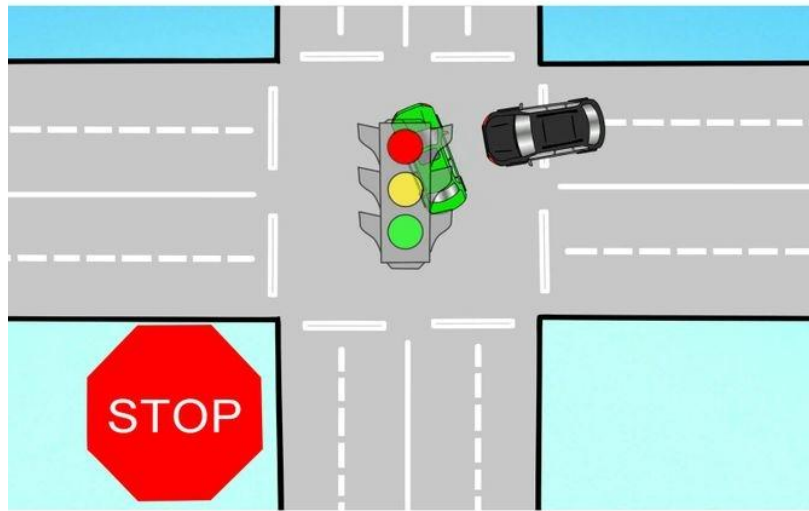
- Signal as soon as you decide that you would like to make a turn, then look for a space into which to make the turn, not vice versa. This gives other drivers more time to notice you, and perhaps even open up a space for you.
- These rules also apply when you are changing lanes, as suddenly switching lanes without giving the drivers around you advanced warning can be very dangerous.
- Turns into traffic (for example, left turns in right-hand-drive countries) are especially hazardous, and should be avoided if possible. Plan your trip to make turns with the traffic whenever possible.



Be cautious around trucks

Trucks are a special hazard; their drivers cannot see other vehicles as well as you can in a car.

- Therefore, it's important to give trucks extra space -- you can do this by observing a six second rule (instead of three second) when driving behind a truck.
- Be extremely careful when overtaking a truck. If there is an accident between a car and a truck, the driver of the car will be the one most at risk.

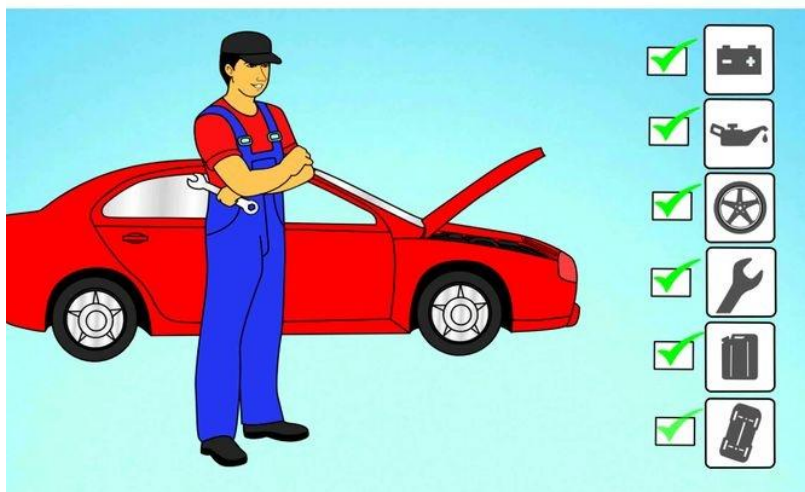


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Never run a red light

When you try to run a red light, you take the risk that another car will turn or pull out in front of you, right into your path.

- It is equally likely that a pedestrian (perhaps a child) might step out into the crosswalk, trying to cross the street. If either of these things happen, there is likely to be a serious accident and no one will be at fault except you.
- Keep in mind that it is exceptionally difficult for another driver to tell how fast you are going or whether you are about to accelerate or stop when they are approaching you head on.

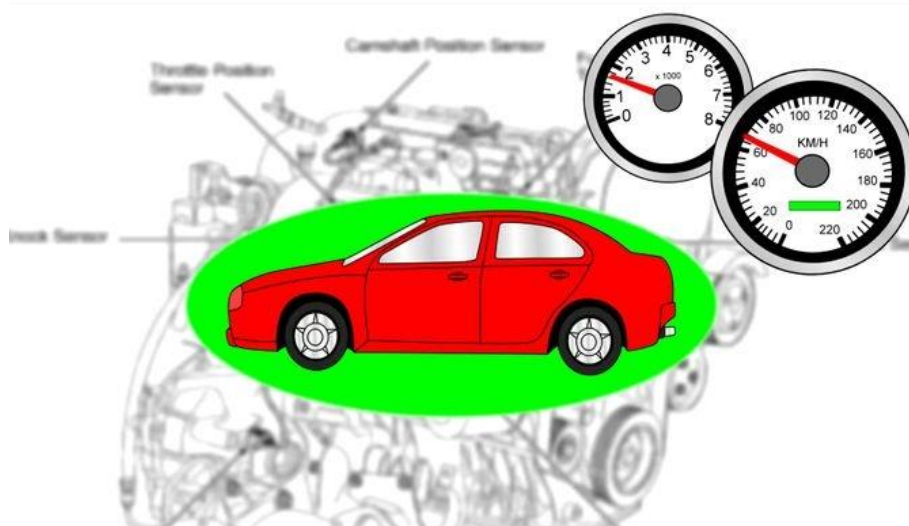


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Regularly check for any mechanical issues

Regularly check the mechanical features of your car, making sure to include the headlights and taillights, the brakes and the suspension.

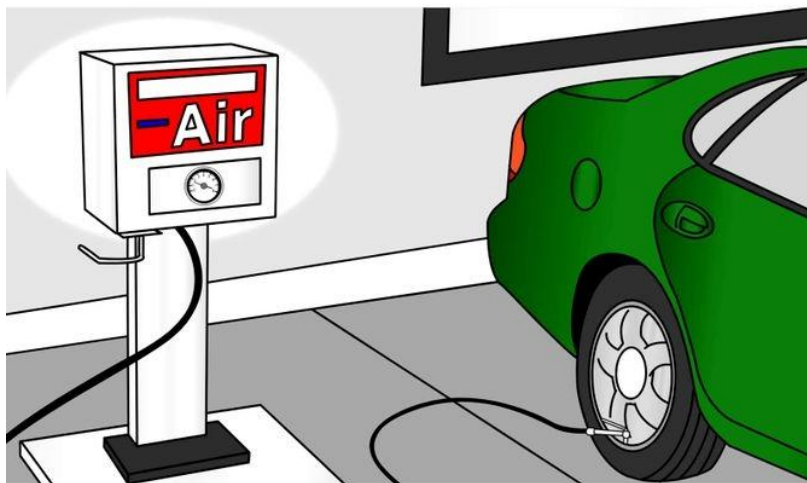
- If you don't feel comfortable doing these things yourself, send your car to a capable mechanic.
- The failure of any of these components can create a dangerous situation while driving.



Maintain your car properly

For example, if your wheel falls off and you have an accident, your insurance company will find that *you are at fault*.

- Minor things count, too. Change windshield wiper blades when they begin to streak the windshield during use.
- Also keep your windshield washer reservoir filled regularly to clear mud or debris from your windshield.



Keep all four tires properly inflated

This will give the best traction, mileage, and performance.

- Make sure the tire pressure is even -- uneven pressure can lead to poor performance or even a blowout.
- Replace worn tires. Remember that wet traction deteriorates before tread wears to its legal limit because the water has only smaller places to be squeezed out to; replacing at 4/32 can be wise. Check your spare when you check your four tires.

Tips

- Always yield to pedestrians.
- To make your car economic with fuel, don't drive too fast or suddenly speed up, plan your trips before you go anywhere at any time, and that includes driving to work..
- Follow the road rules! Take note of the signs and be constantly aware of any danger around you. Do not speed, do not be distracted and do not panic!
- "Move to the RIGHT for sirens and lights!" Be aware that emergency vehicles may appear suddenly in your rear view mirror. Memorize and abide by the handy rhyme and help everyone stay safe! And keep the car's radio down to a normal volume so you can hear the sirens before they get too close.
- Be courteous. People will not expect it, and it will help create good will on the highway, where it is needed so much. If you're in a traffic jam, it's so easy to let a few cars into your lane. It won't make any difference in your time, is much safer, and makes the day so much easier for them too. They will be encouraged to help others too. Make highway driving a pleasant experience.
- Signal in one way or another, be it turn signals ("blinkers") or hand signals. Be sure to know hand signals, in case of turn signal malfunction. If your turn signal malfunctions in the rain, use hand signals at the cost of being wet or ruining your shirt or jacket - a wet sleeve is better than a smashed car!
- If there's an accident on the road near you, don't stop the car to look at it; that will create further chances for accidents. If it's a minor fender-bender, stay to your lane and keep the traffic moving at a slow or safe pace. Don't stop to look.
- And follow the traffic guidelines & sign boards
- Be mindful of approaching emergency vehicles and give them the right-of-way if you see their emergency lights flashing and hear their siren sounding. Remember, they may appear suddenly, may drive against normal traffic flow, and may not fully stop at stop signs or at traffic signals. Also, there may be a high speed vehicle in front of a police car trying to elude them, so make lots of room for the chase to get by safely.
- Never drive a car that is not in good mechanical condition. If your car has faulty mechanics of any kind, call a licensed mechanic immediately.

Warnings

- If a car takes a U-turn at the same time you try to take a right (onto the same road,) give *them* the right-of-way if you can, because they're out in the intersection, exposed to traffic.
- If there's an accident or scene on the side of the road, be particularly careful at these instances, because likely most everybody else is looking at it too, and not paying attention to their driving. So watch out for rear-end collisions, etc., particularly in these circumstances.
- Be *particularly aware* of situations where one lane is almost at a stand-still, and the next lane is moving at normal speed. These are breeding grounds for accidents. People often run into the back of the slow lane at full speed, or they get hit while trying to pull out of the slow lane into the faster lane. The worst position to be in is at the very back of the slow-lane backup, with no slow cars behind you. So be extra careful and aware (of what's in front of and behind you) in these situations.
- Have a license if going off your own property.
- Some of the common mistakes that people make, that you can watch out for, are:
 1. Trying to beat red lights (or just not seeing the red light at all). Watch to make sure all traffic has stopped before going out into an intersections; don't trust them to do it correctly necessarily.
 2. Not looking thoroughly before switching a lane. Never drive in a car's blind spot.
 3. Signaling to do one thing, and not doing it (i.e. an oncoming car signals they're going to turn, but then goes through the intersection).
- Check everything carefully before changing lanes (mirror, vehicle coming, signal, etc.) and don't forget to give signal(indicator) .
- By learning all these things, you can drive more safely.
- Check **both** ways when pulling onto a road, even if you're just taking a right. Sure it's easy to see no cars are coming when you look left, but it's possible a driver could be passing a car coming from the *right*, being in your lane.



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