

Top 10 Safe Driving Tips



Essential driver support



GE imagination at work



Top 10 Safe Driving Tips

Safe driving doesn't happen automatically.

The Transport Research Laboratory will tell you that most drivers only concentrate for 25% of their driving time – that means 3 out of 4 drivers around you are not paying attention to the driving task but are being distracted by something else. Distraction is particularly common for business drivers and the risk of being involved in an accident is 40% greater if you are driving on business.

Distracted drivers are failing to identify the hazards and are missing or ignoring the clues – you have all seen the driver holding a phone, yawning, or not generally paying attention.

Spotting the distracted driver is the first step towards removing yourself from danger.

Following these tips is a great start on the road to becoming a safer driver.

1. Keep your distance

You can't crash into space! The more space you keep around you, the less risk of a collision.

Rear-end collisions are one of the most common forms of traffic accidents – but you don't have to be a victim. Managing the space of the driver behind you is just as important as the space in front of you and you may well need to build into that space, the braking distance of the driver who is too close behind.

When stopping, the early use of brake lights to control the attention and slowing of the driver behind you may well prevent a shunt from behind – so effective is the technique that the latest models of cars flash your brake lights if you brake hard and even flash the hazard warning lights when braking extra hard.

Only a fool breaks the 2 second rule.

At a minimum, during dry weather conditions, you should have at least 2 seconds of space between you and the vehicle in front of you. When visibility is low such as during light fog, light rain or night-time driving, you should double the following distance to a minimum of 4 seconds and in severe weather conditions such as snow and ice, then double the distance again.

Always leave a way out.

Remember to keep space to the sides of your vehicle and avoid wherever possible driving directly alongside another vehicle, especially if that places you in the blind spot of the other driver, for example a truck. Can the other driver see you? A good indication is whether you can see him in his mirrors.

If someone pulls up beside you and matches their speed to yours, adjust your speed slightly to create space next to you. That way, if the need arises for avoidance, you have already built an escape route out of trouble.



2. More haste less speed

In busy congested conditions or in built-up areas give yourself time. There's no need to speed and you won't get there any quicker.

In 2010, 40% of all road-traffic fatalities happened in built-up areas compared to only 6% on motorways*. 75% of all traffic accidents happen in town where there are generally more hazards per mile.

The risk of fatality in your car is dependent on collision speed – a rear end shunt on the motorway is unlikely to be serious if the collision speed is low, but hitting a child, a pedal cyclist or a motorcyclist even below the urban speed limit can be fatal for them.

Don't treat speed limits as a target and ensure you are constantly taking road and traffic conditions into account. Keeping your speed and distance means that hazards are more likely to dissolve ahead of you and you won't fall foul of harsh acceleration and braking (which will also save your fuel too). Pay extra attention where there are junctions, traffic lights and pedestrian crossings. In particular, try to anticipate what pedestrians and cyclists might do. If pedestrians, particularly children, are looking the other way, they may step out into the road without seeing you. Knowing that you have plenty of time to complete your journey will help you to relax and avoid the temptation to push your speed.

* Department for Transport – Road casualties Great Britain 2010

3. Look ahead and anticipate

Don't just look at the vehicle in front and in your mirror to observe what is going on immediately around. Anticipate what is happening ahead of you by looking at the furthest point along the road as well as observing the behaviours of your fellow road users.

One of the main causes of accidents is the failure to recognise a hazardous situation. If a driver fails to see the possible danger, he or she cannot take steps to avoid it. The average driver reacts to an expected event in 0.7 of a second – and up to three times longer when the event is unexpected or the driver is distracted. This means that it can take up to 2.5 seconds for a driver to see what is happening and then decide on a reaction – all this and then the overall stopping distance of the vehicle needs to be taken into account*.

Satnavs are fast becoming a major cause of driver distraction where the driver often blindly follows instructions rather than anticipating the road ahead. What you see takes priority over what the satnav says. We've all heard the stories of people being stuck in narrow lanes, driving into rivers and directed into oncoming traffic. If the road looks wrong, don't take it.

* The Institute of Advanced Motorists



4. Think F.L.O.W.E.R

Ensuring that your vehicle is serviced regularly (in line with the manufacturers recommendations) will help to avoid breakdowns and accidents caused by vehicle faults. To ensure safety for both yourself and those around you and to keep your vehicle running smoothly, remember FLOWER:

Fuel – Play safe and stay topped up.

Lights – Regularly check main beams, indicators, fog lights, sidelights and brake lights.

Oil – Over-filling or under-filling the oil risks engine damage.

Water – Keep the screen wash reservoir full and use plenty of additive in winter, BEFORE it freezes up.

Electrics – Check battery, wiper blades, electric windows, horn and heater fan. Defects will only worsen if neglected.

Rubber – The safety implications of under-inflated tyres include the increased risk of suffering a blow out at high speed due to excessive heat building up in the tyre. The legal limit for minimum tread depth on your tyres is 1.6 millimetres, across the central $\frac{3}{4}$ of the tread around the complete circumference of the tyre.

Worn tyres reduce the effectiveness of braking, steering and acceleration, particularly in the wet. Worn tyres are not only dangerous, they are illegal – you could face a fine of up to £2,500 plus 3 penalty points per tyre.



5. The greater the investment, the greater the risk

Road markings and signs are essential to the safety of the road user. Most road improvements reflect past collision history. So in such areas be alert to what might have caused the hazard in the first place and so keep your distance and slow down.

As a general rule of thumb...

More signs = more danger

By law, traffic routes must also be suitably indicated where necessary for reasons of health or safety. In particular, signs with a red triangular border are usually warning signs.

More paint = more danger

Road users often seem totally unaware of the relevance of road markings, even when they see them. The more paint there is on the road surface, the more potential danger there is.

More street lights = more danger

Assume lamp posts mean 30 mph, until signs say otherwise – but remember it could be 20 mph. The law does not allow highway authorities to put repeater speed limit signs on 30 mph roads that have street lights. Instead the Highway Code advises that street lights usually mean the limit is 30 mph unless there are signs showing otherwise. However, on the open road, the presence of street lights seen ahead will indicate a junction or roundabout coming up – clearly an area of greater danger.

Not many people will recognise that every roundabout in the UK is lit by street lights at night.



6. You are only human

Although it is a familiar everyday task, driving is actually a very complex thing. Trying to do something else (use a mobile phone, use Satnav, unwrap a sweet) at the same time, is distracting.

Listening to music with the volume too high can encourage drivers to speed up. Distracted drivers find it much more difficult to maintain their awareness of what's happening on the road around them, and are more likely to speed. Using a mobile phone while driving is a classic example of this.

The law requires drivers to be in proper control of their vehicle at all times, and drivers who, for example, smoke or eat while driving could be prosecuted under this law. There is also a specific law banning the use of hand-held mobile phones, or other communication devices, while driving.

7. Be safe, be seen

People don't generally hit what they see – so put yourself where you can be seen. Why stay alongside trucks and vans where the driver cannot see you?

Position for vision and early decisions.

Every year about 400 people are killed in EU countries when drivers fail to detect objects in their blind spots while manoeuvring. Most victims are pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists. 'Vehicle blind spots' was a contributory factor in 21 fatal crashes and 2,081 injured people in the UK in 2009*.

*Department for Transport 2009

8. Safe parking

Damage to vehicles often happens in car parks where we least expect it. Think prevention! Use space – park away from other vehicles, trolleys and activity areas where possible.

40% of all company traffic accidents involve parking, manoeuvring or reversing.

It may seem easier to drive straight into a space, especially when you want easy access to your boot at the supermarket, but reversing into a space provides you with several advantages. The main advantage is that it is safer to reverse into somewhere you can see (the parking space) than reverse into somewhere you can't (the line of moving traffic). It is also easier to control a car going forwards when it is first started.

Overall reversing means less vision, less experience and much more risk – so avoid it where you can.



9. Should you even drive?

Someone driving on a motorway at 70 mph who nods off for six seconds would travel more than 200 metres in that time.

Never drive whilst tired. On long journeys stop for at least a 15 minute break every 2 hours.

Don't drink and drive. Alcohol impairs your driving, even a small amount. Think carefully if you're safe to drive the morning after too.

10. A word to the wise - C.O.A.S.T

As experience improves, often attention levels diminish. Get to know what affects a drivers attention levels and watch for those who are affected. Think COAST.

Concentration – Don't become distracted. Focus on the primary task at hand, namely driving.

Observation – Pay close attention to other vehicles and changes in their movement.

Anticipation – Anticipate the good and bad intentions of other road users to avoid accidents.

Space – Keep your distance – remember the 2 second rule.

Time – Plan journeys, allowing enough time to arrive safely without the need to drive hard.

And finally, always be calm and courteous to other drivers.



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GE Capital, Fleet Services
Old Hall Road
Sale
Cheshire
M33 2GZ

T 0870 444 9020
F 0870 444 2033

enquiries.fleet@ge.com
gecapital.co.uk/fleet

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