



# LESSONS LEARNED

## Back To Basics

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Every now and then, it pays to review basic, common-sense safety tips and then consistently practice them until they're second nature. The following tips can help you improve your defensive driving skills, and prevent accidents and injuries.



### ANTICIPATION

One of the most important driving techniques to learn and use is "anticipation." Looking for the expected — or the unexpected — allows for a very smooth flow of your vehicle through traffic. When you use a 12-second visual lead, you will be able to anticipate changes in traffic around you.

You'll be able to accommodate for the vehicles, pedestrians, fixed objects, etc., that you "see" early by moving to another lane, slowing, accelerating or stopping without an abrupt action. Using a 12-second visual lead requires little effort and reduces the number of changes you make in your speed. Anticipating and leaving a space cushion between your vehicle and the one in front of you will reduce or eliminate the need to brake suddenly.

If there is an obstruction, sign or truck that limits your 12-second visual lead, drop back. This will increase your long vision, enabling you to anticipate traffic changes. If the obstruction is the

crest of a hill, reduce your speed so that you have 12 seconds to make necessary changes.

Practice looking 12 seconds ahead so that you can smoothly drive your trip with a minimum of changes. We have seen many accidents that occurred during these moments of change — last minute braking, lane changing, merging, etc.

### TAILGATING

Tailgating is driving too close to the vehicle in front of you. But how close is "too close?" That depends on many factors including:

- 1. The "following" vehicle:** Larger, heavier vehicles need more space cushion to stop.
- 2. The "leading" vehicle:** Larger vehicles are difficult to see around; smaller vehicles may stop more quickly; commercial vehicles may start and stop more frequently.
- 3. Type of roadway:** City streets have many traffic control signals; rural roads have unexpected entering and exiting traffic, crossroads, etc.; highways have greater speeds and merging traffic.
- 4. Weather:** Ice, water, fog and reduced lighting all require greater stopping distances.

The list could go on and on. Spend some time adding to this list, including the defensive driving maneuvers that will prevent rear-end collisions.

Get in the habit of asking yourself this question: If the vehicle in front of me stops, suddenly or otherwise, do I have enough space to stop before I rear-end that vehicle or cause some other accident? To ensure that you consistently

have a proper space cushion, you must adjust your following distance (the distance between your front bumper and that of the vehicle ahead) so that you can see, react and stop before your vehicle contacts the “leading” vehicle’s bumper.

### **FOLLOWING DISTANCE**

A good rule for judging the appropriate following distance is the 2/4-Second rule.

Most people have trouble judging distances. That’s why it’s a good idea to consistently use the “2/4-Second” rule at any speed. Here’s how it works:

- Choose a fixed object, such as a sign or tree, ahead of the vehicle in front of you. Make sure the object does not distract your attention from driving.
- As the vehicle in front of you passes the object, begin counting two seconds (one-thousand-one, one-thousand-two, etc.).
- If it takes at least two seconds before you pass the object, you should have enough distance for a safe stop under ideal, average conditions. If any of those conditions discussed under “Tailgating” (above) exist, then you need to increase your “count” to one-thousand-three, one-thousand-four, etc., before the fixed object passes you.

The 2/4-Second rule takes into account your speed and the speed of the vehicle in front of you. Try the rule while driving. It can help you develop good judgment for proper following distances.

Many driving conditions are not ideal for a commercial vehicle. Many “Million Mile” safe drivers encourage and use a 4 to 6 second rule.

### **WHAT TO DO WHEN DRIVING IN THE FOG**

Fog reflects light and reduces visibility. Both the reflected glare of your headlights and the ability to see through the “haze” interfere with the ability to judge distance and avoid other vehicles or objects.

Even the experts cannot agree on a safe way to drive in the fog. From this we must conclude that “it is not safe to drive in foggy conditions.” The best defense is not to drive in a fog. If you come upon a fog situation, adjust your speed so that you can stop within your “sight distance.” Ask yourself, “How far can I see? Will I be able to safely stop?” Prepare for emergency maneuvers. When blinding fog occurs, pull off the highway and park in a safe location. Use your warning triangles. Parking (stopping) in the road may lead to a rear-end collision. The pavement is usually wet in fog conditions. Therefore, you’ll need to increase your stopping distance. Your lights, horn and signal flashers are excellent warning devices for emergency situations.

It is extremely hazardous to drive through heavy fog patches or smoked highways. Many times alternate route selection may be the safest choice even if you need to drive many more miles. On rainy, snowy foggy or other “gray days,” other vehicles, pedestrians, bicycles, etc., blend into the surroundings.

Remember that foggy conditions raise the probability for an accident. Your judgment can make the difference.

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