



ALTERNATIVE PROVISION

Defensive Driving Techniques

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Introduction

Defensive driving refers to a set of skills and techniques that enable drivers to anticipate and respond safely to potential hazards on the road. It involves being alert to dangerous situations, planning for the actions of other drivers, and taking proactive measures to avoid collisions caused by poor driving, weather conditions or unexpected events.

The core principles of defensive driving include awareness, anticipation and reaction to ensure safety while driving.

This document contains ten effective defensive driving techniques that every driver should master.

Maintain Safe Following Distances

Keeping a safe following distance from the vehicle in front is one of the core principles of defensive driving. Known as the “two second rule,” this practice ensures you have ample time to react if the car ahead brakes suddenly. In adverse conditions like rain or fog, it’s advisable to increase this to a four-second gap. Maintaining this distance reduces the likelihood of rear-end collisions, especially in stop- start traffic. According to National Highways, tailgating (driving too close to the car in front) is a factor in 1 in 8 collisions on the road.

Scan Ahead

One of the most effective defensive driving habits is to constantly scan the road ahead and around your vehicle. This means keeping your eyes moving and checking mirrors frequently. By doing so, you can anticipate hazards like, cars stalling, sudden lane changes, pedestrians stepping into the road, or debris ahead. Being aware of your surroundings will enable you to react early and avoid potential dangers.

Use Mirrors Regularly

Mirrors are your best tool for maintaining situational awareness in driving. Check your rear-view and side mirrors regularly to stay aware of what’s happening behind and beside your vehicle. Make mirror checks a habit, especially before changing lanes, merging, or braking. This practice helps prevent accidents caused by blind spots or sudden movements from other drivers.

Avoid Distractions

Distracted driving is one of the leading causes of accidents, especially for new and young drivers. Defensive driving requires full attention to the road, so avoiding distractions such as mobile phones, loud music, or eating while driving is critical. Staying focused means, you can spot potential dangers and react appropriately without delay.

Anticipate

Assuming other drivers may make mistakes is a key defensive driving technique. Don't expect every driver to indicate before turning or change lanes safely. Instead, anticipate unexpected moves – for example, a car cutting in front of you without warning or someone running a red light. By expecting the unexpected, you can react quicker and avoid potential accidents.

Adjust For Conditions

It's important to adjust your speed according to the road and weather conditions. Defensive drivers understand that driving at the speed limit is not always safe, especially in adverse weather like rain, fog, or snow. Reducing your speed ensures you have better control of your vehicle and more time to react to sudden changes on the road, such as a vehicle stopping abruptly or reduced visibility.

Safe Space

In addition to maintaining a safe following distance, keeping a buffer zone around your vehicle on all sides is essential. This allows room for evasive action if necessary. For example, avoid driving in other drivers' blind spots and ensure you always have an "escape route" if the traffic ahead suddenly stops or swerves.

Signal

Effective communication is essential for defensive driving. Using your signals early and clearly when turning, changing lanes, or merging gives other drivers ample notice of your intentions. This helps to avoid confusion and reduces the risk of accidents caused by sudden movements. Defensive driving is about ensuring that your actions are predictable to other road users.

Avoid Aggressive Driving

Aggressive driving behaviours, such as tailgating, speeding, or weaving through traffic, increase the risk of accidents. Defensive drivers avoid these behaviours and stay calm even when confronted with frustrating situations, like slower drivers or traffic jams. Patience and courtesy on the road are vital – remember that safety is always more important than rushing.

Prepare For Emergencies

Even with the best defensive driving habits, emergencies can happen. Knowing how to handle sudden breakdowns, tyre blowouts, or skidding on ice is crucial. Defensive drivers stay calm, pull over safely when necessary, and know how to manage emergency situations. Keeping a basic emergency kit in your car is also a good practice, providing essential items such as a first aid kit, torch, and reflective triangle.

Conclusion

Defensive driving is an essential skill for all drivers. By adopting these techniques, you can enhance your driving confidence, stay safer on the roads, and be better prepared for the unexpected.

Defensive driving isn't just about protecting yourself – it's about safeguarding your passengers, pedestrians, and other road users. As you continue to develop your driving skills, make defensive driving habits a core part of your routine.

Raise Values

Our [RAISE-AP values](#) (Resilience, Attitude, Interest, Self-Confidence and Empathy) are key in everything we do, specifically with attitudes (positive attitudes towards learning and wider life) and empathy (valuing and caring about each individual) which are linked to our Defensive Driving Techniques guidance.
