



A **positive** approach to safe driving that enables you to translate the information you see, hear, and feel while driving into informed, decisive **actions**.

## Following

*Following distance refers to the amount of space you allow between your vehicle and the vehicle ahead – that is, the one you’re following. By traveling at a safe following distance, you give yourself time to notice and react when the driver ahead is about to stop, turn, or slow down. In Decision Driving, maintaining a safe following distance is an important part of planning an escape route. It keeps you in a safe position, ready to take decisive action and avoid trouble.*

### The Timed Interval Rule

A simple, accurate way to calculate your following distance is to use the Timed Interval Rule. The rule is: allow one second of following distance, or lead time, for every ten feet (three meters) of vehicle length. Note that the Timed Interval Rule applies only under ideal road, weather, and vehicle conditions. Leave at least two or three times as much space if the road is rough, the weather is bad, your vehicle is unreliable, or any other less-than-ideal condition is present.

To keep the calculations safe and simple, all passenger cars are considered to be 20 feet (6 meters) long, and larger vehicles such as trucks and buses are always considered to be an even multiple of ten feet (3 meters) in length. The chart below shows how many seconds of following time are required for vehicles up to 60 feet (18 meters) long. Again, remember that these figures are for ideal conditions and may need to be doubled or even tripled.

	<b>Vehicle Length</b>	<b>Following Time</b>
All Passenger Cars	20 ft (6 m)	2 sec
Trucks/Buses	Up to 30 ft (9 m)	3 sec
	31 to 40 ft (12 m)	4 sec
	41 to 50 ft (15 m)	5 sec
	51 to 60 ft (18 m)	6 sec

### How to Use the Timed Interval Rule

First, figure out the following time you’ll need for your vehicle length. Then, find a fixed reference point up ahead, such as a road sign, a bridge abutment, or a light pole. When the rear of the vehicle you’re following passes that reference point, start counting the seconds it takes for the front of your vehicle to reach the same point. It’s helpful to use the “one thousand one, one thousand two, ...” method to make sure you’re counting full seconds.

If the front of your vehicle reaches the reference after you have counted off the required number of seconds, your decision space should be adequate. If you count fewer than the required number of seconds for your vehicle length, you’re tailgating! Back off and establish a safe following distance.

As the following examples illustrate, the Timed Interval Rule will work regardless of your speed. However, it only works if your speed is approximately the same as that of the vehicle you’re following. These examples are based on ideal road and weather conditions:

### Examples

**Passenger Car** – You’re driving a compact car, following another vehicle at 35 mph (55 kmh). Since all passenger cars are considered to be 20 ft

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(6 meters) long, you should be no closer than two seconds behind the other vehicle.

**Straight Truck** – You’re driving a van-body straight truck, following another vehicle at 25 mph (40 kmh). Your truck is 32 feet (9.6 meters) long. Rounding up to the next even multiple of 10 ft (3 m), your lead time should be no less than four seconds.

**Tractor-Trailer** – Your tractor-trailer unit is 55 feet (16.5 meters) long. You are following another vehicle at 50 mph (80 kmh). You should have at least six seconds of lead time.

### Look Ahead

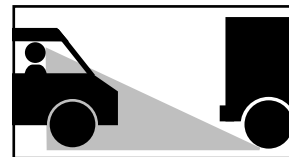
Decision Driving keeps you ready for the mistakes of other drivers or pedestrians. Some drivers look no farther ahead than their front bumpers. If you look ahead, keeping your eyes in front of the next vehicle, you can start to slow or stop even before that driver does. When traveling behind other vehicles on hills and curves, look for parked cars or accidents ahead in the distance. On the straightaway in traffic, keep an eye out for approaching cars cutting into your lane as they attempt to pass.

### Leave Space Around You

When you’re driving along in a line of traffic, safety and courtesy demand that you keep sufficient space in front of your vehicle to permit cars overtaking you to enter that space safely. Not all drivers have the experience or the visual range to pick a safe return space before they pull out to pass. They may just be hoping for a safe spot, or trusting other motorists to let them back in line in case of an emergency. Decision Driving means you give them every opportunity to avoid trouble by reducing your speed and leaving them space to get back in line.

### Use “The Wedge”

It is just as important to leave space when you’re stopped in traffic as it is when you’re driving. As you come to a stop behind another vehicle, think about what would happen if it were to roll back toward you – you could be hit needlessly. If it stalled or couldn’t move for any other reason, you could be stuck behind it. You would be faced with the choice of sitting and waiting, or backing up to get around the vehicle.



The Wedge can help you avoid these traps. When you stop behind another vehicle, be sure you can always see the point at which the vehicle’s left rear tire contacts the road. Picture a wedge, with the angled side leading from your eyes to the left rear tire of the vehicle ahead; that’s the amount of space you want to leave. The Wedge will give you room to maneuver around the other vehicle, or a space cushion should the other vehicle roll back.

### Vehicles Following You

As often as you find yourself following a vehicle, some other driver may be following you. This places an obligation on you to signal your intention whenever you plan to stop, turn, or slow down.

If the driver behind you is riding your bumper, don’t panic. Slow down gradually until the driver gets the message to back off.



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