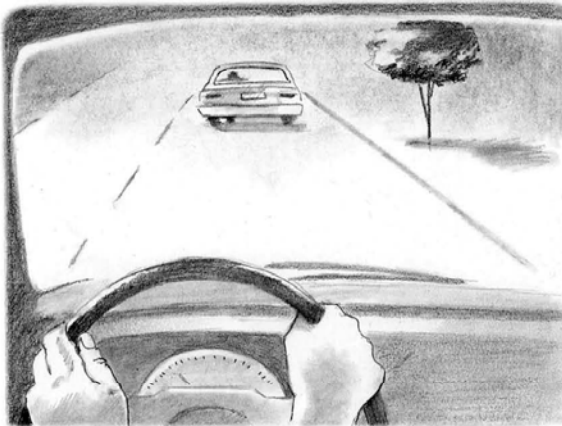
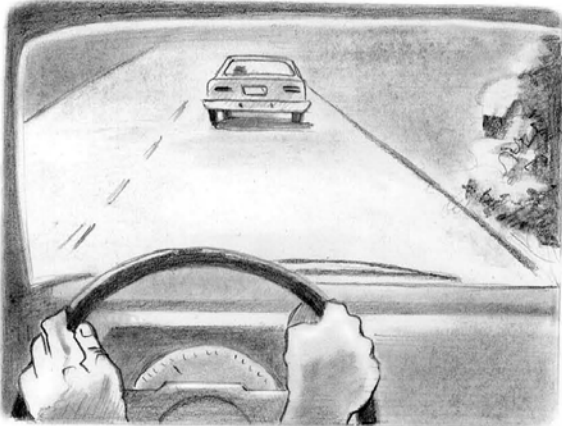


How Close Is Too Close?

For safe driving, you need to keep a safe distance between you and the car in front of you. If you are too close, you will have trouble scanning the road ahead. With enough following distance, you can see 15 to 30 seconds down the road, and be able to plan and make decisions for safe driving. Also, a safe following distance increases the chances that if the car ahead of you stops suddenly, you can stop in time to avoid a collision. But how far is that? Your safe following distance depends on how fast you are going and what the road conditions are. The three-second rule is a convenient way to figure your safe following distance at various speeds without having to do calculations with numbers.



Measure your following distance by choosing a landmark such as a tree. When the rear bumper of the vehicle in front of you passes that landmark, start counting seconds: "One thousand and one, one thousand and two, one thousand and three." If you reach the landmark before you finish counting, you are following too closely.



The Three-Second Rule

The Three-Second Rule says that your following distance should be at least three seconds travel time behind the vehicle in front of you. Measure your following distance this way: Choose a landmark such as a telephone pole or tree that the vehicle in front of you has not yet passed. When the vehicle's rear bumper passes that landmark, start counting seconds: "One thousand and one, one thousand and two, one thousand and three." If your front bumper reaches the landmark before you finish counting, you are following too closely.

The Three-Second Plus Rule

Three seconds is the minimum following distance you should maintain. At that distance, you can see farther ahead safely. Under certain conditions, you should use the Three-Second Plus Rule, and add a second if:

- Visibility is low
- The road is wet
- You're being tailgated (add two seconds if the tailgating vehicle is a tractor trailer or bus)
- You are towing a trailer

If several of these conditions apply, add up the extra seconds for all of them. For example, if visibility is low and you are towing a trailer, add two seconds for a total of five seconds of following distance.

Practice Often

Use the Three-Second Rule and the Three-Second Plus Rule to check your following distance from time to time when you are on the road. By doing this, you will learn to automatically maintain a safe following distance in all conditions.