



DEFENSIVE DRIVING & HAZARD RECOGNITION

Grades 9-12 | Lesson 1





Lesson Overview

Defensive driving is not about fear — it is about awareness.

Learn the **SIPDE** decision-making process, proper following distance and how to identify and respond to road hazards before they become emergencies.



Learning Objectives

BY THE END OF THIS LESSON, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO:

Explain all five steps of the **SIPDE** process and apply each to a real driving scenario.

Calculate and identify correct **FOLLOWING DISTANCE** for varying road and weather conditions.

Distinguish between **FIXED AND VARIABLE** road hazards and predict likely outcomes for each.

Demonstrate understanding of how to maintain an **ESCAPE ROUTE** at all times while driving.

Key Vocabulary

SIPDE:

Scan · Identify · Predict · Decide · Execute.
A defensive driving decision process used by trained drivers.

FOLLOWING DISTANCE:

The time-based gap between your vehicle and the one ahead; minimum 3 seconds in ideal conditions.

FIXED HAZARD:

A stationary road danger: sharp curve, railroad crossing, low bridge.

VARIABLE HAZARD:

A moving or unpredictable danger: pedestrian, merging car, animal near the roadway.

ESCAPE ROUTE:

A pre-planned alternative path identified so the driver has options when a sudden hazard appears.

The SIPDE Decision Process

**Good drivers don't react
— they anticipate. SIPDE
is the system that makes
anticipation a habit.**

SCAN

Continuously search far ahead and around your vehicle for developing situations

IDENTIFY

Pinpoint specific hazards or potential hazards in the scene

PREDICT

Anticipate what each hazard might do next

DECIDE

Choose your best response before the hazard reaches you

EXECUTE

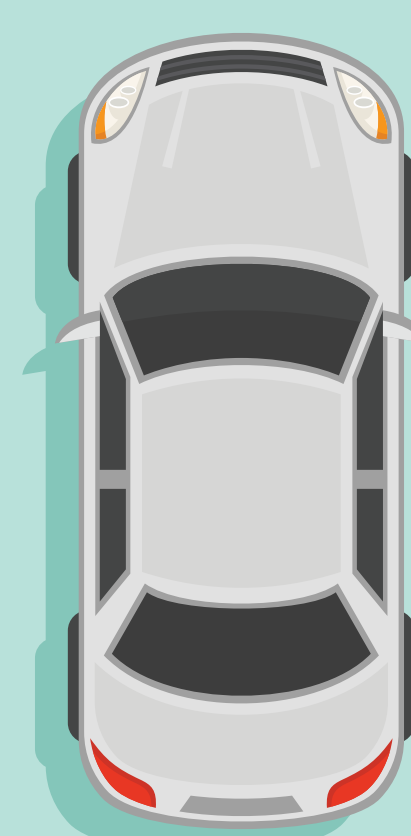
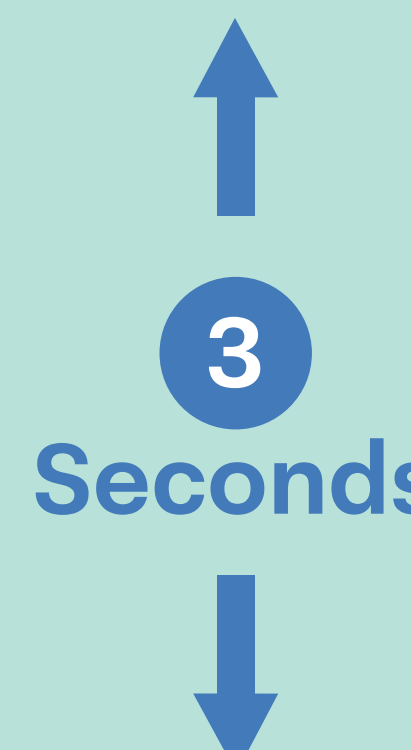
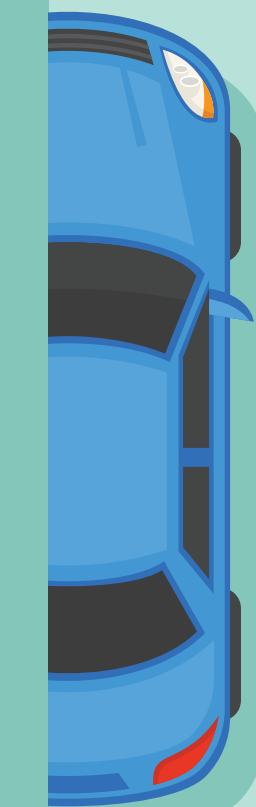
Carry out your decision smoothly and confidently

Following Distance & Space Management

Space is time. The gap between your car and the one ahead is your reaction window.

- **3-SECOND RULE:** In ideal conditions, maintain at least 3 seconds of following distance
- **4–6 SECONDS** in rain, fog, low visibility or other adverse conditions

At 60 mph, 3 seconds
of space = 264 feet
(about the length
of a football field)



Increase distance behind large trucks

They **LIMIT YOUR VIEW** and have a hard time **SEEING YOU**.

- Tailgating eliminates your reaction window — you cannot avoid what you cannot see in time.





Hazard Types & Escape Routes

Every driver needs a Plan B.
Identifying hazards is
step one — having a way
out is **step two**.

STEP ONE: IDENTIFYING HAZARDS

- **FIXED HAZARDS** (Stationary): sharp curves, rail crossings, narrow lanes, low bridges
- **VARIABLE HAZARDS** (Moving): pedestrians, vehicles, debris, animals

STEP TWO: HAVING A WAY OUT

- Always identify an **ESCAPE ROUTE** before you need one — a space to navigate to if the path ahead closes
- Scan your mirrors every **5–8 SECONDS** so you always know what's behind and beside you





Class Discussion

1

How is defensive driving different from how most drivers you observe drive?

2

Which step of SIPDE is hardest to do consistently — and why?

3

Have you ever been a passenger when a driver missed a hazard? What happened next?



Key Takeaways



- **SIPDE** is a repeatable process — use every step, every drive
- Minimum **3 SECONDS** of following distance; more in bad conditions
- Know your **HAZARDS**: fixed dangers require preparation; variable hazards require constant scanning
- Always have an **ESCAPE ROUTE** in mind before you need it



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