

The Smith System

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For information about The Smith System go to:
Smith System Driver Improvement Institute, Inc. Driver Training

The proven, positive approach to protect yourself from the inconsistent, inconsiderate, ignorant, inattentive and unsafe actions of other drivers and HTS users.

Comments by Dale O. Ritzel, Ph.D. and D. Eisenstein

Space

Cushion

Driving

The main concept of the Smith System is
“Space Cushion Driving.”

Space Cushion Driving unlocks vision barriers and allow you to open a whole new vista of comfortable, at ease, and smooth driving. Good vision is based on having space and a clear view of events up ahead, which buys time and space to help you avoid trouble as you adjust to continually changing traffic conditions.

Smith System of Defensive Driving

Three Goals

Space + Visibility = ⌚ Time

achieved using:

The 5 Major Keys [Habits] of

The Smith System

- 1. Aim High in Steering**
- 2. Get the Big Picture**
- 3. Keep Your Eyes Moving**
- 4. Leave Yourself an Out**
- 5. Make Sure They See You**

1. Aim High in Steering

- ✓ Repeated glances well ahead at the center of the intended path (lane) that you are traveling.
- ✓ Keep your vision high, way down the road. Practice looking 20-30 seconds down the road. You do NOT want any surprises!
- ✓ “Look where you want to go and not where you are at.”

☹ Clues to Low-Aim Steering

- ✗ Veers far left to avoid object on right
- ✗ Hugs left side of lane
- ✗ Swings too wide when turning left (not looking through the intersection)
- ✗ Uses bright headlights when overtaking at night
- ✗ Sits on front of seat peering off front bumper
- ✗ Mostly looks at a few cars right in front.
- ✗ Fails to reduce speed under poor visibility

☺ Good Habits

- ✓ Keeps vehicle centered in the lane.
- ✓ Sees moving and fixed objects at least a block away in city traffic and at least ½ mile ahead on expressways or highways.
- ✓ Maintains a safe following distance.
- ✓ Avoids swerving when passing other vehicles, turning or approaching parked vehicles.
- ✓ Reduces speed to allow for poor conditions or reduced visibility.

2. Get the Big Picture

As you move into traffic you are constantly entering new areas and new situations. Each of these areas and situations is presenting new scenes and new opportunities for problems. It becomes your responsibility to make sure you get the entire picture.

What is the Big Picture?

The traffic picture that you see is the sum total of every conflict that can be perceived. It is not just what you see but what you **should** see.

Your big picture should be at least 15-30 seconds (visual control zone OR “Eye-Lead Time”) down the road and entire width of the roadway (from edge to edge). [Roadway - (potholes, debris) shoulders, median, guardrails, rocks, signs, poles, vehicles, pedestrians, etc.]

How Do YOU Get and Keep the Big Picture?

- ✓ You must eliminate all barriers that interfere with getting the picture.
[Slow down or change lanes to let them pass out of your field of vision.]
- ✓ You must establish, and work to maintain, a 4-8 second following distance.
- ✓ When traffic density prevents proper following distance, your speed must be reduced and attention sharpened for trouble clues.
- ✓ You must concentrate on the **job of driving**.

😊 Good Habits

- ✓ Avoids being boxed in when lanes ahead are blocked.
- ✓ Avoids severe braking and abrupt turns/swerving.
- ✓ Adjusts speed when approaching intersections on stale green traffic signal and prepares to stop.
- ✓ Correctly anticipates moves of other drivers and pedestrians and avoids conflicts.
- ✓ Slows down before entering “no control” or “uncontrolled” intersections or where there is a possibility of conflict.
- ✓ Alerts other drivers with signals and does not surprise them

☹️ Clues to Small-Picture Looking [Low-Aim Steering]

- ✗ Following too closely.
- ✗ Hard stops or turns (not looking ahead for what other traffic is doing or not picking out cues as to intersections where they want to turn [not planning]).
- ✗ Traffic delays due to poor positioning, timing and merging
[So called “Bumper-To-Bumper”]
- ✗ Delayed response

to critical situations.

3. Keep Your Eyes Moving

Eye movement is the key to getting and keeping your **Big Picture**.

Since the traffic scene and traffic situations are continuously moving, your eyes need to move too.

- ✓ Keep your eyes moving **every two seconds**.
- ✓ Look near, look far, check to the left, to the right, check your inside mirror, check your right outside mirror, check your left outside mirror, etc.

😊 Good Habits

The Driver with good habits:

- ✓ Keeps eyes moving at least every two seconds and checks to the rear every five to eight seconds.
- ✓ Checks to the rear - mirror and head-check - before changing lanes, turning or stopping.
- ✓ Stays clear of erratic drivers.
- ✓ Checks in all directions for cars that are not stopping and leaves a Time and/or Space Cushion before starting up at intersections.
- ✓ Disposes of eye-holding distractions [interesting, but not related to driving] quickly.

☹ Clues to Fixed-Stare Driving Errors

- ✗ Slow disposal to eye-holding problems.
- ✗ Weak habits in checking sides
(fails to check inside and outside mirrors regularly and blind spot before changing lanes).
- ✗ Fails to check rear before leaving curb.
- ✗ ~~Drives with side and rear view blocked~~

4. Leave yourself an

- ✓ Strives for a Space Cushion.
- ✓ You need space to the front, to the rear and on both sides of your vehicle.
- ✓ You open up space for an **out** when you: slow down and increase following distance/leave space ahead, and to one or both sides and/or choose the proper lane.
- ✓ Plans for space and is ready for the unexpected.
- ✓ Alerts other drivers with signals and does not surprise them

Out

😊 Good Habits

- ✓ Recognizes the lane of least resistance and positions the vehicle accordingly.
- ✓ Allows extra following distance when crowded by a tailgater or a truck.
- ✓ When possible, leaves at least one side open for “swerving” room
- ✓ Passes only when there is space, visibility and distance to do so safely.
- ✓ Quickly re-establishes space around the vehicle when space diminishes.

☹️ Clues to Driver Failing to Leave an Out

- ✗ Space-cushion around vehicle not achieved.
- ✗ Maintains speed when visibility is reduced.
- ✗ Fails to recognize doubtful situations.
- ✗ Drives too fast for conditions.

5. Make Sure They See You 😊

[Distracted drivers often do not even see the flashing lights of Police Cars or Emergency Vehicles. There is no way you can guarantee they will see you, but you must still make your car as visible as possible.]

- ✓ Communicate with all other highway users.
- ✓ Use your turn signals for turns and lane changes.
- ✓ Communicate with the drivers behind you (use hand signals, turn signals, or soft brake applications). For cars in front, flashing headlights might let them know you are approaching, or are giving them the right of way. Use caution to prevent problems from any misunderstandings.
- ✓ Get eye contact.
- ✓ A gentle tap of the horn to get other drivers attention.

😊 Good Habits

- ✓ Alerts non-attentive drivers and pedestrians with gentle tap of the horn or flick of the lights to get eye contact.
- ✓ Keeps lights on at all times to be easily seen under various lighting conditions. [Rain, Snow, Sleet, Glare, shadows, other drivers with dirty windshields]
- ✓ Tries to obtain eye contact with people when conditions dictate that it should be done.
- ✓ Gives early signals for turns or lane changes and checks to see if they are heeded.
- ✓ Does not ride in the blind spot of drivers on the left or right.
- ✓ Alerts other drivers with signals and does not surprise them

☹ Clues to Driver Not Making Attempts to Be Seen

✗ Poor use of turn signals.

✗ Reluctant to use horn. [Tapping to alert someone of danger]

✗ Fails to use lights in dim light conditions. [Best to use lights all the time, to be seen in all lighting conditions, including glare, shadow, cloudy, etc.]

✗ Does not practice brake “taps.”

[This is NOT to scare a tailgating driver, [Illegal] this is to alert :cars :behind that there is a problem up ahead, and that traffic is rapidly slowing and/or stopping.]

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