4 rules of the road

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Chapter 3, signs, signals and road markings, gave you some information about the most common signs, signals and road markings you will see when driving. This chapter gives you the information you'll need to help you drive safely at intersections, use lanes correctly and park legally.

Understanding intersections

Intersections are places where a number of road users cross paths. There is often a lot of activity in intersections, so it's important to be alert. Remember that other road users may be in a hurry, and may want to move into the same space that you are planning on moving into.

Signalling

Signals are important — they let other traffic know what you are intending to do. Signal when you're preparing to:

- turn left or right
- change lanes
- park
- move toward, or away from, the side of the road.

Types of intersections

Controlled intersections

A controlled intersection is one that has signs or traffic lights telling you what to do. To drive safely in these intersections, you need to know what the signals and signs mean, and also the right-of-way rules. But always be cautious. Other drivers may not be paying attention to the signs and signals.

Uncontrolled intersections

Uncontrolled intersections have no signs or traffic lights. They are usually found in areas where there isn't much traffic. But they can be dangerous places because drivers might not be expecting cross traffic or pedestrians.

As you approach, slow down and look out for other road users. Scan the intersection from left to right. If another vehicle has arrived at the intersection before you, slow down and yield. If two vehicles arrive at the same time, the vehicle on the left must yield to the vehicle on the right.

driving tip

Treat an unmarked T-intersection the same way as any other uncontrolled intersection.

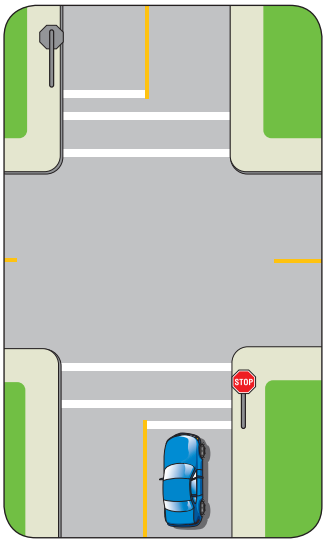
driving tip

If a traffic control person is directing traffic, you must follow that person's directions.

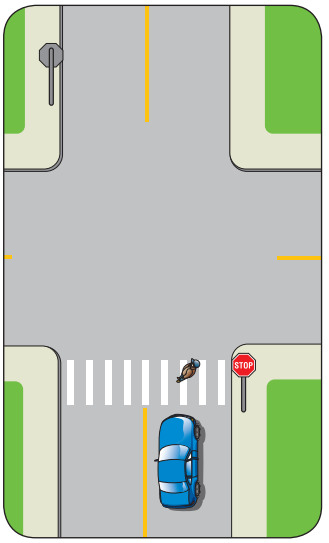
Be careful when you want to turn left where other traffic is approaching from the opposite direction. Yield to traffic that is in or near the intersection. If you intend to go straight through and a vehicle is already in the intersection turning left, you must yield.

Stopping at intersections

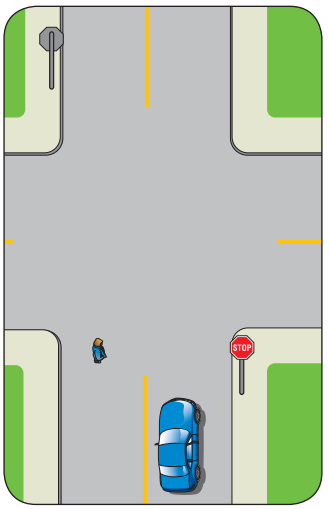
There are rules about where you position your vehicle when you have to stop at an intersection.



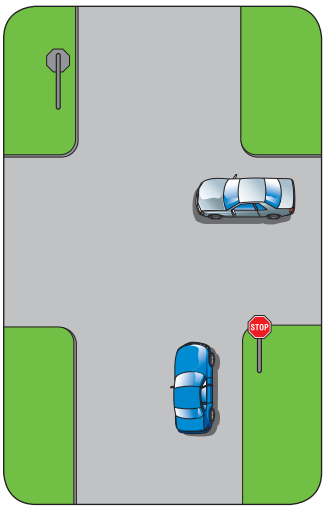
If there is a stop line, stop just before the line.



If there is a crosswalk but no stop line, stop just before the crosswalk.



If there is an unmarked crosswalk, stop where you would if there were a marked crosswalk.



Where there is no stop line, no crosswalk and no sidewalk, stop just before you enter the intersection.

Right-of-way at intersections

Right-of-way rules determine who must yield when more than one road user wants to move into the same space. It's important to know these rules because they keep traffic moving in an orderly way. But remember that you can't always count on the other person to follow the rules. And even if you have the right-of-way, it's still your responsibility to do all you can to avoid a crash.

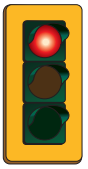
For information on right-of-way rules for crosswalks and railway crossings, see **chapter 6, sharing the road**.

Intersections controlled by traffic lights

Most people know who has the right-of-way at intersections controlled by traffic lights, but they may not understand how to correctly respond to these lights. Here are some pointers that will help you stay safe at intersections:

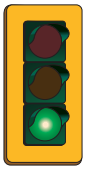
driving tip

Sometimes traffic lights stop working properly. The lights can go out, or all four lights can start flashing. Treat the intersection like a four-way stop if this happens.



steady red light — a red light means that you must come to a complete stop. You must wait for the light to turn green before you go straight ahead.

After you have stopped and made sure the intersection is clear of all vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians, you may turn right or turn left onto a one-way street. Watch for signs prohibiting you from making these turns on a red light.



steady green light — green means go only if the intersection is clear, and it is safe to do so.

- stale green light — a stale green light is one that has been green for a long time, and is about to turn yellow. If you didn't see the light turn green, then it may be stale. Look for additional clues:
  - are there a lot of cars lined up on the cross street waiting for the light to change?
  - in many areas, the crosswalk signal will change from a white figure to an orange hand just before the light turns yellow, or will show how many seconds are left before the traffic light will change.
- point of no return — as you approach a stale green light — taking into consideration your speed, the road conditions and the traffic behind you — decide on a point where you will no longer be able to stop safely. This is sometimes called the point of no return. When you reach this point, keep on going even if the light changes to yellow. You need to judge accurately so you won't be in the intersection when the light turns red.

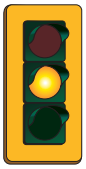
driving tip

If you didn't see the light turn green, then it may be stale. You should be prepared to stop.

driving tip

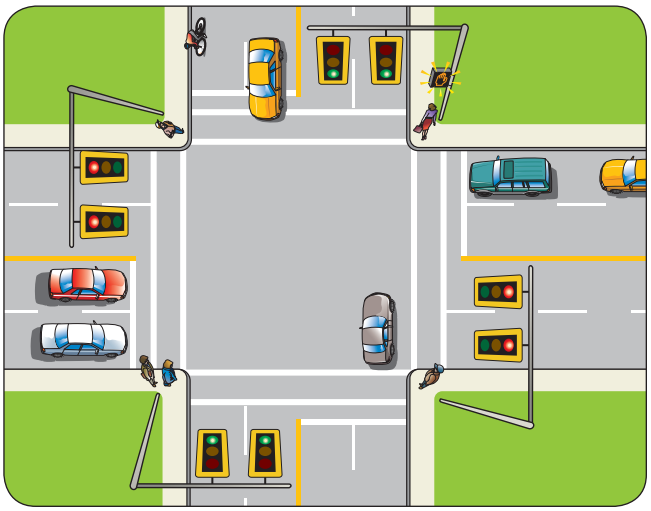
It is illegal to back up into an intersection or over a crosswalk.

- fresh green light — a fresh green light is one that has just turned green. Don't move forward until you've scanned the intersection to make sure it's clear.
- making a left turn on a steady green light — when you are making a left turn, you must yield to oncoming traffic and wait for a safe gap before you turn.



steady yellow light — yellow means that the signal is about to turn red. You must stop before entering the intersection unless you can't safely stop in time.

Sometimes drivers panic if they are in an intersection waiting to make a left turn and the light turns yellow. In this situation, remember that you are legally allowed to complete your turn. But watch carefully for other vehicles, especially oncoming drivers trying to beat the red light.

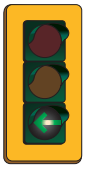


What are the clues that tell you the green light is stale?

flashing green light — watch for pedestrians, who may activate the pedestrian traffic light to change to yellow and then to red. Even if the pedestrian traffic light is not activated, traffic on the side street is facing a stop sign, and may be waiting to move into the intersection when it is clear and safe to do so.

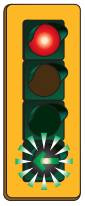
Left-turn signals

Some intersections have turn signals with green arrows, or designated lanes controlled by their own set of traffic lights, to allow you to turn left. These are called protected turns. As long as the green arrow is shown, you are protected from through traffic — they are facing a red light.



separate left signal — some intersections have designated left-turn lanes controlled by their own set of traffic lights. A green arrow at the bottom of a separate set of traffic lights will tell you when to turn left. Traffic in the straight-through and right-turn lanes will be stopped by a red light on a different set of lights.

Once the green arrow has turned yellow, you must stop and wait for the next green arrow before turning.



left signal on regular traffic lights — other intersections have left-turn lanes that are not controlled by a separate set of traffic lights. Here the advance green arrow is located on the bottom of the regular traffic lights.

The flashing green arrow allows you to turn left. Through traffic is facing a red light.

Once the green arrow has turned off, and only the regular green traffic light is on, you may still turn left. But you must yield the right-of-way to pedestrians and oncoming traffic.

Sometimes these advance green arrows operate only during peak traffic hours.

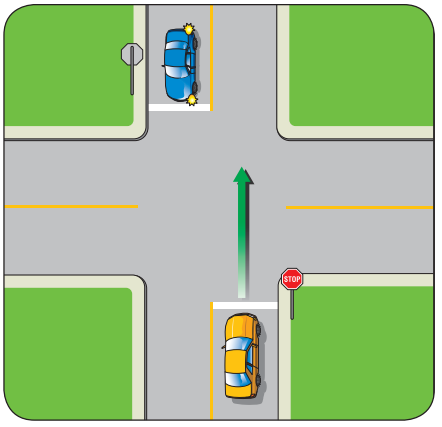
flashing red lights — a flashing red light means that you must come to a complete stop. After you stop, you may move into the intersection when it is clear and safe to do so.

Intersections controlled by stop signs

A stop sign always means that you must come to a complete stop. Once you've stopped, check the intersection carefully. Whether you go or wait depends on the type of intersection and the other traffic around you.

two-way stops — if two streets intersect and only one of the streets has stop signs, then the other street is a through street. Traffic on the through street has the right-of-way. If you are stopped at one of these types of intersections, wait until there is a safe gap before going through or turning.

If two vehicles are stopped at a two-way stop and one of the drivers wants to turn left, this driver must yield the right-of-way to the other vehicle. The only exception is if the left-turning vehicle is already in the intersection and has started to make the turn. In this case, the other vehicle must yield.



These drivers arrived at this two-way stop at the same time. The driver of the blue car wants to turn left. The driver of the yellow car wants to go straight. Who must yield?

driving tip

If there is any doubt about who has the right-of-way, or if there is any chance of a crash, it's always better to yield the right-of-way to the other person.

four-way stops — when there are stop signs at all corners:

- The first vehicle to arrive at the intersection and come to a complete stop should go first.
- If two vehicles arrive at the same time, the one on the right should go first.
- If two vehicles are facing each other and have arrived at the intersection at about the same time, the one making a left turn must yield to the one going straight through.

Intersections controlled by yield signs

A yield sign means that you must let the traffic on the through road have the right-of-way. You may enter the intersection without stopping if there are no pedestrians, cyclists or vehicles on the through road. But you must slow down (and stop if necessary) and wait for a safe gap if there is traffic on the through road.

Traffic circles and roundabouts

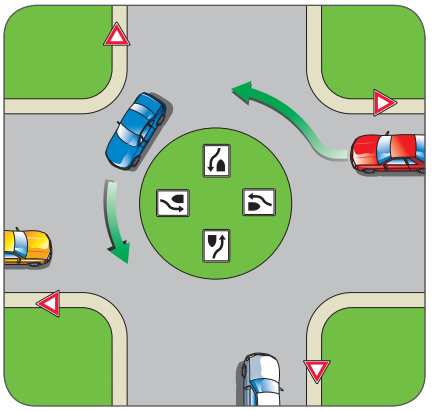
These are found in some areas to help traffic get through an intersection safely without necessarily stopping the flow of the traffic.

Traffic circles

Traffic circles are mostly found in residential neighbourhoods.

When you're using a traffic circle:

- Slow down as you approach the circle.
- Obey any posted traffic control signs, such as "Yield" or "Stop" signs. If there are no traffic control signs, treat it as an uncontrolled intersection.
- Yield to any traffic in the traffic circle. If another vehicle arrives at the traffic circle at the same time as you do, yield to the vehicle on your right.
- Go around the traffic circle to the right (that is, in a counter-clockwise direction).



You must turn right to enter a traffic circle and right again to leave it. Yield to vehicles that are already in the traffic circle. If another vehicle arrives at the traffic circle at the same time as you do, yield to the vehicle on your right.

driving tip

Emergency vehicles displaying flashing lights and sirens always have the right-of-way. If an emergency vehicle is approaching, avoid blocking a traffic circle or roundabout. Stop for the emergency vehicle before entering, or exit the traffic circle or roundabout and then stop to allow the emergency vehicle to pass.

Roundabouts

Roundabouts are usually larger than traffic circles.

Some roundabouts have more than one lane. Lane use signs and markings may be displayed at the approaches to show where you can go in each lane when you are in the roundabout. Make sure you know where you want to go — and are in the proper lane to get there — before you enter a roundabout.

Roundabouts often have a truck apron around the central island to help large vehicles get through the roundabout.

When you use a roundabout:

- Know where you want to go before you enter a roundabout, and enter the correct lane. Lane use signs or road markings will show you which lane you need to use.

  If you want to turn left, make sure you are in the left lane. If you want to turn right, use the right lane. If you want to go straight, you may use either the left or right lane.
- Slow down as you approach the roundabout.
- Yield to pedestrians who may be crossing or about to cross in the crosswalk located in advance of the roundabout.
- Yield to any traffic already in the roundabout.
- Go around the roundabout in a counter-clockwise direction. Do not change lanes in a roundabout.
- Don't ride alongside large vehicles such as trucks and buses in roundabouts. They may need more than their lane to go through the roundabout.
- If you entered the roundabout in the left lane, stay in that lane. You may either go straight or turn left from that lane.
- Signal "right" before you exit.

When you leave the roundabout, be prepared to yield to pedestrians who may be in the crosswalk where you are exiting.

Slow down when approaching a roundabout and yield to traffic already in it. Stay in the same lane that you approached the roundabout from.

In the example above, the red car has entered the roundabout from the south in the right lane after yielding to vehicles in the roundabout. The driver may either turn right at the east exit or continue straight and take the north exit.

This sign warns to keep away from large vehicles such as trucks and buses in a roundabout.

The blue car entered from the south in the left lane, and has merged into the left lane in the roundabout. Because the blue car entered from the left lane, the driver can't immediately turn right at the first exit (east), but can take either the north or west exit.

The tractor-trailer combination entered the roundabout from the east in the left lane and the driver is going to take the south exit. Note that because of the length of the combination, the trailer is partly in the right lane, and the combination will be exiting in the right lane.

The driver of the green car must yield to the tractor-trailer that's already in the roundabout.

Entering a roadway

When you are pulling out of a driveway, alley or parking lot onto a road, stop before the sidewalk or area where pedestrians may be walking. Then pull out carefully, yielding to traffic on the road and waiting for a safe gap.

Using lanes correctly

In the last chapter, you learned about the signs, signals and pavement markings that identify which lanes you can drive in. This section tells you more about which lanes to use and how to use them.

Which lane should you use?

Choose the lane that gives you the best vision and allows you to go where you want to go. On a multi-lane highway, you should travel in one of the right-hand lanes. This is especially important if you are driving more slowly than other vehicles or if signs direct you to keep out of the left lane.

Just because you are driving at the speed limit does not mean you should continually drive in the left lane. This may cause other drivers to try to pass on the right, which may not be as safe as passing on the left.

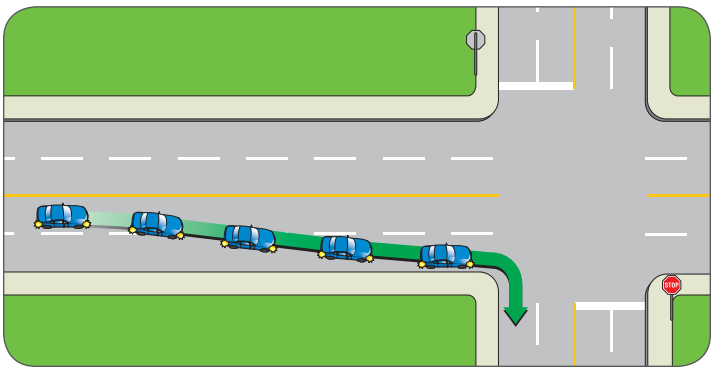
When you are on a freeway with more than two lanes in each direction, you should drive in the centre lane or a right-hand lane. This leaves the left lane for higher-speed traffic and passing vehicles.

Lane tracking

Before you make a turn, you need to get your vehicle into the correct lane. Then you need to end up in the correct lane when you complete your turn. This is sometimes called lane tracking.

Right turns

These illustrations show lane tracking when you're making a right turn.

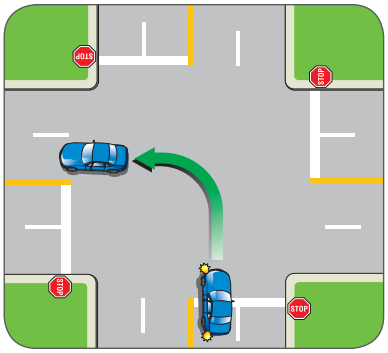


To turn right, move your car to the right lane and turn into the right lane of the cross street. In some intersections, road markings allow you to turn right from a centre lane.

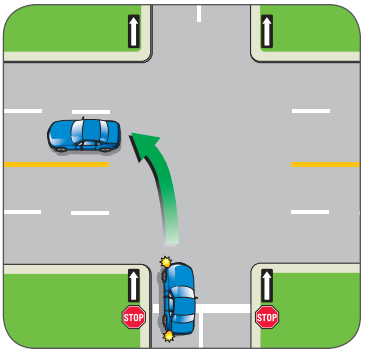
Some intersections have special yield lanes for vehicles turning right. To make a right turn, move into this lane and wait until there is a break in the traffic to complete your turn.

Left turns

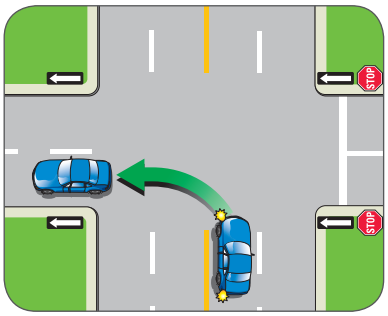
For left turns, it's sometimes harder to figure out which lane to turn into. These illustrations show you the correct lane tracking for different types of roads.



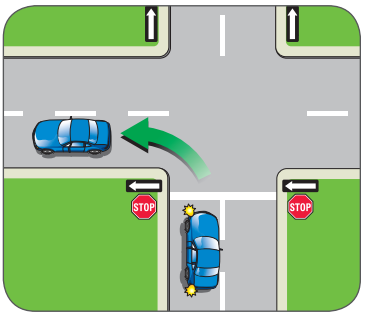
Turning left from a two-way road onto a two-way road: move your vehicle into the centre lane and drive in a smooth arc into the centre lane of the cross street.



Turning left from a one-way onto a two-way road: turn from the left lane into the centre lane.



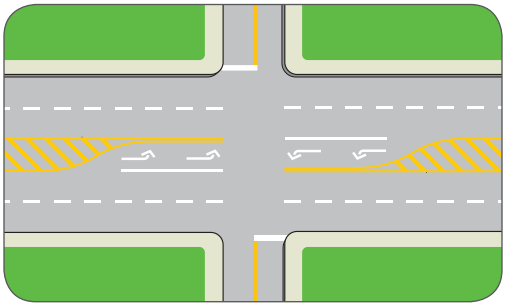
Turning left from a two-way onto a one-way road: turn from the centre lane into the left lane.



Turning left from a one-way onto a one-way road: turn from the left lane into the left lane.

Turning lanes

Some roads have special lanes for turning. As you approach an intersection, always check the signs and pavement markings to make sure you are in the correct lane to turn or to go straight through.



Turning lanes let you wait for a safe gap without holding up vehicles that are travelling straight through. Use the lane with the arrows only if you are turning left.

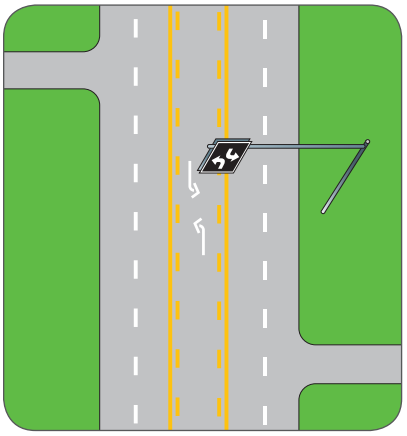
Multiple turning lanes

In large, complex intersections, there may be more than one right- or left-turn lane. Look carefully at the pavement markings, lane-use signs and signals. They will tell you what to do.

For example, the sign shown in the left column tells you that both the far-left lane and the lane next to it are used for left turns. If you are turning from the far-left lane, turn into the far-left lane. If you are turning from the lane next to it, turn into the lane next to the far-left lane.

Two-way left-turn lanes

Two-way left-turn lanes give left-turning vehicles coming from either direction a chance to turn without holding up traffic. They can be handy for turning left in the middle of a block, such as turning into a driveway. When you see one of these lanes, remember that vehicles coming from the other direction also use this lane to turn left.



Drivers from both directions share this centre lane when they want to turn left. Make sure there is enough space before you enter this lane. Remember to watch for vehicles coming from the opposite direction.

Turns in the middle of a block

Most drivers expect other vehicles to turn at an intersection. Sometimes you might want to turn left in the middle of a block — for example, into a driveway. You may turn left — including turning left over a solid double yellow line — **if** you do this carefully and safely and don't impede other traffic, and there are no signs prohibiting such turns.

U-turns

If you find you are going in the wrong direction, you may be tempted to make a U-turn. U-turns are often risky. They are illegal:

- if they interfere with other traffic
- on a curve
- on or near the crest of a hill, where you cannot be seen by other traffic within 150 metres
- where a sign prohibits U-turns
- at an intersection where there is a traffic light
- in a business district, except at an intersection where there is no traffic light
- where a municipal by-law prohibits making a U-turn.

When you are deciding whether to make a U-turn, think about some alternatives, like driving around the block or continuing on to a side road where you can turn more safely.

Reserved lanes

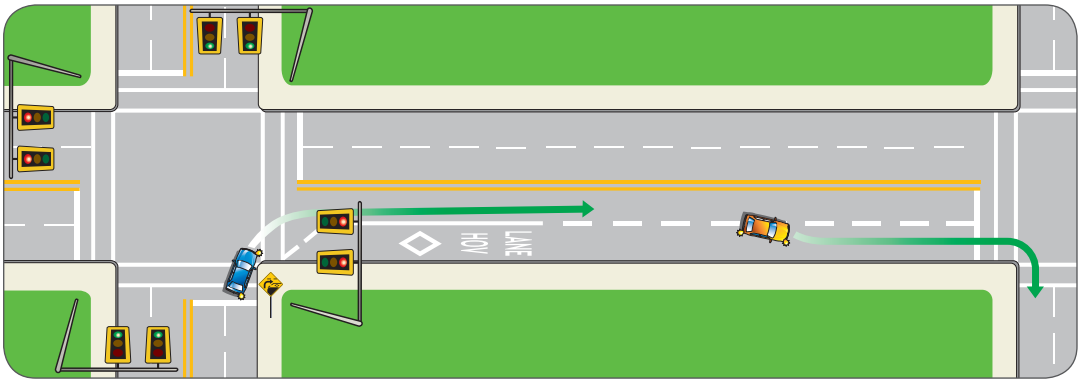
In parts of B.C., some traffic lanes are reserved for different types of vehicles. High occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes and bus lanes help move more people in fewer vehicles. Bicycle lanes are reserved for cyclists.

High occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes

HOV lanes are reserved for buses and carpool vehicles. Motorcycles, bicycles and taxis may also use these lanes on some roads. On freeways and main highways, HOV lanes are beside either the median or the shoulder of the roadway. On city streets, HOV lanes are usually directly beside the curb.

Most HOV lanes operate 24 hours a day, but some are only in operation at peak traffic times. Check the traffic signs carefully. They will tell you where the lanes begin and end, when they are in operation, and the minimum number of people that must be in the vehicle.

If your vehicle is carrying enough people to travel in the HOV lane, or if you need to cross an HOV lane to turn, enter the lane with care. Traffic in these lanes sometimes travels faster than the regular traffic. Make sure there is enough room for you to enter safely. Enter and exit where there are broken lines to indicate a crossing point.



The driver of the blue car has seen the warning sign indicating that there is a reserved lane on the street the driver wishes to turn onto. The driver should turn into the lane next to the reserved lane, unless they are entitled to drive in the reserved lane and wish to drive in it.

To turn right off of a street with a reserved lane, change lanes into the reserved lane where permitted and when safe.

Bus lanes

You will recognize a bus lane by a sign that has a diamond symbol and a picture of a bus. Only buses and sometimes cyclists are allowed to travel in lanes marked with this sign.

Vanpools (vehicles with six or more occupants) may also travel in the bus lane if a "Vanpool Permitted" tab is shown below the bus lane sign.

driving tip

Be sure to signal well ahead and yield to all cyclists whenever you must cross a bicycle lane.

Bicycle lanes

Bicycle lanes are reserved for cyclists. Sometimes you will need to cross a bicycle lane to turn right, or to pull to the side of the road. Take extra care when you do this. The rules for bicycle lanes are:

- don't drive, stop or park in a bicycle lane.
- you may only cross a bicycle lane if the white line is broken or to turn into or out of a driveway.

driving tip

Don't change lanes at an intersection. You could confuse other drivers and cause a crash.

Pulling into a lane

Whenever you enter a lane, whether you're pulling into traffic or changing lanes, the vehicles in the lane you're moving into have the right-of-way. When you pull away from the roadside into a lane of traffic, you need to make sure you are not cutting

anyone off. Watch carefully for smaller traffic — bicycles and motorcycles — that may be approaching faster than you think.

The same rule applies when you're planning to change lanes. Make sure there is a large enough gap so that when you pull in front of another vehicle, that driver doesn't have to slow down to avoid crashing into you. Legally, you must signal when you change lanes.

Passing

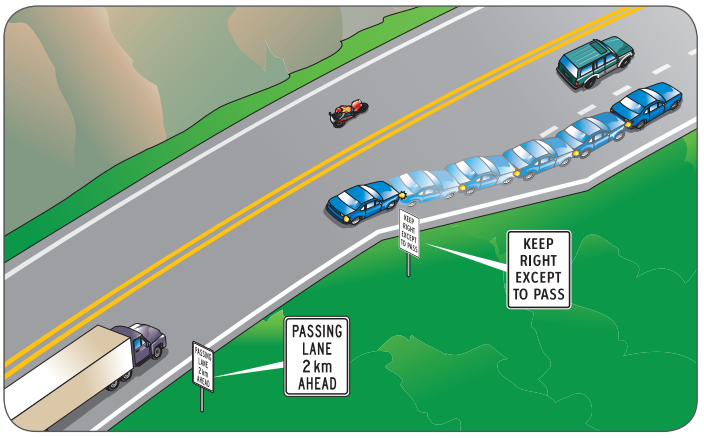
Passing requires moving into another lane — sometimes a lane of approaching traffic — and then back into your original lane. Remember, if you move into another vehicle's lane, that vehicle has the right-of-way. It doesn't matter if it's a car, a motorcycle or a bicycle. Other traffic shouldn't have to change direction or slow down for you.

If you're planning to pass, make sure you can do it safely and legally:

- Pass on the right only on a roadway that has two or more lanes, or if a driver ahead is turning left. Do not use the shoulder to pass.
- Pass on the left only when it is safe to do so and lane markings permit.
- Keep within the speed limit when passing.
- Make sure you know whether the pavement markings allow you to pass. See **chapter 3, signs, signals and road markings**, for more information.

Passing lanes

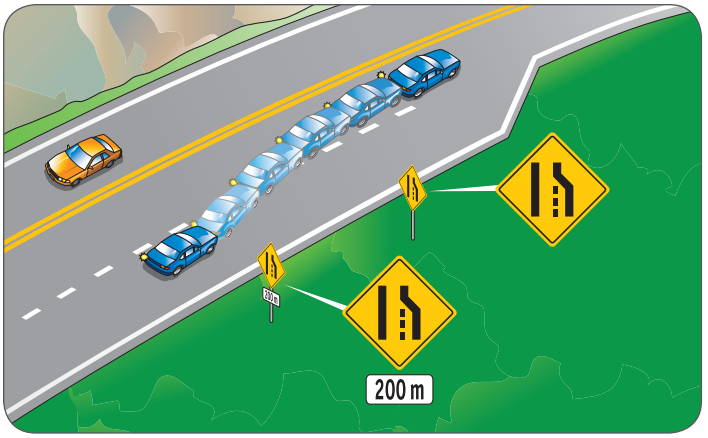
Some highways have special passing lanes. These lanes let slower vehicles move into the right lane so faster vehicles can pass safely in the left lane.



A sign will tell you how far it is to the next passing lane. Keep right unless you are passing.

driving tip

Don't speed up as someone is trying to pass you — it's illegal. Help the other driver get back into your lane by slowing down and making room.



A sign will tell you when the passing lane is about to end. Vehicles in the right lane and the passing lane must merge before the passing lane ends.

Merging

This sign tells you the right lane will end soon.

If you're driving in a lane that ends ahead, you need to change lanes. Adjust your speed, keeping within the speed limit, and wait for a safe gap in the other lane.

If you are driving next to a lane that ends ahead, help the merging traffic by adjusting your speed or changing lanes.

Highway or freeway entrances and exits

These lanes are designed to help you safely enter and exit the freeway.

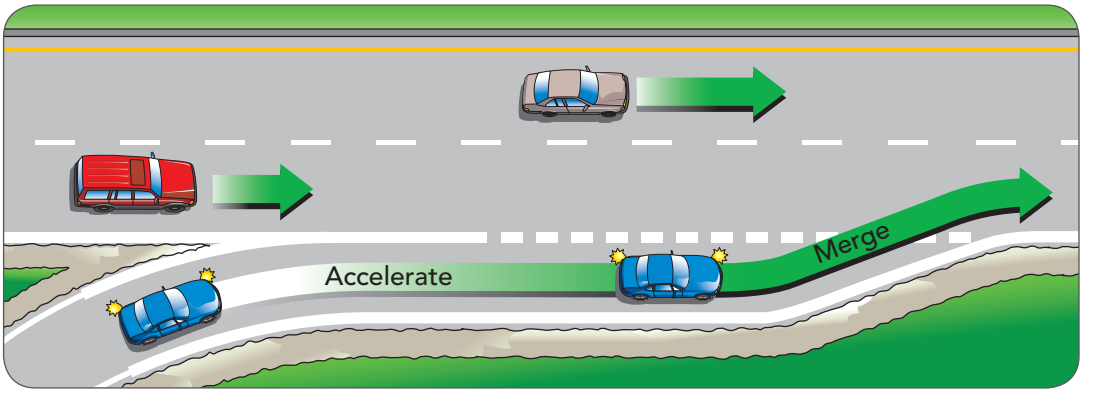
Entrance

warning!

Avoid stopping in the acceleration lane or merging area. You could risk being rear-ended.

The entrance consists of an entrance ramp, an acceleration lane and a merging area. Some freeway entrances have ramp meters — a traffic light that controls traffic entering the freeway by restricting the number of vehicles that may proceed along the entrance ramp.

- While you're on the entrance ramp, scan the freeway traffic for a safe gap.
- The acceleration lane is divided from the rest of the roadway by a solid white line. Use this lane to match your speed to the speed of traffic on the freeway.
- The merging area is divided from the freeway by a broken white line. Use this area to find a safe gap to merge with freeway traffic. Be aware that cycling is permitted on some freeways, so be careful not to cut in front of a cyclist.

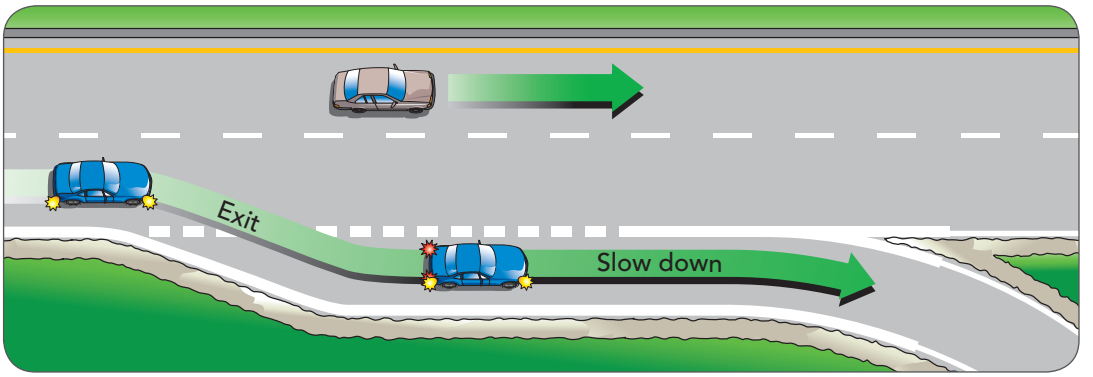


A highway entrance gives you a short distance to match your speed to the vehicles already on the highway. Observe the freeway traffic, make sure you have a space that is safe to move into, signal your intention and then move into traffic.

Exit

The exit lane allows you to move off the freeway and reduce your speed.

Most freeway exits are numbered. Before you start your trip, check a map to see which exit you will need to take. That way you can move to the right lane in plenty of time for the exit.



Signal your intention to turn off the highway, maintaining your speed until you enter the exit lane. Then slow down gradually as you prepare to enter roads with lower speed limits.

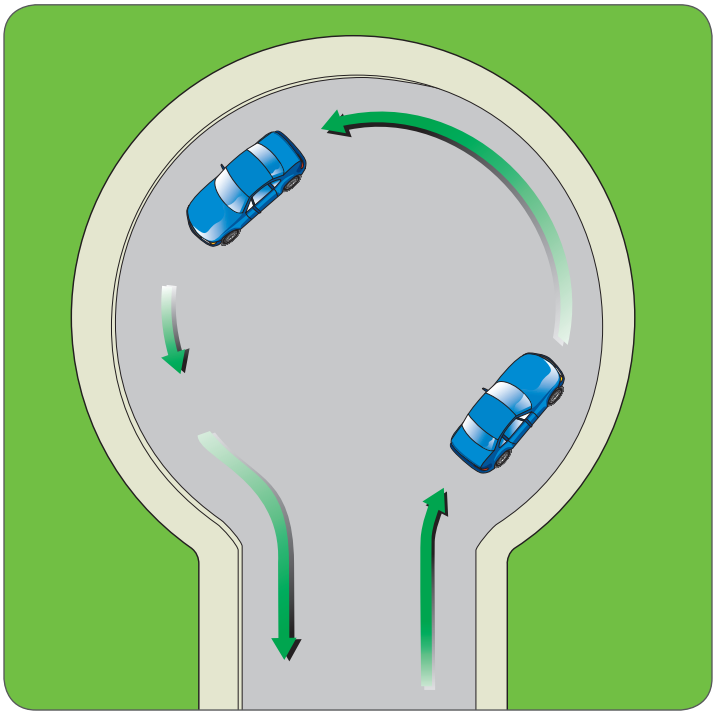
Strategies: freeway courtesy

When you are driving in the right lane of a freeway, other drivers may try to merge from an entrance lane. It's not always easy for them to find a safe gap. Use these pointers to help them merge safely:

- pull over into the left lane (if it's safe) to give them room to merge onto the freeway
- adjust your speed to allow a large enough gap for them to move safely into.

Cul-de-sacs

A cul-de-sac is a street that's closed at one end. Most cul-de-sacs are designed so that you can turn your car around without needing to back up. Slow down and keep to the right. Most cul-de-sacs are in residential areas, so watch carefully for children playing, vehicles coming out of driveways and other hazards.



A cul-de-sac.

Turning around

Sometimes you can turn around by doing a series of turns at intersections or by turning in a cul-de-sac. You may also be able to do a U-turn or a two-point turn or a three-point turn.

A two-point turn is done by stopping near the side of the road, backing into a driveway and then turning into the street to proceed in the opposite direction.

A three-point turn is done by making a sharp turn to the left in the middle of a block, and stopping just before the curb. To complete the three-point turn, back up to your right and then proceed to drive down the street in the opposite direction.

For both two- and three-point turns, you need to make sure it's clear and safe and that there is no other traffic nearby.

driving tip

When parking in a stall, it's usually safest to back in so you won't have to back out. Better still, if there are two empty facing stalls with no barrier between them, drive through one into the next so your vehicle is facing forward.

When uphill parking beside a rolling curb or mountable curb, turn the wheels to the right. This type of curb is not high enough to stop the vehicle from rolling back into traffic.

Parking tips and rules

Park where it's safe and legal. Signs, curb markings and common sense will tell you if you are allowed to park. You should park where you are not blocking traffic and where others can clearly see you. If you park where you shouldn't, you could be a hazard to others, you could be fined or your vehicle could be towed.

It's illegal to park:

- on a sidewalk or boulevard
- across the entrance to any driveway, back lane or intersection
- within five metres of a fire hydrant (measured from the point at the curb beside the hydrant)
- within six metres of a crosswalk or intersection
- within six metres of a stop sign or traffic light
- within 15 metres of the nearest rail of a railway crossing
- in a bicycle lane
- on a bridge or in a highway tunnel
- where your vehicle obstructs the visibility of a traffic sign
- where a traffic sign prohibits parking, or where the curb is painted yellow or red
- in a space for people with disabilities unless you display a disabled person parking permit in your windshield and your vehicle is carrying a person with a disability.

Park parallel to and within 30 centimetres (one foot) of the curb. If you're parked on a hill, turn the wheels to keep your vehicle from rolling into traffic. Turn the wheels:

- to the right when uphill without a curb or downhill with or without a curb
- to the left when uphill with a curb.

Set the parking brake and leave the vehicle in gear:

- leave an automatic transmission in "park" gear
- with a standard transmission, place the vehicle in "reverse" if facing downhill, and "first" gear if facing uphill or if on a level surface.