

DEFENSIVE DRIVING BASICS HOW CLOSE IS TOO CLOSE?

If the car in front of you stops suddenly, you need to be far enough behind it so that 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 Two-Second Rule is a convenient way to figure your safe following distance at various speeds without having to do calculations with numbers.

The Two-Second Rule.

The Two-Second Rule says that your following distance should be at least two 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". If your front bumper reaches the landmark before you finish counting, you are following too closely.

The Two-Second Plus Rule.

Two seconds is the minimum following distance you should maintain. It applies to daytime driving in good weather conditions and at speeds less than 40 miles per hour. Use the Two-Second Plus Rule when traveling at higher speeds, when visibility is low, or when weather or road conditions are less than ideal.

Under the Two-Second Plus Rule, you should maintain a following distance of two seconds plus additional seconds for each additional driving condition.

If...	Add
you're traveling at more than 40 mph	2 seconds
you're driving at night	1 second
the vehicle in front of you is a motorcycle	1 second
there is fog or poor visibility	1 second
the pavement is wet	1 second
you're being tailgated	2 seconds
if the tailgating vehicle is a tractor-trailer or bus	4 seconds
you're towing a trailer	2 seconds

If several conditions apply, add up the extra seconds for all of them. For instance, if you are driving behind a motorcycle in the fog, add two seconds, for a total of four seconds following distance.

Use the Two-Second Rule and the Two-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.

FOLLOWING DISTANCE WORKSHEET

Do you know how much distance you should allow between you and vehicle in front of you in all conditions? See if you can compute the correct following distance in seconds for these driving situations. Remember that you must allow a minimum of two seconds following distance under ideal driving conditions, plus extra seconds for certain road conditions and vehicles.

1. It's a rainy night. Correct following distance in seconds: _____
2. You're driving in the fog. Another car is tailgating behind you. _____
3. You're following a motorcycle and towing a small trailer. _____
4. You are driving on an interstate into late afternoon sun. _____

Answers:

1. Four seconds (two seconds plus one second for night driving and one second for wet pavement).
2. Five seconds (two seconds plus one second for the fog, and two more seconds for the tailgater because you will need extra space so the tailgater won't push you into the vehicle in front of you if you must stop suddenly).
3. Five seconds (two seconds plus one second for the motorcycle, and two more seconds for the trailer because the extra weight of the trailer increases the time it takes to stop).
4. Five seconds (two seconds plus two seconds for speeds greater than 40 mph plus one second for reduced visibility).