

COMMENTARY DRIVING

Driver's Education Terminology and Definitions

Brake early, roll up slow: Almost all drivers ed students have to get velocitation out of their systems. Most students don't realize there are three speeds—accelerating, coasting, and braking. We want our students braking when they turn on the signal. We also have them verbalize at the beginning of our program during the first couple of driving sessions “brake early, roll up slow”. It avoids late braking and jerky stops.

Gear before steer: 90% or more of all young, uninstructed drivers turn the steering wheel first when changing gears from drive to reverse or reverse to drive. Experienced drivers change gears first or at least turn the wheel and change the gears at the same time. We have our students verbalize “gear before steer” to break the habit of forgetting to change gears. (An example of how detrimental this can be is during parallel parking. When a student has completed parallel parking and is now leaving the parking spot, they put the car in reverse and back up. Many times they forget to put the car back into “drive” and when they step on the gas, the instructor has to hit the brake because the student is still going backwards.)

Lefts have no rights: Other than a protected green arrow, we must always yield to oncoming traffic and pedestrians. Every drivers ed teacher I've known has had to hit their brake for a student turning left in front of oncoming traffic. Students verbalize “lefts have no rights” when yielding to oncoming traffic when attempting a left turn.

I'm special: When turning left at a protected green arrow light, students are required to acknowledge verbally that they see the special green turn arrow light by saying “I'm special”. (This is progressing to the point that students are anticipating being special and are now saying it before the fourth/bottom light illuminates with the green arrow.)

Never trust a signal: When stopped at a stop sign and entering the intersection to the left or right, we never pull out in front of a vehicle on that roadway that is signaling a turn. We don't know how long that signal has been on or what the true intentions are of the driver. We need to see two other factors from that vehicle confirming their intentions such as slowing down, turning their wheels, or positioning their car. We want our students to verbalize this defensive technique “never trust a signal” so we know as instructors that our students realize that the approaching vehicle could go straight and not turn.

Shooters: This is a required comment in our program when a student driver is in 1st position at a red light. At the moment when light changes to green, they begin moving forward while quickly scanning left/right and verbalize out loud “shooters” –looking for cars running the intersection

BB's: Our front zone is constantly closing. When cars in front of us brake or signal, we want our students to prove to us they see the brake lights or the blinker. We had a student come up with the term “BB's” instead of “brake lights or blinkers” because it was shorter and faster. It becomes a game for our students to see how far ahead they are looking and how quickly they can acknowledge and verbalize what they are identifying

Ped crossing—no one's home: Every ped crossing sign or school crossing sign must be identified verbally and declared “clear” or “occupied”. A student came up with this saying “ped crossing—no one's home or someone's home”.

Right peds, front peds, left peds: Every lighted intersection has pedestrians that have the right of way. Most students do not anticipate them unless they see them. We want our students to verbally acknowledge that pedestrians could be walking whether they are there or not. At every right turn, as a student is approaching an intersection, they have already signaled and are braking for the turn, but before they enter that intersection, they need to say “right peds”. (Left turns they acknowledge “left peds” and right on reds we verbalize “front peds”.)

Cars, trucks, or clear: Our rear zone is the most difficult to control. Whenever we signal or brake, our students must check the rearview mirror and verbalize “car, truck or clear”. This notifies instructors they are aware of their rear zone.

Light change: This term refers to an expected comment from our students as soon as they see a light change from red to green or green to yellow. This allows us to know how far ahead they are looking, what their eyes are seeing, and how quickly they can respond to the front zone change. By the end of our session on the final drive, it is fun to see how aware they are and how quickly they identify the light change.

Fresh & stale lights: When approaching a green light, our students are required to let us know verbally whether or not they are expecting the light to change or not. They use the terms “fresh light or stale light” because it is quick and easy to say. If the orange light is blinking or the number is counting down, it is considered “stale”. If the “walk” light is up and/or a white stickman is walking, it is “fresh”.

Thru for me or thru for them: (Sometimes referred to as “my favor or their favor”.) We allow our students to say both. This is a required comment for the student approaching a controlled intersection. They designate the right of way by verbalizing “thru for me” or “thru for them” which helps the driver quickly discern proper technique with intersection conflict.

All way stop: (then number yourself) Our students are required to verbalize to us when approaching a stop sign whether it is an all way or a thru street stop. If it is an all way stop, they also need to tell us what number in sequence they are for proceeding. We also like them to tell us that they are going before or after a certain vehicle. Ex. “Mr. Ferda, this is an all way stop. I am 3rd and will go after the black truck or before the yellow Volkswagen.”

Tires on pavement: This is a space cushion reference point for the distance between us and the car in front of us. This is a required comment in our program. Our students say “tires on pavement” or just “tires” to prove they have planned with a purpose to stop with a safe cushion between them and the front car.

Open zone/closed zone: When making a lane change, after students have signaled checked their mirror, they must verbally acknowledge that their blind spot is open or closed. We want them to tell us when they are going.

Hit the flashers: This is more of an action than a verbalized comment. We would hope that all drivers ed programs would consider adopting this into their programs. It is a required task for our students to hit the emergency flashers when stopping for pedestrians at a crosswalk, when stopped by school buses on the highway, and when approaching an emergency or police vehicle with their lights flashing. Our first response is to hit our flashers. We have noticed that our rear zone is very vulnerable to distracted drivers not expecting us to stop.

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