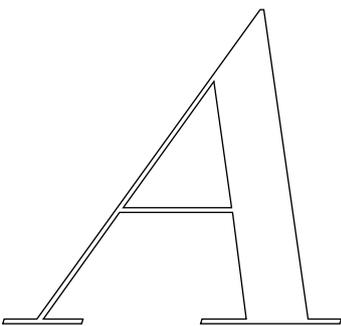




You may be a good driver but are you making mistakes that could end up causing an accident – or even killing someone?

# COLLISION COURSE



According to Arrive Alive, most road accidents are caused by human error and, with as many as 36 deaths on our roads daily, many of us are obviously guilty of making fatal mistakes.

'We're convinced that most of the 900 000 crashes that occurred last year were as a result of a failure to obey traffic laws or apply basic common sense,' says Gary Ronald from the Automobile Association of South Africa. 'If people

were more aware of the incorrect things they do while driving, hundreds of lives could be saved every year.'

**Here are the four mistakes that we most commonly make that can cause or lead to road accidents:**

## 1 NOT KEEPING THE CORRECT FOLLOWING DISTANCE

You're supposed to keep a following distance of at least three seconds when driving at 60km/h, and up to five seconds at 120km/h but most people ignore this rule, says Gerhard Roux,

owner of Sadex Driving School in Johannesburg. 'People think that if they push the brake pedal the car will stop immediately but the reality is very different. When you're driving at 60km/h under perfect conditions your reaction time plus physical stopping distance means an actual stopping distance of almost 34m. At 120 km/h the stopping distance increases to 108m, which means that if you're not at a safe following distance your chances of hitting another car are higher,' he says.

## 2 NOT POSITIONING MIRRORS PROPERLY

The purpose of your car's mirrors is to enable you to see what's happening around you without straining your neck or taking your eyes off the road for longer than necessary. Unfortunately, many people don't stop to make sure their mirrors give a full view of their surroundings, generally only noticing too late that they can't see from certain angles, says Ronald. 'Positioning your mirrors will save you a lot of trouble. Side mirrors are especially important – adjust them so you don't see the back of your own car, which will minimise your blind spot,' he says.

When you're driving behind someone, you're driving in the person's blind spot if you can't see the driver's face in their rear-view mirror, cautions Roux. 'Accelerate or decelerate until the other driver can see you,' he says.

## 3 BECOMING DISTRACTED

As driving becomes second nature, most people allow themselves to be distracted, says Ronald. 'Using cellphones is a major distraction but people do it all the time.' The same goes for women applying makeup while driving, he says.

Technology has undoubtedly increased the number of accidents that occur as a result of distractions, says Johan Jonck from Arrive Alive. 'SMSing has become the number one and most serious driver distraction. Distractions come in many forms but it's important to be alert,' he says. Make sure you're focused on the road at all times.

## 4 BREAKING THE RULES

Accidents are often caused when drivers don't follow the rules of the road. Examples of this are failing to stop at traffic lights and stop signs, illegally overtaking, overloading vehicles and speeding.

Not knowing how traffic circles work can also lead to accidents that could be avoided if the drivers knew the rules, says Jonck. 'Vehicles approaching a roundabout or traffic circle must yield to all vehicles already in the traffic circle that are approaching from the right,' he says.

As for four-way stops, many people don't know that if they come to a stop street where another car has already stopped, the car that's already there has right of way to proceed.

Speeding has also become accepted but people shouldn't break the speed limit because the consequences can be dire. 'Speeding is perhaps sometimes given too much attention as a contributing factor to accidents but it's a fact that most people who've been in accidents say they wish they were driving a bit slower,' says Jonck. 'The faster you drive the shorter your reaction time and the less time you have to avoid an accident.' □