

Defensive Driving 101: Navigating Santa Clara's Tech Traffic

Driving in Santa Clara isn't like driving in a rural town. You share the road with massive tech commuter buses, delivery trucks, unpredictable electric scooters, and high-performance cars zipping down the HOV lane. To survive and thrive here, "basic" driving skills aren't enough. You need Defensive Driving.

Defensive driving is the main thing we teach at AAA Car [Driving School in Santa Clara](#). It's not enough to just follow the rules; you also have to be able to see when other people are going to make mistakes.

The SIPDE Way

SIPDE is a method that police and professional drivers use, and we teach it.

1. Scan: Don't just look at the bumper in front of you. Look ahead for 12 to 15 seconds. In Santa Clara, this means looking past the next stoplight.
2. Recognize: Find possible dangers. Is that car on the side road slowly moving out? Is a person walking by the curb looking at their phone?
3. Predict: Think the worst. Think that the car will pull out. Assume that the person walking will cross the street.
4. Make a decision: come up with a plan. "If he pulls out, I'll hit the brakes and turn left."
5. Do it right away if you need to.

Getting the "Merge" down

New drivers in the Bay Area are most afraid of merging onto Highway 101, I-280, or Hwy 87.

- The mistake: A lot of students stop or slow down on the on-ramp. This is not safe!
- The Defensive Way: The on-ramp is for speeding up. Before you merge, you need to go the same speed as the traffic on the highway (usually 65 mph or more). We take students on the highway over and over until they get used to the feeling of going faster instead of being scared.

Managing Space

When El Camino Real is stop-and-go, it's easy to tailgate to keep people from cutting in. This is a recipe for a crash.

- The 3-Second Rule: Keep a distance of at least three seconds between you and the car in front of you. Make it five seconds if it's raining. This buffer gives you time to react if they slam on their brakes, which happens a lot in our culture of distracted driving.

Areas You Can't See

Sensors are built into modern cars, but they don't always work. We teach the rule "Chin to Shoulder." You have to turn your head to look at your blind spot before every lane change. It's a simple habit that can save lives.

Learn how to defend yourself. Don't just drive; drive defensively. Sign up for our Defensive Driving classes and learn how to drive safely on the roads of Silicon Valley.