

Driver's Ed. Education
A Series of Specifics for Success
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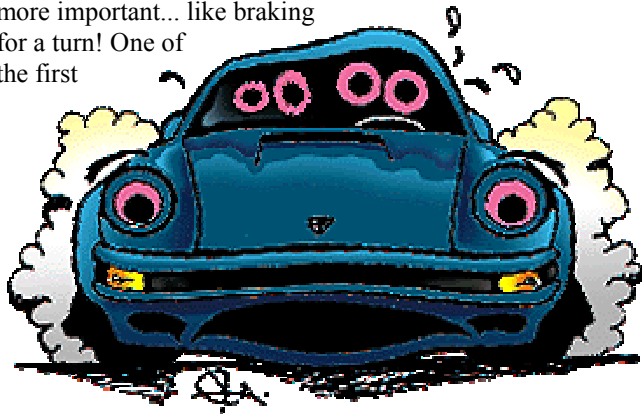
Article #2 - Let's Talk Semantics

The main interface between Instructor and Student is Language. What should it sound like?

Communication between a Driver's Ed. Instructor and the Student is obviously critical to the student's ultimate success. Verbal commands are the only effective means of signaling when a certain task needs to be undertaken, when there is a pending problem, or an adjustment to be made.

In the early stages, information overload is a common problem for students, and experienced instructors will attempt to filter this flood of sensory input by using very simple terms to lead the student through the initial maze of confusion. Trying to elucidate complicated theories on car control dynamics is useless at this point, and both the student and instructor will be better served if the student feels a sense of calm and control emanating from the right-hand seat. Therefore, success is usually to be found by employing the K.I.S.S. Method: "Keep It Simple, Stupid!"

If words are the best tools, what words to use? Hey, the dictionary is full of them, but if the student has to stop and think or ask what the instructor means, he or she may be distracted from doing something more important... like braking for a turn! One of the first



“Something tells me you didn’t quite absorb that last theory!?”

steps toward Driver's Ed. success would then logically be to define and distill a list of terms to be applied consistently to the task at hand. This should be done before any driving takes place.

O.K., after you position the car, the first thing you will have to do when preparing for a corner is to back off the gas. For this purpose, we will use a word that is

definitely a two edged sword, but as long as it is done before a turn - and not during it - the result should be favorable. That word is LIFT. (you likely will never hear your instructor say this in the middle of a turn!).

The next task on the list is to reduce speed in a straight line. That function can obviously be described clearly and succinctly by using the word BRAKE.

Through experimentation and practice with braking, you will then reach a point where you have decelerated sufficiently to turn in safely. At this point, I use the term OFF BRAKE (or later, simply OFF) to signal the student that the brakes should be released smoothly in preparation for the anticipated steering motion.

This steering motion is quite effectively described by using the word TURN. After turning in, I like to encourage my students to move back to the throttle as early as possible and begin applying it progressively after the turn-in to help set their cornering arc and suspension balance. This is achieved by using the term THROTTLE. Later, when we are more experienced and accomplished in driving "the Line," we will combine these last two steps, but for now... yeh, you got it... K.I.S.S.!

The next spot you will be heading for on the track is the epicenter of the turn's inside radius. This most critical point of reference that we are shooting for is the APEX. As we pass the apex, we are continuing to add throttle as we exit the turn. As our speed increases, it is time to UNWIND the wheel and head for the end of our arc. It is now time to use the full track width as we accelerate out of the turn and TRACK OUT.

We now have our basic list of terms to get us through the cornering sequence with minimal confusion: LIFT - BRAKE - OFF BRAKE - THROTTLE - APEX - UNWIND - TRACK OUT.

There are more terms that can be useful in certain situations. One such moment is when the instructor senses (likely before the student) that centrifugal force is causing the car to fight for grip. The tires are working harder than they should or could be, and if the situation is allowed to continue, an unsavory result is possible. The instructor should ask the student to UNWIND or RELEASE the steering wheel slightly and allow the car to become more balanced and flow more smoothly.

Another situation that the instructor is likely to sense before the student (but you'll get there!) is when the car is traveling too fast or on the wrong line for a truly successful cornering experience. When this happens, the student must resist the temptation to modify any control inputs abruptly, and the instructor will ask the student to MODULATE or FEATHER the throttle, to HOLD the current settings and ride it out,

and not make the situation worse by entering erroneous inputs.

So, if we do it right, our distilled verbal cornering sequence will sound like this: LIFT off the gas, BRAKE, OFF BRAKE, TURN, ease progressively into the THROTTLE, clip a tight APEX, UNWIND the wheel, and TRACK OUT. The use and understanding of a like sequence of terms will greatly assist your learning experience... and your instructors peace of mind!

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by John L. Hajny

I have striven to make this an extremely well written and accurate series on a subject that is not to be taken lightly and can obviously be dangerous. To maintain the accuracy and proper presentation of that message, I would ask that absolutely no use whatsoever of any text herein be made without my express written consent.

I ask you to please abide by this request.

Thank you.