

Lesson 1 – Car Accidents

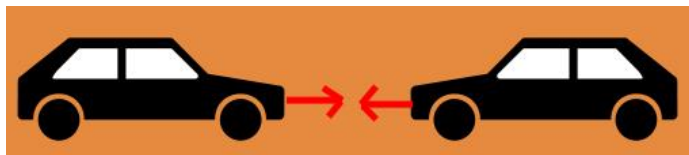
Have you ever been in a car accident? In today's lesson, you're going to learn expressions for describing different types of accidents, their causes, and results.

Let's begin with the difference between a car accident and a car crash. **Car accident** is the most general term – it can describe any type of accident, major or minor, and it can involve only one car or two or more cars.

A **car crash** involves a collision – when a car hits an object with a violent impact. We can also use “crash” as a verb – for example, the car crashed into a tree, or the car crashed into a telephone pole.

Here are four specific types of accidents:

- When two vehicles crash into each other while traveling in opposite directions, we call this a **head-on collision**. This is one of the deadliest types of accidents.



- On the other end of the spectrum is a **fender-bender**. This describes a small accident with very minor damage to the cars involved.
- When multiple cars hit each other, this is called a **pile-up**. Pile-ups often occur when the weather and road conditions are bad.



- Sometimes a car hits a person, but instead of stopping, the driver of the car drives away. This type of accident is called a **hit and run**.

Now we'll look at four descriptions of accidents, and learn the verbs used for talking about them.

#1 – I **slammed on the brakes** to avoid **running over** a dog.

To **slam on the brakes** means to try to stop the car very suddenly, often in an emergency. In this case, the driver wanted to avoid **running over** a dog – the phrasal verb **run over** is used when a car passes over an object, animal, or person.

#2 – The taxi **sideswiped** a parked car and then **rear-ended** a van.

Sideswiped means the taxi hit the side of the parked car while passing it. **Rear-ended** means the taxi hit the back of the van.



#3 – The driver **lost control** of the car and **plowed into** the guardrail.

Inexperienced drivers can **lose control** of the car, especially when driving at high speeds, at night, or in bad weather. The phrasal verb **plowed into** is an alternative way to say **crashed into**.



This is a guardrail

#4 – Lots of cars were **skidding** on the icy road, and I saw one that had **rolled over**.

The verb **skid** means to slide without control on a slippery surface like ice. If a car **rolls over**, that means it turns upside down.

Car accidents can be caused by a number of factors. Here are some of the most common.

- **speeding** – driving faster than the speed limit
- **tailgating** – this is when one car drives extremely close behind another car. It's dangerous because if the first car stops suddenly, the second car will not have time to stop.
- **drunk driving** – driving under the influence of alcohol. To test for the level of alcohol in a driver's blood, police use a **breathalyzer test**.
- **weather conditions** – rain, snow, and ice can make the road **slick** or **slippery**. There can also be **poor visibility** (difficulty to see) due to fog or darkness
- **reckless driving** – the word reckless means “not careful” – so “reckless driving” means driving dangerously, not carefully – for example, people who change lanes without using the turn signal, or who drive impatiently and without careful observation or consideration
- **road rage** – when a driver gets angry at another driver, and begins driving aggressively
- **distractions** – when the driver is paying attention to other things – for example, their cell phone – and not watching the road.

Finally, let's look at the results of an accident.

We can say the car is **damaged** and the people in the cars are **injured** or **killed**. A more formal word for someone killed in an accident is a **fatality** – for example, “there were three fatalities” or “luckily, there were no fatalities.”

One common injury in car accidents is **whiplash** – an injury to the neck due to the sudden impact; when your head goes forward or backwards very suddenly. If someone in the car wasn't wearing a seatbelt, they could be **thrown from the vehicle** – this means they flew out of the vehicle and landed some distance away.

When a car is badly damaged so that it can't be driven, then it needs to be **towed** – transported by another vehicle, which is called a **tow truck**. (Your car can also be **towed** if you park in a prohibited area).



A car being towed by a tow truck

There's a special word for when the car is damaged so badly it can't be repaired – we say the car is **totaled**.

Finally, if the occupants of the car were **shaken but unhurt**, it means that they were emotionally agitated (shaken), but they had no injuries (unhurt).

You've finished Lesson 1! Now do the exercises accompanying this lesson to practice the vocabulary you've learned.

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Pronunciation Practice:

car accident, car crash, head-on collision, fender-bender, pile-up, hit and run, slam on the brakes, run over, sideswiped, rear-ended, lost control, plowed into, skid, roll over, speeding, tailgating, drunk driving, breathalyzer test, weather conditions, slick, slippery, poor visibility, reckless driving, road rage, distractions, damaged, injured, killed, fatality, whiplash, thrown from the vehicle, towed, tow truck, totaled, shaken but unhurt

Quiz 1: Car Accidents

Question 1

After the accident, both cars had to be _____ to the repair shop.

- A. plowed
- B. rear-ended
- C. towed

Question 2

Be careful - it's snowing and the roads will be _____.

- A. damaged
- B. reckless
- C. slippery

Question 3

During the snowstorm, there was an eight-car _____ on the highway.

- A. head-on
- B. pile-up
- C. roll-over

Question 4

I had to pay for the damage after I _____ another car in the parking lot.

- A. sideswiped
- B. skidded
- C. tailgated

Question 5

My teenage son was caught _____ - he was going 80 miles per hour in a 65-mph zone.

- A. crashing
- B. fasting
- C. speeding

Question 6

One of the victims wasn't wearing her seatbelt and was _____ from the vehicle.

- A. distracted
- B. shaken
- C. thrown

Question 7

The motorcycle ran a red light and _____ into the side of a bus.

- A. crashed
- B. injured
- C. raged

Question 8

“Was your car badly damaged?”

“No, it was just a _____.”

- A. fender-bender
- B. hit-and-run
- C. whiplash

Question 9

Two people were _____ in the accident.

- A. damaged
- B. injured
- C. totaled

Question 10

We got a flat tire after _____ over some broken glass.

- A. plowing
- B. rolling
- C. running

Question 11

When a child ran out in front of the car, I _____ on the brakes.

- A. lost
- B. slammed
- C. threw

Question 12

After 10 beers, William was arrested for _____ driving on his way home from the bar.

- A. drunk
- B. poor
- C. rage

Quiz answers at the end of this lesson document.

Vocabulary Practice

Answer these questions – either speaking out loud to yourself, or writing your answers and sending them to me at help@espressoenglish.net. Whenever possible, use the vocabulary words from this lesson.

1. Have you ever been in a car accident, or crashed your car? Describe the accident, its causes, and its results.
2. When was the last time you slammed on the brakes?
3. What should a driver do if he/she begins to lose control of the car?
4. What would you do if another car was tailgating you?
5. What kind of laws or programs could help reduce drunk driving?
6. In your opinion, why does road rage exist?
7. When was the last time you drove in bad weather conditions? Describe the experience.
8. Do you know anyone who has been injured or killed in a car accident?

9. What do you think should be the penalty for someone who causes a hit-and-run accident?
10. What are the biggest distractions for you while you're driving?

Quiz Answers:

1.C 2.C 3.B 4.A 5.C 6.C 7.A 8.A 9.B 10.C 11.B 12.A

Image Sources:

- [Ruben de Rijcke](#)
- [Oregon Department of Transportation](#)