

## Problem-Solution Essay

### Strong Student Model

#### The Case for Graduated Licenses

Statistics about teenage driving are illuminating: automobile accidents are the leading cause of death for teenagers in the United States. According to a *U.S. News Online* (<http://www.usnews.com>) report, though teens account for only 2% of drivers, they are involved in more than 10% of traffic accidents. Nearly half of those accidents are single-car crashes—a car hitting a tree or sliding off the road—almost always the result of a teen's showing off for a friend or just not paying attention. Teenagers are the most unsafe drivers on the roads today, and they endanger themselves and others. A concerned public has demanded that something be done to curb the danger of the teen driver.

Some extremists argue that the driving age should be raised to 18 or 21, pointing to statistics that show drivers who begin at 21 are less likely to be involved in crashes (*U.S. News Online*). But stopping teens from getting their licenses for five, or even three, years would cause enormous problems with their lives. Teens wouldn't be able to drive themselves to school or work and would become more dependent on their already overworked parents. Clearly, raising the driving age is the wrong solution.

Others suggest that the problem could be solved simply by giving students more time behind the wheel in driver's education classes or through driving schools. But a government study has shown that teens who take driving classes are just as likely to be involved in accidents as teens who never take such classes (*U.S. News Online*).

The problem isn't one of conventional education so much as it is of teenagers learning the proper degree of caution and attention that driving demands. Many teenagers are foolhardy, have short attention spans, and care more about looking cool than they do about being safe. They think nothing of tailgating, speeding, ignoring seat belts, or driving their cars as though they were playing a video game instead of piloting a two-ton steel box with the power to kill. Yet caution and attention are not skills that can be taught in a schoolbook; they come with wisdom and are the result of experience.

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## Problem-Solution Essay

### Strong Student Model *continued*

It seems like a catch-22: students shouldn't drive until they have logged enough experience to be fully aware of the dangers of the road, but they can't gain that experience unless they are actually driving. How can we limit teens while ensuring that they receive the experience they need to make them safe drivers?

Lately there has been a heated discussion in the media—and at this high school—about a proposal before the state senate. This proposal would institute graduated driver's licenses for drivers ages 16 to 18. Such a program would restrict teens' driving privileges, only granting them new privileges as they become more experienced behind the wheel.

There would be three stages involved in acquiring a license. The first stage would be nearly the same as the current system: for three to six months, a teen would have a learner's permit requiring a licensed adult driver to be present in the car. The second stage would allow the teen to drive alone during the day, but would require an adult present at night—the time when most teenage accidents occur. After driving accident-free for nine months to a year in stage two, the teen would graduate to the third stage: an unrestricted license.

States that have already instituted such programs have had great success: teen accidents have been reduced by 5% to 16% (*U.S. News Online*). Also, fewer accidents have been fatal, perhaps because teens who do break the law and drive alone at night drive more carefully for fear of being caught.

Many of my classmates complain loudly about having their "rights" violated by the graduated license system, but loud as they are, they are quiet compared to the statistics. Graduated licenses save lives, reduce the number of accidents, and make the streets safer for everyone. If teens want unlimited access to the roads of our country, let them earn the privilege—by showing they are mature enough to handle the responsibility.