

I don't particularly like video games. In fact I don't like playing them at all. I'm not sure if I don't like them because I'm not very good at playing them or, if on the other hand, I'm not very good at playing them because I don't like them. In fact I don't really care which of these statements is true because I am, I've determined, much too old and much too busy to bother practicing long enough to get good enough to even compete with my two sons.

My wife Lana and I have been blessed with two of the finest boys on the planet, Christopher (13) and Jonathan (9). They love to play video games and often invite me to join in, which I try to get out of as often as I'm asked. But you can't say "no" all the time so once in a great while I'll give in, grab the controller and let the embarrassment begin. They whip me unmercifully and thoroughly enjoy every second of it. They are sure I am the most incompetent human on the planet when it comes to video games and have wondered out loud if their dad really drove race cars and if he did how did he win those championships.

After all, doesn't driving fast, really fast cars require lightning reflexes, quick thinking, great eyesight, advanced coordination, intense focus and a competitive spirit? Well... yes it does. So you may believe I had all of those things at one time but now I'm faced with the age old problem of... old age! How could I possibly compete on a video game controller with the quick reaction time of a healthy 13 year old and how, if you are forty-something, can you expect to be competitive with that 18 year old hot shot in the other lane.

Well, I've got some good news for the older generation. It is a common and often repeated misconception that your physiological response time slows down with age. This is a very complicated topic that, at least here, we can only briefly describe.

**First.** The age group I'm talking about is between 16, (the age at which you can drive in most states) and say 60 (the age by which most of us, not all, but most have stopped racing).

**Second.** I am assuming normal health. This is to say no neurological diseases. Also chronic alcohol use and illegal drug use can have adverse effects on your reaction time.

**Third.** You are not required to be an athlete in order to possess quick reaction times. Michael Jordan skills are not required.

What follows is an over-simplified description of what takes place from the time the light is activated and the time the driver "tells" the car to go by releasing a transbrake, releasing a clutch pedal or simply stomping on the throttle pedal.

There are essentially three separate events that combine to form your reaction time and within each, although not described, related events.

**Step One: Visual event.** This is the length of time that elapses from the time the tree is activated and your brain "sees" the light come on in the "primary Visual Cortex." This is not how long it takes you to do something or even to decide to do something, just how long it takes

you to “see” the light. Get this, we’re all about the same. Exactly where you were looking (focal vision) can cause a variance in results and focal vision versus peripheral vision is a separate topic, but if we assume we are all looking in “exactly” the same spot and we are all given the exact same conditions, ambient light, distance, angle, etc. we will all see the light at the same time.

**Step Two: Association Event.** This is the time of communication between the visual event (step 1) and the motor event (step 3). This potentially is our biggest area of turmoil. Various areas of the brain combine to coordinate sensory input from many sources. This event in your brain can look much like a busy intersection at rush hour with the traffic lights not operating and one lone police officer in the center of the intersection trying his best to get everyone to their destination.

This is “decision time” and the more you think about getting a good reaction time the slower you become.

Clearing your mind and programming yourself for an unconscious response is what's required.

**Step Three: Motor event.** The motor cortex generates all of the signals for motor movements (muscle movements) in your body. Here we are interested in nervous system response and not the physical skill of movement. In other words, the instant you start motion, Reaction Time has stopped. The physical motion is a separate topic completely. Factors such as muscle tension (pressure) can vary the results but assuming identical muscle pressure, our nervous system speed is almost the same 16 years to 60 years with a slight, but incredibly small advantage, going to the younger person. This is where people get the idea that younger people react quicker. The difference is real, but within the age group we are discussing it is so small as to not be relevant.

To put it simply, if you are 16 to 60, you're good to go!  
The good Lord gave you everything you need to cut a light.

This topic is, quite complex and we spend a great deal of time discussing it in detail during classes at our drag racing school. If you're interested in learning more about this topic and why I can drive but can't play video games, give us a call. I've got to run now, my boys want to play a video game with me. Let the whipping begin.