



What to do if you are stopped by the Police

The George Mason University Police Department would like to take a moment and give you some helpful and informative tips if you are ever stopped by a Police Officer. We would like any encounter with the police to be brief and positive.

Awareness and cooperation are essential elements of effective policing. The spirit of cooperation on your part can greatly reduce the time you are detained.

Why do the police stop people?

There are many reasons why you may be stopped by the police. Whatever the reason, the police officer needs your cooperation. Overreaction can make the situation worse.

If you are charged with a traffic infraction or a crime, you are presumed innocent until proven guilty by a court of law.

- You fit the description of a suspect
- You witnessed a crime
- You appear to need assistance
- You have been pointed out as a suspect
- You are in an area where a crime has just occurred
- You violated the law

If you are stopped by the police while driving, you may feel confused, anxious, or even somewhat angry. These are natural feelings, but remember, traffic stops are also stressful and dangerous for the police officer. Each year, numerous police officers are killed or seriously injured while making the “routine” traffic stop. Traffic stops are especially dangerous during the hours of darkness. This understandable concern for citizen and officer safety provides the basis for standard police procedures.

When approached by a police officer...

- Follow the officer’s instructions
- Keep your hands visible
- Make your movements slow
- Verbally inform the officer of any weapons which might be present and whether you possess a concealed weapons permit
- Inform the officer of what your movements are going to be
- Try to remain calm and do not become argumentative

When inside of a vehicle...

- Follow the instructions as outlined above
- Remain seated inside the vehicle
- DO NOT GET OUT OF YOUR VEHICLE, unless instructed to do so
- Keep your hands where they can be seen by the officer
- When stopped at night, turn on the interior light prior to the officer approaching your vehicle
- Produce your driver's license and vehicle registration upon the officer's request

Keep in mind that the officer...

- May not be stopping you for the same reason you perceive
- Usually does not have any previous knowledge of you
- Is trained to position him/herself in such a way that enhances his/her own safety
- Does not intend to offend you

You may be searched...

- When you are arrested
- When a warrant allows a search
- When you give consent
- When probable cause to arrest exists

Police Officers may at any time request permission to search a person, vehicle or property. If permission is freely and knowingly given, the officer may conduct a search.

If the officer suspects that you may be armed, the officer is permitted to frisk you to see if any weapons are present. This procedure is strictly to ensure the safety of everyone.

Questions?

If you have any questions or comments concerning your contact with the police, please contact the Police Department.

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703-993-2810
<http://www.gmu.edu/police>

