

2.7.3.1 Types of space

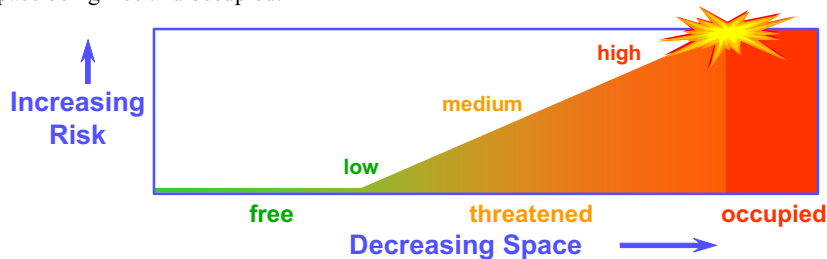
**Key point:** - Understanding “threatened” space is crucial to assessing risk.

In everyday life, we see space in a very simple way - it is either empty or full. But for road users most of the problem is caused because:

**movable objects cast danger into the spaces around them.**

And that changes everything. We saw before, when discussing speed (see The Golden Rule), that a space being “empty” does not necessarily mean it is “clear” and safe to use.

This is resolved by the idea of “threatened” space - with a gradient of risk between the space being free and occupied:



Occupied space is the easiest to see and understand. It is where the objects are, and we can't go there. The purpose then is to gauge the degree of threat that is present in the other spaces. Un-occupied space can be assessed to be either “free” or “threatened”.

**Free space**

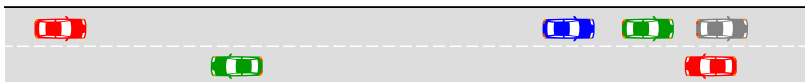
Although it may be increasingly hard to find in modern traffic, we can define space as “free” if:

**entering it carries a negligible risk of collision.**

Within this we can see further types of free space, for example:

- **“Wasted” space**

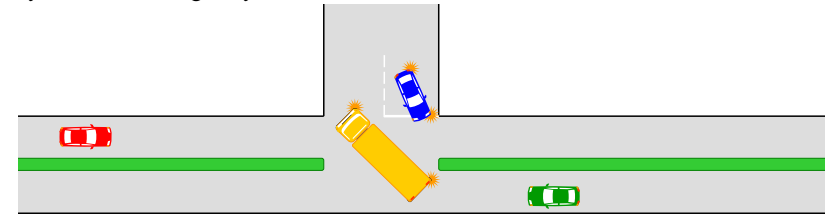
This happens when traffic crushes itself together instead of using space that is easily available. The blue car in this scene is just cruising, with no intention of overtaking even though there may be opportunities.



Dropping back into the space behind would dramatically lower the risk for all three of the bunched group. Similarly, the silver car could try moving forward to test whether the others really are fixated on bumpers.

- **“Shielded” space**

Vehicles are often protected by other traffic. Here, the blue car can emerge, shielded by the slow turning lorry.



Similar effects occur in many junction situations, and if anticipated correctly can be used to safe advantage. But always be aware of the speed of the traffic that could come through after the protection moves away.

- **“Escape route” space**

In an emergency, you may need to steer abruptly to avoid a collision (see also Escape Routes later). Potential escape routes will lie to each side of your current direction. Note that normally prohibited space can be used in emergencies - such as hatched areas.

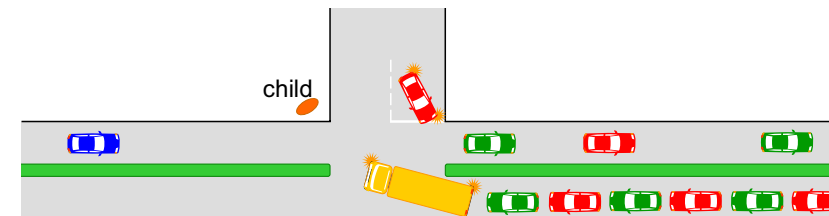
**Threatened space**

Any space you want to enter is threatened if:

**someone else could get there too.**

They may be moving or stationary, but you must judge and prepare for the likelihood that they could be there at the same time as you.

In this scene, if you were the blue car, are you entering “free” space, because it is empty and everyone else should wait for you to go through?



Definitely not. It has several threats that you should have already prepared for.

At a minimum you should have checked behind, be covering the brake, ensuring everyone has seen you, and checking for any movement in the pedestrian's legs or the vehicle's wheels. And possibly started to brake too, depending on your speed.

Notice the part played by good observation, and how the threat to space naturally prompts more attention to speed and surprise (anticipation).