

How to jump-start a car

Easy · 15 min to do · Free if you have cables

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ Jumper cables (AAA suggests heavy-duty, 6-gauge, 16-foot) or a charged portable jump starter
- ☐ A second car with a good 12-volt battery
- ☐ Safety glasses and gloves
- ☐ Your owner's manual
- ☐ A wire brush, if the terminals are crusty

DO IT LIKE THIS

- 1 Read your owner's manual first.** Consumer Reports' chief mechanic says to follow it to the letter, because modern cars' electronics can be damaged by the wrong steps. Some cars have remote jump terminals under the hood.
- 2 Gear up and check.** Put on safety glasses and gloves, and take off rings and watches. Look at the dead battery: if it's cracked, bulging or smells like rotten eggs, don't jump it. That battery needs replacing.
- 3 Confirm both cars use 12-volt batteries.** The voltage is printed on the battery label.
- 4 Park close, not touching.** Put both cars in park (or neutral for a manual), set the parking brakes, and turn both ignitions off. On a busy road with no room to work clear of traffic, or in darkness or fog, don't try it.
- 5 Clamp red to the dead battery's + terminal, then the other red to the good battery's +.** Terminals are usually marked + and -. You may need to wipe off grime to see them.
- 6 Clamp black to the good battery's - terminal.** Put the last black clamp on clean, unpainted metal on the dead car, like a thick bolt on the engine block, away from the battery. Never clamp it to the dead battery's negative terminal, because that could create a spark. Don't let the clamp ends touch each other.
- 7 Make sure no cables hang near belts or fans.** Start the good car and let it run 3 to 5 minutes, then start yours.
- 8 Once it starts, leave both running, still connected, for another 3 to 5 minutes.** Then remove the clamps in exact reverse order: black from the metal, black from the good car, red from the good car, red from your car.
- 9 Drive 20 to 30 minutes without stopping, with the AC and rear defroster off, so the alternator can recharge the battery.**

Watch out Don't put the last black clamp on the dead battery itself. The ground point keeps the final spark away from the battery and any fumes. If either car is a hybrid or EV, check its manual first. AAA warns that using one to jump another car can damage its electronics.

DAD NOTE Red, red, black, metal. Say it out loud while you clamp.

Full lesson: aptkeys.com/your-place/car-ownership/how-to-jump-start-a-car/

Checked October 3, 2026. Sources: AAA; Consumer Reports; AAA Oregon/Idaho; AAA Club Alliance.