RIVALSHOT ACADEMY · COURSE BOOK

Away From Home: Travel, Transit and Parking Safety

A companion book to the RivalShot Academy course

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Foreword: How to use this book

This book goes with the six-lesson RivalShot Academy course Away From Home: Travel, Transit and Parking Safety. The lessons are short on purpose. This book gives each idea more room: more examples, more of the reasoning behind each habit, and more space to think about how it fits your own life.

The whole course rests on one observation. Most of any journey is quiet time — sitting on a train, waiting at a gate, sleeping in a room. The moments that ask the most of you are the transitions: arriving somewhere new, leaving somewhere familiar, getting into a ride, walking back to a parked car, checking in, and recovering when a phone or a plan fails. In those moments your hands are full, your attention is split and the place is unfamiliar. A little planning beforehand moves the hard decisions out of those moments and into calmer ones.

Each chapter follows the same pattern:

- **The ideas**, developed further than in the lesson.
- **In practice**: two short fictional cases. Every person and place in them is invented.
- **Checklist**: a handful of things you can do on your next trip.
- **Key terms**: words used in the chapter, also collected in the Glossary.
- **Talk it through**: three questions for a family conversation, a class or a study group.
- **Journal prompt**: one question to answer in your learner journal.

You can read the book straight through or dip into the chapter you need before a particular trip. You can stop at any point. If a topic brings up a difficult memory, it is fine to put the book down and come back later, or not at all.

A few promises about what this book is and is not. It is not a list of dangers, and it does not ask you to be suspicious of strangers. It never asks you to confront anyone: leaving, asking staff and calling for help are always valid choices. It does not give legal advice; rules about parking, transport, lodging and many other things differ from city to city and country to country, so the book points you to official sources instead. It does not teach self-defense. It is an educational reading course with no saved completion, certification or qualification.

Above all, nothing in this book means that a person who is harmed while traveling did something wrong. Responsibility for harm belongs to the person who causes it. The habits here are about making your own trips calmer and easier to recover from, not about blame.

Chapter 1. Arriving and leaving: the moments worth planning

The ideas

Think about the last trip you took, even a short one. Most of it was probably uneventful: a seat, a view, a queue, a room. The parts you remember as stressful were likely the edges — the scramble at a station exit, the search for a parked car, the moment the ride app said "arriving now" and you could not tell which car it meant. Those edges are transitions, and they share a few features.

First, your **attention is split**. You are reading signs, checking a phone, holding a bag, watching traffic and thinking about the next step all at once. Second, **the place is changing state**. You move from indoors to outdoors, from lit to dark, from a staffed space to an unstaffed one, from good signal to none. Third, **you are carrying things** — luggage, shopping, a child, a coat — which uses up hands and patience. Fourth, there is often **mild social pressure**: a line behind you, a driver waiting, a desk clerk ready for the next guest. And fifth, transitions often fall at the **end of something tiring**: a long flight, a twelve-hour shift, a concert, a day of meetings.

None of those features makes a transition dangerous. What they do is make decisions harder. When you have to decide five things at once, outdoors, tired and with one hand free, you are more likely to skip a step, rush a choice or end up somewhere you did not intend. The course's central idea is modest: **plan the transitions ahead, so that fewer decisions land on you in the moment.**

A map of everyday transitions

It helps to name the transitions in your own life, because they are more common than they first appear:

- stepping off a bus, train or ferry, especially at an unfamiliar stop;
- walking out of an airport or station toward a pickup point;
- leaving a building and walking to a parked car, or arriving in a garage and walking to a building;
- standing at a curb waiting for a rideshare, taxi or family pickup;
- checking in at a hotel, collecting keys for a rental, or arriving at a hostel;
- the end-of-shift walk from a workplace to your transport;
- school, practice and activity pickups for children and teens;
- the moment a plan changes: a canceled train, a missed connection, a phone that dies.

Once you see these as a category, you can plan for them as a category. The same few habits work in all of them.

The doorway pause

The first habit is the **doorway pause**. Before you step through an exit into a new space, stop just inside — out of the flow of people — for about ten seconds. In those ten seconds:

1. **Finish what you were doing on your phone and put it away**, or at least decide that the next thing you look at is the route, not a message.
2. **Name your next destination and the first turn** that gets you there. “Out the doors, left toward the taxi stand.”

3. **Free at least one hand.** Shift a bag to your shoulder, hand a child's backpack to the child, put the coffee down.
4. **Notice the staffed help points**: a ticket office, an information desk, a security booth, an attendant, a café counter, a hotel concierge.

Then step out. The pause moves your decision-making to a calm, lit, indoor place. It costs ten seconds, and nobody notices you doing it.

A habit can be easier to remember when it rides on top of an existing cue. You might attach the doorway pause to a moment they already have: reaching for a ticket, feeling for keys, or putting on a coat. When your hand goes to your pocket for the keys, your mind goes to the pause.

Plan the bookends

The second habit is planning the **bookends** of a trip — the arrival and the departure — before you need them. A simple rule makes this manageable: **decide your arrival plan before you leave, and decide your departure plan before you arrive.**

An arrival plan can be two lines long:

> Arrive at the north bus station around 8:15 p.m. Use the main exit, wait inside the waiting room, book a ride when the bus pulls in. If late after 9, text Aunt M. and take the station taxi stand.

A departure plan is just as short:

> Leave the conference center at 6. Walk out the east doors toward the garage, elevator to level 2. If the walk feels wrong, ask the security desk in the lobby.

The CDC's guidance for travelers recommends taking only recommended, safe modes of local transportation and sharing your itinerary with friends and family. Both are decisions about transitions, and both are much easier to make at a kitchen table the night before than on a dark platform when your phone is at nine percent.

Leave a buffer

Transitions that are rushed are harder. A connection with twelve minutes to spare, a parking space found five minutes before an appointment, a ride booked at the last second all squeeze the decisions into less time. Where you can, add a **buffer** of ten or fifteen minutes around the transitions that matter. If you arrive early, the café is a better place to wait than the curb.

Plans that fit real people

The best plan is the one that fits the person following it. A wheelchair user may need to know which exit has a working elevator and where accessible pickup happens, and may want to ask the information desk on arrival rather than rely on an out-of-date map. A parent with a toddler may need to know where the stroller goes during ticket checks. An older traveler may simply choose the train that arrives in daylight. A person who finds crowds overwhelming may choose a quieter time or a less busy exit. A shift worker may plan the walk to the car for the end of the shift rather than the start.

Plan, too, for the tired version of yourself. The end of a long day is when people skip steps, so keep plans short enough to follow when you are worn out. Two lines are better than a page.

What this does not mean

Planning transitions does not mean treating every station or garage as risky, or scanning strangers for signs of trouble. Most arrivals and departures are completely uneventful. Reading people and places is a separate skill and a related topic of its own. This course stays with logistics: where you will wait, how you will get to the next place, who knows the plan and what you will do if something changes.

And again: if something goes wrong despite your plans, that is not a failure on your part. Plans reduce the number of hard decisions. They are not guarantees, and they are not a test.

In practice

The elevator that was out. A traveler who uses a wheelchair is flying into a mid-sized airport for a family wedding. Her arrival plan, written the night before, says: "Ask the information desk in baggage claim for the accessible rideshare pickup point; text my cousin when I'm in the car." When she lands, she finds that the elevator to the rideshare level is out of service. Because her plan already included the information desk, she goes straight there. Staff tell her that accessible pickups are temporarily using the arrivals curb at door three, and they call ahead to the curb attendant. She takes a doorway pause inside door three, books the ride, and texts her cousin. Her evening runs twenty minutes late, but she never had to improvise on the curb.

The first bus to practice. Two siblings, aged thirteen and fifteen, are taking a city bus to an evening sports practice for the first time. Their parent sits down with them the night before and asks them to write the bookends together. Arrival: "Get off at the stop by the library, walk past the pharmacy, enter the gym by the front doors." Departure: "Practice ends at 7:30. Wait inside the gym lobby until the app shows the bus is two stops away. If the bus is more than twenty minutes late, ask the coach to call home." The teens add their own line: "Phones charged before leaving." The first week, the return bus is canceled. The siblings follow the plan, the coach calls, and the parent picks them up from the lobby. Nobody panics, because the plan had already said what to do.

Checklist

- List the two or three transitions in your regular week that ask the most of you.
- Choose one exit where you will practice the doorway pause this week.
- Write a two-line arrival plan before your next trip, and a two-line departure plan before you arrive.
- Add a ten- to fifteen-minute buffer around the transitions that matter most.
- Note the staffed help points you expect to find at each end of the trip.
- Make the plan short enough for the tired version of you to follow.
- Adjust the plan for the people traveling with you, including access needs, children and energy levels.

Key terms

- **Transition**: a moment of arriving, leaving or changing mode, when attention is split and the setting is changing.
- **Doorway pause**: a ten-second stop just inside an exit to put the phone away, name the next step, free a hand and notice help points.
- **Bookends**: the arrival and departure plans for a trip.
- **Staffed help point**: a place where someone whose job includes helping the public can be found, such as an information desk or attendant booth.
- **Buffer**: spare time added around a transition so it does not have to be rushed.

Talk it through

1. Which transitions in your family's or group's routine are most rushed, and what makes them so?
2. What is one decision you usually make on the curb or platform that you could make the night before instead?
3. How would you adapt the doorway pause for a young child, an older relative or someone who uses a mobility aid?

Journal prompt

Choose one trip you will take in the next month. Write its arrival and departure plans in two lines each, and name where you will take your doorway pause.

Chapter 2. Parking and garages: park for the walk back

The ideas

Every time you park, you make a decision for two moments: arriving now and returning later. It is easy to choose for the first moment. We take the space closest to the entrance, the one that is free, the one that saves a minute when we are running late. But the return is often the harder trip. It may be dark. The stores may be closed, the shift may be over, and the garage may be emptier. You may be carrying bags, a sleeping child or a laptop, with less battery on your phone and less patience in your head. The habit this chapter teaches is to **park for the walk back.**

Choosing the space

Police guidance on garage safety is consistent and practical. The Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department's parking-garage tips, for example, advise paying attention to your surroundings, parking in well-lit areas, and avoiding spaces beside pillars, where a person could be out of sight. Those are good starting points. Add a few questions of your own, asked as you pull in:

- **Where will the light be when I come back?** A space in daylight at noon may be in shadow at seven, or under a light that is on a timer.
- **Which elevator, stairway or exit will I use on the way back, and is this space on that route?** A space close to your return path is often better than one close to where you happen to enter.

- **Is there a staffed or monitored point nearby?** An attendant booth, a help phone, a security desk, a well-used entrance.
- **Can I see my car from the path?** Clear sight lines make the walk feel shorter and calmer.

In an open lot, the same logic applies: a space near the entrance or under a lamp often beats the space nearest the store door. If the only free space is one you do not like, you can drive to another level or another lot. That is not overreacting; it is simply choosing.

Park, photo, path

The core technique of this chapter is a three-step routine called **park, photo, path**:

1. **Park** — choose the space using the questions above.
2. **Photo** — take a quick picture of the level and row sign, or of a landmark beside the car. Large garages are confusing on the way back, and searching for a car is exactly the kind of distracted, hands-full wandering that makes a return harder. Keep the photo on your phone; there is no need to post or share it.
3. **Path** — before you walk away, glance back once along the route from the car to the exit. A route you have looked at once feels familiar the second time.

Set up before you arrive

Part of parking well happens before you even pull in. Put bags and valuables out of sight before you arrive, rather than moving them into the trunk once you are parked. The same police tips advise not leaving valuables in sight in your vehicle and keeping a bag on

the floor rather than on the passenger seat. Decide what you will carry with you and what will stay, so you are not sorting things out in the garage.

The walk back

The return has its own short routine:

- **Finish your call or message before you leave the building.** Your attention belongs to the route for the next few minutes.
- **Have your keys out as you approach the car**, as the Indianapolis tips also recommend, so you are not digging through a bag at the door.
- **Get in, lock the doors, and only then settle**: plug in the phone, set the map, sort the bags.

When something feels wrong

Sometimes, as you approach your car, something does not feel right. Perhaps the area looks different from when you left it. Perhaps someone is close to your car and you feel uneasy, even though nothing has been said or done. Perhaps you simply do not want to continue. The IMPD guidance is plain: listen to your instincts — walk away and go get someone else.

Turning around is a complete plan. You can go back into the building, ask an attendant or security desk, wait with other people for a few minutes, or ask whether the venue offers an escort; many hospitals, campuses and large venues do. You do not need to explain the choice or prove that you were right. If a situation does become threatening, move away and call for emergency help.

Notice what "something feels wrong" is based on. It should be **behavior and context** — where someone is, what they are doing, how the space has changed — never how a person looks, their age, their clothing, their background or a disability. Someone sitting in a parked car is usually waiting for a friend or finishing a call. Someone leaning on a wall is usually just tired. Your unease is information about your own comfort, and acting on it by walking away harms nobody.

Ready the car as well as the route

Some of the hardest parking moments have nothing to do with other people: a dead battery, a flat tire, an empty tank in an emptying garage. Ready.gov suggests keeping an emergency supply kit in the car in case you are stranded, including jumper cables, flares or a reflective triangle, a car phone charger, a blanket and a road map. It also advises keeping your gas tank full in case of evacuation or power outages. If you drive an electric vehicle, the same thinking applies to keeping a sensible charge. Add a written roadside-assistance number to the glove box, and a dead battery becomes an inconvenience rather than an ordeal.

Rules differ by place

Parking rules — time limits, overnight restrictions, permits, how enforcement works — differ from city to city and even from one lot to the next. Read the posted signs and check the official local source. This chapter gives no legal advice.

What this does not mean

Garages and parking lots are not dangerous places to avoid, and the people in them are not suspects. The people around you in a garage may well be doing exactly what you are doing: finding

their car and going home. Parking for the walk back is about making your own return easier. And if something does happen, it is not because you parked in the wrong space.

In practice

The night-shift change. A respiratory therapist works twelve-hour night shifts at a hospital. For months she has parked wherever she found a space at 6:45 p.m., which usually meant the far end of the top level. Leaving at 7:30 a.m. after a long night, she found the walk back the hardest part of her day. She tries park, photo, path for a week. She arrives ten minutes earlier and takes a space on level two by the elevator, beside the hospital's security office. She photographs the level sign because, after a night shift, she genuinely cannot remember. On the one morning when the level is closed for cleaning and she feels uneasy walking around the barriers, she goes back inside and asks security for an escort. The officer walks her out without a single question.

The long-term lot. A retired couple drive to an airport for a week-long trip. In the long-term lot, before getting on the shuttle, one of them photographs the row sign and the shuttle stop number, and the other glances back along the path to the shelter. When they land a week later, tired and late at night, they show the photo to the shuttle driver, who drops them at the right row. The car does not start; the battery is flat after a week of cold weather. They take the jumper cables and car phone charger from their car kit, call their roadside-assistance service from the number in the glove box, and wait in the lit shuttle shelter. Forty minutes later they are on their way.

Checklist

- Choose your space for the return trip: light at return time, route to the exit, staffed points nearby.
- Avoid spaces beside pillars or out of sight lines when you have a choice.
- Photograph the level and row sign or a landmark; keep the photo private.
- Glance back once along the path from car to exit.
- Put valuables out of sight before you arrive, and keep a bag on the floor rather than the seat.
- On the return, finish calls inside, keys out on approach, get in and lock, then settle.
- If something feels wrong, walk away and get someone; you do not need to justify it.
- Keep a car kit and a written roadside-assistance number in the car.

Key terms

- **Park for the walk back**: choosing a parking space for the conditions you will face when you return.
- **Park, photo, path**: a three-step routine for choosing a space, recording where it is and looking at the route back.
- **Sight line**: a clear view along a path or toward a place.
- **Escort**: a walk to your car offered by security or staff at some venues, campuses and hospitals.
- **Car kit**: emergency supplies kept in a vehicle in case you are stranded.

Talk it through

1. Think of a garage or lot you use often. How is it different at the time you usually return?
2. What makes it hard for people to turn around and go back inside when something feels wrong, and how could a workplace or venue make it easier?
3. How can you tell the difference between unease based on behavior and context, and a first impression based on someone's appearance?

Journal prompt

Describe one place where you park often. Which space would you choose for the walk back, what would you photograph, and where is the nearest staffed place you could go instead of walking to your car?

Chapter 3. Rideshare and pickups: confirm before you open the door

The ideas

A ride booked through an app comes with an unusual amount of information. Before the car arrives you usually know the driver's first name and photo, the make, model and color of the vehicle and its license plate. You can watch the car approach on a map. That information is only useful if you use it at the moment it matters: just before you open the door.

Boston Police Department's rideshare guidance sums it up in three steps: **check your app, check the car and check the driver.** It also says riders should never get into a vehicle for hire they did not request, and should not get in if any of the information in their confirmation does not match. This chapter turns that into a routine you can follow even when it is loud, raining and late.

Wait somewhere better than the curb

Where you wait shapes how well you check. A curb is a hard place to make decisions: traffic, noise, rain, people jostling, and a phone held out in front of you. Where you can, **wait inside or in a staffed, lit spot** — a lobby, a café, a station waiting room, a hotel entrance — until the app shows the car is close. Then step out when you can see it arriving. You will be calmer, your phone will be in your pocket instead of your hand, and you will have a clear view of the cars that pull in.

The check, in order

When a car arrives, run the check in the same order every time:

1. **Plate.** Check it first, because it is the detail least likely to match by coincidence. Many cars share a color and a shape; very few share a plate.
2. **Make, model and color.** A quick confirmation that the plate is on the right car.
3. **Driver's photo.** Does the driver look like the photo in the app?
4. **A question the right driver can answer.** Ask "Who are you here to pick up?" or "What's your name?" Boston police advise asking your driver their name to be sure it matches the confirmation. **Let the driver say your name, rather than offering it.** If you call out "Is this for Sam?", a mistaken driver can simply say yes. If the driver says your name, you have learned something.

If any detail does not match, **do not get in.** Step back to where you were waiting, then cancel and rebook or contact the app's support. There is no need to explain or argue. A car that fails the check is simply not your car.

Share the trip

Before you get in, use the app's trip-sharing feature to send your route and live progress to someone you trust. Boston police note that friends can then watch your ride on a map in real time. It takes a few seconds and connects naturally to the itinerary habit in Chapter 5.

During the ride

Some riders who travel alone choose to sit in the back seat on the curb side. Keep your bags with you on short trips, so you are not waiting at the trunk when you arrive. Following the route on your own map is reasonable and common. If you become uncomfortable during a ride for any reason, you can ask to be dropped at a busy, staffed place — a hotel entrance, a station, a well-lit store — and book another ride from there. In an emergency, call the local emergency number. In the United States, that is 911; Boston police put it plainly: dial 9-1-1 if you have an emergency or there is a crime in progress.

Taxis, airports and abroad

Taxis need the same kind of check, using whatever identifying details your city requires. Use the official taxi stand at airports and stations, rather than accepting a ride from someone who approaches you inside the terminal. **Rules for taxis and ride services differ by city.** In Boston, for example, the police department regulates the city's licensed taxis, and riders can note the medallion number, the driver's name and hackney number. Elsewhere, a different agency may be responsible, and the identifying details may be completely different. Check the official local source rather than assuming.

Abroad, the CDC's traveler guidance advises taking only recommended, safe modes of local transportation. Before you arrive, ask your lodging or an official tourist office which services they recommend and where the official stands are. Then your airport arrival plan can say: "Follow signs to the official taxi stand; decline other offers."

Family, friends and group pickups

When a family member or friend is collecting you, agree on a **precise meeting point** — "the information desk by door four," not "outside" — and a backup if phones fail, such as "if you can't reach me, I'll wait at the information desk." For group rides, decide who booked and who checks, and wait together. For a teen's first rides, make a family agreement about which services are used, how trips are shared and what to do if a detail does not match.

Booking for someone else

Many people book rides for others: an older parent heading to an appointment, a friend whose phone is dead, a teenager leaving a practice. In that case the person getting into the car has none of the details on their own screen. Before the car arrives, send or tell them the plate, the make and color and the driver's first name, and agree what they will do if something does not match: "Don't get in; go back inside and call me." Keep the trip-sharing view open on your own phone until they arrive. If the rider has a hearing, vision or mobility need, it often helps to message the driver through the app with a short, practical note, such as "Rider will be waiting at the main entrance with a cane." The check still happens; it just happens with two people sharing the job.

What this does not mean

Checking is not an accusation. A mix-up wastes a driver's time too, and declining a car that does not match is not rude. You are matching facts to a booking. You are never judging a driver by appearance, accent, age or background, and nothing in this routine asks you to. It also does not mean arguing at the curb. If some-

thing is wrong, the quickest and calmest move is to step back inside and rebook. And no check is a guarantee; it is one more sensible layer, not a promise about every ride.

In practice

After the reception. Two friends leave a wedding reception at midnight. One phone is dead, so the other books the ride, and they agree that the booker will check while both wait in the venue lobby. When the app shows two minutes, they step outside. A car pulls in: the plate matches, the make and color match, but the driver's photo does not look like the person behind the wheel. Rather than debate it, they step back inside, cancel and contact the app's support, then rebook. The next car matches on every detail, and the driver says the booker's name first. On the way home, the booker shares the trip with the dead-phone friend's partner, who had been expecting a text.

The arrivals hall. A student arriving for a semester abroad lands late in a city she has never visited. Her hostel's confirmation email named the official taxi stand and said which ride services were common locally. In the arrivals hall, someone offers her a taxi. She says, "No thanks," and keeps walking, following the signs she had already looked up. At the official stand, a dispatcher assigns her a car and writes the taxi number on a slip. She photographs the slip and sends it, with her expected arrival time, to her host family.

Checklist

- Wait inside or in a staffed, lit spot until the app shows the car is close.
- Check the plate first, then the make, model and color, then the driver's photo.

- Ask “Who are you here to pick up?” and let the driver say your name.
- If anything does not match, do not get in; step back, cancel and rebook.
- Share the trip with someone you trust before you get in.
- Use official taxi stands at airports and stations, and check local rules for taxis and ride services.
- Agree on precise meeting points and phone backups for family and friend pickups.

Key terms

- **Ride check**: confirming plate, vehicle, driver photo and name before getting into a booked ride.
- **Trip sharing**: an app feature that lets a trusted person follow your route and progress.
- **Official taxi stand**: a designated, usually supervised place to get a licensed taxi at airports and stations.
- **Mismatch**: any difference between the car or driver in front of you and the details in your booking.

Talk it through

1. Why might people skip the ride check, and what small change would make it more likely they do it every time?
2. How would you explain to a younger family member why they should let the driver say their name, without making drivers sound frightening?
3. What would a good precise meeting point be at a station or airport you use?

Journal prompt

Write the exact words you will use to confirm your next ride, in the order you will check each detail, and describe where you will wait while you do it.

Chapter 4. Hotels, lobbies and short stays: settle in with a plan

The ideas

Lodging is where you sleep, so it is the place you most want to feel settled. Arriving there is a transition with its own features: luggage, a front desk, a lobby with people coming and going, an unfamiliar corridor and a room you have never seen. It often happens late, after a delayed flight or a long drive. A few small habits at check-in and in your first five minutes in the room make the rest of the stay calmer, whether you are in a large hotel, a roadside motel, a hostel or a rented apartment.

At the desk and in the lobby

A hotel lobby is a public space, which is part of what makes it pleasant: people meet, wait and wander through. It also means it is easy to leave a bag behind or have one picked up by mistake. Keep your luggage **in contact** while you check in — a hand on the handle, a foot against the case, a bag strap over a chair leg.

If a clerk says your room number out loud, it is not a crisis. You can ask for the number to be written down next time, or ask for a different room if that would make you more comfortable. Many front desks already write the number on the key sleeve rather than saying it. Keep conversations about when your room will be empty, or how long you will be out, for private moments rather than the lobby.

Before you leave the desk, ask two simple questions: **how do I reach the desk from the room**, and **is there anything I should know about the building** — for example, an elevator under maintenance or an entrance that locks at night. Save the desk number in your phone.

The five-minute settle-in

Once you reach the room, before you unpack, take five minutes for the **settle-in**. The U.S. Fire Administration advises hotel guests to:

- find the two closest exits from your room;
- count the number of doors between your room and each exit;
- find the fire alarms on your floor;
- read the evacuation plan carefully.

Counting doors may seem odd, but it matters: if you ever need to find an exit in the dark or in smoke, you may be feeling your way along a wall rather than reading signs. The USFA also suggests choosing lodging that has hard-wired smoke alarms and an automatic fire sprinkler system in each guest room, which is worth asking about when you book.

CDC traveler guidance adds two lodging points: lock all windows and doors, and where possible avoid rooms on the ground floor or immediately next to the stairs. These are preferences to ask for, not rules you must win.

Then add your own steps:

- a phone charger by the bed;
- one place for your key, glasses and shoes, so you can find them quickly;
- the front desk number saved;

- a glance at how the door lock and any secondary latch work.

The whole routine takes about five minutes, and repeating it on each trip can make it easier to remember.

Known channels for unexpected things

Occasionally, something unexpected happens at lodging: a knock you were not expecting, a phone call to the room, a message about your booking. The habit here is to **verify through a channel you already trust, not the one that came to you.**

If someone knocks saying they are from the hotel and you did not ask for anything, you can call the front desk on the number you saved before you open the door. A genuine staff member will understand. If a caller to the room asks you to read out your card details because a payment "failed," say you will handle it in person, hang up and call or visit the desk directly. A call that arrives on the room phone is not proof that it came from the desk. If a message asks you to "confirm your booking" through an unfamiliar link, use the app or website you booked through instead. This is the same principle as the ride check in Chapter 3.

Short-term rentals and hostels

Rentals and hostels need their own version of the settle-in, because there may be no staffed desk at all. For vacation and short-term rentals, the U.S. Fire Administration suggests making sure that:

- everyone knows two ways out of every room and out of the rental;
- there are working smoke alarms in every sleeping room, outside each sleeping area and on every level;
- there are working carbon monoxide alarms on every level;

- you can open all doors and windows that lead outside;
- everyone knows where any fire extinguishers are;
- you choose an outside meeting place a safe distance from the rental.

Write the rental's address and the host's contact details somewhere other than your phone, so you can give them in an emergency call even if your phone is not working. In hostels, use the lockers provided and keep valuables with you in shared spaces.

Access needs and evacuation

If you would need help in an evacuation — because of a mobility, hearing, vision or other need — tell the front desk at check-in, and ask what arrangements they have. You can also ask for a room closer to an exit or one with visual or tactile alerts if you need them. These are ordinary requests, and asking early gives staff time to help.

Checking out is a transition too

Departure from lodging closes the loop with Chapter 1. Plan how you will get to your next place before you check out, and take a doorway pause in the lobby before you step outside with your bags.

What this does not mean

Hotel staff and other guests are not threats, and a lobby is not a place to stay on guard. You are also not inspecting the building or judging whether it meets fire or safety codes; that is the job of the property and the local authorities, and this chapter makes no legal or code determination. If an alarm sounds, follow staff and

emergency instructions. People who work at front desks have their own side of this story, which is a related topic beyond this book.

In practice

Asking early. A traveler who is hard of hearing is attending a three-day training course. At check-in, she tells the clerk that she may not hear a standard fire alarm at night and asks whether they have a room with a visual alert. The clerk finds one on the second floor near a stairway and notes her room on the hotel's list of guests who may need assistance. During the settle-in she counts three doors to the stairway and reads the evacuation plan. On the second night there is a fire drill announcement for the next morning; the desk slides a note under her door as well. Nothing dramatic happens, and that is the point: the arrangements were in place before they were needed.

The sticking door. Four college friends rent an apartment for a long weekend. One of them suggests the two-ways-out walk-through as soon as they arrive. They find that the back door sticks and needs a hard push, and that the smoke alarm in one bedroom chirps when tested. They message the host, who sends someone to replace the battery that afternoon and explains the trick for the back door. The friends agree that their outside meeting place will be the bench across the street. They write the address and host number on the back of a receipt, which one friend keeps in her wallet all weekend.

Checklist

- Keep luggage in contact while you check in.

- Ask for your room number to be written down if you prefer; keep plans about an empty room private.
- Save the front desk number and ask about anything unusual in the building.
- Do the five-minute settle-in: two closest exits, doors counted, alarms found, evacuation plan read, doors and windows locked.
- Put a charger by the bed and choose one place for your key, glasses and shoes.
- Verify unexpected knocks, calls and messages through a channel you already trust.
- In rentals, check two ways out, alarms, doors and windows, extinguishers and an outside meeting place.
- Tell the desk early if you would need help in an evacuation.

Key terms

- **Five-minute settle-in**: a short routine on arrival in a room to learn exits, alarms and the evacuation plan and to set up the room.
- **Evacuation plan**: the posted map showing exits and routes out of a building.
- **Known channel**: a contact method you already trust, such as a saved desk number, used to check unexpected requests.
- **Two ways out**: knowing two separate routes out of every room and building.
- **Outside meeting place**: an agreed spot a safe distance from lodging where everyone gathers after leaving in an emergency.

Talk it through

1. Which part of the settle-in would be hardest to remember after a long day, and how could you make it easier?
2. Why does verifying through a known channel work better than asking the caller to prove who they are?
3. What would you want a host or front desk to tell you on arrival that they often do not?

Journal prompt

Describe the first five minutes you will spend in your next room or rental, step by step, and name the step you are most likely to skip.

Chapter 5. Itineraries and check-ins: let someone know the plan

The ideas

A plan that lives only in your head cannot help anyone else help you. If a train is canceled, a phone dies or you simply run late, the people who care about you have nothing to go on: no idea where you were going, how you were getting there or when to start wondering. Sharing a plan is a small act that makes every other habit in this course work better.

The CDC's traveler guidance recommends sharing your itinerary with friends and family, including contact details for travel agencies, tours and lodging. Ready.gov's planning guidance makes a related point for any emergency: know how you will contact one another and reconnect if you are separated, and agree a meeting place that is familiar and easy to find.

The three-line itinerary

A shared plan does not need to be long. In fact, shorter is better, because a short message gets read. The **three-line itinerary** has exactly what a trusted person needs:

1. **Where and when.** The main legs of the trip, the name of each place you are staying and your expected arrival times.
2. **How I will check in.** At which moments and by which channel: "a text when I reach the hotel each night."
3. **If you do not hear from me.** What to try, in order, and when: "Wait until 10, send one message, then ask the hotel desk to pass one along, then call my sister, who has agreed to help." A

> lodging desk may pass along a message but may not confirm whether you are there, so also agree what to do if contact remains unresolved. These routine steps must never delay an emergency call when someone has reason to believe immediate help is needed.

That third line is easy to leave out, and it is a very useful one. Without it, a missed check-in leaves your contact guessing, and guesses tend to swing between doing nothing and panicking. With it, they have a calm, sensible sequence to follow.

Send the three lines to **one or two people you trust** — not to a group chat, and not to a public post. A message to a person who knows you is far more useful than a broadcast to people who do not.

Choosing a check-in person

A good check-in person is someone who will actually be reachable at the times in your plan, who knows you well enough to recognize when something is unusual, and who is comfortable following the steps you agreed. If you are crossing time zones, write the check-in times in their time zone, or name both, so a "9 p.m." text does not become a 3 a.m. worry. Give them the lodging names and numbers, and tell them who you are traveling with, if anyone, so they know who else could confirm you are fine. Ask them rather than assume: "I'm going away next weekend — would you be my check-in person? It's two texts and a phone number, and it's fine to say no." Thank them when the trip is over. It is a small favor, and one you can offer back.

Check-ins that fit real life

Try tying check-ins to **transitions** rather than to the clock: "arrived," "checked in," "leaving for the airport." Hourly check-ins become a chore and get skipped; transition check-ins arrive when they mean something.

Build in **slack**. Trains are late, phones die, meetings run over. A missed check-in is a signal to follow the plan, not proof of an emergency, and the third line of your itinerary should leave room for ordinary delays.

Agree **how to update** the plan when it changes — one message is enough — and **when the arrangement ends**: "I'll text when I'm home on Sunday, and then we're done."

An agreement between equals

Sharing a plan should be a mutual agreement. Anyone can decline to be someone's check-in person, and anyone can choose not to share a plan with a particular person. For teenagers on their first solo trips, the plan should be something the family makes together, with the teen's input on what is reasonable, rather than tracking imposed from one side. For older adults traveling alone, the same respect applies: the point is support, not supervision.

Live location sharing can be useful for a single leg, such as a late taxi ride or a long drive, and can be switched off afterward. Keeping it on for days at a time tends to replace a plan rather than support one: your contact can see a dot, but still does not know what to do if the dot stops moving.

Keep the detailed plan private

Posting where you are in real time, or announcing that your home will be empty for two weeks, tells many people more than they need to know. Share photos after you are back, or with a small group you choose. What posts and profiles can reveal is a wider topic of its own; the point here is simply that an itinerary is for the people in your plan.

Check the rules where you are going

Part of planning is checking the rules at your destination, because they are not the same everywhere. Parking rules, rules for taxis and ride services, rules about what you may carry or bring in, rules about photography, rules about medicines — all of these can differ between cities, states and countries. The CDC notes that travelers who break local laws, even unknowingly, can face arrest, imprisonment or deportation.

This book does not give legal advice. Before you go, check the official government source for your destination, ask your lodging, carrier or tour operator, and get qualified advice if your situation needs it. For U.S. citizens traveling abroad, the CDC describes the State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) as a free service that sends safety alerts from the local U.S. embassy or consulate and can help officials contact you in an emergency. Other countries offer their own services for their citizens.

Ready.gov also suggests keeping copies of important documents, stored electronically or in a waterproof container. For travel, that might mean a copy of your passport identification page or insurance details kept separately from the originals.

What this does not mean

Sharing a plan does not mean reporting every move or giving up your privacy. You choose who receives it, what it includes and for how long. A shared plan is also not a guarantee of safety. What it does is shorten the time before someone notices that something has gone wrong, and give them a sensible place to start.

In practice

The first solo train trip. A sixteen-year-old is taking a train alone to a two-week summer music program. The family sits down together to write the three lines. The teen suggests checking in at three transitions — boarding, arriving, and settled in the dorm — rather than every hour, and the parents agree. Line three says: "If no text by 8 p.m., message once; at 8:30, call the program office number; after that, call Grandpa, who lives near the campus." They agree the live location share will be on for the train ride only. The train is ninety minutes late, the teen texts "delayed, new arrival 7:40," and everyone adjusts. The arrangement ends with a "settled in!" message and a photo of the dorm window.

The plan that changed. A sales manager on a four-city work trip sends her partner a three-line itinerary on Monday. On Wednesday a client meeting moves, and she changes her flight and hotel. She sends one message: "Update: now flying Thursday 6 a.m. instead of Wednesday night; staying at the airport hotel tonight; same check-in times." Her partner replies with a thumbs-up. On Friday, back home, she writes "Home. Plan closed," and they both delete the itinerary thread.

Checklist

- Write a three-line itinerary: where and when, how you will check in, what to do if you are not heard from.
- Send it to one or two trusted people, not a group or public post.
- Tie check-ins to transitions, and build in slack for delays.
- Agree how to update the plan and when the arrangement ends.
- Use live location sharing for single legs, then switch it off.
- Post trip photos after you are home.
- Check official sources for local rules at your destination, and ask lodging or carriers when unsure.
- Keep copies of important documents separate from the originals.

Key terms

- **Itinerary**: the plan of where you are going, when and where you are staying.
- **Three-line itinerary**: a short shared plan covering where and when, how you will check in, and what to do if you are not heard from.
- **Check-in**: a short agreed message at a planned moment, usually a transition.
- **Check-in person**: the trusted person who receives your itinerary and check-ins and has agreed to the plan.
- **Live location sharing**: a phone feature that shows your current location to chosen people for a set time.

Talk it through

1. Why might the third line of the itinerary — what to do if you do not hear from me — be the easiest one to leave out?
2. How can families agree check-in plans with teenagers so that the plan feels fair to everyone?
3. What official sources would you check before a trip to a place you have never been?

Journal prompt

Draft a three-line itinerary for a real or imagined trip, using place names only and no home address. Then note who would receive it and how you would ask them.

Chapter 6. Lost phone, dead battery, missed ride: a backup that works

The ideas

Your phone probably holds your tickets, your maps, your bookings, your payment cards and every phone number you know. That makes it wonderfully convenient and also a **single point of failure**. When it dies, is lost or is stolen, all of those things disappear at the same moment — and that moment is often a transition: a platform, a curb, a garage, a hotel lobby late at night.

A backup plan can make a phone failure easier to manage, even when replacing access takes longer than expected. It takes very little to build, and most of it happens before you leave home.

Prepare the phone itself

The FTC's consumer advice on protecting your phone covers the basics:

- **Lock the screen** with a passcode of at least six digits, or with a fingerprint or face unlock.
- **Turn on the find-my-device feature** in your settings. It can help you find your phone if you lose it, or lock or erase it if you think someone stole it.
- **Back up your data regularly** to the cloud or a computer, so you can still reach your information if the phone is lost.
- **Keep the operating system and apps updated**, because updates often include important security fixes.

Ready.gov's emergency kit list includes a cell phone with chargers and a backup battery, and its car kit includes a car phone charger. Check those once before a trip — charged battery pack, the right cable, a wall plug that fits your destination — rather than discovering a gap on the platform.

The analog backup card

A useful backup is also one of the simplest: a small card that lives in your wallet or bag, **not in your phone case** (if the phone goes, the case goes with it). On it, write:

- two or three phone numbers you would actually call, written out in full;
- the name and phone number of where you are staying;
- a meeting point, if you are traveling with others.

Do not write passcodes, PINs or your home address on it. Keep a little money or a payment card somewhere separate from your phone, too. And if you can, memorize one phone number. Many people no longer know a single number by heart; one is enough to reconnect you.

A card like this lets any staff member, desk phone or borrowed handset reconnect you to your plan.

If your phone is lost or stolen

If your phone goes missing, start by going somewhere calm and staffed rather than retracing your steps in the dark. From a device you trust, such as your own updated laptop, you can follow the device maker's official lost-phone instructions to locate, lock or erase it. Avoid entering sensitive account credentials on a shared computer, such as one in a hotel business center or a library; if you have no trusted device, ask your mobile provider

about its recovery options. Contact your provider about the line, using its independently verified support number, and, where relevant, the place where you think you lost it, such as a transit lost-property office. If you think the phone was stolen, ask staff or local authorities how to report it where you are.

If you are stranded

Sometimes the problem is not the phone but the plan: the last bus has gone, a ride is canceled, a car will not start. The steps are similar:

1. **Move toward a staffed, lit place**: a station office, a visitor center, a hotel lobby, a pharmacy, a café counter, a venue's guest-services desk.
2. **Use your backup card** to reach your lodging or your check-in person.
3. **Ask staff to call a taxi company they know**, or to point you to the official stand.
4. **Prefer help that comes through a role or a service you can check**, for the same reason you check a ride in the app. This is not a judgment about anyone who offers to help; it is simply that a booked, identifiable service can be checked, and an offer from someone unconnected to any service cannot.

If your car has broken down, the Ready.gov car kit — reflective triangle, blanket, charger, map, jumper cables — is there for exactly this moment. Call your roadside service and stay somewhere safe while you wait.

In any emergency, call the local emergency number. **It is not the same in every country**, so look it up as part of your trip planning and write it on your backup card.

When you are the one asked

Travel goes both ways: sometimes you will be the person a stranded traveler asks for help. If someone asks to borrow your phone, you can help without handing over an unlocked device. Offer to dial the number for them and put it on speaker, or walk with them to a staffed desk that has a phone. Describe the situation to staff — "This traveler missed the last shuttle and their phone is dead" — rather than describing the person. Helping is generous, and so is pointing someone to the people whose job it is. You can also set kind limits, such as not giving a ride, without explaining your own plans. Offering help well is a wider topic worth exploring on its own.

Rules differ by place

Rules about emergencies, lost property, reporting thefts and transport differ by place. Check the official local source rather than assuming that what works at home works everywhere. This book gives no legal advice.

Putting it together

The six habits in this book fit on one page:

1. **The doorway pause** before stepping into a new space.
2. **Park, photo, path** for the walk back to the car.
3. **The ride check**: plate, car, photo, and let the driver say your name.
4. **The five-minute settle-in** at lodging.
5. **The three-line itinerary** shared with one or two trusted people.
6. **The backup card** and a prepared phone.

None of them needs expensive gear. None of them requires you to confront anyone. Each of them makes the hard moments of a trip a little calmer.

What this does not mean

You do not need to buy special equipment, and you do not need to be reachable every minute of every trip. Asking staff for help is not a failure; it is often the fastest fix there is. A backup plan is not a guarantee that nothing will go wrong. It simply makes a bad moment easier to manage.

In practice

The canceled last train. A paralegal is heading home after a late evening at the office when the station board shows her last train canceled. Her phone is at two percent and dies as she reads it. She goes to the station office, which is still staffed, and asks to use the phone. From her backup card she calls her partner to say she will be late, then asks the staff member which taxi company the station uses. The staff member calls one and tells her the car's number. She waits in the station's lit waiting room, checks the taxi number when it arrives, and is home ninety minutes later than planned — tired, but never stranded without options.

The car that would not start. A father takes his two children to an afternoon baseball game. When they return to the stadium lot, the car will not start. He does a doorway pause in his head: the kids are tired, it is getting dark, the stadium guest-services office is still open. He walks the children back to guest services, where they can sit down, and calls his roadside-assistance service from the number in the glove box. From the car kit he takes a blanket

and the car phone charger. Staff let them wait inside until the tow truck driver calls. The children later describe it as the day they got to sit in the stadium office.

Checklist

- Set a screen lock, turn on find-my-device, back up regularly and keep your phone updated.
- Pack a charger, cable and charged backup battery; keep a charger in the car.
- Carry a backup card with two or three numbers, your lodging's details and a meeting point — no passcodes, PINs or home address.
- Keep some money or a payment card separate from your phone, and memorize one number.
- If stranded, move toward a staffed, lit place and use services you can check.
- Look up the local emergency number before you travel.
- If someone asks to borrow your phone, offer to dial on speaker or walk them to a staffed desk.

Key terms

- **Single point of failure**: one thing whose loss causes many others to fail at once, as a phone often does.
- **Find-my-device feature**: a phone setting that can help locate, lock or erase a lost or stolen phone.
- **Analog backup card**: a small paper card with key contacts and lodging details, kept separately from the phone.
- **Stranded**: unable to continue a planned journey, for example after a missed last bus or a breakdown.

- **Roadside assistance**: a service that helps drivers with breakdowns, flat tires or dead batteries.

Talk it through

1. What would you lose first if your phone died right now, and which item on the backup card would replace it?
2. Where are the staffed, lit places along a journey you make often?
3. How could you help a stranded stranger while keeping your own plans and phone safe?

Journal prompt

Without writing any actual numbers, describe what your backup card will hold, where it will live, and the two staffed places you would head for if you were stranded on your next trip.

Glossary

- **Analog backup card**: a small paper card with two or three phone numbers, lodging details and a meeting point, kept separately from your phone. It never holds passcodes, PINs or a home address.
- **Bookends**: the arrival and departure plans for a trip.
- **Buffer**: spare time added around a transition so it is not rushed.
- **Car kit**: emergency supplies kept in a vehicle in case you are stranded, such as jumper cables, a reflective triangle, a phone charger, a blanket and a map.
- **Check-in**: a short agreed message sent at a planned moment, usually a transition.
- **Check-in person**: a trusted person who has agreed to receive your itinerary and check-ins and knows what to do if they do not hear from you.
- **Doorway pause**: a ten-second stop just inside an exit to put the phone away, name the next step, free a hand and notice staffed help points.
- **Escort**: a walk to your car offered by security or staff at some venues, campuses and hospitals.
- **Evacuation plan**: the posted map showing exits and routes out of a building.
- **Find-my-device feature**: a phone setting that can help locate, lock or erase a lost or stolen phone.
- **Five-minute settle-in**: a short routine on arrival at lodging to learn exits, alarms and the evacuation plan and set up the room.

- **Known channel**: a contact method you already trust, used to check unexpected requests.
- **Live location sharing**: a phone feature that shows your current location to chosen people for a set time.
- **Mismatch**: any difference between the car or driver in front of you and the details in your booking.
- **Official taxi stand**: a designated place to get a licensed taxi, usually at airports and stations.
- **Outside meeting place**: an agreed spot a safe distance from lodging where everyone gathers after leaving in an emergency.
- **Park, photo, path**: a routine for choosing a parking space for the return, recording where it is and looking at the route back.
- **Ride check**: confirming plate, vehicle, driver photo and name before getting into a booked ride.
- **Single point of failure**: one thing whose loss causes many others to fail at once.
- **Staffed help point**: a place where someone whose job includes helping the public can be found.
- **Three-line itinerary**: a short shared plan covering where and when, how you will check in and what to do if you are not heard from.
- **Transition**: a moment of arriving, leaving or changing mode, when attention is split and the setting is changing.
- **Trip sharing**: a ride-app feature that lets a trusted person follow your route and progress.
- **Two ways out**: knowing two separate routes out of every room and building.

Where to go next

Finding qualified hands-on training

This book and its course are reading and reflection. If you would like practice with real people, look for in-person learning from qualified providers. Options worth asking about include:

- community safety or travel-preparedness talks offered by your local library, community center, college or employer;
- your workplace's travel or lone-worker briefing, if your job involves travel or late shifts;
- campus safety programs, which often explain escort services and transport options;
- a recognized first aid and CPR course with hands-on practice, if you would like to be ready to help in a medical emergency. Training of that kind should come from an organization that certifies instructors, not from a book.

When you choose a provider, ask who teaches the course and what their qualifications are, what the course covers and what it does not, and whether it is suitable for your access needs. A good provider will answer those questions plainly. This book does not endorse any particular provider.

Official resources

These official resources were used for this book and are good places to keep learning:

- **Ready.gov** (U.S. federal emergency preparedness) — car safety, making a plan and building a kit.

- **U.S. Fire Administration** — fire safety for hotels and vacation rentals.
- **CDC Travelers' Health** — safety and security guidance for international travel.
- **FTC Consumer Advice** — protecting your phone and your data.
- **Your local police department's non-emergency information** — many publish local guidance on rideshare and parking safety, as Boston and Indianapolis police have.

For travel outside your own country, check your national government's official travel information service for destination advice and any traveler registration it offers. For local rules on parking, taxis and ride services, check the official city or regional government website for the place you are visiting.

Related topics

- Reading people and places without assumptions.
- Bringing your everyday habits together into one plan.
- What to do in the first minutes after an incident.
- What your posts and profiles reveal.
- Offering help to others well.
- The staff side of lobbies and reception desks.

Sources

Each of the following was re-read on 2026-10-15. They support specific factual statements in the course and this book; the habits, examples and wording here are original.

- CDC Yellow Book — Safety and Security Overseas. https://www.cdc.gov/yellow-book/hcp/environmental-hazards-risks/safety-and-security-overseas.html (checked 2026-10-15)
- Boston Police Department — RideShare Safety Tips. https://police.boston.gov/2025/08/06/rideshare-safety-tips-from-the-boston-police-department/ (checked 2026-10-15)
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- FTC Consumer Advice — How To Protect Your Phone From Hackers. https://consumer.ftc.gov/articles/how-protect-your-phone-and-data-it (checked 2026-10-15)
- Ready.gov — Car Safety. https://www.ready.gov/car (checked 2026-10-15)
- Ready.gov — Make A Plan. https://www.ready.gov/plan (checked 2026-10-15)
- Ready.gov — Build A Kit. https://www.ready.gov/kit (checked 2026-10-15)

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