How to jumpstart a car: Our step-by-step guide.

When a dead battery leaves you stranded, you could call road service… or you could jumpstart it back to life. (You'll need to have jumper cables, so if you don't have them, here's your first step: Buy some. You can find them online for less than $20.) Jumpstarting a car isn't difficult, but since you're dealing with electricity, it's important to do it correctly.

Here's the situation: You have one car with a dead battery. You have a second car with a working battery, brought to help you by some good Samaritan (or maybe you're the good Samaritan. In that case, good for you). Now, here's what to do:

Step 1: Consult your car's owner's manual to make sure it is safe to jumpstart. If either car has an electronic ignition system, or is an alternately fueled vehicle, using jumper cables may not be safe.

Step 2: Position the not-dead vehicle so that its hood is as close as possible to the hood of the dead vehicle. Put both cars in Park and turn off the ignition.

Step 3: Open the hoods of both vehicles.

Step 4: Attach one of the red clips to the positive terminal of the dead battery. The positive terminal should be marked with a "+" or the letters "POS."

Step 5: Attach the other red clip to the positive terminal of the good battery.

Step 6: Attach one of the black clips to the negative terminal of the good battery.

Step 7: Attach the other black clip to an unpainted metal surface on your car that is not close to the battery, like the metal strut that props up the hood. DO NOT ATTACH THE LAST BLACK CLIP TO THE NEGATIVE TERMINAL OF YOUR CAR. (It seems logical, but don't do it.)

NOTE: It's important to attach the cables in this order. DON'T switch the order of any of these steps!

Step 8: Start the working vehicle and let the engine run for at least 2-3 minutes before trying to start the dead car.

Step 9: Try to start the dead-battery vehicle.

Step 10: If it starts, hooray! Now you can remove the jumper cables, in REVERSE ORDER from the way you attached them (BLACK from previously dead car, BLACK from good Samaritan car, RED from good Samaritan car, RED from previously dead car).

Step 11: Once you successfully jumpstart the dead vehicle, KEEP THE ENGINE RUNNING for at least 30 minutes. If your destination isn't 30 minutes away, take the scenic route. The battery needs this time to be fully recharged.

If you can't get the car started, now it's time to call road service. The dead car may need a new battery, or there might be some other problem.

Always keep your set of jumper cables in your car and you'll have a little extra insurance, especially on those cold winter days when car batteries just don't feel like waking up.