ADDENDUM: Probably the most common way some beginners mess up their Silver Bath is they simply put their freshly collodion coated plate into the Silver Bath to sensitize way to soon!

Do that a few times in a row and your bath will be totally polluted with lots of dissolved collodion in it, locking up the silver, making your bath weaker and weaker until it is nearly impotent. Images start to come out on the dark side even with inordinately long exposure times. Plates that have been put in the Silver Bath too soon will yield blotchy looking images that seem to have a leaping flame sort of pattern over them. Also, the pour off end is usually very dark to totally black, where the collodion was the thickest and therefore more fluid and quick to dissolve away.

But, not to panic. If you find that you messed your bath up this way there's a way to save it and bring it back up to snuff. You can sun it, filter it, and bring it back up to strength as described in "The Doers Guide" manual on how to revive a worn out bath. But, best to avoid all that by just giving your freshly collodion coated plate time to skin over and gel up properly before you put it in the bath. This could take only five seconds in a very hot super dry desert setting or possibly twenty seconds in a humid cool setting like down by the seaside in winter. A freshly coated plate will have a wet super glossy look at first, but as it begins to set up and gel and starts to get a duller mat like gloss, you know you are pretty much there. Blot off the drip corner {I just use the palm of my hand} and it's ready to go on the dipper and on into the Silver Bath.

Also, another thing that determines how long it takes for a plate to set up properly before it's ready to go into the Silver Bath is the Ether to Alcohol ratio in the collodion. The more Ether and the less Alcohol, the quicker it's going to dry. The common ratio of Ether to Alcohol in the 19th century was 50/50. For summer work they often prescribed a 40/60 ratio. A lot of wet-plate photographers today don't know it, but plain collodion as we buy it is a 75/25 ratio. So, when you mix up your working collodion you have to add a good deal more Alcohol to it than you do Ether to achieve a 50/50 or 40/60 ratio. True, a high Ether content collodion can be made to make fine images. I used a formula like that for years before I discovered the real deal. I made the change and immediately started getting better positives and denser negatives.

Here is an example of an 8x10 Ferrotype I did in August 2010 on a hot day in the high desert country of New Mexico of artists Nicolas Herrera and David Michael Kennedy:

I was using Ol' Workhorse collodion, which is a 50/50 Ether to Alcohol overall content formula. I waited approximately ten seconds after I poured the plate before I put it in the Silver Bath while working out of my portable field darkbox. So, tuck that in your bonnets you hyper-active speed devils out there, and your Silver Bath will be much the healthier for it!