



Practical Driving Test Tips

Core Strategies for Success — 4front Driving School

Test Requirements

To pass your test, you must satisfy the examiner on all of the following subjects:

- Handling of the controls;
- Use of correct road procedure;
- Anticipation of the actions of other road users and the taking of appropriate action;
- Sound judgement of distance, speed and timing;
- Consideration for the convenience and safety of other road users.

Anticipation & Hazard Awareness

Anticipation is a key skill for advanced driving that involves being aware of your surroundings and preparing for potential hazards. Here are some key techniques to improve your anticipation on the road:

- **Be aware of your surroundings:** Use your mirrors and blind spots, and look as far down the road as you can.
- **Observe traffic:** Pay attention to other traffic lights and car lights to anticipate when lights will change.
- **Maintain a safe distance:** Keep at least a 2-second gap between you and the car in front, and increase this in poor weather or heavy traffic.
- **Plan for the unexpected:** Have an escape route in mind, and be ready to change lanes or pull over if needed.
- **Back off a few car lengths:** This gives you a better view of what's happening ahead, and the space to determine your next move.

- **Position your car on the road:** On an A- or B-road, you can position your car closer to the center white line to see further around corners.
- **Look for shadows:** On busy roads, if you can't see past the lorry ahead, look for shadows on the road beside to see the spacing of other lorries.

Managing Space & Drive Flow

Using observation, planning and anticipation you can manage the space around you and dictate and control your own drive and your own mindset. Having a good view of what's happening ahead, reading the road and seeing what traffic ahead is doing (and what's going on behind) allows you to anticipate what is going to happen and plan your driving accordingly.

Tell Me About It (The Running Commentary Drill)

Many advanced driving courses encourage you to deliver a running commentary as you drive, to say what's going on around you, what junctions and road signs you can see, to describe what you're doing, and what you're going to do. You'll probably feel self-conscious but it's a valuable exercise, heightening your awareness of what's going on around you and how you're planning to respond to it. Try it on a familiar drive by stating every traffic sign you see, linking warning signs with a mirror check, then adding the road markings and what they mean. I bet within a few miles you'll spot a sign or turning you haven't noticed before.

The Fuel Economy Observation Drill

As well as a running commentary, another way to hone your observation, planning and anticipation skills is to try to improve the fuel economy of your car. This works best if your car has a trip computer, giving you instant feedback.

The challenge isn't to go as slow as you can, it's to stay with the flow of the traffic but to try not to come to a dead stop at roundabouts, traffic lights and junctions with a give way. If you can keep moving even just a little, blending in on roundabouts or anticipating the change of the lights so you're still rolling as the queue starts to pull away, you'll avoid the hit to fuel economy. You should be fully aware of traffic behind you, of course.

This skill creates an enjoyable flow to the drive too, using your throttle to manage the 'ebb and flow' of the speed you drive at, rather than constantly accelerating and braking as many tend to do.

 **Mental Frame:** Perhaps it would help imagining you've got a very nervous passenger with you and you're trying to make them feel totally at ease with the drive. No strong braking, no harsh acceleration, maintaining a good pace on a light throttle in a high gear, flowing gently along. There is a certain satisfaction to that. It's not the same satisfaction that you get from stringing all the corners of a great road together with the car perfectly balanced on the power, but it relies on the same level of anticipation and awareness, and a heightened degree of

engagement with the process. Great observation, planning and engrossed anticipation too, and the right mindset to not get carried away.

Test Day Specific Guidelines

- **Roundabout Lane Discipline:** Avoid using the right hand lane exiting a roundabout unless you intend to show you will be overtaking vehicles and make progress.
- **Dual Carriageways:** In your test on dual carriageways you will be expected to overtake, make progress and keep to the speed limit. You can use the speed limiter, cruise control etc to assist, but respond to reduction of speed before the sign and don't follow other drivers who may be speeding. 10% + 2mph is speeding ticket territory and won't be accepted by examiners.
- **Express Observation of Mirrors:** Mirrors before signal, before braking, before changing direction.
- **Blind Spot Checks:** Blind spot checks before pulling away, changing direction, before and during manoeuvres, after emergency stop. Quick blind spot checks for changing lanes.

Independent Driving Section

The independent driving section lasts roughly 20 minutes. Here you'll drive without any instruction, instead following directions from a sat nav or road signs. If the examiner chooses a sat nav, they'll set it up for you - you won't use your own. You'll be expected to make the correct decisions without prompting.

If you go off route by mistake, this won't affect your test result, provided you don't make a fault while doing so. If this happens, the examiner will help you get back on the correct route.

Common Pitfalls & Marking Criteria

Here are constructive tips for improving your driving skills based on what candidates could be marked down on:

- **Junctions (Observation):** Always take effective observation before emerging at junctions and be aware of other vehicles' paths to ensure safety.
- **Mirrors (Change Direction):** Use your rear-view mirror and wing mirrors and react to the information they provide. Make mirror checks a habit, and don't use them too late or ignore them altogether.
- **Control (Steering):** Maintain a steady course in normal driving, follow the contour of the kerb, and avoid oversteering or understeering, which can result in misjudging position into new roads and emerging from junctions.
- **Junctions (Turning Right):** Position your vehicle correctly, avoid cutting corners when turning right, and be mindful of pedestrians, cyclists, and motorcyclists. The new Highway Code requires you to let pedestrians cross if they are waiting at a junction or have already stepped out.

- **Move Off (Safely):** Use your mirrors to check for other road users, including checking the right shoulder blindspot, before moving off. Never attempt to move off without doing so.
- **Response to Signs (Traffic Lights):** Give the right response to traffic lights, including waiting for a green filter light to proceed, conforming to a red light, and not stopping beyond an advanced stop line in the area designated for cyclists.
- **Move Off (Control):** Avoid repeated stalling, moving off with the handbrake on, and rolling backward when trying to move off. Always put the car in gear before attempting to move off.
- **Positioning (Normal Driving):** Position your vehicle correctly for the route you're taking, stay in the middle of the lane if lanes are marked, and avoid straddling lanes.
- **Response to Signs (Road Markings):** Follow road markings and directional arrows, avoid crossing solid white centre lines unnecessarily, and never stop in a yellow box junction when the exit is not clear.
- **Reverse Park (Control):** Take your time, reposition if necessary to correct a loss of control or accuracy, and avoid complete misjudgement or significant loss of control, which counts as a serious fault.

Core Principles of Your Drive

- **Forward planning:** Be aware of your surroundings and anticipate potential hazards or changes in the road ahead.
- **Smoothly:** Aim to drive smoothly, with gentle acceleration and braking to ensure the comfort of all passengers and reduce wear and tear on the vehicle.
- **Briskly:** Drive with purpose and keep up with the flow of traffic when it is safe and appropriate to do so. This helps to maintain a steady pace and reduce delays for other road users.
- **Efficiently:** Try to drive in a way that conserves fuel and reduces emissions, by avoiding unnecessary idling or harsh acceleration.
- **Courteously:** Show consideration for other road users, such as giving way to pedestrians or other vehicles where appropriate, and using your signals to indicate your intentions.
- **Full control:** Always maintain full control of your vehicle, keeping your speed appropriate for the road conditions and avoiding sudden movements or harsh braking that could cause a loss of control.

With these tips in mind, you can drive confidently and safely on the road, and be well-prepared for your test.

Test Psychology & Managing Nerves

- **Manage Your Nerves:** If you start feeling nervous or shaky, take a few deep breaths and try to calm down. Breathe in, hold your breath, count to 20, and then breathe out. Repeat this exercise until you regain control of your nerves. Once the exam begins, you'll settle into your driving and your attention will be focused on the road, rather than on your own feelings. Remember, the key to overcoming nerves is to stop perceiving the exam as a threat.

- **Use Running Commentary:** Mentally talk to yourself throughout the test. Describe upcoming hazards and how you plan to deal with them. This technique will help you to stay focused and ensure that you are driving safely and effectively.
- **Ask for Clarification:** If you don't understand the examiner's instructions or directions, don't hesitate to ask them to repeat them.
- **Think Positively:** Prior to starting a manoeuvre, silently repeat to yourself three times, 'This is a piece of cake.' Maintain a positive attitude at all times and believe in your ability to pass the exam.
- **Recover from Mistakes:** If you feel you're not doing well during a manoeuvre, simply pull forward and start again. As long as you haven't committed any serious or dangerous faults, such as touching the kerb or failing to make effective observations, you could still pass with a driving fault.
- **Handle Stalls Properly:** If you stall, deal with it and move on. As long as you don't stall in a dangerous situation, such as on a roundabout, and you handle it properly, it should not count as a serious or dangerous fault.
- **Don't Give Up:** If you make a mistake during the test, don't assume that you've failed. It may only be a driving fault and not a serious or dangerous fault. Put it behind you and continue driving to the best of your ability.
- **Focus on the Road:** Avoid looking at the examiner and trying to deduce anything from their expressions. Keep your attention on your driving and the road ahead.