

# Practising Driving

The learner and the supervising driver

## Guidance for the learner driver

### **Put the horse before the cart!**

Start taking lessons **before** driving with a parent, sibling or friend. Your mum, dad, brother or auntie undoubtedly will have the best of intentions, but if you learn things wrongly at the start, it will take even longer for me to sort out any problems. It is crucial that the core control skills are learnt correctly.

I encourage you to practise driving as much as possible. But please **practise!** Driving the same route to and from school or work is ok, but the route (and your preoccupation with getting to where you are going) may not be conducive to skills development.

Plan what you are going to practise before setting out, and head to an appropriate area. If the route to this area includes situations that you haven't learnt about yet in lessons (roundabouts, for example), ask your accompanying driver to drive you there and then swap seats.

## Guidance for the supervising driver

Please allow the learner to demonstrate and to practise what he or she has learnt in lessons. **Your role is not to instruct.** Your role is to look ahead and take account of upcoming hazards before they become a problem, and to assist your driver in preparing for them. In the early stages, a learner shouldn't be expected to notice everything that an experienced driver would. Please read the latest version of the **Highway Code** to ensure that your own knowledge is up to date.

**Driving faults:** Avoid giving your own opinion on what actions may or may not lead to a learner failing or passing the test. When a candidate commits a fault during the driving test, an examiner will consider a range of factors before deciding whether to record as a **driving fault**, a **serious** fault or a **dangerous** fault (or, in fact whether it is not worth recording at all).

The main aim is to develop the learner into an independent, confident and safe driver for life. By that stage, passing the test will be fairly straightforward. It will be better to avoid developing unnecessary anxiety about driving faults.

## Some driving myths dispelled

### **Steering:**

The only official requirement for steering is that it should be *smooth* and *under control*. Do not attempt to insist on a *10-to-2 hold*, or stifled shuffling of the wheel. I encourage *pull-push* steering as the primary technique, and I explain the reasons to my pupils. But there is **no reason** to criticise the learner for crossing hands, especially when manoeuvring the car slowly.

### Use of gears:

Do **not** expect, encourage, or insist on sequential down-shifting of gears when slowing the car down. This is an outdated approach that should not be used when driving a modern (post 1980) car. The footbrake can handle the task of slowing the car down without any assistance from the engine. It is more important for the driver to keep both hands on the steering wheel while slowing the car down, and only to handle to gear stick when a lower gear is needed to accelerate again.

**YES! It is correct to slow to a stop from 30 mph in 4th gear, disengaging the clutch when needed.**

**YES! Even when slowing from 70 in 5th or 6th gear.**

**NO! It is neither necessary nor correct to work down through the intermediate gears**

In fact, sequential up-shifting is not always required either. When changing up, there are many situations in which, in the interests of economical driving, it is appropriate to miss out gears.

### Use of mirrors:

- Please reinforce the need for effective use of mirrors. Regular updates on the situation behind are crucial. Exactly *how regular* will depend on traffic speed and density.
- Follow the **Mirror-Signal-Manoeuvre** routine.
- As an ADI, I am experienced at spotting mirror checks **and** keeping an eye on what else is going on around us (**and** watching what else the driver is doing **and** planning for contingencies!). You might be too preoccupied by keeping you both safe to spot the timely use of mirrors. If you haven't spotted whether the learner used the mirrors **before** considering any signal, change of direction or change of speed, **ask** him or her soon after the event.
- Buy a sucker-mounted interior mirror for your use. It will avoid the constant bobbing of your head and looking over your shoulder which can be quite distracting for the learner.

### Use of indicators:

- You should **not normally** expect to indicate either to pull out past parked cars or to move back in afterwards. There are 1 or 2 situations where the indicator might be useful – ask the trainee driver to tell you these.
- Do not expect the routine use of an indicator before moving off. It's generally not needed (although there is no need to criticise the learner for using it when not needed). The learner should know when an indicator would be helpful – let him or her decide.

### Stall recovery:

- Should the trainee stall, encourage a calm but prompt recovery: clutch down - check 1st gear (or reverse, where applicable) selected - restart the engine – move off if safe to. Only apply the handbrake **if necessary** – perhaps where there is an uphill gradient.

- There is ordinarily **no requirement** to apply the handbrake and go into neutral before restarting the engine - just be sure that the clutch is fully down before turning the key.

### Route selection:

- The trainee driver will want to drive well for you and will want to impress you with the skills learnt in lessons. Select a route that will allow this to happen.
- **You** will probably need to plan a route in advance to ensure that you do not put the trainee into situations for which they are not ready.
- **Avoid roundabouts** until the trainee has worked on them in lessons. There is too much for the driver to process without proper preparation and *risking it* because you haven't planned an alternative route is a recipe for disaster.
- **Avoid the temptation** to just *go for a drive* without thinking through the route first.

### Legal considerations

- To accompany a provisional-licence-holder (PLH), a driver must be over the age of 21 and have held a full UK driving licence for at least 3 years (and still holds one).
- While the PLH is driving, L plates of the correct size must be displayed on the front and rear of the car and be clearly visible to drivers in front and behind. These must be removed when a full-licence-holder is driving.
- Expect the same laws that apply to a full-licence-holder (FLH) while driving **also** to apply to an FLH who is accompanying a learner driver (eg. laws regarding use of mobile phones).
- Although it is legal for a learner to drive on a motorway, this is **only** permitted in a dual-controlled car, accompanied by an ADI.

### A general point

Practising driving between lessons is a good thing. Not only is it good for the trainee driver, but it is also a good opportunity for the accompanying FLH to reflect on – dare I say *improve upon?* – his or her own driving. If you both follow this guidance, the experience should be enjoyable, and beneficial to all concerned (that includes me!). Avoid discussion (or argument) while the trainee is driving. There is already enough for him or her to think about when on the road.

### Useful publications

- The Highway Code (DVSA)
- Know Your Traffic Signs (DVSA)  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/know-your-traffic-signs>
- The Official DVSA Guide to Driving – The Essential Skills
- Roadcraft – The Police Driver's Handbook
- DVSA Guidance for Driving Examiners  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-driving-examiners-carrying-out-driving-tests-dt1>