

# Safe driving for life



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Learning to drive is an important decision. This leaflet will explain some of the stages and answer some of the most common questions raised about learning to drive, preparing for and taking your tests, and after you have passed your test.

## Starting to drive

Before you start to drive, you must:

- hold a valid, provisional driving licence for Great Britain or Northern Ireland; and
- make sure that any vehicle you drive or ride is roadworthy and properly taxed and insured.

You must be able to read an old-style vehicle number plate from 20.5 metres away (67 feet – about five car lengths) in good daylight, or a new-style number plate from 20 metres away (66 feet). If you need to wear glasses (or contact lenses) to do this, you must wear them at all times while driving.

Your eyesight is very important. Your instructor should check your eyesight before you start to drive.

It is important to learn safe driving practice from the beginning of your driving or riding career because bad habits are hard to break.

## Why use an approved driving instructor?

It is unlikely that anyone except an approved driving instructor (ADI) would have the experience, knowledge and training to teach you properly. Learning safe driving habits from the start will improve the safety of yourself and other road users.

To become qualified, an ADI must pass a theory test, and strict tests of driving and instructional ability. All ADIs must maintain a high standard of instruction.

Fully qualified ADIs must display a green certificate on the windscreen of the tuition vehicle while giving lessons. Trainee driving instructors are granted a trainee licence so that they can gain teaching experience before their final qualifying examination. Their licence is pink.

Your instructor should explain how your lessons will be structured and show you the key skills that you will have to complete before you take your driving test (these key skills are shown in our publication *The Official Guide to Learning to Drive*).

Take advice from your instructor on all aspects of driving, including:

- which books to read;
- how to practise;
- when you will be ready for your test; and
- further training after you have passed your test (Pass Plus).

## **How do I choose an ADI?**

It is a good idea to ask friends and relatives. Look for someone who has a good reputation, is reliable and punctual, and whose car suits you. Ask the instructor if they have signed up to the voluntary code of practice, or if there is a company code, and ask for a copy.

The code of practice has been agreed with the driving instruction industry and covers instructors' personal and professional conduct, advertising and their complaints procedure. For more information, call us on 0115 901 2500.

We regularly check the standard of instruction of all ADIs. Instructors are graded as follows.

- Grade 4 is competent.
- Grade 5 is good.
- Grade 6 is a very high standard.

When choosing an ADI, ask for his or her grade before you start a course of lessons.

## **What do I do if I am not happy with my ADI?**

If you are not happy with your instructor, tell him or her why and discuss the way forward. If you still can't reach an agreement, find another instructor. If you have any serious complaints about your instructor, contact us on 0115 901 2500.

## **Your Driver's Record**

You may have received a Driver's Record with your provisional driving licence. This will help you monitor your progress and provide you with a lasting record of your achievement. You can also get one from your instructor, from your local practical driving test centre or from our website at [www.dsa.gov.uk](http://www.dsa.gov.uk) or [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk).

The Driver's Record has a list of the 24 key skills covered in the practical driving test. It has space for your instructor to fill in as you progress through the five levels shown on the Record. From this, both you and your instructor will be able to see at a glance which skills you need to improve.

You also need to learn both the theory and practical driving at the same time.

If your instructor fills in your Driver's Record, it will help to show you when you're ready for your test.

## Practising

There is no substitute for learning car-control skills and how to deal with different road situations with a professional driving instructor before going out to practise privately. When you have enough confidence, your instructor will tell you what and where to practise. Your instructor will also be able to talk to the person who is going to supervise you. Your accompanying driver must be 21 or over and have held (and still hold) a full licence for three years.

Practise on as many different types of road as you can, in all sorts of traffic conditions – even in the dark and on dual carriageways where there is a higher speed limit. You may be asked to drive on these types of road during the test. Don't just concentrate on the exercises involved in the test.

Record your hours and miles on private practice sheets that you can get from your instructor or download from [www.dsa.gov.uk](http://www.dsa.gov.uk). This will help you remember the amount of private practice you have had in different conditions.

When you practise, try not to slow down other traffic. Most drivers are tolerant of learners, but don't try their patience too much. Try not to annoy local residents, for example, don't practise emergency stops in the same quiet residential streets or reverse around the same corner over and over again.

## To help you study

### Books

*The Highway Code* is essential reading. It explains the rules of the road and gives good advice about best driving practices.

*Know your traffic signs* explains most signs.

*The Official Theory Test for Car Drivers* and *The Official Theory Test for Motorcyclists* contain all the questions in the multiple choice part of the theory test, together with the answers and explanations.

*Driving - the essential skills* explains the best driving practices in more detail.

*Official Motorcycling* includes details of basic machine handling for the compulsory basic training course and the full practical test syllabus.

*Motorcycle riding - the essential skills* is the complete guide for new and experienced riders.

*The Official Guide to Learning to Drive* gives details of the 24 key skills shown in the Driver's Record and explains the standards needed to achieve Level 5 on this Record (that is, the standard needed to pass the practical driving test).

*The Official Guide to Helping Learners to Practise* is based on the same 24 key skills, giving general advice and suggestions for the person who is helping the learner to practise, as well as specific advice for each of the key skills.

## **Other media**

*The Official Theory Test CD-ROM for Car Drivers* and *The Official Theory Test CD-ROM for Motorcyclists* contain all the questions and allow you to practise for the multiple-choice part of the theory test.

*The Official Guide to Hazard Perception DVD* will help you prepare for the hazard perception part of the theory test. A video and workbook-based training pack, called *RoadSense*, is also available. *What If* is another video and workbook designed to improve your ability to think ahead to boost your awareness of hazards. There are separate versions for car drivers and motorcyclists.

*The Official Guide to Learning to Drive DVD* shows learners driving at the Level 5 standard in each of the key skills. It also shows the presenter taking each of the skills during a test.

You can order all these study materials on-line from [www.dsa.gov.uk](http://www.dsa.gov.uk) or by mail order from 0870 241 4523. They are also available from bookshops and electronic retailers along with similar products from other publishers.

## **How will I know when I am ready for my test?**

You will be ready for the test when you show that you have reached Level 5 in all the key skills on your Driver's Record. Learners who pass first time do so because they are well instructed and get plenty of practice. They pass because they wait until they are ready. Your instructor has the knowledge and experience to tell you when this is.

The pass rate for the practical car test is 42%. The reason for such a low success rate is because candidates are not properly prepared.

You must be able to drive consistently well, with confidence and without help or guidance from your instructor. If you can't, you aren't ready for the test. Waiting until you are ready will save you time and money.

## **How many lessons am I likely to need?**

Those who pass their driving test have had, on average, about 45 hours of professional training, combined with 22 hours of private practice. Candidates who combine professional instruction with private practice are also more successful on the test. Some people need more lessons and practice than others. If you're not getting it right all the time without your instructor's help, you're not ready to take your test.

# **The driving test**

The driving test is in two parts – the theory test and the practical test. You can study for the theory test while you are learning to drive, but you must pass the theory test before you apply to take the practical test.

## **The theory test**

### **Where do I go to take my theory test?**

There are over 150 test centres throughout Great Britain. Most people have a test centre within 20 miles of their home, but this will vary depending on the population in your area.

### **What will I have to do?**

The theory test is a computer-based test and has a multiple-choice part followed by a hazard perception (HP) part. You need to pass both parts of the theory test at the same sitting to get your theory test pass certificate.

For the multiple-choice part, you choose your answers to 35 questions by simply touching the screen. The touch-screen system has been carefully designed to make it easy to use. You can practise for up to 15 minutes before the test starts. Only one question appears on the screen at a time. You can move backwards and forwards through the questions and go back to questions that you want to look at again. It's easy to change your answer – the system will alert you if you have not completely answered a question.

You will have 40 minutes to complete the multiple-choice part of the test and you must answer at least 30 questions correctly to pass. Following the multiple-choice questions, there will be an optional break of up to three minutes before the HP part of the test starts.

The HP part is introduced by a short tutorial video that explains how the test works and gives you the chance to see a sample film clip. This will help you understand what you need to do. You may repeat the tutorial once more if you want to. The test is made up of 14 video clips, each lasting about one minute. The clips feature various types of hazards, such as vehicles, pedestrians and road conditions. You should respond by pressing a mouse button as soon as you see a hazard developing that may result in the driver having to take some action, such as changing speed or direction. The earlier you spot the developing hazard and respond, the higher the score. You can score up to five marks on each hazard, and the test contains 15 scoreable hazards.

The pass mark for this part of the test is **44 out of 75** for car drivers and motorcycle riders. Those taking LGV or PCV (lorry or bus) tests must score at least **50 out of 75**. You will be given your results when you have finished both parts of the test and have returned to the waiting room.

### **What happens if I fail?**

If you fail your test you've shown that you aren't fully prepared. You will have to wait at least three clear working days before you can take the test again. Good preparation will save you time and money.

## **Equal opportunities**

'The Driving Standards Agency recognises and values its customers. We will treat all our customers with respect, and deliver our services in an objective, polite, and fair way.'

We are committed to equal opportunities for everyone. We provide facilities for candidates with special needs or physical disabilities. These include the following.

- We will give you more time to complete your theory or practical tests.
- We will provide audio versions of the theory test to help candidates who do not understand or read English, or who want to take the test in their first language. These languages are Albanian, Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, Dari, Farsi, Gujarati, Hindi, Kashmiri, Kurdish, Mirpuri, Polish, Portuguese, Pushto, Punjabi, Spanish, Tamil, Turkish, Urdu and Welsh.
- We will deliver the theory test in British Sign Language by an on-screen signer if you are deaf or have other hearing difficulties.

## The practical driving test

The driving test is straightforward. You will pass it if you can show your examiner that you can drive safely, complete the set exercises, and show, through your driving, that you have a thorough knowledge of *The Highway Code*.

All examiners are trained to assess tests to the same standard. Test routes are designed and approved locally to include a range of typical road and traffic conditions.

On your test, you need to be able to drive safely and skilfully in various road and traffic conditions. You will be given directions clearly and in good time, and asked to carry out set exercises.

Your examiner wants you to do well and will try to put you at ease. Drive in the way that your instructor has taught you. If you make a mistake, keep calm and concentrate on your driving. The mistake may not mean that you fail your test.

In Wales, your test may be carried out in Welsh if you ask for this when you book it.

### Can anyone come with me on my test?

You can ask for a friend or your instructor to be present during your test, but they must not interfere in any way. If necessary, you can bring an interpreter or signer with you, but you must not use an approved driving instructor for this purpose. Anyone who comes with you on your test must be 16 or over and wear a seatbelt if one is available.

### Are the examiners supervised?

Examiners are closely supervised and a senior officer may sit in on your test, but don't worry about this. The senior officer won't be examining you, but will be making sure the examiner is assessing you properly. They won't interfere with the test, so just carry on as if they weren't there.

### How long is the test?

The test will last about 40 minutes.

### What do I have to do on my test?

Apart from general driving, the test will include an eyesight test, vehicle safety check questions and special exercises. You'll be asked to carry out two of the following.

- Reverse round a corner.
- A turn in the road.
- A reverse park (either into a parking space or behind a car on the road).

You may also be asked to carry out an emergency stop.

### **What if I don't understand what the examiner means?**

Listen carefully to the explanation, but ask if you aren't sure about anything. Your examiner understands that you may be nervous and won't mind explaining again.

### **How does the examiner mark my driving?**

Your examiner will assess any mistakes you make and, depending on how serious they are, record them on the driving test report form. You will fail your test if you commit a serious or dangerous fault. You will also fail if you commit more than a certain number of driving faults. At the end of the test, you will be offered an explanation of your driving test report. You might like to ask your instructor to listen while your examiner gives you the explanation.

Examiners do not have a set number of people they will pass or fail. If you achieve the standard needed, you will pass your test.

## **Safe driving after the test**

Passing the test is a great feeling but it's only the first step in learning to drive.

New drivers are at a greater risk of having an accident than experienced motorists. New drivers account for 10% of all drivers, but are involved in 29% of all accidents. You are more likely to have an accident in the first two years after passing your test than at any other time.

It is important to remember that safe driving is not just about passing the test but is about safety – your own as a driver and the safety of your passengers and other road users. You need to know how to drive safely, how to stay alive and how to avoid killing or injuring others. We make no apology for saying this. As a driver, you are responsible for making decisions that can affect other people's lives as well as your own.

### **Beware**

Once you have passed your test, you are on probation for two years. If you get six or more penalty points during this time, you will lose your licence. You will have to reapply for a provisional licence and have to take all the tests again. Since the New Drivers Act was introduced in 1997, over 80,450 drivers have lost their licences.

## Stay alert

### Drink

The effects of drinking alcohol and driving are well known. The simple answer is **don't drink and drive**.

### Drugs

Driving while under the influence of illegal drugs is an offence. The effects are unpredictable, but can be even more serious than alcohol and stay with you longer.

Medicines may also affect your ability to drive. Check the labels carefully and if you are in doubt, ask your doctor or pharmacist.

### Tiredness

Tiredness can also affect your concentration and reaction times. Take regular breaks to avoid becoming tired when you are driving.

## Improve your driving

### Pass Plus

This scheme is made up of six modules covering driving in and out of town, and driving in all weather, at night, on dual carriageways and on motorways. You do not have to take another test and at the end you will receive a certificate from us that may entitle you to a motor-insurance discount from certain insurance companies.

### Advanced driving

There are various advanced driving courses to improve your driving and road-safety awareness. If you complete one of these, you may also get cheaper insurance. You can get information on these courses and other road-safety advice from the Road Safety Officer at your local council.

## **Message from Robin Cummins, the Chief Driving Examiner**

'Over the years I have conducted or accompanied thousands of driving tests and, in my opinion, the main cause of failure is inexperience. Preparation is the key to success. Take professional advice. It's unlikely that anyone other than an Approved Driving Instructor would have the experience, knowledge and training to teach you properly. Check your progress using DSA's Driver's Record which helps assess where you are on the official learning to drive syllabus.

Driving can be an enjoyable experience as long as we all recognise the potential danger all around us. As a new driver, your inexperience will make you vulnerable. I hope the information in this leaflet will help you to drive safely throughout your driving career and especially during that period immediately after passing the test when you are most vulnerable.'

**Aim for  
'safe driving for life'.**

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