

DRIVING LESSONS

Student Parent Guide



Driving Lessons

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A huge thank you to everyone involved in making this book possible.

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Please Note: The views and advice in this book may not reflect the opinion of all driving instructors.

Introduction

Every year in the UK, large numbers of people begin the process of learning to drive, and most of them use a driving school but not all driving schools and instructors are the same. They differ in many ways. So how do you choose an instructor that's right for you – an instructor that suits your budget, your schedule and your personality? This guide is designed to answer these questions and more, to provide you with the information you need to find an instructor who will help you get your licence in a fast, friendly and cost-effective way.

Note to students

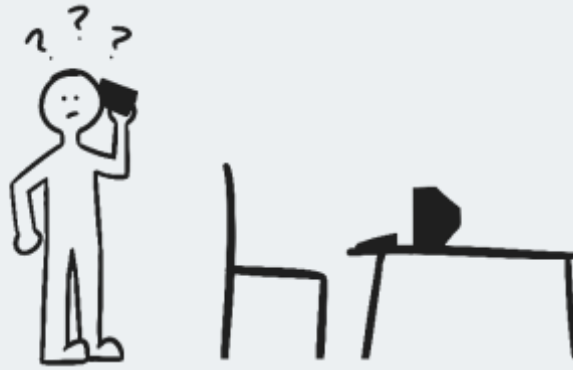
Learning to drive should be an enjoyable and rewarding time; a period you'll always remember fondly. After all, you're about to gain skills that you'll probably use every day of your life for decades to come. We want you to enjoy the process of achieving your goal but remember: it's not just about passing the driving test; it's about driving safely for life. Taking care to get things right at this early stage will pay real dividends in the future.

Note to parents

Naturally, you want to help your child learn the lifetime skill that you, almost certainly, now take for granted. Your own road experience and knowledge could be very helpful too but don't forget that today's road systems, traffic levels, vehicle technology and driving test standards are very different from a decade or two ago. The days of having just a handful of lessons before taking the test are long gone. Today's students must not only acquire sophisticated driving skills, but have extensive knowledge of theory too. It takes time and money, and you need to be prepared for that.

Applying for a provisional licence

Before you can legally drive on the UK highways you must hold a provisional driving licence. Apply online or through the post office. You can start driving a car at sixteen if you get the enhanced rate of mobility component of personal independence payment (PIP). If not, you can start on your 17th birthday.



Finding a driving instructor

Once you've started thinking about driving lessons, you'll notice learners everywhere. And you'll suddenly realise just how many driving schools there are! This will raise the question of how to choose one that suits your particular needs. There are a number of things you can do to help find a suitable instructor.

1. Internet research

There are plenty of websites with useful content - but remember, most have a very biased opinion! You'll only read what the driving school wants you to read.

2. Local events

Some driving schools participate in local events. A great way to meet with instructors and to gather information.

3. Friends and family

Ask for recommendations. Most driving instructors pride themselves on their reputation, so if a particular instructor is recommended by several people, it's generally a good sign.

4. Young driver schemes

There are quite a few under 17 and off-road driver schemes throughout the UK, designed to give you a taste of being behind the wheel. Book yourself in for a driving experience, or pop along and have a chat with the driving schools and instructors taking part.

5. Social Media

Asking in social groups, or chat to previous students. This is likely to give you the names of some good local instructors.

Booking your first driving lesson

Calling a driving school or instructor

First, make sure you call to book your first lesson well in advance of when you want it. Most good driving instructors are likely to have long waiting lists, and you may have to wait a

month or two for a slot. When you call, have a chat with the instructor and get any information you need to ensure that you'll feel comfortable during your learning period. If you have health issues, or any special requirements regarding your driving, make sure you mention them at this early stage.

Planning your lessons

There are several ways you can structure your learning:

Intensive courses

These can be as short as a week, with the test on the last day, and you must have passed your theory test before booking the course. It's certainly a fast-track approach to getting a licence, but it doesn't suit everyone as the word 'intensive' means just that – and it's a lot to take in during a single week. After your final lesson, you and your instructor must agree that you've reached the necessary standard to take the driving test. Any fees you pay cover the cost of your lessons during your course. You may not be entitled to a refund if you don't take the test. If you are unsure check the terms and conditions before booking your course. You may also lose your DVSA test fee if you don't postpone or cancel your test within the allocated time.

Semi-intensive courses

These are usually spaced over 4 - 6 weeks and – again – you must have passed the theory test before taking your driving test. You'll need to pre-book with your instructor, as he or she will have to allocate slots to fit your lessons around other commitments.

It's important with this type of course not to skip any lessons, as there's a lot to learn. You'll be given the option to defer your driving test without losing your fee if either you or your instructor feel that you're not quite ready.

Regular weekly lessons

This is by far the most popular, and probably the best, way to learn to drive. It gives you plenty of time to take your theory test (though we recommend you take it as soon as possible), and after each lesson you'll have time to reflect on your experience. This means you can learn at your own pace without worrying about having to take a test before you're ready. You'll also experience a wider range of road and weather conditions throughout the learning process, making you a more confident and rounded driver when you pass your test.

Frequently asked questions

- *How long are the lessons, and how many can I have each week?*

Everyone has a different learning ability, financial situation and availability. Discuss these with your instructor so that they can help you decide the best course of action.

- *What times are you available?*

Your driving instructor could be working full or part time. If you're only available at particular times each week, make sure these times marry up with your instructor's schedule.

- *Can I have a taster lesson?*

However social and friendly we are; we can't get on with everyone. Sometimes our personalities will clash. But it's important to feel relaxed during your lessons, as you'll be spending a lot of time with your instructor, and any tension due to personality differences will affect your performance. Some driving schools offer a taster lesson so you can meet your instructor and 'test the waters' before committing to regular lessons.

- *Should I block book my lessons?*

You might be offered a discount if you block book your lessons. If so, it's a great way to get a bargain. However, it might be worth having a couple of lessons first, to make sure you feel comfortable with your instructor before handing over the full amount of money.

- *What type of car do you have?*

Would you prefer to learn in a manual or automatic car? Or do you have preference about car size due to personal reasons? Discuss the options with your instructor to make sure you make the right choice for you.

- *Are you a properly-qualified instructor?*

Before committing to an instructor, you should ask to see their badge. This shows that they are legally qualified to instruct. A fully-qualified driving instructor will have a badge in the shape of a green hexagon, while a trainee driving instructor's badge will be a pink triangle, and it should be displayed in the car window. If your instructor can't show you a badge, they may not be legally qualified to teach.

- *Do you do cheap lessons or deals?*

It's tempting to play the bargain hunter in the hope of saving money. If you do, though, remember that – as with any product or service – you usually get what you pay for. Like anyone running a business, driving instructors have overheads, and these overheads can be considerable. The profit they make is what's left after subtracting the cost to them of each lesson (their overheads) from the amount you pay. If a driving school is offering extremely cheap lessons, you may not be getting the quality service you expect and deserve.

- *Do I need to bring anything on my first lesson?*

Before starting your first lesson, your instructor will want to check your provisional licence. You will be asked to do an eye test by reading a number plate (you can wear glasses or contact lenses if required). Some driving schools will also ask you to sign a form, which will contain terms and conditions. If you're asked to sign such a form, make sure you read it carefully first.

- *Can I cancel a lesson if necessary?*

Many driving schools will have a condition that you must give appropriate notice (this may be 24, 48 or 72 hours) if you want to cancel a lesson. If you give the required notice, you won't be charged for the cancelled lesson. If you don't give the required notice, you will be charged the full lesson fee.

- *Why am I being charged for my cancelled lesson?*

If you cancel a lesson at the last minute, you give the instructor or school no chance to fill the slot. So, unless they charge you, they have lost out. Remember that most driving instructors are self-employed, which means that if they don't work, they don't get paid. A typical instructor may teach many students in a week – so it's easy to see how a small amount of cancellations could affect his or her income quite considerably. Having said that, it sometimes happens that a student has no choice but to cancel without warning. If this happens to you, try and explain things to your instructor as soon as possible – they may be able to suggest a solution.

- *How much do you charge per hour?*

It's worth calling a few driving schools to find out what they charge. You'll find that they all charge a similar amount. If the driving school, you prefer charges significantly more or less ask them to explain the cost difference.



Instruction and coaching

In a nutshell, a Driver Trainer should be extremely adaptable to suit your learning style. You will need to work as a team in order for you to form your own opinions and develop your Driver skills for life after your test!

Instruction:

The phrase “Instruction” suggests that your Trainer should tell and explain everything before you even begin, no matter how much you know in advance. Your Trainer will be in charge of what and when you learn.

Coaching and CCL:

Alternatively, a Trainer who uses Coaching and Client Centred Learning (CCL) techniques will also use you and your existing skills and knowledge, to fill in any gaps. As an example, think of how much you already know about Pedestrian Crossings (e.g. should cars wait for pedestrians at Zebra Crossings? Or what happens when you push the button at traffic lights?)

Many people have previous road experience, i.e. cycling or motorcycles, that should be exploited.

You will have chance to discuss your preferences and concerns. You will have a say in what you learn, how and when.

A good Trainer will help you learn in a way that suits you best – the Trainer should put you first and allow you to progress at your own pace. You may like diagrams or to talk about how best to learn something, you may prefer a demonstration. Many people are much more ‘hands on’ and like to ‘have a go’ without too much talking first. You will learn more quickly if you are engaged and valued as the most important member of the team. An approach that includes good Coaching conversations will develop your Self Evaluation skills which will help you after your test when ‘unusual’ situations develop on the road ahead. You will already be accustomed to working out the solution on your own, rather than ‘trying to remember what your Instructor told you to do’.

Fiona Taylor - Driver Trainer and Coach

Practising privately

If, together with regular lessons, you have the option of practising in your own car or someone else's, your skills will develop more quickly. Your instructor will advise you when you're ready to go out with family or friends. If you decide to practise privately, remember:

- You must display front and rear L plates.
- You won't have dual controls.
- You will require relevant insurance.
- Your accompanying driver must be over 21, and have held a full UK driving licence for at least 3 years.

While practicing it's important to try and maintain the standards taught by your professional instructor - bad habits can easily creep in.

Assessing progress

You should regularly assess how you're progressing against your expectations. If your expectations were reasonable at the beginning, it's probable that you'll feel comfortable with your progress throughout your course, and have no reason for concern. It could happen, though, that you don't progress as quickly as you had anticipated. Perhaps you're not getting on with your instructor, or you find the teaching techniques used difficult to grasp. Whatever the reason, you should talk to your instructor and explain how you feel. If, after that, there's no change, you shouldn't feel pressured to continue down the same path. As a paying customer, you should expect a professional service that meets your needs – there's absolutely no need to feel bad if you have to change instructors to get that service.

Taking the theory test

Before you take the driving test, you need to pass the theory test. This has two sections:

multiple-choice questions and a video-based hazard perception section. To pass the test, you must score at least 43/50 on the multiple-choice section and 44/50 on hazard perception. To help you prepare, it's useful to study the Highway Code, and there are a number of revision apps and CDs you can use, too. It's important not to take the theory test lightly – remember that you're not just trying to pass an exam, you're learning a new skill that will play a big part in the rest of your life. Driving a car safely isn't only about the ability to operate its controls. It's about knowing the roads, the rules, regulations – and even etiquette – that govern them. It's also about knowing the basics of how cars work and how to maintain them. Gaining this knowledge will pay real dividends in the future.

Taking the driving test

So, you're finally ready to take your driving test. Great! The very first thing you need is a car. The DVSA won't supply this - you must use either your instructor's car or your own. If you use your own, it must be road legal, and you must have appropriate insurance. There are a few cars that aren't accepted as a test vehicle – you'll find further details on the DVSA website.

You should only take the driving test if you're considered to have reached the standard required to pass it. Here, you need to listen to your instructor's advice. We all like to do things quickly, but to take a driving test before you're ready is a waste of time and money, and could be dangerous. If you genuinely feel that you've reached the DVSA standard to pass, but your instructor disagrees, you could consider getting a second opinion from another instructor (you'll obviously have to pay for this). If you're basing your opinion of your skill level on the advice of friends and family, you should keep in mind the fact they may not be aware of the standard required to pass - especially if they took their own test many years ago!

When you do take your test, you can, if you like, have your instructor sit in the back of car as an observer. Although instructors can't get involved in any way during the test, their presence can be helpful for 'post-match analysis' if you fail. Sometimes another examiner may sit in the back during your test – they won't be involved in any way, they're just there to observe the examiner in front.

One common mistake students make is to book the driving test, and then start trying to find an instructor (usually for their car). You should reverse this process, as most driving schools won't take on last-minute tests.



Examiner's view

If you were asked what the most challenging thing about being a driving examiner is, what would you say?

Nervous candidates?

Confrontational behaviour?

Or maybe dangerous driving?

Well, while it's true that we occasionally face these issues, the one thing we are always up against is time.

Each test is only 57 minutes apart, so every minute counts. During each test period we have to:

- Greet a candidate
- Provide a legal test
- Follow it all up with a debrief to the candidate and a written report.

As well as taking all this into consideration, traffic flow, particularly in urban areas, is so unpredictable that we sometimes have to reroute to manage our time.

Candidates and Approved Driving Instructors (ADIs) can help us out here. To make sure your test is as stress-free as possible, it would really be helpful if you could:

Be in the waiting room in good time and ready to go.

Have all necessary documents ready and with the correct address.

Make sure you have your glasses or contact lenses with you if you need them, so you can read a number plate from the minimum required distance.

Only practise the bay parking exercise in the test-centre car park in agreement with test-centre staff. They'll be able to advise you when would be a good time to do this so you don't get in the way of anyone taking their test.

Ask your ADI to accompany you on your test so they are there for the debrief and can help you to understand how you performed.

If you decide not to take your ADI out with you, ask them to be ready for the debrief when you return to the test centre.

During the working day we occasionally run late because of these issues and, when we do, it can snowball to the point that other candidates' tests may be affected. Of course, the traffic sometimes gets so bad that we run late, whatever route we take, and we have no control over incidents in the area. This can cause you and your ADI to be late too. We are sympathetic in these cases, but there's not much time between test slots, so we can only allow so much leeway.

Examiners make every effort not to lose tests and this is less likely to happen if all customers are ready when their appointment time arrives. If you have any doubts or questions, then feel free to speak to the staff at your nearest test centre.

Thanks and maybe we'll see you soon ... on time and ready of course!

Mark Pritchard - DVSA Driving Examiner

You've passed! So, what's next?

Congratulations! You've passed. You can now legally drive a car unaccompanied. It's a great feeling, isn't it?

But while you've done well, please remember that the process of learning doesn't stop there. In fact, it doesn't stop at all. However, experienced you get as a driver, you're always learning. Many people believe that passing your driving test is just the starting point in a lifelong journey of improvement.

So, what should you do first? It's not uncommon for people to take a couple of extra lessons after their test, using their own car. This will help you safely familiarise yourself with your own vehicle, as well as consolidate your newly acquired skills. Your instructor will be more than happy to help. It's worth remembering that, for the first two years after passing your test, you'll be on probation, and if you get 6 penalty points on your licence, you'll have to start the whole process again.

You may want to consider extending your skills and broadening your experience by taking the Pass Plus Scheme, a skid pan course or some motorway lessons. You could also take your driving to the next level by taking an advanced driving course.



Stay Safe on the Road

We all like to think of ourselves as safe and responsible drivers. But the fact is, driving carries many risks and is probably the most dangerous thing you will do on a daily basis. An estimated 1.24 million people die every year on the world's roads. It's worth doing all you can to ensure that you help minimise these risks.

Please take a couple of minutes to read the advice from Brake, the road safety charity – knowing the facts could save lives.

As a charity that supports bereaved and seriously injured road crash victims, we know only too well the devastation left behind when a young person dies on our roads and we want to make sure you're not one of them!

Although there are some useful tips in this book for learning to drive, please make sure that once you've passed your test, you consider the high-risk behaviours that young people too often underestimate such as speeding, using your phone, not wearing a seatbelt and not maintaining your car. These are summed up in our Brake Pledge, which we would encourage you to read more about and take action to keep you, your mates and family safe when using our roads.

Brake Pledge:

Slow - I'll stay under limits, and slow down to 20mph around schools, homes and shops to protect others. I'll slow right down for bends, brows and bad weather, and avoid overtaking. I'll speak out for slowing down and help drivers understand that the slower they drive, the more chance they have of avoiding a crash and saving a life.

Sober - I'll never drive after drinking any alcohol or taking drugs – not a drop, not a drag. I'll plan ahead to make sure I, and anyone I'm with, can get home safely and I'll never get a lift with drink/drug drivers. I'll speak out if someone's about to drive on drink or drugs.

Secure – I'll make sure everyone in my vehicle is belted up on every journey and I'll choose the safest vehicle I can and ensure it's maintained.

Silent – I'll never take or make calls or text when driving. I'll put my phone out of sight and on silent, and stay focused on the road. I'll never chat on the phone to someone else who's driving.

Sharp – I'll get my eyes tested every two years and wear glasses or lenses at the wheel if I need them. I'll take regular breaks and never drive if I'm tired, stressed or on medication that affects driving. I'll look out for friends and loved ones by ensuring they only drive if they're fit for it, and rest if they're tired.

Sustainable – I'll minimise the amount I drive, or not drive at all. I'll get about by walking, cycling or public transport as much as I can, for road safety, the environment and my health.

**Dave Nichols - Community Engagement Manager
Brake, the Road Safety Charity**

We hope the information you have received will enrich your learning journey and help you achieve your goals.

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