

*test  
guidelines*

*the car  
test*



**RoSPA  
Advanced  
Drivers'  
Association**



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# **Taking the advanced car test: guidance for candidates and training officers**

## **What is advanced driving?**

It is a safe, thoughtful and methodical way of driving. Advanced drivers are more observant and better at anticipating changes in the surrounding conditions. Because of this they are able to plan their driving to deal with any circumstances.

## **Why should you be interested?**

We are often asked by people why they should be interested in advanced driving. Here are some of the reasons which we think make it worthwhile:

- Your motoring costs can be noticeably reduced by improved driving techniques.
- You can often get discounts on insurance premiums.
- You will enjoy your driving more, to the benefit of yourself and your family.
- You will feel more relaxed when driving. You will become a safer driver.
- Your driving may one day save someone's life - it could be yours.

## **What makes a better driver?**

By looking carefully, analysing accurately what they see advanced drivers have learnt to anticipate and plan so as to be able to manage situations safely. The best drivers do this by driving systematically.

There are only two things you can change while driving a vehicle by operating the controls: you can change its direction and its speed. It is as simple as that.

In becoming a better driver you learn the overriding importance of safety, both of yourself and others. You learn how to drive more safely by learning more skill in how, why and when to change your direction and your speed.

Many drivers drive badly because their errors usually cause no ill effects, thus their errors are reinforced. The average driver does not associate crashes with careless and thoughtless driving. But poor planning promotes poor performance. Advanced drivers aim positively to cut down their risks of being involved in someone else's crash while minimising risks from their own driving. At best a crash is inconvenient but at worst it will result in serious injury or death.

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So advanced driving is achieved by driving to a system which is simple, efficient, effective, always applicable and gives those precious gifts of space and time in which to deal with hazards. The advanced driver is never taken by surprise. The word 'suddenly' does not appear in the driving vocabulary.

With all this in place the advanced driver will be able to make unobtrusive, planned progress consistent with safety and the law.

### **The Test**

The RoSPA advanced driving test is regarded as the most comprehensive and challenging available to the public. It is monitored and approved by the Driving Standards Agency. A RoSPA gold is the highest civilian driving standard available and the holder will be a master of his or her art. It is unlikely that anyone will gain a high grade without a good knowledge of *The Highway Code and Roadcraft*. Local groups have experienced and trained tutors who will, free of charge, assess your performance and provide advice to help you as you prepare for the test.

You may not be as fully practised in the application of the police system of driving as the advanced police driver who has spent many weeks of full time training in order to achieve this standard. Most members of the public will not have the opportunity to reach this level of excellence. However, the examiner will be looking for a satisfactory display of safe, systematic and smooth driving. After the test he will comment on your weaknesses and give advice and suggestions on how to improve. If you pass the test you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you really are a good driver.

The following notes describe points which the examiner will look for during the test.

### **Preparation**

The examiner will do his best to set you at your ease. He will expect your vehicle to appear roadworthy and the view through the windscreen and windows to be clear. Before starting you should be prepared, if asked, to carry out or describe the daily or weekly checks which you do on your vehicle. Shortly after moving off, if conditions permit, you should carry out a moving brake test which should be sufficient to indicate a serious fault. A brake check that tests the seatbelts is not necessary.

### ***The use of the controls***

You will be expected to use all controls smoothly and with finesse.

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## **Steering**

This should be smooth, accurate and controlled. The examiner will watch how you use the steering wheel, your hand position and your method of steering. Although *Roadcraft* mentions rotational steering in certain circumstances, the preferred method is still pull-push and the examiner will expect this.

## **Clutch**

You should use the clutch smoothly showing good balance between clutch and accelerator. Double declutching is not necessary with modern cars but is perfectly acceptable. Sustained revs gear changing, when appropriate, will be appreciated by the examiner. You should not ride or slip the clutch.

## **Gears**

The way you use the gears will tell the examiner a lot about your driving ability. He will consider the way you make the change, the way you match engine revolutions to road speed and the timing of your changes. Intelligent use of the intermediate gears is important as is the ability to omit them when appropriate.

If you are tested on a vehicle with an automatic gearbox the examiner will watch your starting procedures and your use of 'kick-down'. He will also note if you override the transmission to keep the vehicle in a lower gear when appropriate. You should not use the automatic gearbox as a manual gearbox.

## **Brakes**

The examiner will expect smooth braking, applied in good time, appropriate to the prevailing weather, in one progressive application at the correct point within the system. The pedal pressure should be tapered off when unwanted speed is lost.

## **Accelerator**

Do you use the accelerator correctly, firmly where it is needed, and precisely and controlled all the time? Do you display acceleration sense which is a hallmark of the accomplished driver? This is the ability to vary the speed of the vehicle in keeping with road and traffic conditions where braking is not needed. It is directly linked to the quality of your observations. The examiner will look for power to be applied precisely, smoothly and progressively at the right time.

## **Mirrors**

You will be expected to use the mirrors, internal and external, correctly in the correct sequence within the system but in addition you must have an accurate knowledge of what is happening behind you all the time. Use of mirrors does not replace shoulder cheeks where necessary.

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## **Horn**

The examiner will note if you use the horn when necessary, with the appropriate length of note for the hazard, or if you use it aggressively. Although a horn warning may not be necessary during the test, movement to cover the horn or reference to it during commentary may indicate that you considered using it.

## **Visibility**

The inside and outside of screens and windows should be clean, clear of mist and ice and swept of water so as not to inhibit your view. A candidate will not pass if owing to condensation or frost he or she peers through a small hole rubbed clear with the back of the hand. Proper use of the demisters, wipers and natural ventilation is essential. You should ensure that your views are not reduced because of stickers and other objects.

## ***Driving performance***

### **Moving off and stopping**

Your moving off and stopping must be safe, smooth and precise. You should be aware of what is happening around you, check over your shoulder and signal as appropriate. Similarly when stopping you should be observant, brake smoothly and signal as necessary.

### **System**

The examiner will expect to see you demonstrate your understanding of the system so that your driving actions are always in the correct sequence. For example, he will note if you brake before or after you change gear and if you signal too early or too late.

The use of the system as outlined in *Roadcraft* is the cornerstone of advanced driving and inconsistencies in applying it will affect the grade awarded. To achieve a gold or silver grade you should apply the system consistently throughout the test. You may be given a bronze grade if you are inconsistent in applying it.

### **Positioning**

The examiner will note how you position your vehicle on the open road and on the approach to hazards such as junctions and roundabouts. He will note your use of lanes. You should always be able to position the vehicle in order to obtain the best view that is available. But you should also understand that at times a position for view or speed will have to be sacrificed for the sake of safety.

We again emphasise that the mark of an advanced motorist is always to be able to place the vehicle precisely where it belongs under all conditions and that it should be in the right place, travelling at the right speed and with the correct gear engaged.

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## **Cornering**

The examiner will watch how you drive around corners and bends in both urban and rural areas. He will look at the line you take: does it give the best view and safety margin? Was the speed chosen correct and were the controls used correctly? You will be expected to control your vehicle precisely so that you can stop on your own side of the road within the distance you can see to be clear. You should be able to make good use of limit point analysis. When you drive round bends and corners, you should not cross marked centre lines. You should not cut corners when entering marked junctions. RoADA believes that these actions are potentially dangerous because they may be the result of entering the hazard too fast and may confuse both oncoming and following drivers. This view is supported by *The Highway Code*. If anything untoward happened during such a manoeuvre the driver might be seen to be at fault and might then blame RoADA for teaching or condoning this action. If there are no centre markings then some movement over the centre of the road may be acceptable.

## **Signals**

You should regard signals as the language of the road. You will be expected to give signals correctly and in good time. You should give them only where they will help other road users. They must indicate what you intend to do and not what you are doing. Where appropriate you should back indicators with arm signals. The examiner will note whether you give signals which are unnecessary or misleading.

## **Reaction to signs and hazards**

If you are to maintain safety and flow you must be able to recognise early and react to signs and hazards. You should always have time to consider all the phases of the system, and form and apply a driving plan before reaching the hazard.

## **Reversing**

You will be asked to carry out a manoeuvre involving reversing. Stopping and realigning the vehicle so as not to strike the kerb may be acceptable.

## **Progress**

Advanced drivers must demonstrate the ability to control their vehicles at speeds up to the legal limits where it is safe to do so. While the speed must always be safe and legal, the examiner will expect a brisk drive with optimum progress where possible.

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## **Overtaking**

Overtaking must be planned and carried out safely and within the speed limit. Before you decide to overtake you should consider many safety factors. Examiners will expect you to overtake if it is appropriate but remaining in the overtaking position for long periods may indicate that you are not looking far enough ahead or may be interpreted as being aggressive. Correct positioning and acceleration sense will help add smoothness and finesse. Exceeding the speed limit in order to complete an overtake is unacceptable.

## ***General ability***

### **Depotment**

You should have a comfortable but businesslike position and show a high degree of alertness and concentration.

### **Consideration and restraint**

The examiner is looking for you to display a thoughtful, progressive drive but showing self discipline and restraint to ensure safety. Creating too many opportunities for others may be appreciated but may adversely affect the opportunities to make progress during the test.

### **Speed**

Advanced drivers must demonstrate the ability to control their vehicles safely at speeds up to the legal limits. A driving plan that relies on exceeding the speed limit to complete a manoeuvre is unacceptable. If you consistently exceed the speed limit the examiner will stop the test and you will fail.

### **Temperament**

The examiner will expect you to feel nervous and will make allowances. You should try to appear businesslike and confident during the drive and try not to let any nervousness affect your overall performance.

### **Vehicle sympathy**

You should respect your vehicle and drive it in a way which while displaying sympathy for it allows you to obtain the optimum performance from it. You should avoid harsh use of the controls. You should drive according to changes in road surface.

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## **Observations**

Advanced drivers will be expected to search for information in the near, middle and far distant views. They look for and see more than other drivers and so have more information on which to plan their driving. They will look ahead and cover a much wider field of view. They are always looking for clues to enable them to anticipate the actions of other road users. The examiner will want to see evidence that you are doing this.

Even in congested traffic advanced drivers will always be using observation to form a driving plan, looking far enough ahead so that they are not forced into an unplanned action or a move out of sequence in the system. It is not enough merely to acknowledge a change as the examiner will expect to see how this is being analysed and ordered in developing a driving plan.

## **Judging distance**

The examiner will note your ability to judge distance and note whether you follow vehicles at a safe distance. He will also expect some appreciation of the speed of approaching vehicles and judgement of closing distances. You should use acceleration sense to maintain a safe position in relation to other traffic.

## **Commentary**

If you wish to give a commentary the examiner will be pleased for you to do so though this is not essential. The examiner may ask you to think aloud for a few minutes to illustrate how you are using the system when approaching a hazard. This will help him to judge your observation and planning. If you choose to give a commentary it should describe what you see, your assessment and anticipation, and your proposed driving plan.

## **Concentration**

Concentration and alertness are the keystones of good driving. Distractions are a part of life with which we must cope. Do not fix on one view but scan the surroundings constantly.

## **Motorways and dual carriageways**

joining the motorway can be from either lane of the slip road and the choice will depend on traffic conditions and which lane gives the best view. You should use the different elevations of slip road and motorway to give the best view. You should use acceleration sense to achieve an appropriate merge speed. Speed and following distances should be appropriate for the conditions. When leaving the motorway you should be in lane 1 before the 300 yards marker and, if necessary, signalling that intention.

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## Questions

To conclude the test the examiner will ask you questions on *The Highway Code* which you should know thoroughly and general motoring matters, perhaps including knowledge of *Roadcraft*. There will be some questions on basic car mechanics. Your vehicle handbook should provide enough information to answer these.

## *After the test*

At the end of the test the examiner will discuss the test and tell you if you have passed and at what level. He will send a report to the Regional Senior Examiner who then has one week in which to clarify any details and return it to us. We shall type your report and issue a certificate. We shall also send you our brochure of regalia from which you may wish to purchase a badge and other items.

## Driving grades

Advanced driving is the ability to control the position and speed of the vehicle safely, systematically and smoothly, using road and traffic conditions to progress unobtrusively with skill and responsibility. This skill requires a positive but courteous attitude and a high standard of driving competence based on concentration, effective all round observation, anticipation, and planning. This must be co-ordinated with good handling skills. The vehicle will always be at the right place on the road at the right time, travelling at the right speed with the correct gear engaged and can always be stopped safely on its own side of the road in the distance that can be seen to be clear.'

DSA, RoADA, IAM, 1997

It is difficult to lay down precise specifications for the association's three gradings as it is very much a matter for the expertise and overall judgement of the examiner. It is important, however, to provide guidelines on how the various grades are determined to ensure consistency, understanding and above all confidence in the grading system. The grade decided by the examiner will not be changed, although any appeal in writing will be reviewed by the chief examiner, who may offer a retest or comment on any points raised. Examiners operate under strict national guidelines to ensure that the association's very high standards are maintained. The following guidelines about the requirements for each grade are intended to help you to understand better the criteria applied when awarding a grade.

## **GOLD**

This grade is recognised as the highest driving award available to the public. It will be awarded only to the driver who displays a complete understanding and appropriate application of the principles outlined in *Roadcraft*. With all this in place the gold standard driver will be able to make unobtrusive, planned, polished progress consistent with safety and the law.

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The candidate will display a confidence and ability throughout the whole test which leads the examiner to consider that the candidate has the potential to do well on a police advanced course. The candidate's performance must be consistent throughout the whole of the test and so any lapses may result in a lower grade. Awards of this grade must therefore be reserved for the very best drivers.

### **SILVER**

This grade will be awarded to drivers who are well above average. These drivers will drive consistently safely and systematically but without the final polish, flair and smoothness of the gold driver. They will demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the system of car control. Candidates must be able to drive up to the permitted speed limit where it is safe to do so and vary speed according to circumstances and conditions. It must be emphasised that silver is an extremely high grade and a commendable achievement.

### **BRONZE**

This grade will be awarded to drivers whose driving performance is significantly above the standard required to pass the L-test. These drivers will show a basic knowledge of *Roadcraft* but lack the ability to apply the system consistently throughout the test. The drive should be entirely safe, observing traffic signs, responding correctly to hazards and should display advanced driving techniques.

### **FAIL**

Candidates who fall below the minimum pass will fail. Drivers will fail if they display potentially dangerous faults, persistently infringe speed limits, commit violations of Road Traffic Law or the rules contained in *The Highway Code*. If the candidate fails to reach the pass standard, the examiner will offer advice on improvement and encourage further training or guidance from a local group.

Occasional minor infringements with perceived acceptable reasons should not result in failure on their own but may be a reason for a lower grade. As a general rule, the examiner will consider whether the candidate is a driver worthy of displaying the badge of an advanced driver, i.e. someone who will consistently drive according to the principles of *Roadcraft*.

If you fail your initial test you may take a free retest between three and six months later. During this time we hope that you will have received assistance to improve your driving. If you wish to take a retest before your free test is due you will be expected to pay a fee of £20. Examiners' decisions on test results are final. If you wish to improve your standard we do suggest that you join a local group. You will then be in touch with other members who will advise and perhaps offer tuition.

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## How does it all work?

RoADA is a section of RoSPA, one of the foremost safety advisory and training organisations in the world. Local groups have been formed to offer free training, support and advice to anyone who wants to improve their driving and to pass the advanced test. RoADA operates in a very practical style by creating local groups of volunteers, all of whom have passed the advanced test and have been trained to pass on their knowledge to others. Groups often work closely with police advanced drivers and instructors to ensure that the standards outlined in *Roadcraft the police driver's handbook*, are maintained.

Before taking the test you should study the current editions of *The Highway Code and Roadcraft*. Without a good knowledge of both you are unlikely to obtain a high grade. You would be unwise to apply for an advanced test unless you have had some additional training since passing your L-test. For information about the location of your nearest group you should contact RoADA headquarters or visit our websites, details of which are at the end of this booklet.

### Administration

Test administration takes place at RoSPA headquarters in Birmingham where you can contact the Administration Officer during office hours (0 1 21 248 2099). Outside office hours there is an answer service (0121 248 2000). Please preface messages '*For the Advanced Drivers' Association*'.

When we receive your application form we shall send it to the Regional Senior Examiner for your area. Within one week he will allocate an examiner who will contact you by phone or by letter within two weeks to arrange your test. This will be carried out using your own vehicle. Many examiners are serving police officers who work shifts so please book your test at least a month in advance. You may be asked to travel a short distance to meet the examiner or to start the test away from a congested area.

All examiners hold a UK police advanced driving qualification and many are also police instructors. Your examiner will therefore be one of the best trained drivers in the country.

Please bring your driving licence, MoT certificate if appropriate, and insurance certificate. Tests last about an hour and a half and cover a variety of road conditions. Occasionally a senior examiner may wish to travel on the test but will take no part in the testing and will not accompany you if you object.

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If at the last moment you are unable to keep your appointment it is unlikely that we shall be able to cancel the test. The examiner may even have taken time off work to test you. Please make sure that you cancel your test only in unavoidable circumstances and not just for your own convenience. If you cancel your appointment at short notice (three days or less) you will be charged £10.

When your retest is due we shall send you a reminder and booking form. You must take your retest within a reasonable time of the due date in order to keep your membership.

We offer you our good wishes for a successful test.

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Web sites:    <http://www.roada.org.uk>  
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