

Driver Assessment Companion Document

The information below accompanies the Driver Assessment form (thanks and acknowledgement to the Pacific Traffic Education Centre) to explain evaluation terms and criteria, as well as the behaviors and range of values assessors should observe when assessing drivers.

Eye Lead Time

Eye lead time is the time (and distance) a driver visually scans ahead of their vehicle. Drivers must continuously survey their path of travel to detect objects and activities, acquire enough information to understand each one, and decide what actions to take (e.g. slow down, change, lanes, pull over, etc.). Eye lead time is the furthest distance ahead the driver includes in their active scanning cycle.

Sufficient eye lead time gives drivers the opportunity to complete necessary response maneuvers. Reaction times vary by individual, and by the condition of the driver (e.g. fatigued drivers react slower than when they are not fatigued). As vehicle speed increases, the distance travelled while the driver plans and completes a maneuver (e.g. apply brakes, and slow down) increases; drivers must increase their eye lead time accordingly.

On the highway, eye lead time should be **20 to 30 seconds**. In the city, it should be **12 to 15 seconds**, or about 1.5 to 2 city blocks. Assessors can determine eye lead time by watching the driver's glance, asking the driver to periodically describe objects they observe in the distance, and then timing how long it takes to get there.

Left to Right Scanning

Drivers must look left and right of the roadway to see and respond to objects and events relevant to their travel path, particularly in heavy, multi-lane traffic and school zones, and "high activity zones" such as intersections, wildlife crossings and shopping malls exits. The assessor should detect the driver moving their eyes (and to a lesser degree, their head) to the left and right to capture 180 degrees of information.

Shoulder Checks

Drivers should conduct shoulder checks:

- Before pulling to or from the roadside,
- Before changing lanes, or merging onto a highway,
- Before entering a turning lane, and turning at intersections,
- Before overtaking another vehicle,
- Before reversing (360 degree check required),
- Before performing a U-turn, 2-point turn or 3-point turn.

Using Rearview Mirrors to Track Traffic

To keep track of traffic coming up behind or beside them, drivers should check rearview mirrors **every 5 to 8 seconds**. The assessor should see the driver also check their mirrors before initiating a significant speed reduction (e.g. braking for an obstacle, stopping at an intersection), starting down a hill and before exiting their stopped vehicle (to avoid opening the door or exiting into close-passing traffic).

Following Distance

Because reaction and stopping distance both increase with speed, safe following distance increases with speed. It's easier to apply a safe following time. The most common measure is the **2-second rule**: your vehicle passes a fixed object on the side of the road (e.g. tree, signpost) at least 2 seconds after the vehicle you are following. That's for ideal driving conditions. When roads are slippery or visibility is poor due to rain, fog or smoke, double that to **4 seconds**. During very slippery winter conditions, use **6 seconds**. Assessors should observe drivers adjusting their following distance / time in response to changing road, weather and traffic conditions.

Space At Stops

When stopping in the line of traffic, drivers should maintain **1 car length** between their vehicle and the vehicle ahead. You should be able to see the pavement just behind the rear wheels of the vehicle ahead. There should be enough space to allow the vehicle behind to pull to the left or right and move past the vehicle in front, without first backing up. This gap also provides "cushion area" in the event you are suddenly rear-ended while stopped.

Path of Least Resistance

The "path of least resistance" refers to the route by which the driver minimizes risks caused by their vehicle, and minimizes risks posed by other vehicles. In an emergency, this means selecting the path and executing maneuvers that avoid the crash, or at least minimize the magnitude of total consequences. In everyday driving, this means moving the vehicle to minimize risks – giving cyclists and pedestrians a little extra room, avoiding interactions with aggressive drivers, selecting the lane that most closely matches your speed, etc.

Right of Way

Assessors should observe drivers yielding the right of way to others consistent with the law, and best driving practices. The rule is "right of way should be given, and not taken". The driver of the vehicle *entitled* to right of way should make eye contact with the driver of the other vehicle to confirm that driver is actually "giving" the right of way. When it's your turn to yield, exchange a courteous glance with the other driver to let them know you are yielding.

The following rules apply.

- When 2 vehicles arrive at an intersection (with or without signals) at about the same time, yield to any vehicle approaching from the right.
- At a 4-way signed intersection, yield to the vehicle that is first to come to a complete stop. If 2 vehicles come to a stop at the same time, the vehicle to the left yields to the vehicle to the right.

- At an intersection, the vehicle intending to make a turn must yield right of way to pedestrians and other vehicles.
- At a yield sign, the driver must slow down (or stop if necessary) and yield right of way to traffic already *in* the intersection or traffic circle.
- A vehicle entering the roadway from a side road or driveway must yield to vehicles and pedestrians.
- At all marked and un-marked crosswalks, vehicles must yield to pedestrians.

Acceleration / Deceleration Smoothness

Smooth driving is the hallmark of driving finesse; the key to smoothness is technique and anticipation. Think of the limousine driver that must get clients to the opera in a hurry. The driver makes positive starts and uses accurate throttle control to move up to speed. There's no neck-jarring acceleration, or on-the-gas / off-the-gas uncertainty. The same applies to slowing – the driver anticipates a stale green will soon turn amber, and eases off the throttle early to avoid abrupt braking. The smooth driver surveys the driving environment to anticipate what new circumstance may arise from the actions of other drivers, and is ready to implement that plan as events occur.

Braking: Full Stops

Think again of the smooth limo driver who must make “champagne stops”. They apply well-timed, purposeful braking that relaxes in the final few metres to ensure there is no perceptible spring rebound when the limo gently comes to complete rest just behind the stop line, ensuring no tea is spilled by guests in the back.

Speed for Conditions

Drivers must continuously evaluate their driving environment and adjust vehicle speed to correctly accommodate them. Drivers should be observed reducing speed for declining road conditions (e.g. pavement ruts, gravel surfaces), weather conditions (e.g. snow, fog), driver conditions (e.g. uncertainty, fatigue) and traffic conditions (e.g. congestion).

Speed Signs

Assessor should observe the driver reading and acknowledging speed signs (and other traffic signs) by checking the speedometer to confirm they are already travelling at that speed, or adjusting their speed consistent with signage.

Lane / Turn Position / Set-up

Drivers should position their vehicle in the centre of the travelled lane width (i.e. don't hug the centerline, and don't travel on the shoulder). When approaching intersections, the assessor should see the driver plan the turn, slow the vehicle, check mirrors, activate turn signals, move into the appropriate lane when the way is clear and position the vehicle to prepare for a smooth and efficient turn.

A left-hand turn should begin and end in the left-hand lane in your direction. A right hand turn should begin and end in the right lane, unless the right lane is a parking lane, and there is a vehicle parked there.

Steering: Hand Position, Smoothness

The best way to grip the steering wheel is the “9 to 3” position, not the “10 to 2” position. Click [here](#) to learn more. This grip is essential to contributing to smooth control of the vehicle. Check out [this video](#) to understand the preferred push-pull strategy for steering wheel operation. Note: Although this video shows the driver initiating push-pull steering from the top of the steering wheel, it is quite acceptable to begin push-pull steering from the “9 to 3” position.

Signals: Timing and Use

Assessors should observe the driver signal their intention to turn well before initiating the turn. The objective is that turn signals are used to provide others (drivers, cyclists and pedestrians) with ample advance notice of the intention to turn.

Activating turn signals too soon can create confusion, causing others to misunderstand your plan. For example, consider a vehicle preparing to exit a side road between you and the intersection at which you plan to turn. Activating the signal too soon may lead them to think you are turning at their location, and pull out in front of you.

Ensure signals are deactivated after the turn is complete.

Other Means of Communication – e.g. horn, eye contact

Vehicle horns should be used as a tool to promote safe driving practices, not to remind other drivers of their small mistakes. Drivers may use their horns to alert other drivers of relevant hazards, or draw their attention to driving-related matters. If the car ahead has been stopped at a green light for 4 or more seconds, a polite beep (rather than a BEEEEEEP!!) may inspire them to move forward.

Eye contact is a crucial driving tool. Assessors should observe the driver making eye contact with pedestrians, cyclists and other motorists, particularly when one seems unsure of the intentions of the other, or is unclear who has the right of way.

Seating, Head Rest Position and Mirror Adjustment; Seat Belt Use

Before getting underway, the driver should take a few minutes to adjust their seat and headrest to achieve a comfortable and efficient seating position (see [WikiHow](#) for a thorough description). Once they are settled into that position, the driver should check and adjust all mirrors to maximize rearward view and minimize blind spots (see [this link](#) for further information). Drivers must consistently use their seatbelts, and require passengers to do the same.

Parking / Backing

Parking and backing exercises are a good way to evaluate driver skills, and see how precisely they maneuver their vehicle. Assessor should have the driver parallel park their vehicle, and complete a backing maneuver similar to what they would have to do during their work-related driving. The assessor should stand outside the vehicle to observe the parking maneuver and evaluate its effectiveness, and to assist in the backing procedure (e.g. signaling).

Anticipation – Adjusting Driving to Anticipated Conditions / Events

Check to see how the driver anticipates events, objects or hazards that will be relevant to their driving. To anticipate what might happen, the driver must pay attention to and make early use of information available to them. As they approach a roadside work zone, does the driver observe activities in the zone to anticipate when the flagperson will stop traffic? Do they seem surprised by a vehicle approaching from a side street, or a pedestrian leaving the sidewalk?

Judgment and Decision-Making

Driving success depends on a series of important decisions based on sound judgment. Drivers are presented with a stream of information and situations they must evaluate to “make the right call”. Does the driver interpret the information correctly? Do they make appropriate decisions followed by an effective response? Do they follow the rules of the road?

Consider a pedestrian busily texting but not paying attention to traffic. Rather than *expect* the pedestrian will not step into the crosswalk against the traffic signal, an alert driver judges the situation and acknowledges the possibility the pre-occupied pedestrian will not heed the traffic light. They develop a plan to avoid striking the pedestrian should that occur, and proceed with that plan until the driver confirms (via eye contact) that the pedestrian will remain on the sidewalk.

Timing: Approach, Traffic Interactions

Does the driver time plan and complete lane changes in a manner that contributes to steady traffic flow? Or, do other drivers have to “get out of their way”? When overtaking another vehicle, is there sufficient time and space to do so? Do they adjust their speed to courteously accommodate merging traffic? Do they properly respond to road maintenance vehicles, emergency vehicles and roadside work zones?