



How To Read Road Signs - Roundabouts

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Introduction

Most people think that reading road signs is easy. In my experience there is more going on than meets the eye. This document hopes to help you understand what is going on and so you will find getting around becomes much easier.

I do not intend this document to explain what each individual road sign means, it is designed to explain common misconceptions or problems people experience when learning to drive; you should therefore still read:

The Highway Code <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-highway-code/traffic-signs>
and

Know Your Traffic Signs (free download on my website) or
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/know-your-traffic-signs>

Please note that most of these pictures in this document are taken from Google Maps and so some are slightly distorted due to how they overlay the images.

If you see HC, I am referring to the Highway Code, if you see KYTS I am referring to Know Your Road Signs.

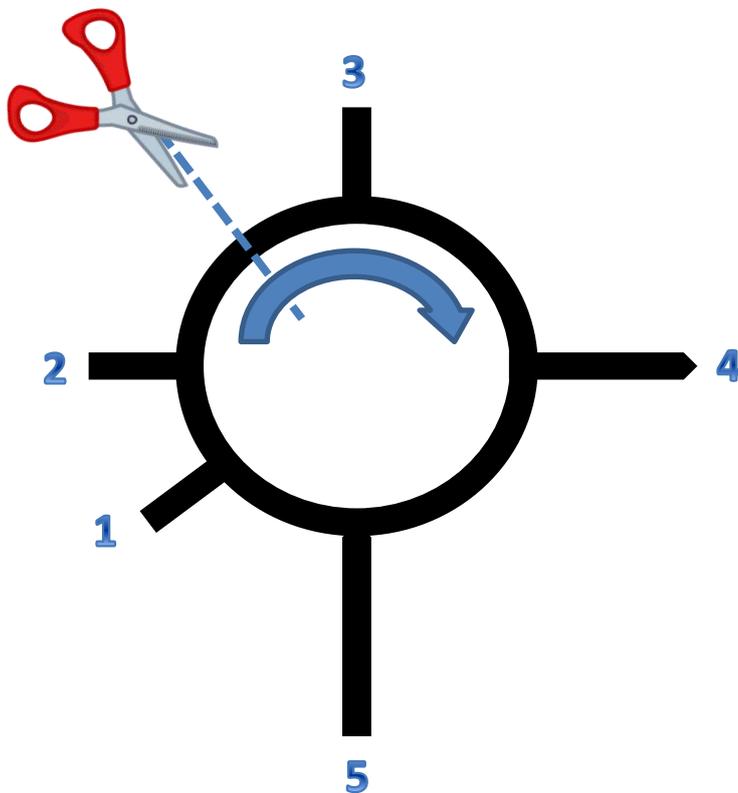


Roundabouts

The roundabout is the main road

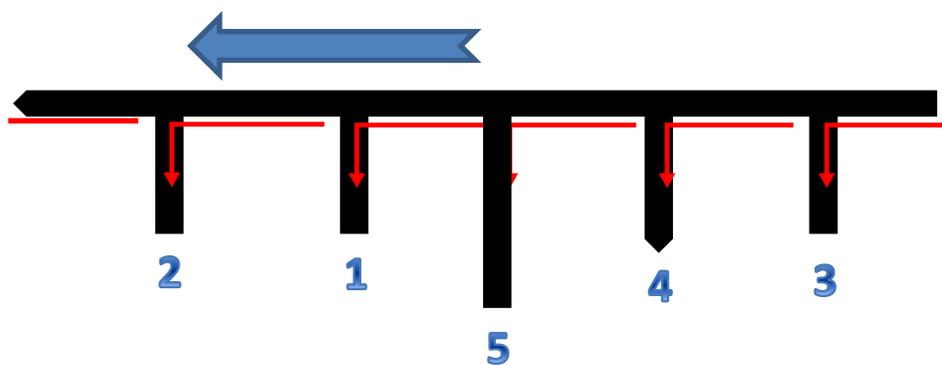
The roundabout is the main road and all joining roads are side roads. It's basically a one-way street with side roads on the left. You can also get things in the middle of roundabouts like a carpark; this should be thought of as a side road on the right.

You will be used to approaching the end of a road at a T-junction (a road approaching another and there's a Give-Way sign at the end). You can only cross the line at the end if you are happy that you won't hit the car on the main road.



Again, just thinking of a normal main road, you only indicate left as you approach the side road you will be entering; otherwise you'd give a misleading signal and potentially have someone pull out in front of you.

Here we have a 5 exit roundabout going around in the usual clockwise direction. Imagine that you have cut it and straighten it out like it was metal.



To get this:

Now the roundabout looks like a one-way street with 5 side roads. You should now treat it just like you would any other main-road/side-road meeting situation and only indicate (red

line) left when you have passed the previous exit or are approaching the road you intend to enter.

The terminology used

At roundabouts we use terms such as “left first”, “ahead second”, “right fourth” and so on. This terminology is broken into two pieces of information; how to treat the junction and what exit number you need to aim for.



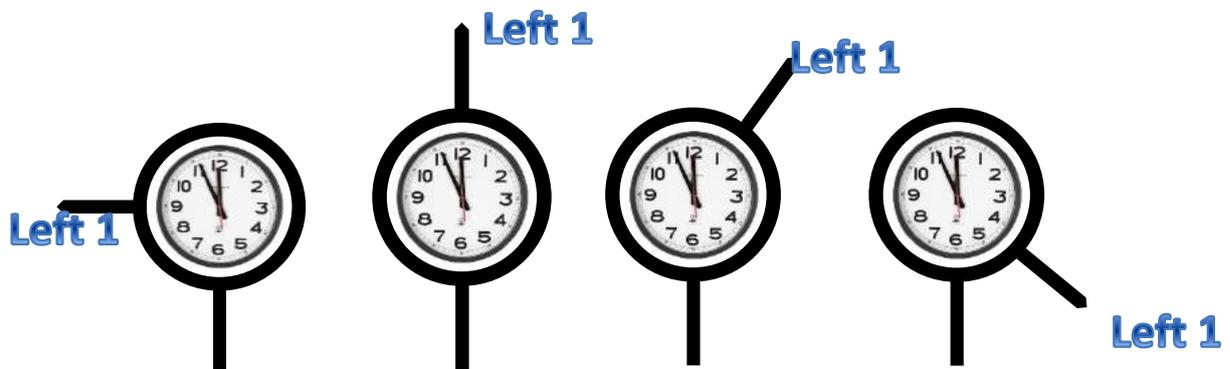
We say **Left**, not because it's on the left but because you should treat it like it's on the left.

This means, left lane, left indicator.

You will need to note the position of the exit and the order at which you find it; assume a clock face is superimposed onto the roundabout sign; you are approaching from 6 o'clock.

Left

Left means, exit number 1 on the outside of the roundabout; doesn't matter where it is on the roundabout. You should be thinking left lane and left indicator.

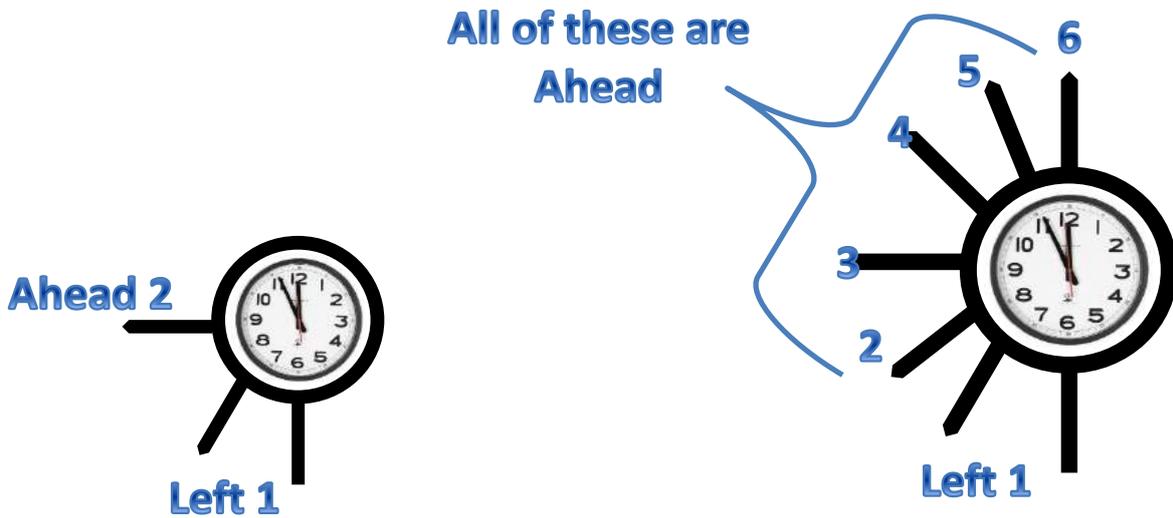


Please note that indicating left is mainly for the benefit of the person approaching the roundabout in that exit. This is because that person would like to know that you are entering their road and so they do not need to wait for you. If there is no one approaching in that road then no-one else benefits from an indicator and so you could decide not to indicate if you so choose.

Also note that approaching in the left hand lane will put you on the outside of the roundabout so that you do not cut across the path of anyone when leaving. You can see that the only difference in the above 4 roundabouts is that that you just travel further between the entrance and exits.

Ahead

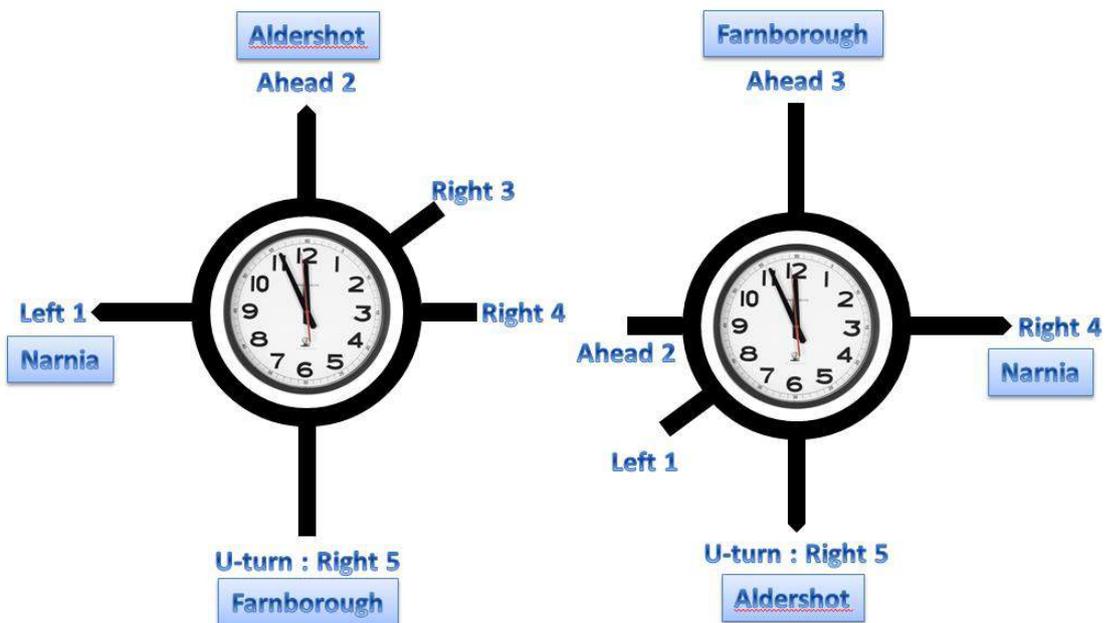
Ahead means, exit number greater than 1 and positioned somewhere between 6 and 12 o'clock inclusive. You should be thinking left lane, no indicator.



Right

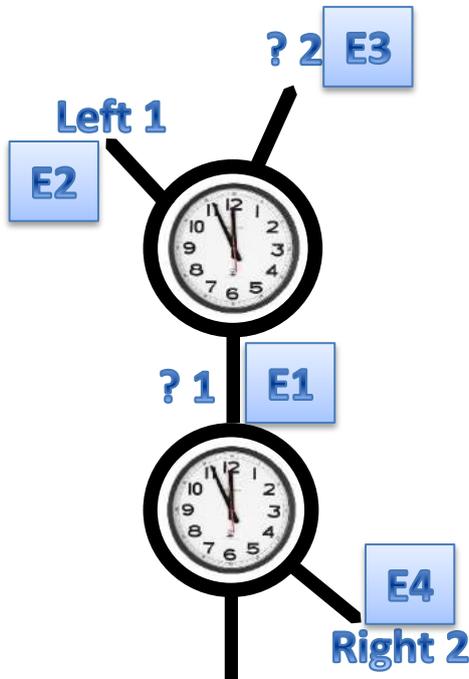
Right means, exit number greater than 1 and positioned after 12 o'clock. You should be thinking right lane, right indicator.

The number is purely the number of the exit in the order that you find them.



The possible exceptions

Here's a good one and it concerns indicator usage. I have marked the diagram with exits (E1,E2, etc) and how they should be treated but questions remain.....



When it comes to indicators you ask two questions:

1. Could it be misleading?
2. Does it benefit anyone?

If it's misleading then don't indicate; if it's not misleading but no one is there to benefit from it then you can choose not to indicate.

Regarding this diagram, I intend to approach from the bottom and go to E3.

E1 is clearly a 'left 1', however, leaving a left indicator on as you enter the road that's joining the roundabouts, might make it look like you're going to E2 and someone could pull into your path from E2.

You're clearly not turning right to E4 otherwise you'd have a right indicator going.

You could argue that no indicator is the correct course of action at this point to avoid confusion, but if there are people entering the roundabout at E1 then they would like to know that you are leaving the roundabout at E1.

Personally, I would indicate left on approach with the intention of immediately switching the indicator off as soon as I have left the first roundabout.

Now to the second roundabout! E3 is clearly a 'right 2' but as it is very close to being an 'ahead 2', if you indicated right then people in E3 might think that you're doing a U-turn; after all, why tell someone you intend to come in front of them if you don't actually intend to do so?

People in E2 will assume that you're travelling in front of them unless you indicate left (and I've made sure I'm not doing that), so they're happy.

So, this journey looks like it will be 'left 1', 'right 2', but I would personally treat it like 'left 1', 'ahead 2'; equally you could argue that it would treat it like 'ahead 1', 'ahead 2' and not indicate at all. You will have to decide on the day how you feel you look to others and what will help people the most.

They spread destinations over multiple signs

This sign is for long distance things like towns and motorways but in the distance you can see another sign that looks similar....



And here it is.... the local stuff.



The first sign shows places where lots of people go and the later one shows more local destinations. They spread places over multiple signs so that each sign doesn't become too busy to read. You will often find multiple signs of the same shape but each one talking about a different place; therefore don't worry if you don't see what you're looking for at the first sign.



This sign is the newer version of the one at the top of the page and as you can see, they have added more information.

Bypass or filter lanes



This sign shows that a road exists that basically misses out the roundabout.

You can still use the roundabout to turn left if you want to, but with the additional lane, you can miss the roundabout altogether.

There may or may not be a Giveaway sign at the end of the filter lane as sometimes traffic will just merge. It means that you won't need to stop at the roundabout though – cool huh!



This picture shows that the filter lane just goes around the corner; you can see the Giveaway line for the roundabout on the right.



This picture shows that although you do miss out the roundabout, in this instance there is still a Giveaway line.

Always look for the line and just proceed if there isn't one; lots of people fail the driving test for stopping when there isn't a Giveaway line, so be vigilant!

Red rectangles

The red rectangle on the above roundabout sign means dead-end or no through road and helps when your satnav tells you to go that way. **It is still a valid exit from a roundabout and should be counted as such;** it might go to a trading estate for instance! You will be coming back again if you go down there though.

So in the roundabout sign at the top, Aldershot is the third exit.

Pointy bits = Text relationship



The point on the end of lines purely means that text nearby is talking about that road. Any road on a sign without a point is just not being talked about on that sign.

Note that the road without an arrow is still a perfectly valid road and should be counted as such.

The second image below shows a sign that is further down the road from the first one. It is the same roundabout but you can now see more squared off ends because this sign simply isn't talking about them.

In the first image, Guildford is therefore 'Ahead 2nd exit'. IT IS NOT LEFT 2nd EXIT!!!!!!

With regards to these two signs; they are showing an extra level of complexity which is explained next.



Green and Blue signs show entrances and exits

So here's something that supplies additional confusion to everyone. Whenever they are talking about a motorway or dual carriageway (blue or green signs) they are likely to show entrances and exits to the roundabout, not just exits.



This is an exit from the roundabout onto a dual carriageway (the point on the road shows that the green box relates to it and because it's green, it's a dual carriageway)

and

because this line is the same width, this is the entrance onto the roundabout from the dual carriageway.

So the fat short roads should be ignored as exits from a roundabout.

So this roundabout sign is actually saying this:

Left 1st is not being talked about on this road sign. It is a perfectly valid exit, maybe there's a second sign that tells you it leads to shops?

Ahead 2nd is a dual carriageway called the A331. You can get to Guildford and Farnham if you subsequently get on to the A31. You can additionally get to Birdworld this way.

Ahead 3rd is a normal road called the A323 and you can get to Fleet or Aldershot this way.

Right 4th is a dual carriageway called the A331. You can get to the M3 and Reading this way.

Right 5th is a U-turn and would bring you back to where you had just come from.

Mind the gap



Roundabout signs have a gap between the entrance and the last exit.

This is only to make it easier for us to spot the last exit before coming back on ourselves.

Use defaults unless lane markings say otherwise



This road sign shows that the Aerospace Centre is right 3rd exit.

The image below shows that there are 3 lanes and lanes 2 and 3 go to the A325(S); equally, the A3011 is the left lane.

Frankly, WHO CARES??? I haven't been told to follow the A325 or A3011 so I will therefore get into lane 3 as that is the default lane to turn right.

If I was told to follow the A325 I would use lane 2 to turn right. (See 'Roundabout arrows are weird' later in this document).



Road signs are riddled with errors

Here are examples of errors; you need to keep your wits about you.

Fleet is shown as going left 1st, we get onto the A327 (not in brackets) and then get on to the A327 – wait, what???? I’m already on the A327!!!

This should actually say A323 just like the sign after it says:



This sign shows a roundabout with 6 roads joining it (5 exits, 1 entrance) but the sign on the other side of the same roundabout (coming from Ash Vale) only shows 5 roads!! They have joined the two roads after the Guildford exit together on the second sign – useful! Not...



Roundabout arrows are weird

There are different arrow markings for traffic light controlled roundabouts from non-traffic light controlled roundabouts – well of course there would be; why make life simple? Let me explain:



This roundabout doesn't have any traffic lights on it.

The arrows on the floor show that you can turn left from the left lane, go ahead from the centre lane and right from the right hand lane.

Basically you are told where each lane will take you.



This roundabout has traffic lights controlling it (you can see the stop line at the light).

The left hand lane goes left but apparently all the other lanes go ahead. In this instance they are telling you to go ahead at the traffic light; they are not telling you where each lane will go.

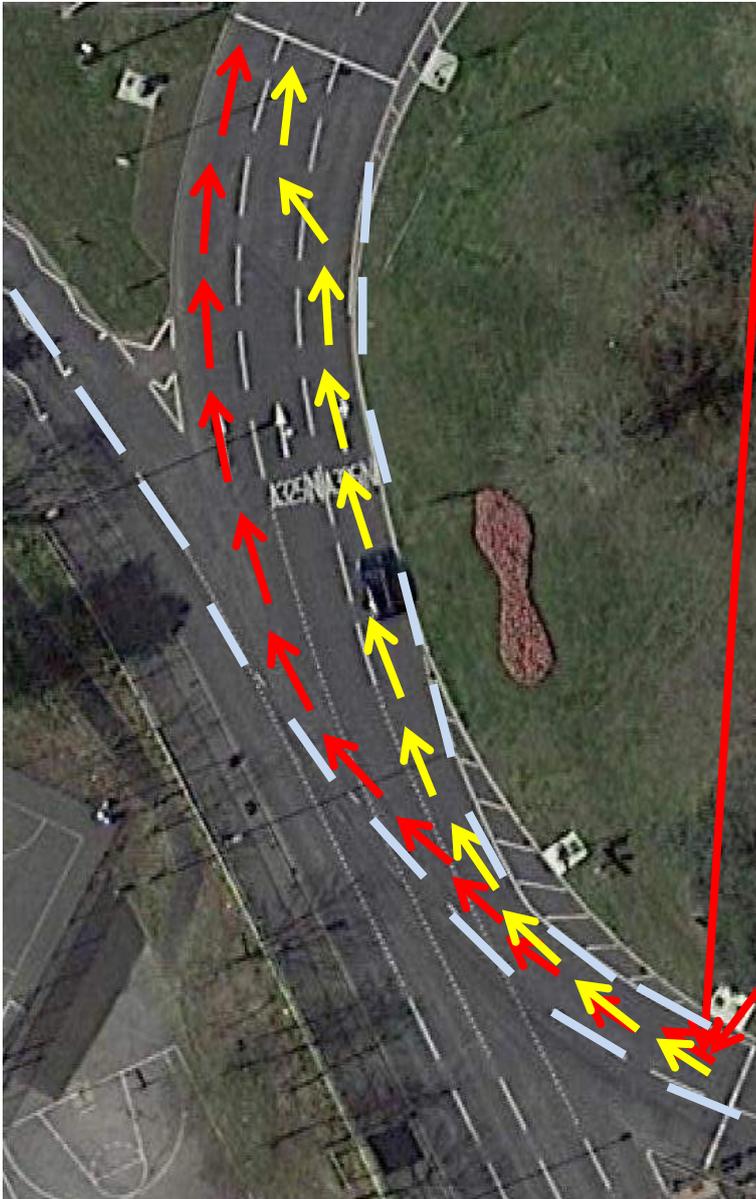
The markings after the traffic light show where the lanes go:



You must therefore ensure that you look ahead onto the signs and markings on the roundabout itself to see where each lane goes and not just rely on the signage on the approach to traffic lights.

Get In your lane!!!!

From time to time lanes split from one to any number of lanes. It is your job to read the signs, pick a lane and get in the lane immediately – don't delay, if you need the left lane, get in the left lane.



Starting from here turning right,
You see this sign telling you the Business park is the left lane:



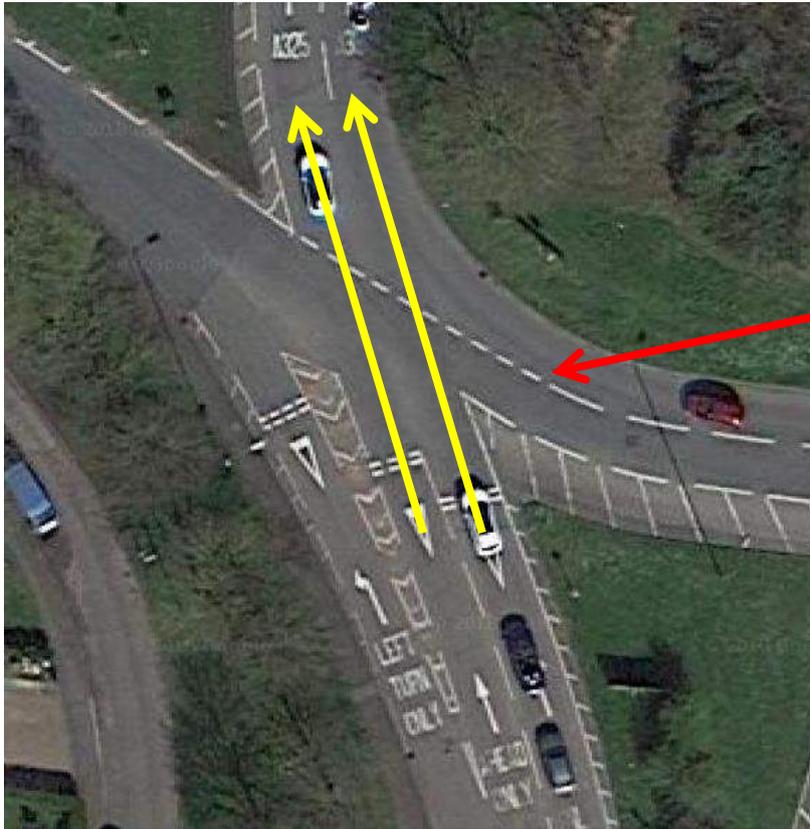
Get in the correct lane by staying on the left and turning when your newly created lane starts, like this (red line):

The yellow shows usual learner behaviour and THIS IS WRONG!!!

The light blue line shows the left and right hand sides of your lane, you are

therefore not doing a lane change (your lane is splitting from 1 into 4 lanes) but obviously it is beneficial to check on your left as you move over.

Ignore lines coming from elsewhere

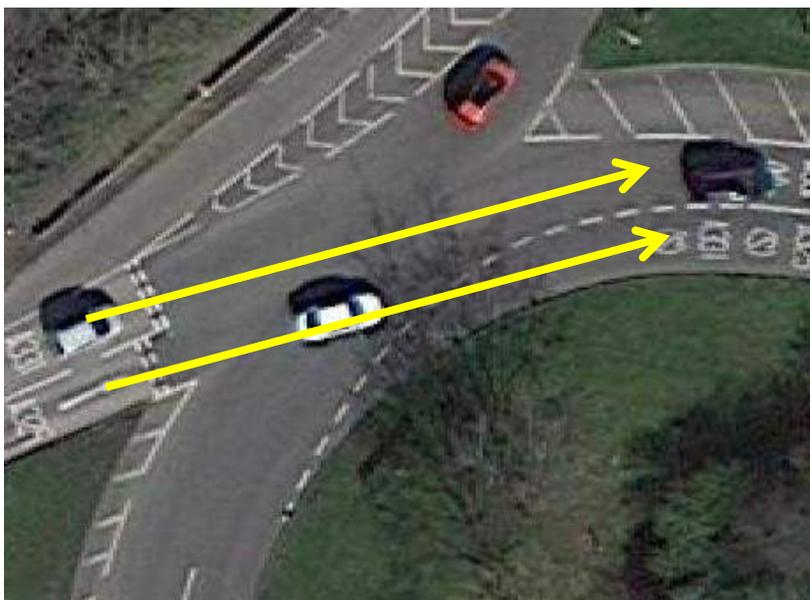


Only follow lines that you pass the start of and follow logical routes to avoid going into another person's lane.

In this picture a line cuts across the path of 2 others.

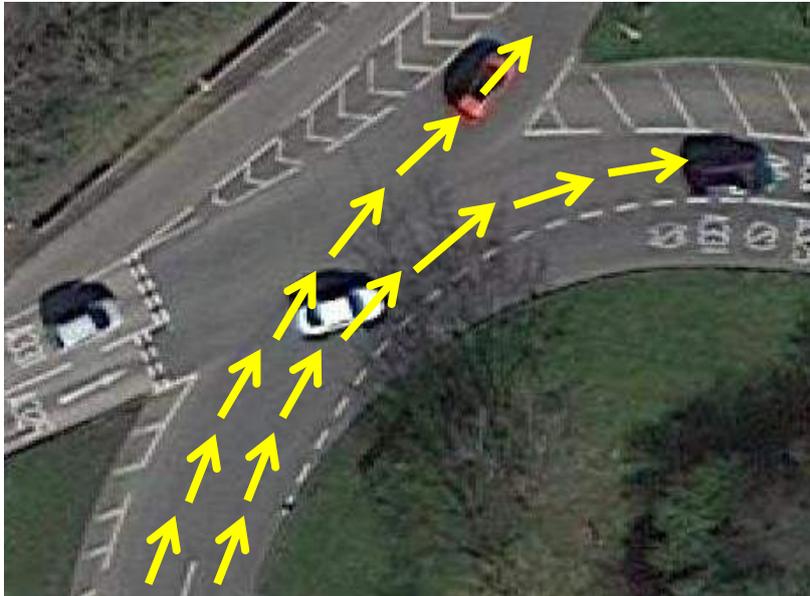
Ignore this one.

You should maintain 2 lanes if there is room for 2 vehicles at the entrance to the roundabout.



Lines from a roundabout are the right of your lane

On a roundabout, you have the kerb for the roundabout itself to the right of you. If a white line then appears to come out from a roundabout, this should be assumed to be the right of your lane.



In this picture, the left lane gets off; the right lane becomes the left lane purely by following the lines.

Think of other cars for positioning



When you have 3 lanes, the right hand lane on approach must become the right hand lane on the roundabout.

The middle approach lane must therefore be one lane over and thus become the left lane on the roundabout.

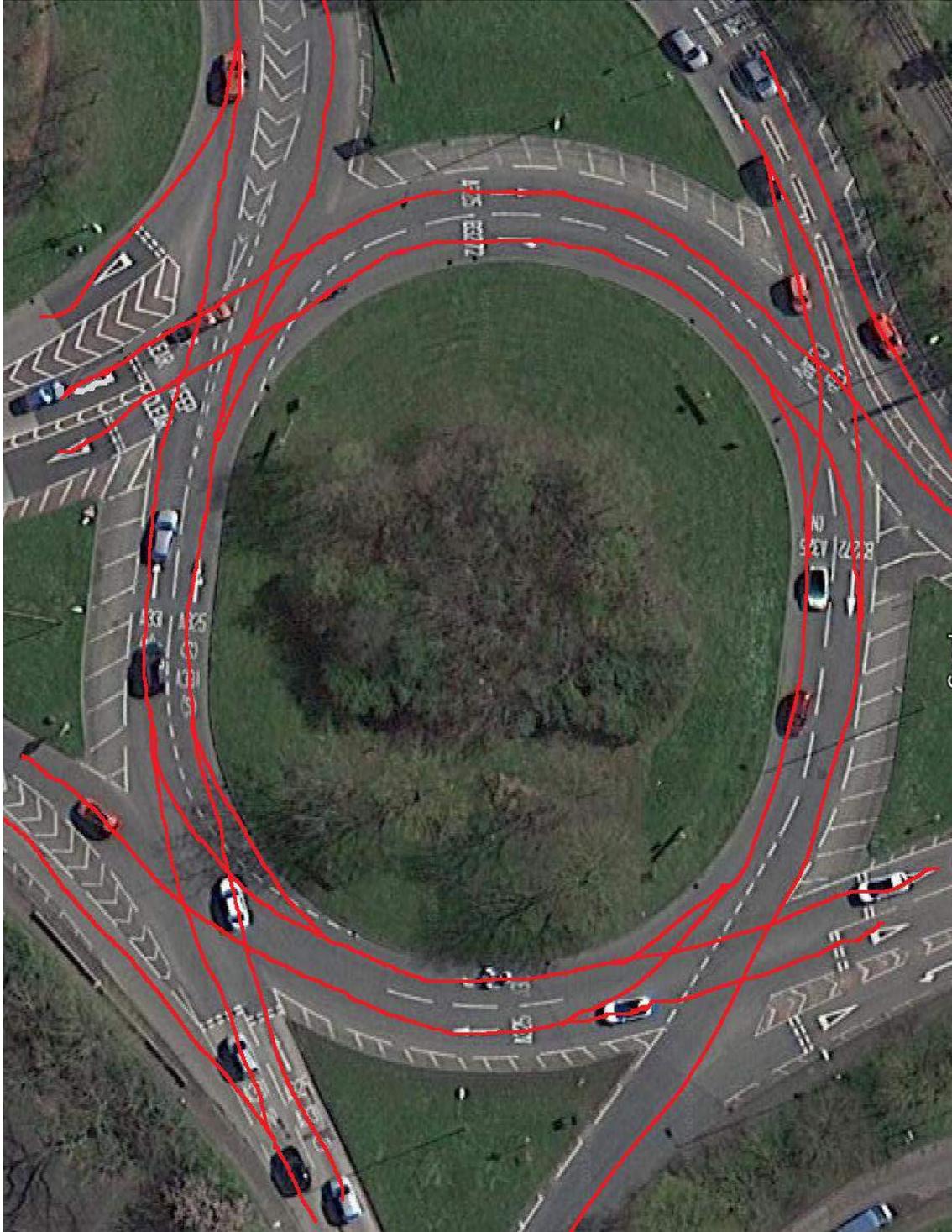
The left approach lane is therefore an implied left turn lane and would turn off.

Of course, you may still get someone going ahead from the left lane so if you approach in the middle lane, make sure you blind spot check to your left as you go out; if there's a car there, brake and drop in behind them; **what you must avoid is turning into the car that's on your right whilst trying to avoid the car on your left.**

The outside will go to the next exit

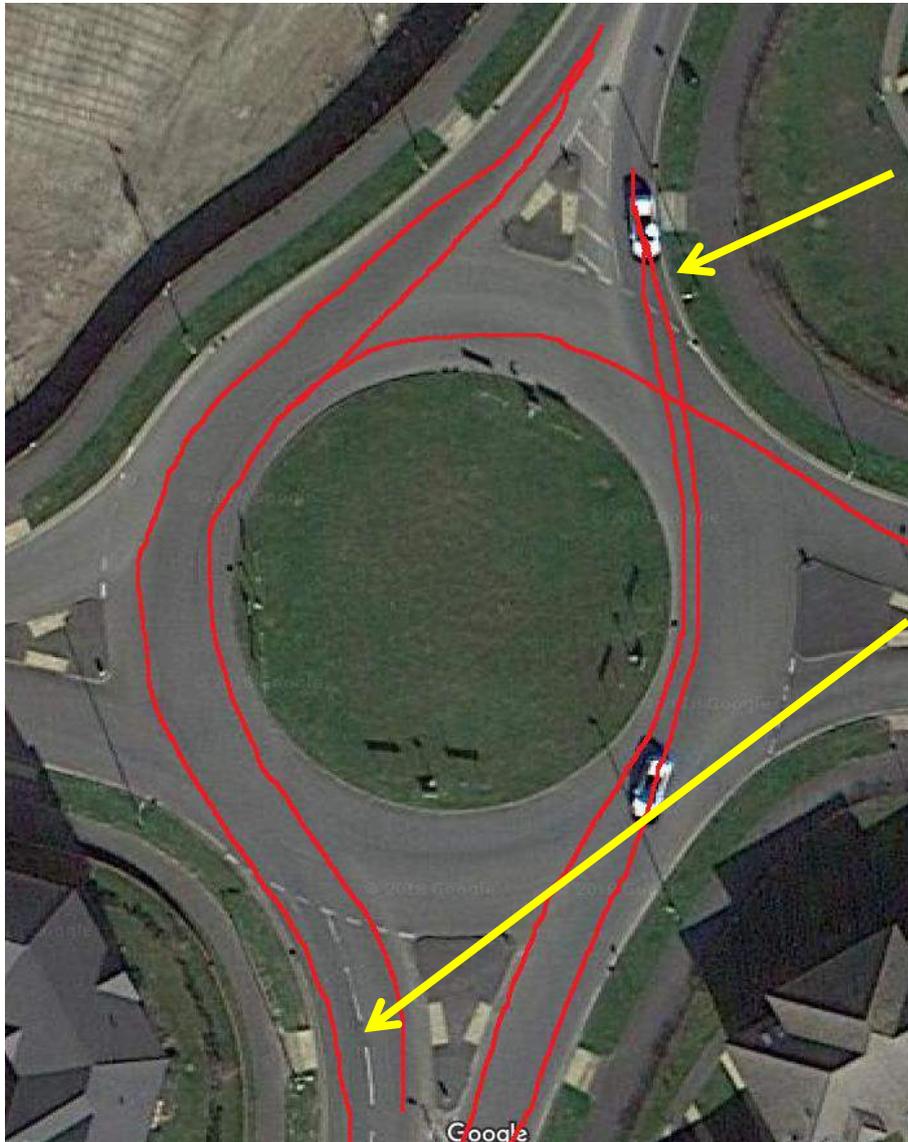
The outside will always go to the next exit. Other lanes may also go there but there's no guarantee. Count your exits and try to be on the outside as you approach yours.

Blind spot check and lane change if you are in the wrong lane.



Two lanes or not two lanes – that is the question!

QUESTION: How do you know whether to maintain two lanes or not at a roundabout when going ahead? ANSWER: The number of lanes ON THE APPROACH!!!!



Here there's one lane, therefore you need to look like you're heading to the lane you want after the roundabout. Take the shortest route.

Here, there are two lanes. You may have a car in the other lane next to you; therefore you can't do a lane change without doing a blind spot check. In the absence of a check, you must stay in your lane.

If there are actual marked lanes on the roundabout, it makes it easier to follow.



When the lane dividing line is missing (they get worn away by traffic sometimes), use the kerb on the left or right of you and stay near it; you can't fall into the other lane by accident this way.

Sometimes you get gravel and glass collecting on the outside of roundabouts; try and stay wide but avoid driving in this rubbish.

Example of following lanes

The following is the old Queens roundabout in Farnborough but hopefully it shows how to follow a lane. I have darkened down the lanes to ignore but in this example we are going to the third exit. Just keep an eye on the white lines to the left and right of your lane and ignore all other lines.



Gavin House Instructor









Gavin House Instructor

