



## How to read the road - Anticipation and Planning

### **Reading the road – overview**

You are driving a big heavy metal box that will cause a lot of damage or death if you collide with something. If you see dangers early you can avoid them and keep everyone safe.

A major problem with drivers in general is a lack of observation. Most people tend to stare at the back of the vehicle they are following and when that vehicle brakes, they brake. If the car in front were to brake hard then there's a real risk that the following car could react too slowly and crash into the back of the car they were following.

What we should all be doing is looking as far ahead as possible to get early warning of upcoming events. If you can see a traffic queue at the end of the road you can approach by lifting off the accelerator early and gently slowing. The car in front of you will brake anyway but because you already knew they would, you can maintain a safe distance, reduce the risk of skidding and hopefully not need to stop at all.

To get this early warning you need to read the road as though your eyes were a wave at the seaside. Waves move away from a beach and then come back in.

Your eyes need to:

1. Move away from the car looking as far up the road as you can see,
2. Start coming back to the car to check your lane positioning and look for potholes etc,
3. Look at the speedo to ensure you don't speed or drive too slow,
4. Go up to the mirrors to see what the people behind are doing,
5. Repeat point 1 to 4.

As you're doing points 1 and 2 from above, you want to:

1. Scan the road from left to right like you were reading a paper,
2. Make a note of all potential hazards such as pedestrian crossings or junctions,
3. Make a note of road signs and road markings and note what they are telling you about the road ahead,
4. Prioritise all the hazards and potential hazards,
5. Work out how you're going to deal with the hazards.

**Never stare whilst driving, you must constantly flick your eyes to find dangers and if you find one, look more often in that direction (but not at the expense of looking at the others). 3 quick looks in a direction is far better than 1 long look.**

**Ideally you want to be checking your mirrors every 3 to 5 seconds.**



## Examples

The diagram below shows the areas you should be looking at.



- 1** Whilst driving you should be looking as far ahead as you can see – know what you will have to contend with in the next 20 or 30 seconds.
- 2** Work your way back towards the car and pay attention to what is immediately ahead of you; is there a lane you need to be in? Do you need to avoid a pot hole?
- 3** Check the speed of your vehicle (especially if you are near to the speed limit)
- 4** Check behind you to find out what is happening. This is usually the centre mirror but can include side mirrors if they supply a better view at the time.

## Why bother? What's so important about looking in these areas?

Driving a car is all about knowing what is around you so that you can make informed decisions. If you know what's around you, you can start to anticipate what people will do and then change how and where you drive to best suit the situation.

- 1** Look ahead as far as you can see.

**Is there a slow moving vehicle in the left lane 5 cars ahead on a dual carriageway?** Start looking at the traffic behind you to see if you can find a safe moment to lane change before you get stuck behind a slow moving convoy.

**Is there a pedestrian approaching a crossing?** If there is, you should start to slow the vehicle just in case the pedestrian walks in front of you.

**Has someone just got into a car and so may be about to pull into your path?** Keep extra vigilance on the approach. You may not need to slow but you can position slightly further away from the parked cars to allow for doors to open. Maybe cover the horn and get ready to use it if they start to move. Be prepared for the actions of others.

**Is the road icy ahead?** If so, start progressive gentle braking to avoid skidding, braking suddenly where it is icy can cause you to lose control.

**Are you entering a new speed limit?** If the speed limit is lower than the current one, think about gear choice and look behind to see how close vehicles are; would it be dangerous to brake at the last moment?

If the speed limit goes up, that's a good opportunity for others to overtake you – look out for motorbikes behind that may pull in front of you just as you start to accelerate.



**Are you approaching a school?** Schools mean children and parents who are rushing around. Children also don't develop the ability to assess speed until they are older; they are unable to differentiate between a car approaching at 20mph or 40mph – scary stuff!!! If you don't adjust your speed, you could easily injure or kill a child.

## 2 Looking closer in front of the car

**Is there a lane to stay in?** Are you on a roundabout in a marked lane? Changing lane inadvertently if there's someone to your side could result in the death or a motorcyclist.

**Is there a pothole?** Potholes do thousands of pounds of damage to vehicles each year by bursting tyres or destroying suspension; if it's safe to go around then do so; if you can't (maybe there's oncoming traffic) reduce your speed so that the impact isn't as harsh.

**Are you just about to enter a left turn only lane?** Failing to notice you are in a lane that goes left can result in accidents as the people around you will expect you to turn. There's a really big chance that someone will drive in front of you causing an accident. To avoid this, always know where you are driving, you can then safely lane change if you're in the wrong place.

**Is there a child or cat coming through between parked cars?** Roads with lots of parked cars can hide approaching hazards – keep your eyes peeled! A child doesn't stand much chance if you're not looking for them and they walk out into your path 2 car lengths ahead of you.

## 3 Check your speed

Unless there's good reason, you should be driving near the speed limits.

Driving too slowly causes inconvenience for others at best but can be exceedingly dangerous in other situations. The bigger the difference in speed between your speed and the traffic around you, the harder it is for people to avoid a collision and when one occurs, the bigger the impact.

Speed limits are there for a reason, they keep people safe in built up areas and improve survival rates. You have to know the current speed limit you are driving in and know the speed you are driving at. Speed cameras are everywhere, don't risk losing your licence because you aren't aware of your speed.

## 4 Check your mirrors

**Is there a bike coming through stationary traffic behind you?** If you pull away as a bike passes you on the left or right, you could cause a collision – check!

**Is there an emergency vehicle trying to get through?** Anticipating this situation will mean that you have left enough room in front of you to get out of the way of the emergency services. Failing to get out of the way could ultimately hold them up – do you want it to be your fault that someone failed to get to hospital in time?



**Is there a car approaching in the right hand lane of a dual carriageway?** If you need to do a lane change, you need to move into a safe gap in the traffic. Good early knowledge of an approaching vehicle will give you options; you could slow down so that they pass earlier or you could speed up so that they can't catch you. Either option may be what you need; you decide at the time.

If you only looked in your mirror at the moment you needed to change lane but then found that there was a car there, you would have to take evasive action and you'd look pretty stupid.

**Is the person behind you weaving and looking down the side of your vehicle?** People who drive like this are generally looking for an opportunity to overtake. Some people will take serious risks to overtake and you may be called upon to slow down to give them room to get back to the left in order to avoid them hitting someone else. This happens a lot and can happen at any time – you have to be prepared for situations like these.

## **Examples of how to do it**

Hopefully you now appreciate why you have to know what's going on all around you. You need to know what's going on in all 4 places pretty much all the time.

Sometimes you will spot a hazard that needs extra attention in one of those areas. For instance, staying in your lane on a roundabout is very important so look at position 2 in preference to the other positions. Once you are happy with your positioning, start looking at your mirrors for people trying to overtake you or looking ahead to see the speed limit of the new road.



**Normal driving** you could cycle through 1,2,3,4.

**A car is trying to overtake you**, you could do 1,4,2,4,3,4,1,4,2,4,3,4 so I'm looking twice as often in the mirrors.

**Average speed cameras are in operation** and I can't afford to break the speed limit 1,2,3,4,3,1,2,3,4,3,1,2,3,4. I'm now looking more often at the speedo (I don't need to look twice as often but I do need to look more often).

**There's a pedestrian crossing** in the distance with a pedestrian approaching; in this instance I would look more frequently at the pedestrian the nearer I got to them (still keeping an eye on everything else).

At the end of the day it doesn't matter the actual order you look at these 4 places, what does matter is that you know what's going on in them all and that you prioritise where to look when you find hazards.

Be careful not to fall into the trap of spotting a hazard and then only looking at that hazard. For example, you could see a motorbike start to overtake you in the high street only to find that a pedestrian walks out in front of you.

Good drivers notice everything and think about how others will affect them; they almost see into the future and anticipate what will happen shortly. By anticipating, you adapt your driving; always assume the worst will happen and look out for idiots!