Many checkpoints have a legitimate purpose, for example to prevent weapons from entering an area. Some checkpoints, however, are designed to harass people or as a cover for ambush, theft or violence. It is important to recognise the difference between a legal, sanctioned checkpoint and one designed for the gain of the checkpoint personnel.

You first need to rapidly assess the nature of the checkpoint.

* Where it is located?
* Who is manning it?
* What does their mood appear to be?
* Are there any signs of trouble?

Checkpoints at crossroads, bridges, mountain passes and town entrances and exits are to be expected, and are likely to have been set up for the general monitoring of all passers-by. Checkpoints in the middle of a forest or on a mountain road away from habitation may exist for a more ominous purpose. Checkpoints manned by regular army and police forces may be less problematic than ones manned by irregulars.

If you suspect that there is a risk of violence or other serious problems, turn round and drive steadily away, if it is safe to do so.

Before approaching or leaving a checkpoint, inform base by radio. Do so in a discreet way, far enough from the checkpoint to avoid them seeing that you are using the radio

* Slow down
* Turn radios down low or off
* Keep valuables out of sight
* Roll window down low enough for civil conversation, but difficult to put hand inside car
* During day, remove sunglasses
* After dark, turn light inside the cabin on and headlights off
* Be ready with your ID documents
* Have one person who is prepared to talk on behalf the group: Agree where you have come from/ Where you are going/ Who you work for
* Keep a reasonable distance between vehicles
* Be sure you understand the signals given by checkpoint personnel (e.g. are they waving me on or into the side of the road?). Stop if unsure.

You should know the accepted etiquette for passing through a checkpoint in your area. It is always important to stay calm and clearly demonstrate that you are not a threat.

* Stop a few meters from the barrier
* Keep engine running unless told otherwise
* Remain in the vehicle unless asked to get out
* If asked to get out release seatbelt slowly so it does not look like you are reaching for a gun
* Avoid any sudden movements in the car ? if moving announce what you are doing before you do it, and move slowly
* Do not laugh or giggle
* Keep hands visible
* If vehicle is searched, comply
* Be friendly, co-operative and alert. Treat the soldiers or police with respect. They have a boring job to do, and are likely to give you an easier time if you show an interest in them. If appropriate, chat a little, perhaps about their family.
* If they ask you to do things that are inappropriate, be polite but firm in refusing, and use gentle humour if appropriate.
* NB. A soldier asking for money is a negotiation. A solider pointing his gun at you and demanding money is armed robbery. If threatened with a weapon, comply calmly with their instructions.
* If anything stolen, politely ask for it back (use your judgement; if the situation is threatening it may be best to accept the loss). If there is the possibility of violence at a checkpoint report the incident to a more senior officer once your journey is complete.
* If at all possible, refuse lifts to armed or uniformed personnel. Be prepared to be turned back if your organizational policy forbids it.
* Avoid looking back
* Once the checkpoint has been cleared and you are out of view report back in to base that you are continuing on your route.

Swipe right for this lesson's checklist

### RELATED LESSONS/TOOLS

* [Preparation lesson](umbrella://lesson/preparation)
* [Arrest lesson](umbrella://lesson/arrests)

### FURTHER READING

* [Good Practice Review Number 8: Operational security management in violent environments (Revised Ed.)](www.odihpn.org/download/gpr_8_revised2pdf)
* [CARE International: Safety & Security Handbook](ngolearning.org/courses/availablecourses/CARE%20Safety%20Course/Shared%20Documents/English_CARE_International_Safety_and_Security_Handbook.pdf)