

Developing your skill at using signals

Key points

- Consider the need to give a signal on the approach to every hazard, and before you change direction or speed.
- Give a signal whenever it could benefit other road users.
- Remember that signalling does not give you any special right to carry out the actions you indicate.
- Follow the *Highway Code* – check your mirrors before you signal or manoeuvre.

Using signals may seem to be a basic skill, but many drivers don't use the full range of available signals consistently or to best effect. This chapter will help you improve your skill at using signals. Giving information to other road users is a key part of information processing in the system of car control.

See Chapter 3, *The system of car control*, page 50, Information.

The purpose of signals

Signals inform other road users of your presence or intentions. Think before you signal; indiscriminate signalling is not helpful to anyone.

Give a signal whenever it could benefit other road users.

Whatever the situation, give signals clearly and in good time. Always make sure the meaning of your signal is clear. Sometimes a signal is not in itself enough to make your intentions clear and other road users may use your position and speed to interpret what your signals mean. When negotiating a roundabout, for example, your signals can be misinterpreted if you have not taken up the correct position for your intended exit.

The range of signals

- it reduces the number of hand movements you have to make
- it reduces signalling clutter

The purpose of signals is to warn other road users of your presence and/or your intention. Signals are informative and do not give right of way.

One signal should not cover two manoeuvres. Use your position to make your intentions clear to other road users.

The signals available to you are:

- indicators
- hazard warning lights
- brake lights
- headlights
- position of your vehicle
- horn signals
- arm signals
- courtesy signals (for example, raising a hand to thank another driver).

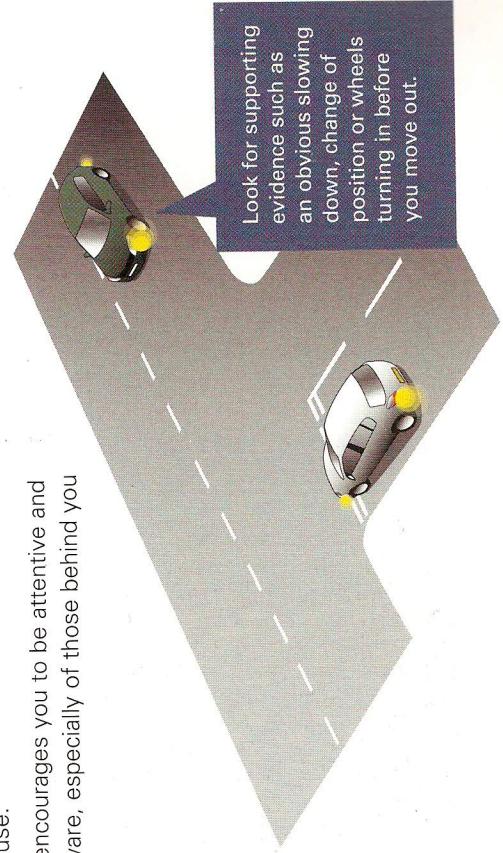
Never take an indicator signal as proof of another driver's intention when you are waiting to emerge from a side turning. Look for supporting evidence such as an obvious slowing down or wheels turning before you move out. Indicator mechanisms don't always self-cancel, especially when a turn is followed by a bend in the same direction. Take care to cancel the indicator yourself in such situations.

Cancelling indicator signals

Select the most effective signal for the job. Any signal must be given in plenty of time if it is to benefit other road users. Be aware that when you change the speed or position of your vehicle you are also giving information to other road users.

Using the indicators

The system of car control advises you to give a signal when another road user could benefit. This helps your driving because:



Do you give clear signals to other road users?

- Do you always signal when another road user could benefit?
 - Do you signal your intentions clearly and in good time?
 - Where possible do you choose a position that helps to make your intentions clear to other road users?

- Remember that rear foglights are brighter than brake lights and may mask them when you are slowing down.

Flashing your headlights

Flash your headlights when the horn would not be heard, and in place of the horn at night. Flashing your headlights should only be used for one purpose: to inform other road users that you are there. Never assume that another driver flashing their headlights is a signal to proceed.

Use a headlight flash in daylight:

- when speed makes it likely that the horn would not be heard, for example on a motorway or when signalling to a lorry driver in an enclosed cab
- to alert other drivers to your presence behind, for example where a driver in the nearside lane of a motorway starts to pull out in front of you.

Use your judgement to decide the duration of the flash and how far in advance you should give it. This is critical and will depend on your speed. The purpose of flashing your headlights is solely to inform the other driver of your presence. It does not give you the right to overtake regardless of the circumstances.

During darkness flash your headlights to inform other road users of your presence:

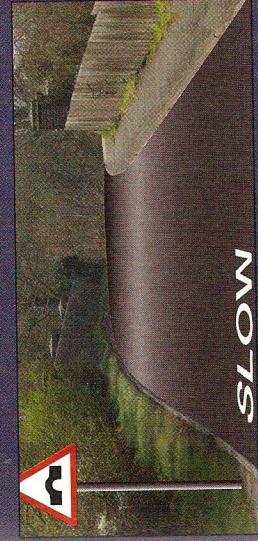
- on the approach to a hill crest or narrow hump back bridge
- when travelling along narrow winding roads

Using the horn

Only use the horn when it is necessary to warn other road users of your presence. If you see that another road user is not aware of your presence, first choose an appropriate position and speed so that you can stop safely.

Consider using the horn on the approach to hazards where the view is very limited, such as a blind summit or bridge on a single track road. Never use the horn to challenge or rebuke other road users.

It could be beneficial to use the horn:



Using hazard warning lights

Consider using hazard lights to alert other drivers to your presence when you have stopped. Don't use hazard lights when moving except on unrestricted multi-lane carriageways and motorways. Here you can use hazard lights briefly to warn the vehicles behind you that there is a hold-up ahead.

Using brake lights

Brake lights are used to indicate either slowing down or your intention to stop. Always check your mirrors before using your brakes unless you are doing an emergency stop.

- Start braking well in advance of an anticipated hazard to alert the driver behind that you mean to slow down or stop, especially if the vehicle behind is too close. Avoid 'dabbing' the brakes; if your brake lights flash on and off but you don't slow down, you will confuse the drivers behind you.

- before overtaking another vehicle – flash your headlights early enough to enable the driver of the other vehicle to react to them.
- Don't flash your headlights when they might be misunderstood by road users for whom they are not intended.

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Driver's Signals

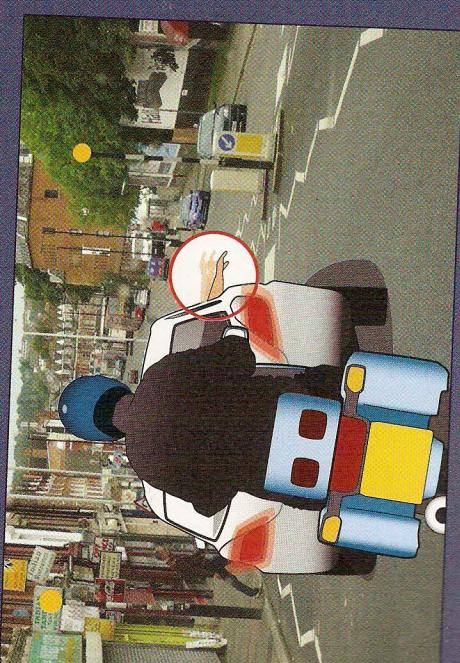
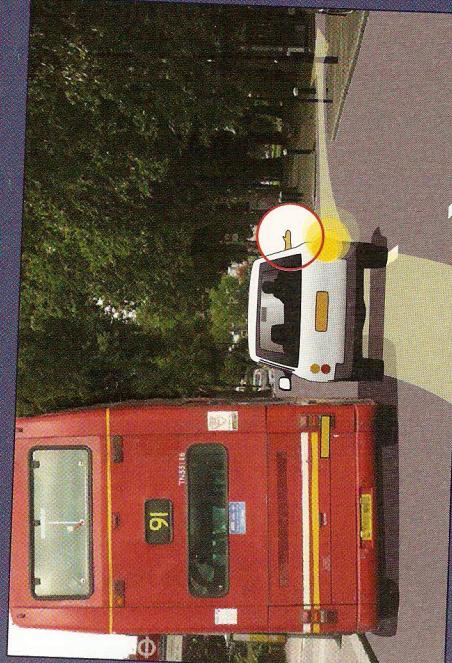
Using arm signals

Although arm signals are no longer in regular use, you should know what they mean and how to give them according to the *Highway Code*. Be aware that many young drivers are less familiar with arm signals and may not understand them.

Think about using arm signals to reinforce other signals in ambiguous situations.

Do not use arm signals when you need both hands on the steering wheel to control the car, such as during braking or cornering.

Arm signals might be useful:



Using courtesy signals

Courtesy signals encourage cooperative use of the road space and help to increase road safety. Acknowledging the courtesy of other road users encourages good driving and helps foster positive attitudes. Using a courtesy signal to defuse a potential conflict can make a real difference to road safety. Use courtesy signals:

- to thank another driver for letting you go first
 - to apologise when you have unintentionally caused inconvenience to another road user.
- Use either hand to give a courtesy signal but not at the risk of your steering control. You can signal without removing your hand from the wheel by raising your palm or nodding your head. Or you can ask your passenger to signal for you. But make sure that your courtesy signal cannot be mistaken for a 'waving on' signal.

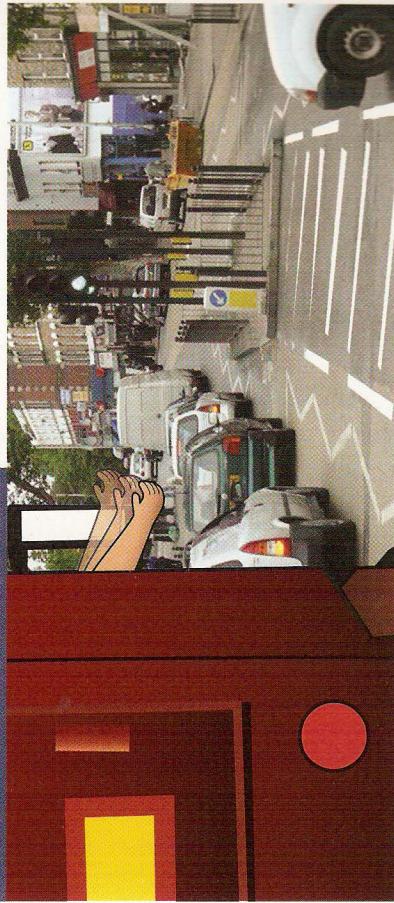
On your route home from work, make a conscious effort to give and acknowledge courtesy signals.

- How does this affect your own state of mind?
- How does it influence the actions of other drivers?
- Do you think you tend to give courtesy signals more or less often than other drivers?

Ask other people who know your driving whether they agree with your self assessment.

Responding to other people's signals

Signals other than those given by authorised officials should be treated with caution. If someone beckons you to move forward, always check for yourself whether it is safe to do so.



Review

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In this chapter we have looked at:

- the place of signals in the system of car control
- why it is important to give signals clearly
- the different signals available to you, and how and when to use them
- how courtesy signals can help road safety.

Check your understanding



List the full range of signals that you can use to give information to other road users.

When should you consider signalling?

What should you do before you signal or manoeuvre?

Why must you take care in interpreting the signals of other road users?

Why should you only signal when someone else could benefit?

Why do left-hand junctions pose problems for interpreting indicator signals?

In what circumstances should hazard warning lights be used?

When and for what purpose should you flash your headlights?

When should you use the horn?

How do courtesy signals contribute to road safety and positive driving attitudes?

If you have difficulty in answering any of these questions, look back over the relevant part of this chapter to refresh your memory.

Use this chapter to find out about:

- how to position your vehicle on the road for safety
- which hazards to look for on the nearside of the road
- how to improve your nearside view
- what is the best position for following another vehicle
- how to position your vehicle for bends and corners.