

Alertness: Seeing, Thinking, and Acting Early

Driving safely starts long before you turn the wheel.

It begins with your **awareness**, your ability to notice, to think ahead, and to act in good time.

Alertness is the habit of watching the road, understanding what might happen next, and being ready to respond calmly and correctly.

Observation – Looking and Seeing Properly

A responsible driver never relies on luck or guesswork.

Before any movement, whether you're setting off, changing lanes, or turning, use **the full observation routine:**

mirrors → signal → manoeuvre (MSM) → look over your shoulder to cover blind spots.

When carrying out a **U-turn**, reduce speed and check carefully **in both directions**.

Attempt it only if the **road is wide enough and completely clear**.

Be cautious where your **view is restricted**.

At a hump bridge, a dip in the road, or a sharp bend, slow right down.

Hidden hazards, pedestrians, cyclists, or oncoming vehicles can appear without warning.

Always make sure you can stop within the distance you can see clearly.

Reading the Road and Markings

The road surface constantly gives information.

Learn to read it.

- **Hatched areas** and **double solid white lines** show **where overtaking is unsafe**.
- **Directional arrows** guide you into the correct lane or warn of height restrictions ahead.
- **Warning lines** that lengthen before junctions or roundabouts mean: *reduce speed now and prepare to give way*.

Treat these markings as instructions from the road itself — they keep you one step ahead of danger.

Traffic Lights and Signals

Approach every traffic light expecting it to change.

The longer a signal has been green, the more likely it is to turn amber.

Before you slow down, check your mirrors to see what's behind you, then ease off the accelerator smoothly.

Signal only if it will help others.

Good anticipation prevents harsh braking and protects the vehicles following you.

Keeping a Safe Distance

Never follow another vehicle so closely that you lose sight of the road ahead.

If you cannot see a lorry's mirrors, the driver cannot see you. Keeping back gives you time to react and space to stop safely.

Use the two-second rule in dry conditions; choose a fixed point ahead, when the vehicle in front passes it, say,

“Only a fool breaks the two-second rule.”

If you reach the point before finishing the phrase, you are too close.

Double that distance, **four seconds**, on wet roads, and leave 10 times on ice or snow.

Restricted Views at Junctions

At closed or partially blocked junctions, **edge forward very slowly** until you can see clearly both ways.

Do not force others to change speed or direction because of your movement.

Windscreen pillars can also **hide hazards; a pedestrian, cyclist, or motorcyclist can disappear completely behind them.**

Move your head slightly to look around the pillar; never rely on a single quick glance.

See and Be Seen

Your own visibility matters as much as what you can see. Keep the windscreen and mirrors **clean and clear** of stickers, sat-nav mounts, or hanging ornaments that obstruct the view.

Use dipped headlights whenever visibility is reduced, in heavy rain, fog,

If other drivers cannot see you, they cannot avoid you.

Fatigue, Knowing When to Rest

Tiredness is one of the most common causes of serious collisions.

When you feel drowsy, your reactions slow, your judgment fades, and you may drift across lanes without realising.

At the first sign of fatigue, **stop somewhere safe, never on the hard shoulder except in an emergency.**

Take a short walk, have a drink, or close your eyes for a proper rest.

The official guidance is clear: **take at least a 15-minute break**

every two hours on long journeys.

Fresh air alone will not cure tiredness; rest will.

Distractions, Focus on the Road

Anything that takes your mind or eyes off the road is a risk.

Using a hand-held phone while driving is illegal.

Even a hands-free conversation divides attention.

Switch **your phone off** or to **silent** before starting the engine.

If it rings, wait until you are safely parked before answering.

Set your sat-nav before moving off.

Talking with passengers is normal, but if the traffic becomes demanding, it's okay to say,

Moving Off and Overtaking

Before moving off, perform the full safety routine:

mirrors, signal, shoulder checks, then move.

Look well ahead and steer smoothly.

Overtake only when it is **safe, legal, and necessary**.

Never overtake near bends, junctions, or hills where you cannot see far ahead.

When passing a **cyclist**, give at least **1.5 metres** of space at **30 mph**, and more at higher speeds.

Expect them to wobble or change course suddenly to avoid drains or potholes.

When turning right onto a **dual carriageway**, check that the **central reservation** is deep enough to hold your whole vehicle.

If it isn't, treat it as a single carriageway and wait until both directions are clear.