

Planning a good practice session

This resource aims to help you plan a good practice session for your learner driver and make your coaching time a positive experience for you both.



Plan your lessons beforehand

A good driving session isn't just getting in the car and going for a drive. There's a bit more to it than that.

Start by mapping out a training area or route that's right for their level, such as a quiet car park or street. Then decide what skills you want to focus on so you're not trying to cover too much in each session.

Wait until your learner has got the basics first—can set up and move the car, steering and braking—before getting them to drive on the road and around other traffic.

Once they've had lots of sessions and you think they're ready, get them building experience in a range of conditions like driving in the wet, at night and on rural roads. It's a lot safer if you're there to help them the first time they face these conditions.



Keep the lessons short

30 minutes can be a long time for someone to concentrate behind the wheel, especially if they're new to driving. Your first few sessions can be as simple as talking through the controls in the car and driving around the corner a few times.

Once your learner has got the basics—can indicate correctly, checks mirrors and blind spots without being reminded—then you can make the sessions longer.



Talk before you drive

Before you start each session, talk to your learner about where you're going and what skills you're going to do during the session. This will make sure there are no surprises.



Take your time

Learning new things takes time and your learner may need to repeat a skill many times before it sinks in. Just because a learner does something right the first time, doesn't mean they've got it. If in doubt, repeat, repeat, repeat.



Show don't tell

Showing how to do something is a lot better than just telling your learner how to do something. Be prepared to show them more than once and give them lots of encouragement, especially if they don't get it right straight away.



Give clear instructions early on

During the session, give plenty of notice about what you want them to do - and keep your instructions simple and short. You need to allow your learner enough time to take in what you say and then follow your instruction - while still staying in control of the car.



Listen

If your learner says they're not comfortable about a new situation, ask them why. It may be that they haven't practised a skill enough to progress yet, so allow more time until they are more comfortable.



Use the WASP technique to manage mistakes

Remember that mistakes are OK. Your learner won't be perfect the first time. They'll make mistakes – and that's an important part of learning. Your job is to help them through those mistakes, and to make sure any mistakes they do make aren't putting anyone in danger. The WASP technique is a great way for you to manage a learner's mistakes.

- **W**ait – see if your learner notices they've made a mistake.
- **A**sk – if they haven't said anything, ask if they've noticed the mistake.
- **S**how – if they can't work it out, show them.
- **P**ractise – repeat the skill a few times the right way.

If your learner is starting to make so many mistakes that either of you is getting flustered or upset, it could be a sign that the driving task is getting too challenging, or that the session has gone on too long. It's better to stop the session, and try again another day, than carry on and make things worse.



Keep your cool

Don't get frustrated if your learner doesn't pick things up as fast as you expect. Everyone learns at different speeds, and there may be something else on their mind that you don't know about. You might need to take a break from practice sessions for a while.



Review the lesson afterwards

Leave enough time at the end of each session to go through it with your learner. Review what skills you went through and ask them to assess how they felt they did at each skill. For example:

- Today we did x, y and z.
- How do you think x went?
- I saw that you did y really well.
- How could you have done z better?

If you or your learner feels like they're not getting a particular skill, explore the reasons why. You may need to show them how to do it a few times.

Finally, call out any skills your learner needs to focus on when practising, and then briefly go over what they'll be learning in the next session.