



Tips for nervous drivers and first driving lesson

By Mike Emslie

1 HAVE A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Seems stupidly simple but it is key to success. You need a rapport, need to be able to trust the person teaching you to drive and know you can rely on that person to teach you well. You need to be able to openly discuss and question your progress without fear of negativity. If you don't feel like you can connect with your instructor you will inevitably make mistakes and not understand why you aren't making progress. Your instructor will find out what drives you, what makes you tick and how you like things done so that they can structure lessons and feedback in a manner that relates to you.

Your instructor should be clean and tidy, dressed appropriately and not have any issues with personal hygiene! It's bad enough you're nervous, you really don't want to be smelling BO/damp dog/cigarette smoke/last night's dinner during your lesson!

You should never feel like you can't ask a question or respond to feedback. Your instructor needs you to be honest too, if you don't understand, ask for it to be explained another way. Don't be embarrassed to challenge, question or verify anything we say to you. We would far rather you tell us directly any concerns you have so we have the opportunity to work on it with you, we want your posts on Facebook to be positive and not complaints! If your instructor does something you aren't happy with, say something!

2 MANNERS AND RESPECT

Your instructor should always turn up on time or let you know if they have been held up. If you are nervously waiting and building yourself up to your lesson, your instructor being late can send you into a tailspin. But this works both ways too. If you have booked a slot, be ready to get into the car at that time. It's a waste of your money if you aren't in the car right at the start of the lesson, you have paid for a prearranged time slot, not an hour of your instructors' time with a flexible starting time so if you are ten minutes late, you have lost ten minutes of your slot. You may as well spend that time getting comfortable in the car and getting value for your money!

During the lesson, keep your phone switched off but again this applies to your instructor too. If they take a call when you are driving, say something! Make sure they know you don't appreciate it and you would prefer they don't do it again. Your instructor should be completely focused on you, you don't need to hear all about their personal life, favourite football team or heaven forbid, their personal problems! They should never snap, berate, get angry or laugh at anything you say, do or any questions you ask. A good instructor will be considerate and patient and will never make fun or criticize how long it is taking you to learn. If you simply don't get something, just can't seem to make any progress, your instructor should stop that part of the lesson temporarily and try something else, coming back to the issue once you have made some progress in another aspect. This will help keep building that positive experience and in turn, keep your confidence levels up!

Again this is a two way street (pun not intended). Listen to your instructor and when you understand what you are being asked to do, do it! It can be as frustrating for us if you simply don't do what we need you to do. There is a reason we need you to keep both hands on the wheel, check your mirrors and indicate etc. We want you to pass your test so we can brag about how good we are as instructors and attract new pupils!

3 KNOW THE CAR YOU ARE DRIVING

Make sure you have spent time familiarizing yourself with the layout of the car. Know where the key parts are and I don't mean how you hook up your iPhone for your bangin tunes! The most important features you need to use without even thinking where they are such as indicators, lights, hazards and windscreen wipers. You need to be comfortable too, adjust the seat so that you don't feel like you are struggling to see the end of the bonnet. Know how to set the mirrors, seat and steering wheel properly, your instructor will advise how this should be done. The seat should be so close you could press the pedals further than they floor at (if you sit further away your feet will get tired), and the wheel so close you can relax your arms while holding it.

The very first time you go out in a car, the instructor will take you through a cockpit drill which usually lasts about half an hour, this is the only time you will go into so much detail and ongoing should be no more than a few minutes to get yourself ready to drive.

Think about what you want to wear during your lesson too, you need to be as comfortable as possible and you are going to be using your feet a lot! Heels are generally a big no, no matter how small the heel may be as they can get caught in the carpet and don't offer your ankles any real support.

Oh and the car should be clean with clear windows, lights and mirrors! If you can't see clearly, don't drive!

Top tip – once you have gained your confidence and are making real progress, try driving with the radio on quietly in the background. Once you pass your test, listening to music can be a familiar comfort and can help with those nerves when you are out on your own.

4 RELAX AND ENJOY

Now I know this sounds like a stupid statement! You're nervous, you can't relax, and that's the whole point! But you have to ask yourself what you are most nervous about. Your instructors' car is fitted with dual controls so you can't hit the car in front of you, believe me we will safely stop you long before that happens and that's what we are there to do! Your instructor expects you to do this so are well prepared and that's what we have been trained for. You can't brush up against the kerb, your instructor has extra mirrors to watch your road positioning and will carefully help you keep in the right place while you drive. You are completely safe in a registered, dual controlled instructor car with someone who has been extensively trained and who's only job is to get you through your test! Talk to your instructor before you start your lesson and outline what your concerns are, talk through them and get reassurance what actions the instructor will take to make sure you are completely safe.

5 PLAN YOUR LESSON

Your instructor should spend the first 5 minutes or so of your lesson planning ahead so you know what to expect. This gives you the chance to question anything you are not sure of in advance and if you don't understand what you are supposed to do, ask, ask and ask again! Your instructor will not mind you asking the same questions over and over, they need to know you have understood what you are expected to do. When you have it clear in your mind what you are going to tackle, there will be no nervous anticipation or surprise instructions to throw you off course. It gives you a chance to think ahead and raise any issues early in the lesson.

6 KNOW YOUR ROUTE

You are well within your rights to ask your instructor to go to an area you know well. Being in a familiar territory is one less thing to worry about. If you know the roads, you won't be concerned with taking the wrong turn or getting confused with areas you don't know. Think where you would like to drive, what would make you most comfortable. Without stating the obvious, until you are confident avoid busy dual carriageways, roads with lots of pedestrian crossings, areas with cars that park either side of the road and restrict your vision etc. If you don't know anywhere, the instructor will usually find a quiet industrial estate or somewhere similar for your first attempts on the road. Once you have the hang of moving off and the basics of driving, the instructor will start to find new roads to give you further experience driving to different conditions.

7 KEEP A DIARY

Write down all the aspects of your lesson and what you are going to do. At the end of the lesson your instructor will give you feedback on your progress which will give you the opportunity focus on what you are really good at! Ask to keep score on your lessons, use a matrix such as 1-5 with 1 being your first attempt at a new skill to a 5 being the skill has been carried out without prompting and perfectly executed. You will make progress every time you drive, even if you don't feel like you have and you can

review your progress over the weeks and months. Initially it may be a small step forward and you don't notice it, again that's your instructors' job, to monitor and note your progress. You can then ask to spend some more time on the areas you are good at to help you gain more confidence but remember, you do need to keep moving forward. Staying focused on the same parts for any length of time will not only cost you a small fortune but eventually you will lose your new found confidence as learning the next bit will become daunting.

Consider taking two hour lesson slots at a time. You may well find you just start getting into the swing of things and because you need to allow time for discussion at the end, it's time to pull over and hand back the car. You may also find you have to go through the initial nerves so many times it takes up too much of your valuable time on the road.

8 TACKLING THE HARD BITS

There will be a nemesis when you first start driving. Almost everybody has one part they dread and just can't seem to get their head around. It may be changing down gears, parallel parking or a turn in the road. Unfortunately there is simply no way around it, you have to learn how to execute every part of driving or maneuvers, there is no way to guess what you might be asked to do in your test so you have to learn them all.

If you find one thing in particular really tough such as parallel parking, ask your instructor if you can spend some lessons just not doing that task at all. You want to keep your enjoyment of driving up and the thought of doing that maneuver won't help your nerves during a lesson. We don't want you spending the whole time dreading the part when we ask you to pull over and stop! So we won't mind if you just want to skip it for a week but remember, the longer you put it off, the more it's costing you and the harder it will be to tackle the issue later. A good instructor will encourage you to overcome the problem and sooner rather than later!

9 BREATHING AND BANANAS!

Some breathing techniques can be hugely helpful before and after a lesson, ask your friends and family for advice or search online for some tips and guidance. You may also find some of the natural herbal remedies such as Kalms helpful but do ask the pharmacist if there is anything that may adversely affect your driving, read the label carefully and start taking them a couple of weeks before you start your lessons and before your test date too. You may have heard instructors and learners recommending that you eat a banana before your test. They are full of vitamin B which will help to calm your test nerves. The main reason for this is that they contain tryptophan, a type of protein that the body converts into serotonin, the 'happy hormone'.

10 SHOW SOMEONE WHAT YOU HAVE ACHIEVED

Positive encouragement is fundamental to your progress so ask your instructor if you can take Mum/Dad/best friend/hubby/wifey etc. on a lesson but make sure it is someone who really will recognize your achievements and praise you for your progress. They also have to stay quiet in the car,

getting directions, tips or comparisons throughout your lesson really doesn't help! It can be a huge help afterwards to discuss the lesson with someone who was actually there and get their advice and help with any areas you might be struggling with.

11 HINTS AND TIPS FROM OTHER LEARNERS

Do some research online for some ideas to help you cope with the nerves. There are dozens of forums out there that can offer some great tips and advice and it also shows you are not alone, there are hundreds of others just like you having the same problems! Here are some hints and tips from other learner drivers about how they overcame driving test nerves:

- Think of all the good times that you're going to have when you pass your test.
- Break up the learning into smaller chunks so you don't feel overwhelmed.
- Chill out with friends before your test to help relax.
- Chewing on chewing gum.
- Don't be arrogant or cocky, just because your Dad passed after 3 lessons, doesn't mean you will and no amount of time of Grand Theft Auto makes you a good driver!
- Have a positive attitude – "I will try my best but if I fail then at least I've tried".
- Don't dwell on your mistakes, accept it, deal with it and move on!
- Don't have a big meal before your test – it will make you feel sluggish and tired.
- Hypnotherapy.
- Don't tell everybody when your lesson is so you don't feel under pressure!
- Listen to calming music before your lesson.

12 START SHOPPING FOR YOUR FIRST CAR!

Everyone remembers their first car! Start dreaming about what you are going to buy when you pass, the more hideous it is the more you will remember it fondly in years to come. You won't remember every car you own over the years, no matter how nice they become but you will never forget that banged up rust bucket that got you to work and back every day or lets you take your kids out somewhere they haven't been before. Mine was a naff brown Austin Allegro 1.3 with a cream velour interior and I loved it with a passion! Think about all the fantastic things you will do once you are on the road and the places you can go with ease, how you can apply for that job you really want but was too far away before or the public transport didn't go anywhere near.

Keep in touch with your instructor after you have passed your test, most will happily come with you when you go to buy your car and help you get familiar with it before you head off on your own. You can also take additional lessons on motorways, in the dark, adverse weather etc. Once you know your car inside and out, there will be no holding you back! And remember, you can do this! It may take you a few lessons more than your friends, you might scuff the alloy wheels on the instructors car (and we will forgive you for it!) and you may well stall a few times but it's all part of the learning curve. If you are focused and determined and it's something you want badly enough, you will achieve it!