



# SkillCheck

## Driver Assessment Guide



This guide was developed in cooperation with the Justice Institute of BC and its Driver Education Centre. It's a key part of Road Safety at Work's [SkillCheck driver assessment tool](#). You can use this guide to understand terms on the SkillCheck Driver Assessment Form, learn behaviours and actions to look for during assessments, and apply the criteria to evaluate driver performance.

Each section explains the basic concept and then suggests some factors to consider when scoring driver performance.

We recommend you read this guide before conducting a driver assessment, and keep it with you during the assessment for reference.

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## Observation

### Eye lead time

Drivers must continuously scan their driving environment to see objects and events that are — or may become — hazards. Eye lead time is how far ahead of their vehicle drivers scan.

On the highway, eye lead time should be **20 to 30 seconds**; at 100 km/h that's at least 500 metres. In the city, it should be **12 to 15 seconds** or about 1.5 to 2 city blocks.

By watching far enough down the road, drivers give themselves enough time and distance to see, analyze, and correctly respond to hazards. Reaction times vary from driver to driver based on factors such as driving and decision-making skills, attentiveness, fatigue, etc. As speed increases, the distance travelled while the driver plans and executes their response (e.g., steer, apply brakes) increases so they must increase eye lead time accordingly.



### Scoring suggestions

- Watch the driver's glance.
- Periodically ask the driver to describe what they are watching in the distance, and then time how long it takes to get there.
- Pick out something the driver should be seeing ahead (a pedestrian starting to cross the street, a car getting ready to pull out of a driveway, etc.), wait a few seconds, and then ask the driver a question like, "When did you notice that car getting ready to pull out of that driveway?" Their response should tell you if they were scanning as far ahead as they should be.

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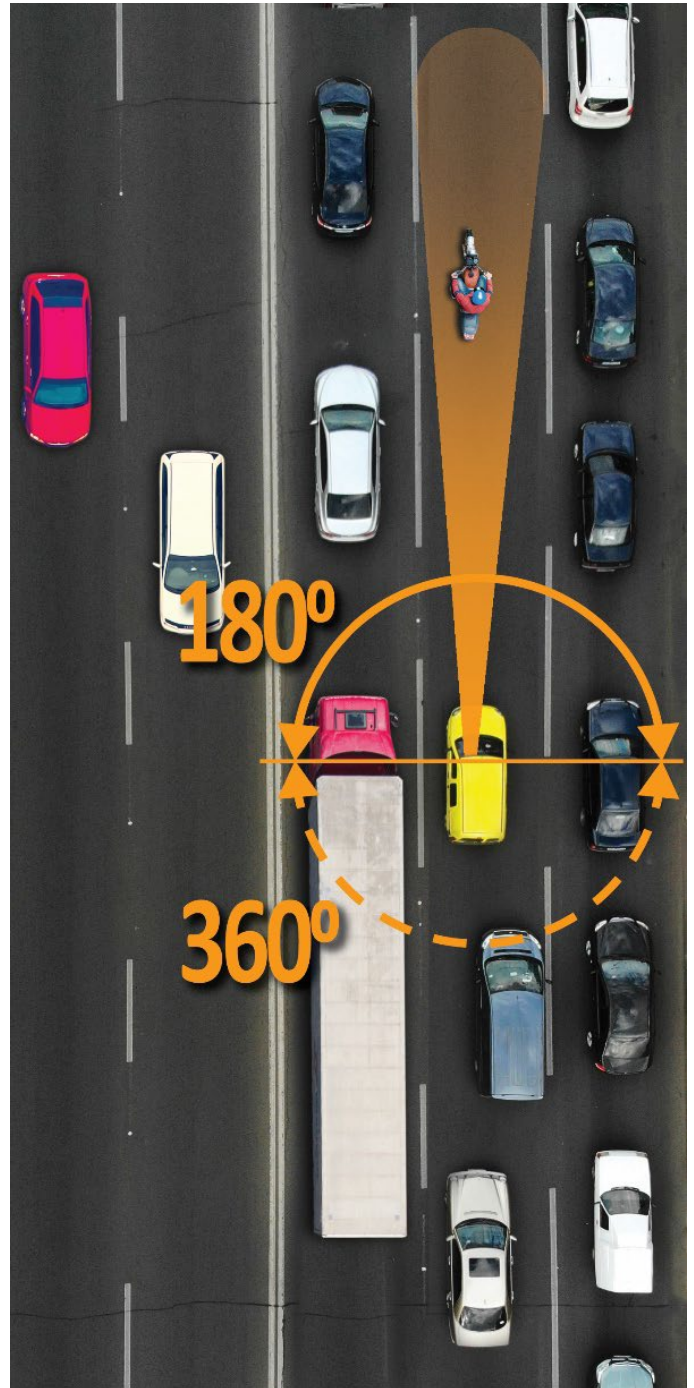
## Left to right scanning

Watching left and right is an essential part of the scanning cycle. In conjunction with shoulder checks and monitoring mirrors, left to right scanning helps drivers track other traffic and gives them a 360-degree view of their surrounding driving environment.

**Every 5 to 8 seconds**, drivers should look from left to right on the roadway ahead in order to see and respond to hazards they may encounter. This is particularly important in complex situations and high-risk areas such as intersections, multi-lane traffic, school zones, crosswalks, wildlife crossings, etc.

### Scoring suggestions

- You should be able to see the driver moving their eyes (and to a lesser degree, their head) to the left and right as they scan.
- How often does the driver do that?
- To learn how wide an area the driver is scanning, ask them about objects/activities that should be within their field of view.
- Are left to right checks more frequent at complex and high-risk locations?



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## Shoulder checks

Shoulder checks are used to confirm that areas drivers can't see with their mirrors (i.e., blind spots) are clear and that it's safe to move their vehicle into that lane or area.

To do a shoulder check, drivers should turn their head about 90 degrees to the left or right in the direction they are planning to move. Before changing lanes, drivers should scan the lane(s) beside their vehicle. At an intersection they should scan a wider area for oncoming vehicles and cyclists.

Shoulder checks should take only a second or 2, or a little longer if there's something drivers need to deal with. Shoulder checks are typically done in conjunction with mirror checks. For example, when planning to change lanes, drivers should activate their turn signal, check their rear-view mirrors, and then shoulder check in the direction they are planning to move. Review our [Managing Blind Spots Tailgate Meeting Guide](#) for more information.

Drivers should shoulder check *before*:

- Pulling to or from the roadside
- Changing lanes or merging onto a highway
- Entering a turning lane at an intersection
- Overtaking another vehicle
- Reversing (check over both shoulders)
- Doing a U-turn, 2-point turn, or 3-point turn
- Opening a vehicle door into the roadway



### Scoring suggestions

- Does the driver do shoulder checks when they should?
- Does the driver check their mirrors first?
- Does the driver turn their head about 90 degrees and look over the appropriate shoulder?



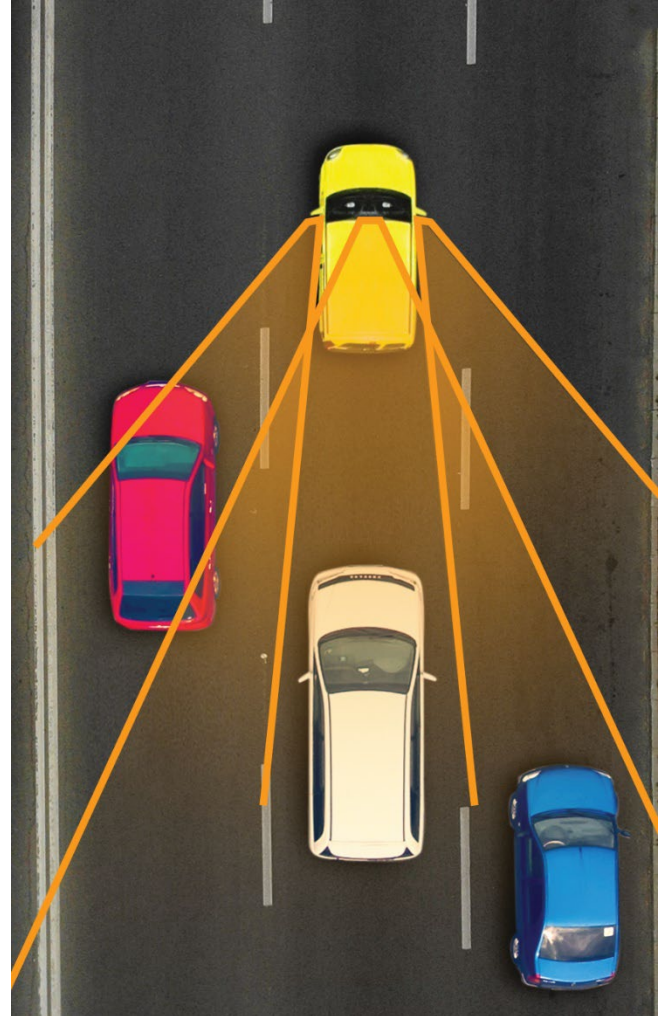
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## Mirrors/tracking traffic

To keep track of traffic coming up behind or beside them, drivers should check their rear-view mirrors every 5 to 8 seconds. Drivers should glance upward to their rear-view mirror and to the left-side and right-side mirrors. Drivers should check their mirrors before significantly reducing their speed (e.g., braking for an obstacle or stopping at an intersection), before starting down a hill, and before getting out of their stopped vehicle so they avoid opening the door or exiting into traffic.

### Scoring suggestions

- How often does the driver check their mirrors?
- Does the driver ever seem surprised if someone overtakes them, or there's a vehicle in one of their blind spots when they do a shoulder check? If they are surprised, they might not have been adequately using their mirrors to track traffic.



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## Space Management

### Following distance

Reaction distance and stopping distance both increase with speed. So does safe following distance. The 2-second rule is a common measure: the vehicle ahead should pass a fixed object on the side of the road (e.g., tree or signpost) at least 2 seconds before the following vehicle does. That's for ideal driving conditions. When visibility is poor and in winter conditions, double that to 4 seconds. When behind a large vehicle such as a transport truck, a following distance of at least 3 seconds lets the truck driver see the following vehicle. It also gives the following driver a sightline to what's going on ahead.

#### Scoring suggestions

- Does the driver establish an appropriate following distance?
- Does the driver adjust their following distance in response to changing speed, road, weather, and traffic conditions?



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## Space at stops

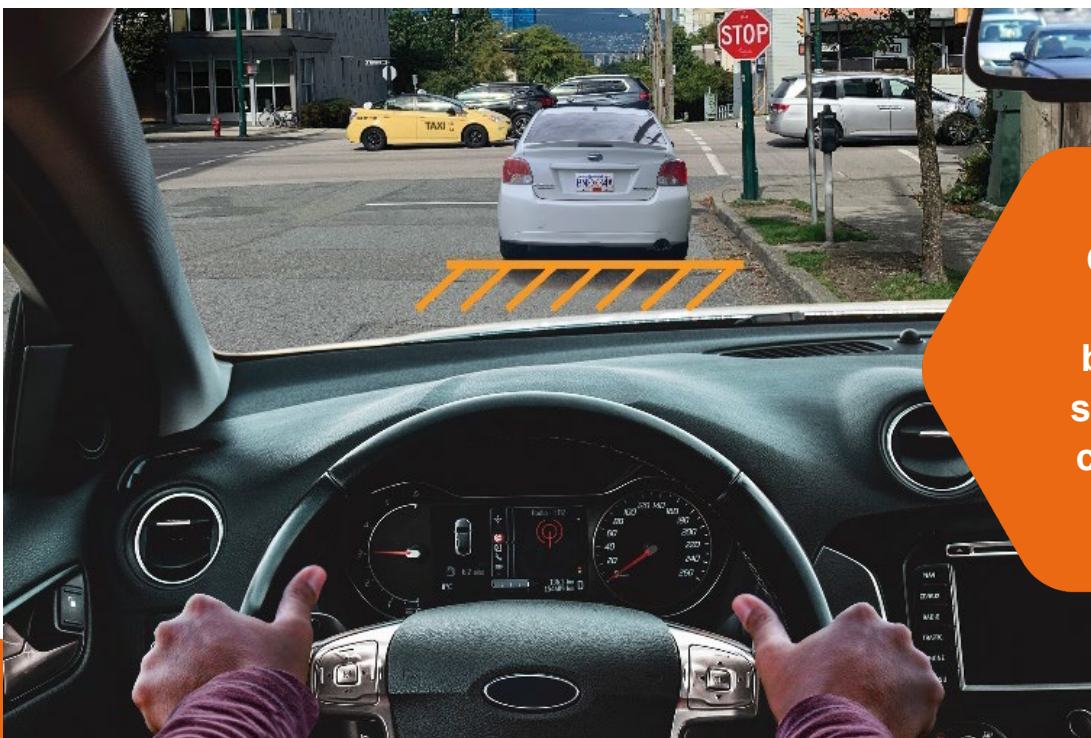
Drivers should start slowing down about 30 metres before a stop sign. Vehicles should come to a smooth, **complete stop just before the stop line or crosswalk**. If drivers can't see cross traffic after they've come to a full stop, they can move slowly forward until they can see when it is safe to proceed.

When stopping in the line of traffic, drivers should maintain **one car length** between their vehicle and the vehicle ahead. They should be able to see the pavement just behind the rear wheels of the vehicle ahead. There should be enough space to allow the vehicle behind to pull to the left or right and move past the vehicle in front, without first backing up. This gap also provides "cushion area" if the vehicle is rear-ended while stopped.

At rail crossings, drivers should stop at least 5 metres from the nearest rail.

## Scoring suggestions

- Where does the driver begin slowing down for a stop sign?
- When the driver comes to a stop, is any part of the vehicle ahead of the stop line or blocking the crosswalk?
- Can you see the pavement just behind the rear wheels of the vehicle ahead of you when stopped for a stop sign?
- Does the driver come to a stop a little further behind the vehicle ahead, and then inch forward until they are the right distance between vehicles?



**Complete stop just before the stop line or crosswalk.**



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## Path of least resistance

Using the path of least resistance means drivers use the route that minimizes the risk of injury or damage to them and other road users.

In an emergency, this means manoeuvring to avoid a crash if possible.

Drivers should always be looking ahead to identify potential hazards and making necessary adjustments to minimize risks. Examples are changing lanes to avoid a backed-up left turn lane, and making room for a vehicle entering the roadway from a driveway. Drivers should give cyclists and pedestrians a little extra room, avoid interactions with aggressive drivers, select the lane that most closely matches their speed, etc.

## Scoring suggestions

- Where does the driver manoeuvre the vehicle? Does their driving seem patient and courteous or is it pushy or aggressive?
- Does the driver give pedestrians and cyclists a little extra room?
- Ask the driver "what if" questions: what would they do if the vehicle ahead stopped suddenly, if a cyclist veered into their lane, and so on. Their response will tell you if they have a plan or can quickly identify the path that minimizes risks.





## Right of way

Yielding the right of way is required by law, and doing it correctly is a sign of skilled and patient drivers. The rule is "right of way should be given, and not taken." When approaching an intersection with a yield sign, the yielding driver should try to make eye contact with the other driver (or cyclist or pedestrian). If they can't establish eye contact, the driver should look at which way the other driver's head is turned and from that judge where their attention is focused. The driver of the vehicle entitled to right of way should look for a courteous nod from the driver of the other vehicle to confirm that the right of way is being "given."

The following rules apply:

- When 2 vehicles arrive at an intersection at about the same time, yield to the vehicle approaching from the right.
- At 4-way signed intersections, yield to the vehicle that is first to come to a complete stop. If two vehicles come to a stop at the same time, the vehicle to the left yields to the vehicle to the right.
- At an intersection, the driver intending to make a turn must yield right of way to pedestrians, cyclists and other vehicles.
- At a yield sign, the driver must slow down (or stop if necessary) and yield right of way to traffic already in the intersection or traffic circle.
- A vehicle entering the roadway from a side road or driveway must yield to other road users.
- At all marked and unmarked crosswalks, vehicles must yield to pedestrians.

## Scoring suggestions

- Does the driver know and follow the rules?
- Does the driver yield and accept right of way when they should?
- Does the driver make eye contact with other drivers, pedestrians, and cyclists?



## Speed control

### Acceleration/deceleration smoothness

Smooth driving is the hallmark of driving finesse. The keys to smoothness are technique and anticipation. Think of a limousine driver whose passengers expect a smooth ride. The driver makes positive starts and uses accurate throttle control to move up to speed. There's no neck-jarring acceleration or on-the-gas/off-the-gas uncertainty.

The same applies to slowing. Drivers anticipating that a green light will soon turn amber should ease off the gas to avoid abrupt braking. Smooth drivers survey their driving environment for clues about hazards they may encounter. Because they are watching well ahead of their vehicle, they have the time and space to implement a plan with gentle manoeuvres.

### Scoring suggestions

- Rather than slamming on the brakes, does the driver apply well timed, purposeful braking that relaxes in the last few metres before stopping?
- Is there any spring rebound when vehicle comes to a complete rest?

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### Braking: full stops, smooth

Anytime the driver brakes to slow the vehicle or to come to a stop, think again of that limo driver. Their passengers expect smooth stops so their beverages don't spill. Drivers should gently apply pedal pressure, steadily increase it to slow the vehicle, and then ease off the pedal with equal smoothness.

### Scoring suggestions

- How does the driver approach and leave intersections, change lanes, execute turns, adjust following distance, etc.?
- Does the vehicle feel like it's rolling smoothly? If you'd had a glass of water on the dash or console, would it have been spilled at any point during your ride along?

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## Speed for conditions

Drivers must continuously evaluate their driving environment and adjust their speed so it's right for the conditions and circumstances.

## Scoring suggestions

Does the driver slow down for:

- Poor road conditions (e.g., slippery roads, pavement ruts, gravel)?
- Poor weather conditions (e.g., heavy rain, fog, snow or ice)?
- Challenging traffic conditions (e.g., complex intersections, congestion, work zones)?
- Challenging human conditions (e.g., confusion, uncertainty, feeling tired)?

## Speed and traffic signs

Drivers should check their speedometer every 30 to 60 seconds. Speed signs are also great places to check speed, especially when the sign indicates a change.



## Scoring suggestions

- When passing a speed sign, does the driver acknowledge it by glancing down at the speedometer and adjusting their speed as necessary?
- Does the driver keep a steady pace?
- Do they drive within the legal speed limit, generally keep up with traffic, and maintain consistent space between themselves and other traffic?
- Does the driver see and heed traffic signs? Do they prepare for work zones, school zones, etc.?



## Steering

### Lane/turn position/set-up

Most of the time, drivers should position their vehicle in the centre of their lane rather than hugging the centreline or being too close to the right side. It is acceptable for drivers to move a little to the left or right in their own lane, or change lanes entirely, to avoid a hazard.

When approaching intersections, drivers should plan their turn. They should check mirrors, activate turn signals, move into the turning lane when the way is clear, and then position their vehicle to the side of the lane in the direction they're planning to turn.

Left-hand turns should begin and end in the left lane. Right-hand turns should begin and end in the right lane, unless the right lane is a parking lane with a vehicle in it.

Designated lanes are reserved for the exclusive use of specific types of vehicles (e.g., high-occupancy vehicles, buses, or bicycles). Drivers of other vehicles should cross reserved lanes only when legally permitted to do so.

### Scoring suggestions

- Does the driver generally stay in the middle of their lane? Is there **about a metre on either side** of the vehicle in the lane?
- Does the driver adjust their lane position to accommodate other road users/avoid potential hazards?
- Does the driver follow all the steps when approaching an intersection turn lane?
- Does the driver execute proper turns (e.g., signalling, changing lanes, entering intersection, yielding right of way, finishing turn in correct lane, etc.)?

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## Hand position, smoothness

There are 2 acceptable ways to grip the steering wheel: the *9 and 3 position* and the *10 and 2 position*. Of the two, the **9 and 3 position** is the preferred approach. Learn more [here](#).

Whichever positioning drivers choose, it's essential they apply it smoothly and efficiently.



### Scoring suggestions

- Is the driver using the preferred position?
- Does their grip on the wheel seem awkward or clumsy? Do their steering movements seem smooth, well-timed, and accurate (they move the steering wheel as much as they need to but not more)?

## Communication

### Signals: timing and use

If traffic may be affected by turning their vehicle, drivers need to give the appropriate signal. That means they should use their turn (or hand) signals when turning at an intersection, changing lanes, entering a roadway from a parked position, pulling to or from the roadside, leaving a roundabout, or merging onto a highway. Doing so communicates their intentions to other drivers, and helps them prepare for those manoeuvres.

Activating turn signals too soon can create confusion. In the city, drivers should activate turn signals about **5 seconds or 75 metres before** they plan to turn or change lanes. On the highway, they should allow **5 seconds** whenever merging, changing lanes, exiting or pulling over. When highways are slippery or visibility is poor, they should increase the time to **7 seconds**.

### Scoring suggestions

- Does the driver follow the requirements for signalling?
- When does the driver activate turn signals? Do they give other road users appropriate notice of their intentions?
- Does the driver check that signals turn off once they've completed the turn?

### Other: horn use, eye contact

Vehicle horns should be used as a tool to promote safe driving practices, not to remind other drivers of their mistakes. Drivers can use their horns to alert other drivers to hazards or draw their attention to something important. For example, if the car ahead has been stopped at a green light for 4 or more seconds, use a polite beep rather than a HONNNNK!

Eye contact is a crucial driving tool. Drivers need to make eye contact with pedestrians, cyclists, and other motorists. This is particularly important when one seems unsure of the intentions of the other, or it's unclear who has the right of way.

### Scoring suggestions

- When and how does the driver use the vehicle horn?
- Does the driver make eye contact with others on the road?



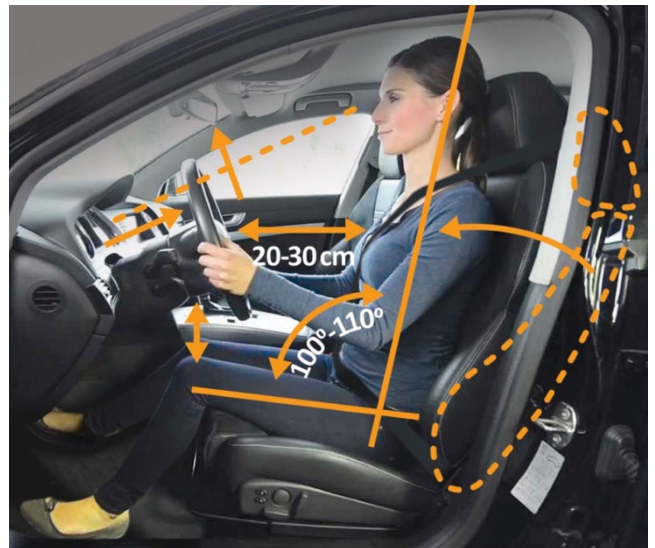
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## General

### Seat and mirror adjustment; seat belt use

Before getting under way, drivers should adjust their seat and headrest to achieve an ergonomically correct and comfortable position (see our [Adjust your seat](#)). Once they are settled into that position, drivers should check and [adjust all mirrors](#) to maximize rearward view and minimize blind spots.

Drivers need to always use their seatbelts and require passengers to do the same.



### Scoring suggestions

- Does the driver correctly adjust their seat and mirrors?
- Does the driver put on a seatbelt before the vehicle moves?

## Parking/reversing

Many companies say parking and/or reversing incidents are the most frequent motor vehicle incidents they experience. It's worth spending a few minutes evaluating how well drivers can execute the necessary manoeuvres. Also review our [Backing up Safely Tailgate Meeting Guide](#).



### Scoring suggestions

- Have the driver parallel park the vehicle and complete a reversing manoeuvre, as they would when they are driving for work.
- Stand outside the vehicle to observe and evaluate the parking manoeuvre. You can provide spotting and guidance, as needed, since drivers may have a co-worker or someone else help them reverse or park when they're driving for work.

## Anticipation/adjustments

Drivers need to scan their driving environment to gather information to understand the implications it has for their driving. Once drivers determine what they expect will happen, they should adjust their driving or execute specific manoeuvres to deal with those objects or events that are – or may become – hazards.

## Scoring suggestions

- Does the driver appear to be gathering and analyzing the information?
- Once the driver observes a hazard, do they adjust their driving in a correct and timely way?
- Does the driver see the pedestrian entering the crosswalk later than they should? How do they respond?
- How well does the driver judge a green light that is about to turn amber?
- As they approach a roadside work zone, does the driver watch those activities to anticipate when the flag person will stop traffic?
- Does the driver seem surprised when another vehicle overtakes them or when a vehicle pulls out of a driveway?



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## Judgment: decision-making

Driving success relies on drivers correctly evaluating a stream of information, applying sound judgment, and making choices and taking actions that minimize risks.

For example, consider the scenario of a pedestrian who is busily texting and not watching the traffic lights or traffic. Rather than expecting that pedestrian will not step into the crosswalk against the traffic light, alert drivers recognize the preoccupied pedestrian might not heed the traffic light. They slow down a little just in case. And they follow through with that plan until they confirm by eye contact that the pedestrian will remain on the sidewalk. Or drivers may beep their horn to get the pedestrian's attention.



### Scoring suggestions

- Watch how the driver responds to potentially hazardous situations.
- Are the driver's decisions and actions sensible, effective, and safe?
- Does the driver follow the rules of the road or do they bend them a little?
- When confronted with a dangerous situation, does the driver take a cautious approach or do they choose a response that unnecessarily puts someone at risk?
- As a passenger do you feel "at risk" because of anything the driver does or does not do?

## Timing: approach, traffic interactions

How drivers approach driving and how they interact with traffic depends on their knowledge, skills, and attitudes. They need to know the rules of the road and have the physical ability to apply them properly. Once those components are in place, a driver's attitude is the biggest determinant of how well they interact with other traffic.

### Scoring suggestions

- Does the driver choose the lane that most closely fits their speed? Or do they drive in the left lane when they shouldn't?
- Does the driver plan and complete lane changes that don't impede the flow of other traffic? Or do they just change lanes and expect other drivers to "get out of their way"?
- Do they tailgate?
- Do they allow enough time and space when passing?
- Do they adjust their speed to courteously accommodate merging traffic?
- Do they properly respond to emergency vehicles and roadside work zones?
- Do they verbally criticize other drivers?

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