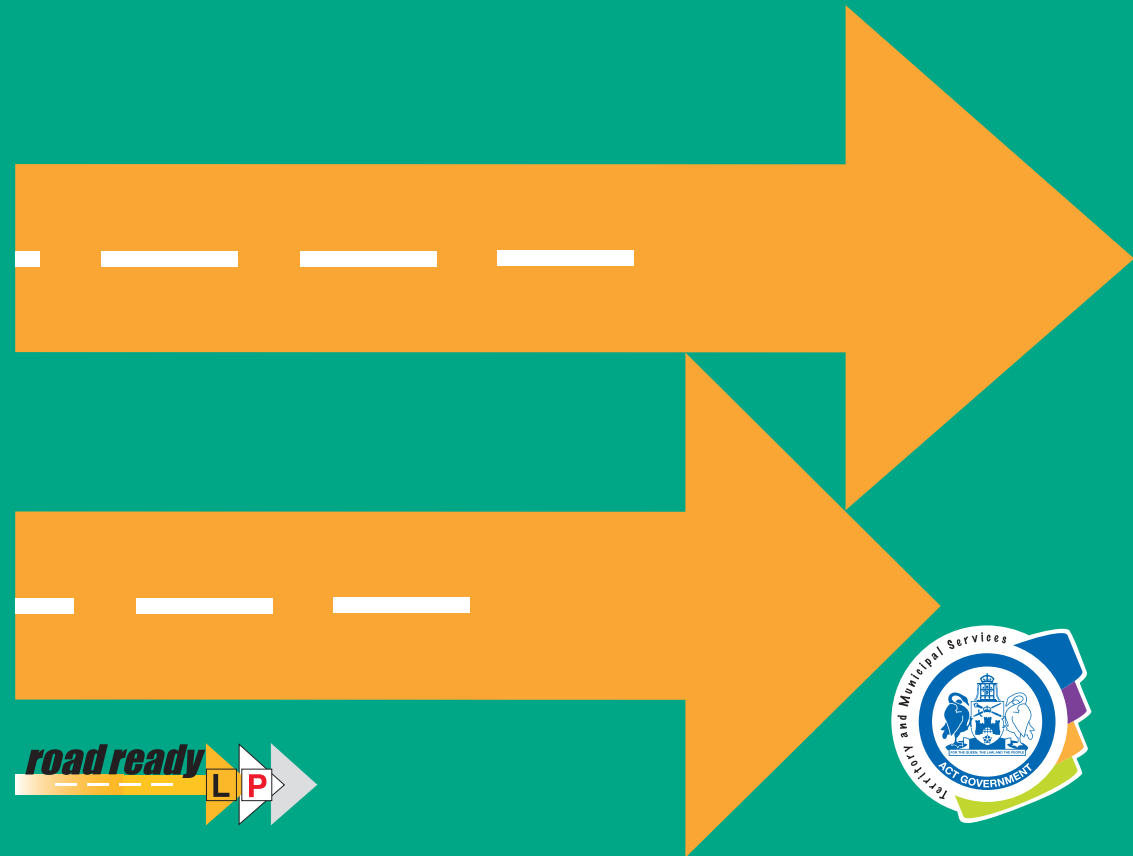


# Preparing your Pre Learner for Driving



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Having a driver's licence is important to young people, and most strive to get it as soon as they legally can. A licence brings with it many things – independence, freedom, convenience, enjoyment and status.

Unfortunately, for too many ACT families a licence also brings the unexpected expense, or even tragedy, that can result from a road crash.

Drivers aged between 17 and 25 make up slightly more than 15% of the population, yet they represent around 32% of serious crash casualties. Of these casualties, 75% are drivers and 20% are passengers.

Young drivers appear in these crash figures partly because they lack driving experience compared to older drivers, but also because they take more risks, either intentionally or unintentionally. They are unable to detect hazards easily or quickly enough to take evasive action, and they drive at high risk times (recreational and night driving) and in high risk locations (e.g. highways).

It takes a long time and a lot of practice to become a safe driver, but the learning can commence long before the formal Learner Driver period. Your child can begin learning and practising some of the skills of safe driving while still a passenger.



## What can we do about the over-representation of young people in road crashes?

The ACT Government has implemented a program called *Road Ready* as part of its commitment to making new drivers safer on the roads.

*Road Ready* is an innovative graduated licensing system that commences even before young people are legally able to get behind the wheel and continues into the Provisional Licence period when new drivers first go solo.

There are four stages in the *Road Ready* program.

1. Pre Learner – involves young people as passengers learning about driving and the road environment.
2. Pre Licence – involves young people, usually in Year 10, who are learning about the complexities of driving. It culminates in them being eligible for a Learner Licence.
3. Learner – for those young people who have their Learner Licence. It promotes the need for plenty of driving practice.
4. Solo Driver – this stage assists new solo drivers to continue learning about driving.



## Sharing the driving task with your pre learner

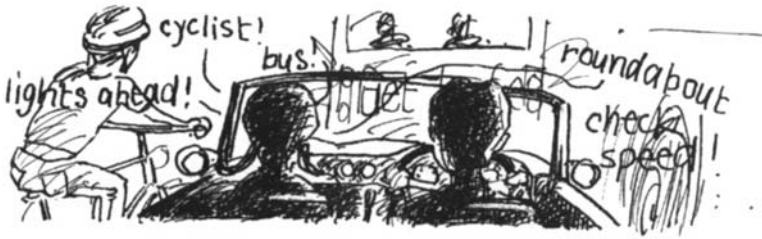
This booklet presents some strategies you can use with your pre learner to get them road ready. Although each strategy is treated separately, they are all related to each other.

The best time to start is several years before your child will be legally behind the steering wheel.

No back seat drivers! Have your pre learner in the front passenger seat to get a sense of the road and a view of traffic similar to your own. You could even buy a clip-on rear vision mirror for your co-driver to use, both now and when you start supervising their practice driving on L plates.

Log on to the *Road Ready* website for more ways to work with your pre learner in building up their skills and understanding about the demanding task of driving: [www.roadready.act.gov.au](http://www.roadready.act.gov.au)





## Commentary driving

*Commentary driving* is a simple, straightforward, and very effective way for you to alert your pre learner about the complexities of driving. It will also help make some of the information processing and decision making required in driving become automatic.

Driving is a complex task requiring many different kinds of skills to be integrated at once.

Safe driving depends a lot on being able to scan, assess, and predict what is likely to happen. Commentating different journeys will build up the pre learner's ability to scan the driving environment and develop their hazard perception and management skills.

*Commentary driving* involves the driver and passenger talking about the driving task during a trip. It's a chat about what is happening inside and outside the car.



## Getting started with commentary driving

Talk about what is happening in the car from a driver's perspective and about the order in which you do things. For example

What are you doing to prepare to drive?

- making sure seat belts are on
- checking the position of all mirrors
- adjusting the seat height and position.

What physical skills are you using and in what order?

- clutch and brake use
- mirror and head checks
- position of hands on the wheel.

What thinking and perceptual skills are you using?

Talk about what is happening outside the car, in front, and on each side of the roadway, and what potential hazards you can see.

- ‘There is a bus pulling away from the kerb. Pedestrians may come out unexpectedly.’
- ‘There are children on the footpath ahead. One may run onto the road.’
- ‘The lanes are merging ahead. I’d better do a mirror and head check for vehicles behind and beside.’
- ‘There’s a give way sign up ahead. I had better begin to slow down.’

Ask prompting questions.

- What is the speed limit here?
- How can we tell what the driver ahead is planning to do?
- Which car can proceed first at the roundabout?
- Where can we expect pedestrians or cyclists to appear from?
- What can we expect near a school around 3.00 pm?



## Have your pre learner commentate driving

Build up the commentary from simple to more complex. In the beginning, have the pre learner describe what you are doing as a driver. Next have them talk about things to look out for on and around the roads - the potential hazards. Build up to talking through particular driving manoeuvres, such as changing lanes and turning. Eventually put it all together!

Take turns in commentating the drive.

Invite your passenger to

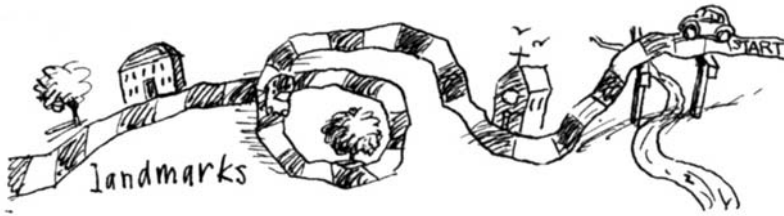
Talk you through particular driving situations.

- 'I want to turn right at the next set of lights. Can you talk through each step I must follow?'
- 'I will be crossing the multi lane highway soon. Can you tell me how to do it safely?'

Talk about what is ahead of, behind, and alongside your vehicle, and what this means for the driving task. Measure the time gap between mirror and head checks (try to do these every 10-12 seconds).

Talk through the skills required to be a safe driver on each trip. Include

- physical skills (such as clutch, brake, turning)
- thinking skills (such as travel speed, directions)
- hazard perception skills (such as other road users, and their own capabilities).



## Co-navigating

Experienced drivers have ‘cognitive maps’ of their local driving environment that they carry in their head.

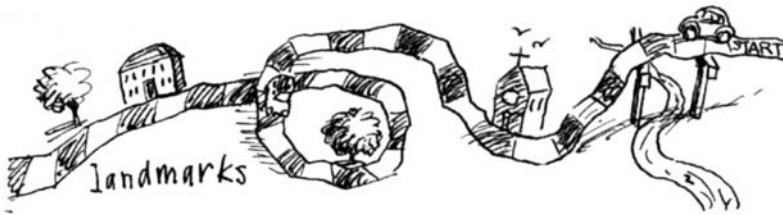
When you make regular trips, such as driving to work and dropping children off at school, you use important familiar ‘signposts’, such as the location and names of streets, location of intersections and traffic signals, special buildings or features along the route.

It takes time, experience, and practice at driving along the same routes, to build up these cognitive driving maps. Although your pre learner may have accompanied you on many trips, it is unlikely that they have any existing cognitive maps for driving.

Co-navigation requires your pre learner to actively observe and comment on the location and type of things in the road and traffic environment and their identifying features, such as the

- names, location and types of roads
- type and location of traffic signals, road signs, parking signs
- location of important features that affect other road users, such as bicycle paths, bus stops, schools & shopping centres.

Over time, co-navigation activities will develop the pre learner’s cognitive driving map and develop their knowledge and awareness of the routes. Having knowledge about where they are going means they can give more attention to looking for hazards and driving safely.



### Getting started with co-navigation

- Talk about what makes the road traffic situation in your neighbourhood and city distinctive, such as roundabouts, bicycle paths, one-way streets, buses, parking rules, give way rules at roundabouts, rules regarding cyclists on the road and in bicycle lanes.
- Talk about differences in unfamiliar, non local areas, and what the driver must do to adapt.
- Together, before getting in the car, study a map of the route you are planning to take. Point out and discuss with your co-navigator the various road and traffic features on the map.
- Commentate the route as you drive. Make sure you use not only a map, such as a street directory, but other physical features, such as particular buildings or bridges, and geographic features (lake, park, etc.).

### Have your pre learner co-navigate by

- following both familiar and unfamiliar routes using a street directory
- looking for a specific street into which you want to turn, and telling you in advance when you are approaching that street ('you will need to turn left at the third street past the lights, or school ...')
- recognising the type of traffic signal coming up and what you will need to do in preparation
- looking out for appropriate places to park – discuss the driving challenges involved in different types of parking on the streets and in car parks, for example parking in multi storey parking lots
- suggesting an alternative route to a familiar destination
- navigating during the day and at night, at different times of the day to reflect different traffic densities, in good and poor weather with different visibility conditions
- accompanying you as navigator when you are driving to a relatively unknown part of the city. Give them the responsibility for planning the route, and discuss it in detail before you set out.



## Error spotting

Error spotting involves building up an awareness of what road users (drivers, pedestrians and cyclists) do that are examples of unsafe or illegal behaviours. Your pre learner can look out for errors made by other road users and then say what a safer action would be.

Having your pre learner spot the errors in your own driving behaviour can be an entertaining and interesting way to reinforce safe driving behaviours and to check their knowledge of the road rules.



## **Make a game of it!**

You could reward alert error spotting by allocating points according to the seriousness of the infringement. (You could even link these to the level of demerit points that apply in the ACT. For example, going through a red light is three demerit points.)

When the number of total error points reaches an agreed target, this can be translated into time for driving practice when your pre learner is on their L plates. For example 30 points could equal a 30 minute practice drive.

Remember to give feedback about the spotted error and why it can be an unsafe action.

## Getting started

- Use a commentary to point out mistakes or errors that other road users make.
- Use a ‘see-think-do’ process.
  - ‘What do you see the vehicle up ahead doing?’
  - ‘What do you think the driver should do?’
  - ‘What should I do if I was in a similar situation.’
- Own up to mistakes you make when driving. Suggest possible reasons why you made the mistake and what could have happened to you and other road users (e.g. I was distracted, didn’t scan and see the problem early, so had to brake extra hard).

### **Have your pre learner spot errors and look out for**

- other road users not indicating what they are going to do
- people in a vehicle who are distracted, for example talking on a mobile phone
- vehicles following too closely
- pedestrians who do not look before crossing the road
- other driver errors

### **Observe and comment on the different behaviours of drivers at roundabouts or intersections.**

- discuss who has right of way at roundabouts or intersections
- discuss who checked and rechecked before entering the intersection.
- observe unsafe overtaking when cars squeeze in where there isn't enough room, forcing other vehicles to suddenly brake hard. Your pre learner should not only spot the error, but describe the effect on safety. Reinforce how important it is to closely monitor other vehicles in front of, beside and behind you, in case they do the unexpected.
- observe and comment on drivers or cyclists disobeying traffic signals and speed limit signs. (A STOP sign means come to a complete stop, not just slow down!)



## Speed sensitivity

Many motorists drive above the posted speed limit. They believe they have the skills to avoid crashes. Yet, speeding is a major contributing factor to a large number of road crashes, even in urban areas.

The faster a vehicle is travelling, the more difficult it becomes to scan the driving environment and respond to potential hazards, and the more likely it is to be involved in a crash. And the faster a vehicle is travelling at the point of impact, the more devastating the outcome is.

It is thus very important for your pre learner to develop a sensitivity about speed.

The best measure of vehicle speed is the figure shown on the speedometer. In addition to this, experienced drivers develop their judgement or sensitivity of speed from comparing their speed to that of other vehicles, from the 'noise' of other vehicles, and from the feedback from their own vehicle as they increase or decrease speed – its feel, its sound, its stability on different road surfaces.

By doing the activities that follow this page, you can build up your pre learner's knowledge of the speed limits in different places and increase their awareness of how speed complicates driving and increases the risk of crashing.

## Getting started with building speed sensitivity

- Continually ask your pre learner what the speed limit is in the area you are driving through. Remind them that speed limits change, so not to assume all built up areas are 60 km/h.
- Talk about travelling at the legal speed limit and discuss why it is not always safe to travel at the legal limit (slippery conditions, lots of other road users).
- When you are driving between towns on the open highway, ask them to monitor the changes in speed limits approaching the outskirts of the town and through the town itself. Have them identify the higher speed limit signs on the other side of the town as you return to the open highway again. Discuss how travelling at higher speeds for a while can give a false sense of travelling very slowly when you first slow down. Don't be misled – to observe the speed limit accurately you need to look at the speedometer and not rely on how you feel.
- Talk about 'urban myths'. 'It's OK to go the speed limit plus 10%', - it is never safe to exceed the speed limit.
- Talk about the importance of leaving plenty of space between your vehicles and others – so you can see them, they can see you, and you have more time to react to new situations.

## Have your pre learner become speed sensitive by

- estimating how fast you are travelling without looking at the speedometer. Discuss with them what influenced their guess.
- describing how the vehicle sounds and feels as you increase or decrease speed suddenly. What happens to their body if vehicle speed changes suddenly? What happens to the stability of the vehicle? Compare this with what happens if speed is increased or decreased more gradually.
- judging the speed of vehicles coming towards you (this is an important judgement skill necessary for safe overtaking and for judging when to complete right hand turn manoeuvres). Estimate or count how many seconds it will be before you pass each other.
- judging how far behind the vehicle in front you should be. A useful rule of thumb for drivers is 'at least three seconds'. Three seconds allows more time to react to changed circumstances. On different occasions (varying types of roads and speeds) get them to practise calculating how far a three second distance is. To do this they should watch for the vehicle in front to pass a marker such as a post or a tree, or even a shadow on the road, then count how long it takes for your vehicle to reach the same marker. Your vehicle should be 3 seconds behind. Give this lots of practice. Rear end collisions are one of the most common types of crashes young drivers have.
- On long trips on the open highway, when you have been travelling at say 100 km/h for some time and then have to slow down as you approach a built up area, ask your pre-learner to estimate your speed (no peeking at the speedometer).



## Planning ahead

Planning is an important factor in safe driving, as most road crashes occur within 5 km of the driver's home.

Experienced drivers use their built-in knowledge to plan drives. They know what is likely to come next with regard to the traffic, the road, and the behaviour of other road users. Anticipating and predicting are both part of planning ahead to drive more safely. For example, 'I'm choosing to go this way to avoid the congestion at the Mall at this time of day'.

Being able to accurately estimate travel times for particular journeys is also an important skill. It can help to avoid situations where the driver starts rushing, becomes stressed and irritated and loses concentration, and begins to take risks and drive unsafely.



## Getting started on planning with your pre learner

- Talk about how important it is to plan ahead to avoid getting into situations that put stress on driving. Not knowing where you are going may mean you stop suddenly, or in dangerous places, to check the route.
- Avoid known congested areas whenever possible, such as sporting events or tourist points.
- Plan all journeys carefully and consider an alternative route in case problems arise (such as road works).
- Encourage your pre learner to regularly check the fuel gauge in the car. Have your pre learner identify the location of petrol stations on commonly travelled routes and decide which ones to use and what factors apart from cost (e.g. easy and safe access) are important in this decision.
- Plan all trips with enough time to get there without speeding. If you don't leave enough time, speeding won't actually help much!



### Have your pre learner

- estimate how long it will take to get to your destination. Ask them to time the journey to check their estimate. Discuss with them
- how accurate was their estimate
- what factors affected its accuracy
- how travel time can vary at different times of the day
- what other factors may affect the time a short or long journey will take (weather, day of the week, familiarity with the route).
- plan an alternative route for a journey you often make.
- plan any long trips by preparing and checking the vehicle, and deciding on
  - the route to take
  - departure and arrival times
  - places and times for meal breaks and other breaks (short breaks every two hours are recommended).