An introduction to driving for deaf people

An information pack on learning to drive for deaf and hard of hearing people
I'd like to learn to drive but I am deaf – can I do it?

You are likely to take a little longer than average to learn to drive but it is impossible to predict the length of time required until your instructor has worked with you for a little while. There is no reason why a deaf person cannot learn to drive either a manual or automatic car but an automatic car is easier. However, you should be aware that if you pass your test on an automatic you are only allowed to drive automatics and would need to pass another test to drive a manual car. Whereas if you pass on a manual car you can drive either. This is worth considering before you start your lessons.

Where do I begin?

You need to apply for your provisional driving licence in the normal way, persons need not notify DVLA of deafness until the age of 70 for cars or motorcycles (group 1 entitlement).

Finding a driving instructor

We have a database of driving instructors who are trained to teach people with disabilities, please contact us at info@mobility-qe.org or get someone to call us on 020 8770 1151. Please provide us with your postcode and whether you wish to drive a manual or automatic and we can look up the driving instructors in your local area who have experience of teaching deaf and hard of hearing people to drive. Any instructor is welcome to apply to us to come on our three-day course on teaching disabled people to drive which covers teaching techniques for common disabilities including hearing impairment.

Some large driving schools such as BSM, have special instructors for deaf people, so remember to inform them that you are deaf when applying for lessons.

How will my instructor teach me?

The text on the pages to follow is from our Driving Instructors' booklet created by us for use on our training course. This helps demonstrate teaching techniques.

But I sign!

As far as British Sign Language is concerned, it should be borne in mind that ‘signing’ cannot be used by the instructor to assist the pupil whilst driving along, this also applies to the examiner when you come to take your test. There are specific directional signs that are used for route directions. These are agreed between instructor and pupil at the beginning of the course. Detailed instruction occurs when parked. The deaf learner and their instructor spend a lot of time stationary during lessons. Many deaf people are able to lip read to a certain extent and instructors use written information and sketches to help them teach their pupil to drive.
Technology

Equipment is available to help. **Connevans** offer a choice of assistive listening products to help with everyday life. Contact Connevans to find out what may be suitable for you:

Tel: 01737 247571  
Text/minicom: 01737 243134  
Fax: 01737 223475  
Email: mail@connevans.com  
Internet: www.connevans.com

A Univox 2A hearing loop for car use is also available from Gordon Morris:

Tel/text: 01458 272 121  
Email: info@gordonmorris.co.uk  
Internet: www.gordonmorris.co.uk

How will I know when to change gear?

Knowing when to change gear can be a problem at first – even for learners who can hear! It isn’t a problem specifically for the deaf learner – it is just a bit more difficult than usual. The deaf driver learns to feel the level of engine vibration. You have to learn what it feels like when the engine is revving enough to change gear.

A helpful tip when learning is to use a car with a rev counter. This is a dial on the instrument panel beside the speedometer. It counts the engine revs in 1,000, 2,000 revs and so on. It is not just good for changing gear but for finding the clutch biting point, which is something that all learners often find difficult.

You can practise feeling the engine when the car is stationary but with the engine running (gears in neutral) by pressing the accelerator and watching the rev counter needle pointing out the revs. More acceleration makes more revs and you learn what the vibrations of 1,000 and 2,000 (etc) revs are like. The instructor can tell you when the engine is revving fast enough to make a gear change a good idea. You can see what number the rev counter is pointing to when a gear change is necessary. Then you try it going along – glancing at the rev counter to check your feelings.

If all that sounds a bit complicated, there is a rough and simple guide that might help to start with. (It is not perfect, but is roughly right.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speed (mph)</th>
<th>Gear</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-10</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-20</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-30</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30+</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The rule works on fairly level roads but if you are on a steep hill up or down or have a car full of heavy passengers it changes the situation.

How will I hear sirens?

Some deaf people have concerns about hearing police sirens etc but don’t forget that you will have other clues to show that something is happening – other drivers pulling over, for instance. Hearing drivers with the windows closed and the radio on will hear little from the outside! It is usually the case that the deaf driver’s observations and mirror work are excellent and you will spot the blue flashing lights before anyone else would if the sirens are not on. Breakdown equipment
The AA and RAC offer support to deaf customers in breakdown or accident situations, you can contact either via SMS (text message) on your mobile:

**RAC** 07855 82 82 82  
**AA** 07900 444 999

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**Driving and people with disabilities**

**Taking your theory test**

The driving theory test was introduced in July 1996 as part of a package of measures designed to improve road safety among young and inexperienced drivers who are, statistically, more at risk of being in road accidents. The theory test is intended to ensure that all new drivers have a sound knowledge and understanding of driving and road safety issues before they are issued with a full licence and drive unaccompanied.

Having successfully completed the theory test candidates must pass their practical driving test within two years; otherwise they have to take the theory test again. The Driving Standards Agency (DSA) provides a number of facilities for those people with special requirements, these include foreign language voiceovers, extra time, British Sign Language interpretation and translator assisted tests.

The theory test is made up of two parts; the multiple choice part and the hazard perception part. You need to pass both parts to pass the theory test. Once you have passed the theory test you can then apply to take your practical driving test.

Arrangements can be made to meet a range of special needs that people who want to take a theory test may have. The exact nature of the arrangements will depend on the nature of the special need.

**Physical disabilities**

Most theory test centres are accessible by wheelchair. Where a candidate’s nearest test centre is not wheelchair accessible, the Driving Standards Agency (DSA) will arrange for an alternative, easily accessible, venue to be used or, in very special cases, will arrange for the test to be conducted at the candidate’s home.

The theory test is based entirely on multiple choice questions that require the correct answer to be selected from a number of options. Candidates do this by touching a square (like a computer key) on the screen. However, if a candidate would have some difficulty doing this, a member of the test centre staff will be on hand to provide help.

**Deaf candidates**

If you are deaf or have hearing difficulties you can ask to take the theory test in British sign language (BSL). The BSL interpretation will run alongside the standard test questions and answers. If you do not use BSL, an interpreter can be taken into the test centre, this facility needs to be arranged through the theory test customer services section. There is no extra fee for either facility. Tests can be booked at [www.dsa.gov.uk](http://www.dsa.gov.uk).

**Highway Code and Theory Test:** There are videos and CD Rom computer programmes which help you learn visually. You will find these in your local bookshop, eg WH Smiths. TSO sell The official DSA theory test for car drivers CD Rom (telephone 0870 6005522 or you can order via their web site [www.tsoshop.co.uk](http://www.tsoshop.co.uk)).

You can practice the multiple choice test online through the DSA website [www.dsa.gov.uk/mockpaper/theoryintro.htm](http://www.dsa.gov.uk/mockpaper/theoryintro.htm)
The touch screen computer testing equipment has a facility for a BSL signer in the corner of the screen for deaf candidates who also have reading difficulties.

The test is presented one question at a time and candidates respond by touching the correct answer on the screen.

City Lit, (The centre for adult learning) run Deaf Education and Learning Support course Driving Test Theory to learn the terminology and understand the questions you will be asked. The course is taught in British Sign Language. For more details contact City Lit:

Tel: 020 7492 2725/6
Minicom: 020 7492 2746/7
Email: cfdp@citylit.ac.uk
Web: www.citylit.ac.uk

A minicom number is available for test bookings and enquiries on 0870 0106372 or you can email customercare@pearson.com.

Dyslexia and other reading difficulties

People who are dyslexic, or who have other reading difficulties, can listen to the questions on headphones with an English or Welsh voiceover. They can also request double the normal length of time to complete the multiple choice part of the theory test but, for that would need to provide written evidence of their requirements. For example, a statement from a teacher, educationalist or other suitably qualified professional is required. However, if a candidate cannot provide such a statement they should call the theory test enquiry line on 0870 01 01 372 and speak to a member of the ‘Special Needs’ team to agree what other confirmation of their requirements can be accepted.

More about the test

Booking a test

To book a theory test you will need:
- a valid UK driving licence
- a valid debit or credit card for payment (Visa, Mastercard, Delta, Visa Electron, Switch/Maestro and Solo cards are accepted)

To book online go to www.dsa.gov.uk

You can book a theory test over the phone using the numbers below, from 8.00 am to 4.00 pm except on Bank Holidays.

Theory test booking line – 0870 0101 372
Welsh language booking line – 0870 0100 372
Minicom booking line – 0870 0106 372
Fax booking line – 0870 0104 372

In addition to English and Welsh, voiceovers are available in the following languages Albanian, Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, Dari, Farsi, Gujarati, Hindi, Kashmiri, Kurdish, Mirpuri, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Pashto, Spanish, Tamil, Turkish, Urdu.

Candidates wanting to take the theory test in another language may need to arrange for an interpreter to accompany them – they should call the Helpline for further details.
Taking your practical test

When booking a practical driving test you must inform the DSA of any special needs or disabilities. Extra time for the test may be allowed so that the examiner can talk to you about your disability and any adaptations fitted to the vehicle, but however serious the disability is, you will still take the same driving test as any other candidate. Someone with mild hearing impairment may only require the examiner to speak more loudly or turn towards them when speaking and so they should advise the DSA to that effect. However for a person with profound deafness, examiners have cards with written instructions which can be used. Alternatively you are entitled to take an interpreter with you to translate instructions into sign language. He/she must be at least 16 years old and must not be the driving instructor. They must also not interfere with the test in any way.

The candidate must provide the interpreter as the DSA does not employ them, and the person booking the test must also inform us at the time of booking that there will be an extra person in the car. See below for further information on interpreters.

If a test cannot be conducted due to a lack of communication between candidate and examiner then it must be terminated due to the safety implications of the driver being unable to follow the examiners instructions. It is therefore in the pupil’s interest to provide the DSA with all relevant information when booking the test.

Interpreters for practical tests

Council for Advancement of Communication with Deaf People (CACDP) is a national organisation, they have a directory of a range of Language Service Professionals (LSPs) – lipspeakers as well as sign language interpreters. LSPs will require payment for their services.

For those with problems paying an interpreter: From October 1999 the Disability Discrimination Act covers service provision and service providers must make reasonable adjustment, and providing an LSP would count as such. Lipspeakers are often used to assist in the theory test and this can be paid for by the Driving Standards Agency. CACDP can be contacted at:

Durham University Science Park,  
Block 4, Stockton Road,  
Durham, DH1 3UZ  
Tel: 0191 383 1155 (voice)  
Textphone: 0191 383 7915  
Fax: 0191 383 7914  
e-mail: durham@cacdp.org.uk

Hearing aids available:

Connevans Wire Free Communication

CRM-220 Lite Radio System
The Connevans CRM-220 Lite Radio System offers wire free communication for use by hearing aid users and people who are hard of hearing. The 220 Lite reduces background noise and sound loss between the speaker and listener, whether it is the driver of the car who has hearing loss or a passenger. The hearing aid user wears the receiver, usually with a neck loop and the companion wears the transmitter/microphone, delivering good sound quality to the listener.
System includes:
- 220 Lite receiver with neckloop
- 220 Lite transmitter with aerial
- transmitter neck harness
- cable for TV listening
- SCART adaptor
- system carry pouch
- 2 x PP3 alkaline batteries

The CRM-220 Lite is a portable wire free personal loop that is excellent for use in a car and for many other everyday situations.

Crescendo 50 System
The Sarabec Crescendo 50 system is a personal listening product with a range of accessories for use by those with or without a hearing aid. A ‘T’ coil facility is required for use with a hearing aid and a neck loop is worn around the neck. Non hearing aid users can choose either a stethoscope headset or headphones.

The volume can be varied without affecting others and has variable tone control to suit your needs. Recommended for in car use as well as TV listening.

System comprises:
- neck loop, headphones or stethoscope headset
- amplifier (94 x 61 x 24mm) with tone control
- external microphone with a 4m lead and velcro pads
- loop listening facility
- 2 x AA batteries supplied
- battery life approx 75 hours, depending upon volume
- weight 100g

In addition Connevans are able to supply other types of Crescendo from the Sarabec range. Please discuss your requirements with Customer Services.

For further information please contact:

Connevans Limited
54 Albert Road North
Reigate
Surrey RH2 9YR
Telephone: 01737 247571
Text/Minicom: 01737 243134
Fax: 01737 223475
Email: info@connevans.com
Information website: www.connevans.com
Online shopping: www.DeafEquipment.co.uk

(Information provided by Connevans 29.05.07)
Disabilities and how they affect driving

Deafness

Deafness is not classed as a driver disability. No restrictions are placed on a full licence when a deaf driver has passed the driving test. Deafness is socially isolating, deaf people find it hard to mix comfortably with hearing people due to the communication difficulties. Thus their own transport enables them to visit deaf friends and relatives who often live a long way off or to go to their local Deaf Club.

The profoundly deaf (those who have no hearing of speech at all) do benefit when filling in the Department of Transport’s application form for the driving test by disclosing that they are totally deaf. This ensures that the Driving Examiner is properly prepared and extra time is allocated for slower communication.

It may not be commonly known that the majority of deaf people pass the driving test at the first attempt. This may be due to deaf people developing more acute co-ordination of eye and hand as a natural consequence of being deaf. Those who are unable to hear are forced to use their eyesight more.

Statistics show that deaf people are as safe as people with normal hearing when it comes to driving, which is a skill related to good driving sense and the intelligent use of vision. Deaf people use their mirrors constantly so they are aware of traffic conditions all around them. Possibly the only hazardous instances for a deaf driver are the police car, ambulance or fire engine when they race up unexpectedly. However, even then there are visual clues to indicate its approach, ie cars move over to the left when an emergency vehicle is overtaking thus giving the hint to look out for a flashing light.

Driving instructors are not often called upon to tackle this type of training and some are reluctant to undertake the task because of their limited knowledge of the deaf person’s handicap. It only requires patience and common sense for any instructor to teach a deaf person to drive.

The age of 17 must have been reached before a provisional licence can be issued to the deaf youngster.

Deafness is a communication handicap so it requires the instructor to be aware of a few problems and to adapt his teaching technique slightly. The instructor does not need to learn sign language but your face should be seen clearly by the pupil. He cannot lip-read you and watch the road at the same time. A small suction mirror (like ADI’s rear view mirror) suitably positioned on the windscreen so the driver can see the instructor’s facial expressions with a quick glance can be very helpful. You will not be able to give instructions while the pupil is driving along. Wait until the car has stopped at a quiet part of the road.
When you speak to a deaf person, remember to:

- Speak clearly
- Do not shout
- Keep your head still
- Do not speak until the deaf person can see your lips clearly. Try to move your lips a little more than you normally do
- Be patient

It is vital to realise that lip-reading is largely guesswork because so many words look the same. For example, the sounds, M, B and P look exactly the same and the lip-reader cannot see any difference between the words PETER, BETTER and METER. There are thousands of such ambiguities – compare COLD, OLD, HOLD and GOLD. Lip reading is made more difficult because sounds such as N, T, D, K, L, G are ‘invisible’. The lips do not move when these sounds are made. Some deaf people are very good at lip reading so clear speech is important.

Face to face conversation, demonstration, written notes and the use of visual aids will cover all requirements. Unsatisfactory response is likely to be the fault of the teacher rather than the pupil.

At the outset it is necessary to establish what is the best means of communication. Putting a thumb up will mean "good" whereas putting a thumb down will mean "bad".

**Introduction to the controls**

The first introduction to the controls of the motor car will be as normal, by demonstration when stationary, but in addition emphasis must be made to show which limb has to operate each control as demonstration is the method which will be used to communicate. For instance, the right leg being the limb used for the accelerator and the footbrake, tap your own right leg as you place it over the accelerator and the footbrake. Similarly when demonstrating the use of the clutch, tap your own left leg as you demonstrate to the pupil how to operate this pedal. This will establish to the pupil what he is being asked when you tap either leg.

**Mirrors**

Explanation of the need for constant use and why. Pointing first towards the eyes and then to the mirrors will be the method used throughout.
**Steering**

Demonstration as normally shown to hearing pupils, plus the use of the illustrations in the visual aids. Establish at the outset, while stationary, how vital it is to look well down the road and not just ahead of the bonnet of the vehicle. When it is seen that the eyes have dropped with the resultant wander of the vehicle, point to pupil’s eyes followed by a hand movement straight ahead.

Visual aids will also assist to show the correct way to turn the wheel.

![Steering Diagram](image)

**Gears**

Following explanation of the positions of each gear and their uses, establish the method to be used to communicate which gear needs to be selected when on the move. The only safe way you can do this on the move is to point to the speedometer and teach the pupil to match the gear of the car to the correct speed, ie:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speed Range</th>
<th>Gear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-10 mph</td>
<td>1st gear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-20 mph</td>
<td>2nd gear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-30 mph</td>
<td>3rd gear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-40 mph</td>
<td>4th gear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The other way round can be used when slow moving or slowing down.

**Speed first – then gear**

Recognising when it is necessary to change gear will be known by the awareness of different speeds, but also by the feel of vibrations. It is very helpful if the vehicle is fitted with a revolution counter, as it can then be taught that when the needle reaches the correct number of revolutions on the dial, this indicates the necessity to move to another gear up or down.
**Clutch**

Locate with left foot, tapping left leg; explain use and how to operate, again using visual aids in addition. Establish the code which will be used for instruction on use of the clutch when the vehicle is moving. Place left hand horizontally, as near to the dashboard as possible. When requiring the clutch to be pressed, palm facing down, move hand downwards. For lifting the clutch, palm facing down, move hand upwards very slowly.

![Clutch Diagram]

**Accelerator**

Having explained what this is for, where it is and how to use it, establish the method you will use to indicate when you require more or less pressure. Raise right hand to shoulder level in horizontal position with palm facing downwards. As advised with left hand for the clutch, move right hand up or down to demonstrate the pressure required.

![Accelerator Diagram]

**Footbrake**

Following introduction to the use, make sure your pupil then knows what will be the signal you will use when braking is required. Raise right hand again in horizontal position, with palm facing downwards, but this time locate your hand a little further to the left in order to indicate the use of the middle pedal. As advised with left hand for the clutch, move hand up or down to demonstrate the pressure required.

![Footbrake Diagram]
Clutch and accelerator co-ordination
Use both hands (palms facing down) extended horizontally and work in unison – one up and other down like a see-saw. Biting point is shown to be when hands are level.

Stopping
While in a stationary position, demonstrate by raising the right foot from the accelerator and transferring it to the footbrake, followed by progressive pressure. Later, when on the move, the right hand will be used as already described. How much pressure required will be shown by the amount of downward movement of the hand. Just before the vehicle is stationary and the left foot is required to press the clutch, the left hand should be raised alongside the right and pressed down fully.
Further signals for instructions
When requiring the car to stop at the side of the road, use the same movement with the arm as advised for positioning and follow this by an up and down movement, similar to the Highway Code signal for “I am going to slow down or stop”.

Positioning
Use the right hand (back of hand facing pupil) with fingers extended. To indicate necessity to move further to the right, move hand towards the right. Similarly, when requiring the vehicle to travel nearer to the left, move hand towards the left.

Turning corners
When requiring a pupil to take a road on the left:

a) If it is the first road:

Place right hand up to the windscreen with one finger pointing upwards, immediately followed by moving the whole hand to the left.

When requiring the pupil to take a road on the right:

a) If it is the first road:

Place right hand up to the windscreen with one finger pointing upwards, immediately followed by moving the whole hand to the right.

b) If it is the second road:

Place right hand up to the windscreen with two fingers pointing upwards, immediately followed by moving the whole hand to the right or left. Ensure the two fingers are clearly visible and not held at an angle so they look like only one finger.
Roundabouts
Make a round movement with your hand and hold up the number of fingers to show which exit - 1st, 2nd, 3rd etc.

Traffic lights
With palm upward and fingers closed, ‘explode’ fingers outwards to describe the light coming on. You can describe the light more fully by doing three lights one beneath the other like on the real thing. Then give the direction in the normal way.
Further signals for instructions
When requiring the car to stop at the side of the road, use the same movement with the arm as advised for positioning and follow this by an up and down movement, similar to the Highway Code signal for “I am going to slow down or stop”.

Emergency stop
The word ‘emergency’ must be explained so that it is ensured the pupil understands exactly what this means in relation to stopping in a hurry. Give a demonstration, stressing the progressive braking and the use of the clutch at the last minute.

Work on your signing together