



Helping people with physical disabilities, with special educational needs and those with hearing difficulties.

Special needs accommodations for candidates with learning difficulties & developmental conditions when booking and taking the practical driving test:

Special needs notification:

When applying for a provisional license DVLA do not need notification of a learning difficulty (such as dyslexia or dyspraxia) or of any neurological developmental conditions (such as Autism, Aspergers or ADHD) unless the condition affects driving ability; they do however need to be notified of any learning disability which results in reduced intellectual ability.

DVSA do not normally need notification of these conditions before a practical driving test unless any accommodations are required; if that is the case notification would be needed to allow for them to plan for any necessary reasonable adjustments.

It is unlikely that DVSA would decide that extra time, sometimes referred to as a “double slot”, is required for these tests unless there is some sort of physical disability associated with the condition that requires the use of adapted controls; the examiner is also not required to complete any extra paperwork for candidates with learning difficulties, so extra time is not needed for that purpose.

It should be noted that the elements of the practical driving test remain the same for all test candidates. The special needs accommodation does not mean that the drive will be any longer but it could allow extra time for the additional discussion needed before the start of the test and provides extra time to allow for breaks during the test if required.

Booking the test: If special needs notification is required it should be declared when booking the test. For on-line applications make sure that the box marked “Special learning or educational needs” is ticked and fill in the special requirements drop box detailing any difficulties the candidate may have with any aspects of the test. For telephone bookings discuss this with the booking centre staff. If there is a difficulty using one or other method used for the independent drive this should also be declared when making the booking.

The preferred method of booking a special needs test is on-line at <https://www.gov.uk/book-driving-test> or via the DVSA Trainer Booking Service; make sure that the special requirements sections of the booking form are completed; DVSA should then automatically select a “double slot” if this is needed.

It may though be more convenient to make these bookings by telephoning the DVSA call centre (0300 200 1122) to ensure that special needs requirements are accurately and fully explained. If extra time is required for the test the booking centre staff would arrange for a “double slot” test.

Confirmation: Once the special needs requirements have been received by DVSA they would then be entered onto the examiner’s journal and sent to the allocated examiner at the specified test centre in advance of the test, so the examiner should be aware of any requirements in advance.

DVSA have though advised that ADIs should contact the test centre a few days before the test to confirm special needs requirements. It is vital in cases of communication difficulty that the examiner is made aware of any potential problem in advance; they will need to discuss this with the candidate but if there is a communication difficulty the candidate may not be forthcoming with the relevant details. If there is a need for the examiner to communicate with the candidate in a quiet environment the examiner needs to know about this in advance, it may sometimes be advantageous for a meeting to be arranged in advance of the test date if the candidate has difficulties interacting with strangers.

The Association of Disability Driving Instructors CIC

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Procedure on test

Following notification in advance of any special needs requirements, DVSA has agreed to make any necessary reasonable adjustments to accommodate those special needs.

Eyesight test: DVSA have stated that “reasonable adjustments” may be made for the eyesight test if required, when they are made aware that a candidate has dyslexia or similar reading difficulties.

The DVSA DT1 section 1.20 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-driving-examiners-carrying-out-driving-tests-dt1/01-the-practical-driving-test-and-extended-test-for-cars> states that:

“Black on Yellow number plates are ordinarily easier to distinguish by most dyslexic candidates. They understand that some candidates may read back to front or in a non-uniform order and may have difficulty distinguishing between certain images, for example B and 8, D and O, 5 and S. They may find it easier to write down the letters and numbers rather than reading them out - these are all deemed to be reasonable adjustments.

The eyesight test is a legal requirement and the correct procedure must be carried out. However, providing the test is not undermined, common sense should be applied where the numbers or letters are ambiguous.”

General communication and interaction with candidates: The DVSA DT1 section 5.13: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-driving-examiners-carrying-out-driving-tests-dt1/05-candidates-with-an-impairment> and section 7.36 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-driving-examiners-carrying-out-driving-tests-dt1/07-general-operational-matters> details special needs provisions available for candidates with learning difficulties or spectrum and processing disorders when taking a practical test and states that “where a spectrum condition (or special need) is declared or apparent, and providing the test is not undermined, the examiners should wherever possible adapt their approach to accommodate the candidate.”

DT1 advises that the following should be considered at the start of the test:

- Examiners should consider communicating with the candidate in a quieter environment.
- The examiner should be clear and concise with any questions or statements.
- The candidate should be given plenty of time to respond to any questions.
- The candidate should be asked if they prefer not to talk during the test as this could be distracting and could be interpreted by the candidate as being part of the test.
- When informed (either by the journal, or personally) that a candidate has a special need such as dyslexia or dyspraxia, examiners should tactfully establish how severely this affects them when following directions for the independent drive; in these cases examiners should ask the candidate which is their more able method, following directions given by a satnav, or following traffic signs. Therefore, if examiners are made aware prior to the test commencing, they should carry the satnav and peripherals to cover each scenario.

During the course of the drive:

- The examiner should consider checking through the test that the candidate is keeping up with the information being given.
- DT1 advises that some disabilities may affect a candidate’s ability to read road signs whilst for others following verbal directions could be difficult.
 - Writing down the place names may help if the candidate is struggling to understand.
 - It may help for the examiner to say “my side” or “your side” rather than left or right.
 - It may help for the examiner to point to the left or right to back up verbal direction.
 - It may assist to include appropriate landmarks e.g. “turn left just after the cinema”.
 - Raising the fingers may help to illustrate which exit to take at roundabouts.
- Many people on the spectrum have heightened use of senses. This can create a sensory overload that may cause additional distractions and anxiety for the candidate. Therefore, consider avoiding routes where building or roadworks are taking place and routes that are known for low sun.
- Consider trying to avoid bright clothing and accessories and wear a more subtle fragrance.

A candidate with a declared spectrum condition or learning difficulty may need very little if any adjustment so it’s important for the examiner to assess every candidate on an individual basis and conduct the test in whichever way they best see fit. In these situations if the condition is obvious but no adjustments are considered necessary, it would be of benefit to the examiner if the ADI could inform them in advance that although the candidate has a learning difficulty or developmental condition, the condition does not affect their ability to drive and no accommodations are required.

Independent driving: If the medical condition compromises the ability to navigate by either following directions on road signs or following directions given on sat-nav this should be declared when booking the test, stating that the medical condition causes difficulty with either method.

DVSA DT1 section 7.36 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-driving-examiners-carrying-out-driving-tests-dt1/07-general-operational-matters> confirms that examiners should discuss any difficulty with the candidate before the start of the test to establish how severely this affects them when following directions for the independent drive; in these cases examiners should ask the candidate which is their more able method, following directions given by a satnav, or following traffic signs. If examiners are made aware prior to the test commencing, they would then be prepared by carrying the satnav and peripherals to cover each scenario

Despatch states that if the sat nav is to be used: “The examiner will be able to change the colour, contrast and volume”. “If you think your pupil will need to change the sat nav layout, you’ll need to set up a meeting with your LDTM before the test” to discuss what settings they need. “On the day of the test you should arrive earlier than normal with a copy of the agreed setting requirements” <https://despatch.blog.gov.uk/2017/10/24/what-weve-done-to-make-sure-the-new-driving-test-is-accessible-for-everyone/>

The ADI/candidate is not permitted to dictate to the examiner which method of independent driving should be used but it is perfectly acceptable to state that there is a difficulty with one or other method due to the declared medical condition.

Show me question: Dyspraxia may affect fine and gross motor skills which could compromise the physical ability to operate some of the secondary controls switches needed for the show me question on the move (e.g. if the lights on/off switch is operated by rotating the end of the indicator stalk this requires greater fine motor skill than turning a large dashboard mounted switch located to the right of the steering column – adaptation would not be needed for the candidate’s own vehicle, just careful choice of car, but this may not be a practical consideration with an ADI’s tuition vehicle). Any difficulty should be confirmed with the test centre, stating which controls cannot be safely operated.

If necessary, adaptations should be available to allow controls to be operated safely on the move; controls for sounding the horn and operating the front wash/wipe (along with those for the indicators) are considered to be safety critical and must be able to be operated at any time whilst driving. The headlamp on/off switch is also considered to be safety critical but if this cannot be safely operated on the move the dipped headlamps could be switched on before starting the drive and left on until the end of the drive, this would overcome the problem of not being able to operate the switch on the move. The other secondary controls for heating/demist operation, heated rear screen, the switches to open and close the side windows and switches to operate the rear wash/wipe are not considered safety critical and so do not *have* to be operated on the move.

If a particular secondary control cannot be safely operated on the move, DVSA have agreed that the examiner will ask for an alternative control to be demonstrated for the “show me” question. The ADI/candidate is not permitted to specify which control the examiner should ask for the “show me” question, they should merely declare if any of the secondary controls cannot be safely operated on the move. See DVSA DT1, section 1.21 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-driving-examiners-carrying-out-driving-tests-dt1/01-the-practical-driving-test-and-extended-test-for-cars> It is important that the examiner is aware of any difficulty operating a particular control in advance of the test, ADIs are advised to contact the test centre a few days before the test to discuss this.

COVID-19 restrictions

Dyspraxia may affect fine and gross motor skills which could make the adjustment of face coverings difficult whilst driving. If the candidate finds it difficult to ensure that their face covering remains over their mouth and nose for the duration of the drive and they struggle to adjust it or to re-fit the covering on the move, the option of applying to take a test without a face covering should be considered.

A disability such as dyspraxia should count as a good reason for not wearing a face covering if there is a difficulty fitting or adjusting the covering. If DVSA agree to this and an examiner is prepared to conduct the test with the candidate not wearing a face covering it would not then be an issue if the candidate’s face covering slipped off during the drive. If no application for taking the test without a face covering had been made and the mask was repeatedly slipping off their nose or if it was repeatedly completely coming off during the drive this may result in the test being terminated, especially if the candidate had difficulty re-fitting or adjusting it.