

Special Needs Accommodations for the practical test – advice to ADIs (amended to include 2024 DT1 update)

If your pupil has a physical disability, a specific learning difficulty or a hearing difficulty, special needs accommodations may be required when they are taking their practical test.

Many of the accommodations are confirmed in the DVSA DT1 and other agreed documents but occasionally examiners may not be aware of this. This information guide lets ADIs know what is available and will also make it easier for the examiner to check what is permitted to ensure that the appropriate assistance is provided; references to the relevant documents are included.

1) **The eyesight test** (reading a vehicle number plate at a distance of 20 metres):

DVSA DT1 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-driving-examiners-carrying-out-driving-tests-dt1/6-general-technical-matters> section 6.17 gives specific advice regarding candidates with dyslexia (or other reading difficulties).

“Black on Yellow is ordinarily easier to distinguish by most dyslexic candidates. They may also 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 - this is deemed to be a reasonable adjustment”.

(Alternatively use a printed sheet to point at the numbers/letters).

Deaf candidates may also need to write down the letters rather than read them out. The ADI or independent interpreter may need to assist with the instructions for this.

Disabled candidates with mobility difficulties may remain in the car to read the number plate (examiners may advise where to park to facilitate this).

2) **‘Tell me’ safety questions** (before the start of the test):

DVSA DT1 section 6.20 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-driving-examiners-carrying-out-driving-tests-dt1/6-general-technical-matters> states that “where a special need prevents a candidate from carrying out a practical activity for the ‘tell me’ question (e.g. physical disability making walking round the car or opening the bonnet difficult) they should be asked to demonstrate understanding by oral explanation”.

3) **General communication and interaction with candidates:**

DVSA DT1 section 8.13 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-driving-examiners-carrying-out-driving-tests-dt1/8-candidates-with-a-disability-health-condition-or-learning-difficulty> details special needs provisions available for those with learning difficulties or spectrum and processing disorders. It 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”.

Section 1:21 of DT1 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-driving-examiners-carrying-out-driving-tests-dt1/1-car-driving-test> (Instructions to candidates) states that: “Examiners should ensure their instructions are absolutely

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clear.... Candidates should not be given any grounds to complain of being flustered or uncertain. If you are aware a candidate has dyslexia or dyspraxia you should tactfully establish if it affects their driving and if any adjustments are necessary. This may include confirming directions by pointing or using hand signals”.

4) **For Deaf candidates:**

DVSA DT1 section 8.15 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-driving-examiners-carrying-out-driving-tests-dt1/8-candidates-with-a-disability-health-condition-or-learning-difficulty> states that “A special needs interpreter may accompany deaf and/ or deaf without speech candidates for tests conducted in English or Welsh only. The interpreter must be at least 16 years of age”. This could be for the initial discussion and for the ‘tell me’ question at the start of the test, or could be for the entire on-road part of the test. The interpreter may be the ADI or the accompanying driver.

Examiners may use the Deaf Candidate Support Pack as part of making reasonable adjustments.

5) **Independent driving:**

Section 6.34 of the DVSA DT1 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-driving-examiners-carrying-out-driving-tests-dt1/6-general-technical-matters> states that if the examiner is made aware that a candidate has a special need they will ask the candidate which is their more able method, either following directions from the sat-nav or following traffic signs; if the examiner is aware of this prior to the test commencing they would be able to bring both a sat-nav and the peripherals to cover either scenario.

This applies to those with dyslexia or other learning difficulties and to Deaf candidates; if Deaf candidates are following road signs, changes of destination will require candidates to pull up at the side of the road to communicate the new destination, see: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/driving-tests-prompt-cards-to-support-learner-drivers-who-are-deaf>

Despatch stated in 2017 that if the sat nav is used: “The examiner will be able to change the colour, contrast and volume”. Set up a meeting with your LDTM before the test to discuss what settings are needed. <https://despatch.blog.gov.uk/2017/10/24/what-weve-done-to-make-sure-the-new-driving-test-is-accessible-for-everyone/>

DVSA DT1 Section 6.34 also states that “If the candidate requests that the audible directions be turned off, they should not be refused”.

6) **‘Show me’ safety questions (on the move during the test):**

DVSA DT1, section 6.20 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-driving-examiners-carrying-out-driving-tests-dt1/6-general-technical-matters> states that candidates “should be expected to carry out the ‘show me’ question on the move. Reasonable consideration must be adopted in cases of disability and if adaptations don’t allow candidates to operate windows or demisters on the move, and they are unable to do so, then an alternative question should be asked”.

The December 2024 update of the DT1, section 6.20, now clearly states that “candidates (driving) with adaptations need to be able to operate the horn and windscreen washer whilst driving as they are safety critical; these controls can also be used as one of the safety questions on the move”. So, these two secondary controls are the only mandatory controls required for the ‘show me’ question.

Lesley Young (Chief Driving Examiner 2012-2018) emphasised in Despatch (Oct 2017) <https://despatch.blog.gov.uk/2017/10/24/what-weve-done-to-make-sure-the-new-driving-test-is-accessible-for-everyone/> that “we will only ask a ‘show me’ question that the candidate can demonstrate safely whilst on the move.”

Notification of special needs requirements must be made on application for the test if accommodations are required; this is to allow for DVSA to plan for any necessary reasonable adjustments. The ADI is also advised to confirm this at the test centre before the test date to ensure the notification has been received and accommodations can be made.