

Independent Driving on Your Test

Independent driving is the part of the practical car test where you follow a route without turn-by-turn directions from the examiner. The examiner is looking at how safely you drive while planning ahead and following directions.

Current GOV.UK guidance

You should be ready to drive independently for 20 to 35 minutes. You may be asked to follow directions from a sat nav, traffic signs, or a combination of both.

What happens

- The examiner tells you whether to follow the sat nav, traffic signs, or both.
- If a sat nav is used, the examiner sets it up. You cannot use your own sat nav for the route.
- You still need to drive normally and safely: mirrors, signals, position, speed, observations and judgement all still matter.
- The car test includes various road and traffic conditions, but not motorways.
- The examiner may still ask you to pull over, move off, answer a show me question, or complete other test requirements during the independent driving section.

If you go the wrong way

Taking a wrong turn is not automatically a driving fault. The important thing is how you deal with it. Stay calm, keep the car safe, and continue unless the examiner gives you another instruction.

- If you miss a sign or turn, the examiner will help you get back on route.
- If a traffic sign is hidden or unclear, the examiner can give directions until you can see the next one.
- You can ask for confirmation if you are unsure where you have been asked to go.

How to prepare

Practise before your test

- Follow a sat nav on lessons while still reading road signs and markings. Do not stare at the screen.
- Practise following signs to local places, especially through roundabouts, one-way systems and multi-lane junctions.
- Ask your instructor to give less help as your test gets closer so you build real independence.
- Practise dealing with missed turns safely. The aim is not perfect navigation; the aim is safe driving.

During the independent drive

- Prioritise safety over the route. A safe missed turn is better than a rushed unsafe turn.
- Use early observations, correct lane choice and steady speed control.
- Listen to sat nav instructions, but always obey road signs, road markings and traffic conditions.
- If you are unsure, ask. Asking for the direction to be repeated is not itself a fault.

Remember

Independent driving is not a memory test. It is a test of forward planning, decision making and multitasking while keeping full control of the vehicle.

Quick questions

- Can I use my own sat nav? No. If sat nav is used for the route, the examiner sets it up.
- Will I fail for going off route? Not just for going the wrong way. Faults depend on the safety and quality of your driving.
- Are test routes published? No. GOV.UK says driving test routes are not published, so you cannot check them before your test.

Sources checked

This guide was rewritten using current GOV.UK and DVSA information checked on 21 May 2026.

GOV.UK: Driving test - what happens during the test. DVSA: Carrying out driving tests, examiner guidance sections 1 and 6.