

Driver Awareness Scheme (DAS)

Pre-Course Workbook



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Introduction



As you have been registered to complete the Dorset Driver Awareness Scheme (DAS) Course, you must complete all sections and exercises in this workbook before attending.

Many drivers assume that passing their driving test means they have the necessary knowledge and skills to drive through to old age, but there can be many human factors that affect your driving abilities along the way. You can make mistakes when driving no matter how experienced you are or how well you have been trained. Sometimes, you may deliberately break the road traffic law believing that it will not be a risk to do so.

Road traffic injuries are consistently one of the top three causes of death for people aged between 5 and 44 years and it is often stated that human error is a major contributor to road traffic crashes.

As more technology is introduced to reduce human error, drivers may 'switch off' from the driving task and expect that the vehicle will do the driving but technology has not advanced enough for this to be a safe decision. As well as new skills being required for the vehicle assisted driving task, concerns have also been expressed about how increasing automation may lead to driver skills fading so that drivers are ill-prepared for taking over manual control.

The Dorset DAS Course is not a 'Speed Awareness Course'. It is offered for a range of offences including driving through a red traffic light or careless and inconsiderate driving. It may also be offered to people as refresher training if they drive for work.

This workbook will take you through some of the human factors underpinning driving behaviour, whether your offence was due to an error, lapse of concentration or a deliberate violation.

Risk & Unconscious Bias

10

Most road traffic incidents are due to risk-taking behaviour such as,

- poor decision making
- driving when tired
- not leaving enough space between the vehicle and other road users
- using a mobile phone whilst driving

You can influence how much demand you place on yourself as a driver. The easiest way to reduce risk, especially when the traffic situation is difficult, is to reduce your speed.

The faster you drive, the less time you have to,

- process information
- make safe decisions
- take action
- correct errors

Multi-tasking and other distractions – such as talking on the mobile phone or using a music system – makes the task of driving even harder. The fact is that a lot of us overestimate our driving ability and we underestimate the risks we face on the road.

As human beings, we tend to make basic mistakes in our thinking. These mistakes happen without thinking, but if we're aware of them, then we can make sure they don't put us at risk on the road.

The next few sections will cover some biases in the way we think. These are mental shortcuts the brain uses based on our beliefs and values which influence our decisions or judgements about different driving and traffic situations.

1.1 Optimism Bias



As humans we generally believe that bad things don't happen to us. For example, we think we're less likely than other people to get ill and we are overly optimistic about the outcome of our decisions.

The same applies to things like being stopped by the police if we break a traffic law or crashing if we take a risk. We think we're more likely than others to get away with it.

We don't want to believe something bad will happen to us. It's a kind of defence mechanism.

In life, optimism bias is quite a good thing. It helps us get through the day!

Test yourself

Compared to other drivers, how likely do you think you are of being involved in a crash when you are driving?



Where did you place yourself? If you believe there's little chance that you'll have a crash, then you're more likely to take risks and increase your statistical risk by the way in which you choose to drive.

Typically, you will have shown some optimism bias if you score yourself as anywhere below 50. This means that you believe you are safer than other drivers. Whether your self-rating is realistic or not is difficult to determine but most people judge themselves to have a lower probability of being involved in a crash compared with others – and they can't all be right.

- Your self-rating should be like that of your rating for your peers.
- If there is a big difference between your rating for yourself and your rating for others, ask yourself whether this difference is realistic.
- Is your driving that much better than your peers?

IMPROVE YOUR RISK

Through self-reflection, make a note of how you could be more realistic about your risk in future.

1.2 Self-Enhancement Bias



When we compare ourselves to other people, we naturally pay more attention to things that show us in a positive light and dismiss the things that show us in a negative light – we say they are “bad luck” or “someone else's fault”. This is called ‘self-enhancement bias’. For drivers, one of the effects is the belief that they are skilled and experienced enough to take risks.

Assess your Driving Skills

Have a look at the following questionnaire and estimate how much skill you have in each aspect of driving. Tick the box that best represents your judgement of your skills using the following scale:

1 = Well below average 2 = Below average 3 = About average 4 = Above average 5 = Well above average

		1	2	3	4	5
1	Tolerating other drivers' blunders calmly					
2	Perceiving hazards in traffic					
3	Conforming to the traffic rules					
4	Prediction of traffic situations ahead					
5	Fast reactions					
6	Paying attention to other road users					
7	Driving in the dark					
8	Keeping sufficient following distance					
9	Adjusting your speed to the conditions					
10	Overtaking					
11	Conforming to the speed limits					
12	Avoiding unnecessary risks					

How did you do?

Look carefully at those areas where you have scored yourself as above average. Are you sure your skills are above average all the time? Under what circumstances are you less likely to perform these driving tasks competently? You might rate yourself differently when you are in a hurry or in a bad mood?

There are several reasons that will have influenced how you rated your skills as a driver:

1. You only focus on times when your driving was skilled and ignore times when you were not driving well.
2. A belief that bad outcomes are because of other drivers' decisions and not yours
3. You tend to see what you expect to see.
4. The tendency to overestimate your control in risky situations.
5. A hindsight bias that means safe outcomes are interpreted as the result of actions you took as a driver rather than due to good fortune.

Whatever your perception of your driving skills, there is often a difference between what you think and your actual driving skills. This is due to the way humans think.

Even the best drivers make mistakes, do foolish things or bend the rules sometimes. Some of these behaviours are trivial, but some are potentially dangerous.

Errors (mistakes) and Violations (breaking the law)

There is no such thing as a perfect driver. Below, make a mental note of how often you commit errors and violations. An error is when you make a mistake or have a failure in your concentration. A violation is a deliberate action which breaks the law.

Statement	Error or Violation
Attempt to overtake someone that you hadn't noticed to be signalling a right turn	Error
Fail to notice that pedestrians are crossing when turning into a side street from a main road	Error
Drive especially close to the car in front as a signal to its driver to go faster or get out of the way	Violation
Cross a junction knowing that the traffic lights have already turned against you	Violation
Disregard the speed limits late at night or very early in the morning	Violation
Fail to check your rear-view mirror before pulling out, changing lanes, etc.	Error
Become impatient with a slow driver in the outer lane and overtake on the inside	Violation
Underestimate the speed of an oncoming vehicle when overtaking	Error
Brake too quickly on a slippery road, or steer the wrong way in a skid	Error
Drive even though you realise you may be over the legal blood-alcohol limit	Violation

How did you do?

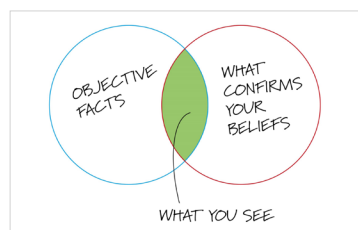
Look carefully at those areas that apply to you most often.

If you assessed yourself honestly, you'll know that thinking about why you have made a mistake or committed a violation is the first step to finding out how you can avoid this in the future.

Ask yourself: What are the circumstances under which I am more likely to commit errors and violations? Every time you make a mistake or commit a violation there is an opportunity to be a better driver by reflecting on the reasons why it happened. These are the triggers for self-reflection – the first step in developing safer driving habits by acknowledging your mistakes - not necessarily due to poor driving skills - but due to the belief that taking a risk is OK because your driving skills are above average.

When you understand how your beliefs about risk and confidence in your driving skills might influence your driving behaviour, then you can take steps to recognise this tendency when you're behind the wheel and you can make safer decisions.

1.3 Confirmation (What's Worked Before) Bias



Confirmation bias is the tendency to search for, and recall information in a way that supports your beliefs and values. Are you prone to confirmation bias when driving? Think carefully about the following driving scenarios and rate whether confirmation bias has affected any of your driving decisions in the last 12 months.

Driving Scenario	Yes / No
You believe it is OK to drive faster than others around you because nothing bad happens and everyone else does it.	
You think it is OK to overtake on a bend because you know the road and there's hardly ever any oncoming traffic.	
You drive really close to the car in front because this always gets them to move out of the way.	
You cross a junction knowing that the traffic lights have already turned against you because there's plenty of time to make it across before the waiting traffic moves.	
You don't stick to the speed limits late at night or very early in the morning because there's no police around and hardly any traffic.	

How did you do?

Could you identify which scenarios might lead to confirmation bias? Think about the potential consequences of confirmation bias in this scenario. When you make decisions based on past experiences, you are taking a calculated risk. A risk is an event that "may" occur. The probability of something going wrong with your decision can range anywhere from just above 0% to just below 100%. The question is – do you feel lucky? The law of probability means that eventually, your luck will run out.

IMPROVE YOUR RISK

Confirmation bias increases your risk of being involved in a crash.

- Be aware of the different scenarios where you are most likely to make a decision based on confirmation bias.
- Consider the potential risks in these scenarios.
- Attend to information that might run contrary to your beliefs.
- Allow for a high chance that the scenario may not unfold as safely as you think it will.

1.4 Good Enough Bias



This is a bias in which you choose the satisfactory 'good enough' option, when choosing from different paths of action. Driving is a complex and difficult task at times, and you may develop a habit of putting in less effort and consider this to be acceptable. However, you take more risk when you are influenced by the Good Enough bias.

Think about each of the different examples below and honestly rate yourself for how frequently you do these things: -

	Not at all				All the time
	0	1	2	3	4
Staying in the same lane when you should move left.					
Following the speed of the vehicle in front when you should be looking ahead to make your own decisions about speed.					
Not checking your mirrors as often as you should or when you should.					
Accelerate to get through traffic lights before they turn red to avoid the effort of having to stop.					
Cut across the corner rather than turn at right angles into a junction because it's less effort.					
Staying in the same gear when you should change up or down.					
Pay little attention to road signs.					

How did you do?

Look carefully at those areas where you have recognised that you may not drive to the best of your ability and think about the potential consequences. For example, staying in the same lane might mean putting in less effort, but it may also result in other road users becoming frustrated and overtake you at risk.

IMPROVE YOUR RISK

- Thinking your driving is good enough means you may not put in the required effort in driving. Reflect and acknowledge how this bias can affect your risk.
- Next time you have a near miss, consider what element of your driving needs to be improved.

For example

- Should you have changed lanes earlier?
- Should you have been checking your mirrors more?
- Should you have followed the road signs better?

Summary

Look again at the responses and ratings you gave for each of the four biases. Consider whether your probability of being involved in a crash is optimistic. Have you underestimated your risk?

Think about what the errors and violations you are likely to commit. For example, you tend to,

- drive too fast for the circumstances and you may lose control of your vehicle.
- use your mobile phone whilst driving and become distracted.
- drive too close to other vehicles in a traffic queue and narrowly miss going into the back of another car.
- emerge from junctions without looking out for fast moving vehicles in the far distance.

Once you have thought about these different kinds of scenarios, it is easy to discover how to reduce your risk. To be a better and safer driver, recognise your mistakes and think about how to make safer decisions every time you drive.

IMPROVE YOUR RISK

Biases in your beliefs about your driving skills are a common human tendency that we are mostly unaware of. Reflect and acknowledge how biased is your view of your own driving?

Next time another driver is aggressive towards you because you made a mistake, instead of automatically defending your actions, consider what element of your driving needs to be improved.

For example

- Were you driving too close?
- Did you force another driver to brake quite harshly?
- Were you driving too fast for the conditions?
- Did you fail to look in the mirror and see this road user?



Influences & Distractions

2.0

The association between stress and crash involvement has been well established. Studies have found that individuals who have experienced recent traumatic life events (e.g., divorce) have a greater risk of crash involvement.

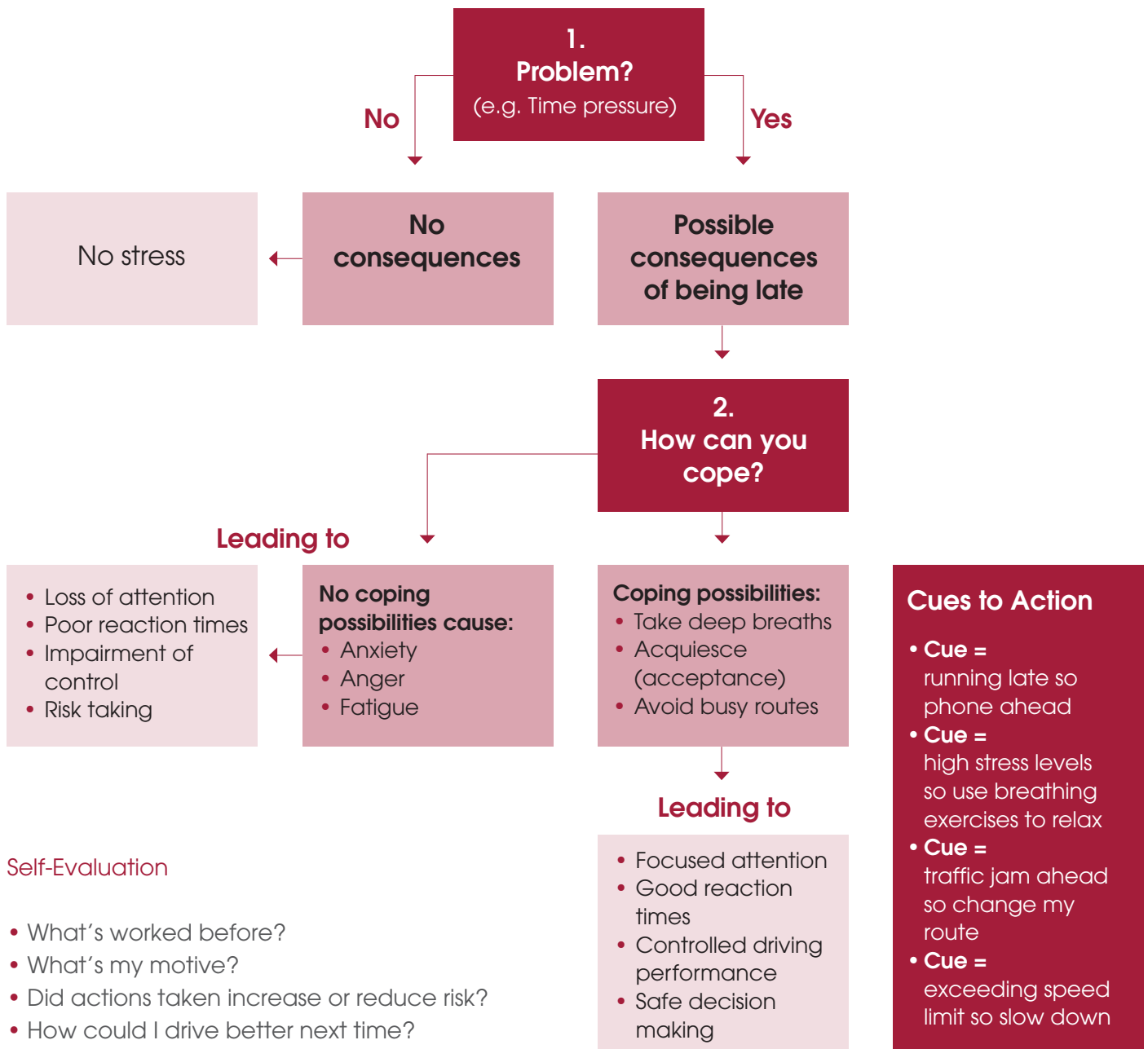
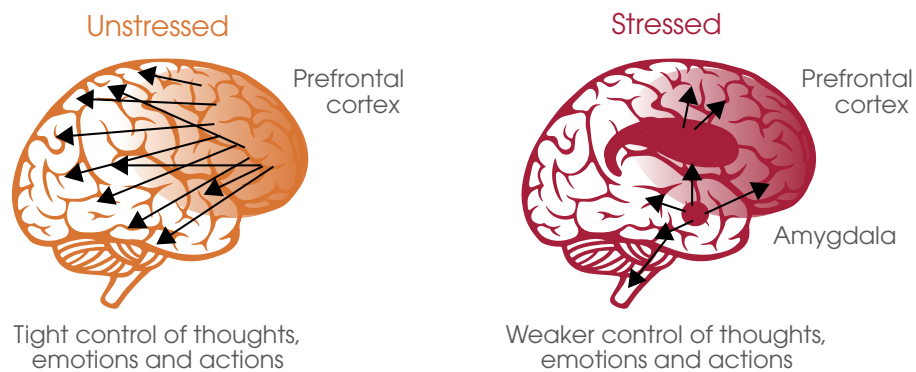
There may be two main reasons for this link:

- Drivers who are stressed may be distracted by thoughts about their personal problems.
- Stress may cause drivers to lack the necessary motivation to avoid hazardous driving situations.

Driver Stress

The traffic situation and the nature of the driving task can also lead to driver stress. The model below shows how we commonly react to a situation based upon our first thoughts and choice of coping strategy. Understanding your own triggers to emotions behind the wheel is the first step to controlling your responses and improving your risk.

2.1 Driver Stress



Self-Evaluation

- What's worked before?
- What's my motive?
- Did actions taken increase or reduce risk?
- How could I drive better next time?

2.2 Time Pressure

As shown in the above model, an example of a stressful situation is when you are driving under time pressure. Time pressure often leads to high risk driving such as speeding and dangerous overtaking. This is particularly the case for those people driving for work or with a busy schedule. For many situations you can call ahead to remove any perceived pressure due to being late.

- Are the few minutes saved worth the risks you're tempted to take by driving too fast?
- Question what you think the consequences of lateness really are. Will being late really affect you?
- Ask yourself whether others would really want you to increase the risk of a crash and the consequences to you, other road users and the vehicle so that you are not so late?

SELF REFLECTION POINT

Think about how you drive when you are under time pressure compared to when you are not. Do you often find yourself running late and wishing you had organized things better? Are you more likely to take risks when you are running late?

2.3 Using Safe Coping Strategies

When you feel stressed you have different coping options. Safe coping strategies like looking out for hazards and increasing your concentration will improve your safety whereas unsafe coping strategies like getting angry will increase your risk.

Imagine yourself in this scenario...

You are driving on a country road on the way to visit a friend. You are running a little late and notice that you are going over the speed limit.

Unsafe Coping

- Keep checking the time and thinking about whether you will make it.
- Get annoyed when you see a slow-moving tractor ahead of you.
- Keep driving over the speed limit so you can be on time.

ASK YOURSELF

- How much time am I likely to save by driving a few miles over the speed limit?
- Am I accurately assessing the risk of driving too fast on country roads?
- Am I feeling stressed, will this mean that I might miss hazards because I'm thinking about being late?

Safe coping options

- I'll just take it easy and enjoy the drive instead – my friend won't mind if I'm a little late.
- I'm going to relax on the journey so I can enjoy time with my friend.
- I can pull over and let my friend know I'm delayed.
- I'll make a special effort to focus on my driving.

Self-reflection

A slow vehicle on a winding country road will not pull over and let you pass. What coping strategy would you use?

- a. Speed up and overtake as soon as possible
- b. Honk your horn and flash your lights
- c. Tailgate them so they get out of the way
- d. Don't let it bother you and continue to drive normally

Someone fails to indicate before turning causing you to brake. What coping strategy would you use?

- a. Ignore it, we all make mistakes
- b. Honk your horn and flash your lights
- c. Show them what you think by making a few gestures
- d. Mutter to yourself and speed up

You are stuck in a traffic jam. What coping strategy would you use?

- a. Overtake on the inside lane if possible
- b. Drive bumper to bumper and not let anyone in
- c. Relax and stay focused on your driving
- d. Get frustrated and let off steam with other road users

Do you use mostly safe or unsafe coping strategies? Try and focus on increasing your use of safe coping strategies and reduce your use of poor coping strategies. On your next journeys make sure you follow the coping strategies below to help you be a safer driver.

When driving is difficult....

1. Make a special effort to look out for hazards.
2. Make an extra effort to drive safely.
3. Try to stay calm and relaxed.
4. Concentrate on what you must do next.
5. Learn from your mistakes.

When you might have a difficult journey to do....

1. Plan your journey in advance
2. Give yourself as much time as possible by leaving early.
3. Avoid travelling at busy times whenever you can.
4. Recognize how the stress of being under time pressure might affect your driving
5. Take some deep breaths and relax.

2.4 Angry Driving

Another emotion that can often lead to crashes is anger and this is a form of stress response. Angry drivers frequently let off steam and express their irritation by behaving aggressively towards other road users. This can include: -

- verbal abuse
- gestures
- flashing lights
- tailgating
- horn-blowing
- lane hogging

Not surprisingly, such behaviour is known to be dangerous. This is because strong emotions such as anger take up a lot of your brain's processing capacity, leaving less for you to concentrate on your driving. Even relatively mild annoyance can mentally distract you from focusing on hazards. Angry drivers spend less time assessing hazards in traffic situations and are quicker to allocate blame to others.

Imagine yourself in this scenario...

You are driving in the city at rush hour when someone pulls right out in front of you, and you must brake sharply. You are very annoyed and use your horn and shout at the driver. You then accelerate sharply around the driver and continue on your way. You can feel your blood pressure has gone up.

ASK YOURSELF

- What was going through my mind? Did I think that the driver deliberately pulled out in front of me?
- What if the driver was distracted and made a mistake? Would that change how I reacted?
- Does getting annoyed help the situation or change anything for the better?
- How has my reaction increased my risk?

Safer coping: -

- I should give other drivers the benefit of the doubt.
- Getting annoyed will only put me at risk.
- I'll change the way I think about mistakes by other road users.



2.5 Assess Your Emotions

Think about how angry each of the following traffic situations would typically make you feel.

		Not at all Angry	A little Angry	Fairly Angry	Very Angry	Extremely Angry
1	Someone in front of you doesn't move off straight away when the traffic lights turn green					
2	A pedestrian walks slowly across the middle of the street, slowing you down					
3	Someone is driving too slowly in the outside lane, and holding up traffic					
4	Someone is driving very close to your rear bumper					
5	Someone cuts in right in front of you on the motorway					
6	Someone fails to indicate before turning					
7	Someone is driving more slowly than is reasonable for the traffic flow					
8	Someone backs out right in front of you without looking					
9	Someone runs a red light or 'Stop' sign					
10	Someone beeps their horn at you about your driving					
11	Someone coming towards you doesn't dim their headlights at night					
12	Someone speeds up as you try to pass them					
13	You are stuck in a traffic jam					
14	Someone is driving well above the speed limit					

2.6 Summary

Reflect on the circumstances under which you may get annoyed or angry when driving and what you can do to reduce your levels of stress and frustration. Finding different strategies on how to tackle difficulties and frustrations in traffic often makes you feel more in control and less prone to stress and angry outbursts. Understanding your own triggers to emotions behind the wheel is the first step to controlling your responses and improving your risk.

Safer Driving Solutions




























3.1 Speed Limits

Because we miss signs, something like a speed limit sign is not registered, possibly because of its position or possibly because we think we know the speed limit or make up our own speed limits. When driving, a few miles per hour can mean the difference between life and death. The faster you drive, the less time you have to stop if something unexpected happens. The speed limit is the absolute maximum, and it doesn't mean it's safe to drive at this speed in all conditions. Speed contributes to around 1 in 4 fatal collisions on our roads, this includes collisions where the driver was within the speed limit but driving too fast for the road conditions.

DID YOU KNOW?

There are 2 'blanket' speed limits - 30 mph and the National Speed Limit (NSL) - referred to as 'blanket' because they cover a large area. You will see where a speed-limit starts as there will be a sign. However, there is no specific requirement that signs indicating the beginning of a speed limit be placed on each side of the road. This relaxation has been made to reduce environmental impact, but a single sign must be clearly visible to all road users. In some instances, the sign might be placed on the off side of the road. When a blanket limit is declared you won't see any other signs.

The presence of streetlights generally means that there is a 30 mph (48 km/h) speed limit unless otherwise specified. [Highway Code – Rule 124](#)

Type of Vehicle	Built-up Areas / Street Lights	Single Carriageways	Dual Carriageways	Motorways
	MPH	MPH	MPH	MPH
 Cars and Motorcycles (including car derived vans up to 2 tonnes maximum laden weight)				
 All vehicles towing (including car derived vans, motorcycles and goods vehicles)				
 Buses and Coaches (not exceeding 12 metres in overall length)				
 Goods Vehicles (not exceeding 7.5 tonnes maximum laden weight)				
 Goods Vehicles (exceeding 7.5 tonnes maximum laden weight)				

















+ The National Speed Limits for Goods Vehicles exceeding 7.5 tonnes apply to all roads in England & Wales.

SELF REFLECTION POINT

In what circumstances are you likely to drive above the speed limit?
 What can you do to make sure that you keep to the speed limits?

Remember it's a limit, not a target!

For example, if someone steps into the road in front of you, the following table shows the difference travelling over the 30-mph speed limit makes.

Speed of vehicle (MPH)	Speed of vehicle (MPH) on impact	
	 	
	 	
	 	
	 	

3.2 Keep Looking

Drivers looking for different kinds of hazards generally have a much lower risk of a crash than drivers who concentrate on one area. Effective observation helps you to spot more hazards, process information and stay aware of the traffic situation as it changes.

Effective observation is a continuous process and requires high levels of concentration. On every drive, a new view opens out in front of you constantly. You will need to look far, middle and near view, the sides and rear. This means that you will know where the areas of risk are all around you. Check and re-check these risk areas as the scene changes. Try not to focus too long on particular risk areas because this means that you might miss other areas that are also risky.

3.3 Commentary Driving

As a driver, you must process information from several different sources through different senses at the same time – assessing road conditions and traffic as well as navigating. Keeping your eyes moving is essential for situational awareness but sometimes the next step in being in control is required – especially when you're driving in a high-risk road environment in dense traffic. When your brain is required to process a lot of information, it can discard or forget new information from the road scene before it can be stored. If important information is filtered out, you might miss an unfolding hazard that can turn into a dangerous situation very quickly. Processing complex information can slow down your reaction times and you may fail to notice hazards. Distractions divert your attention from important driving-related information to other non-driving related matters.

One of the best strategies for concentrating and therefore being in control is to do a commentary drive. A commentary drive will help you to stay focused and to re-adjust your priorities as the situation develops. With practice you can learn to concentrate on the priorities. A running commentary means that you briefly say out loud the hazards you can observe and how you plan to deal with them. Hazards include road features such as junctions, other road users and road signs. Hazards should be prioritized according to their danger including how close it is to you, whether the hazard is stationary or moving and how fast you are approaching it.

By taking on board the information covered in this workbook, you can meet the challenge of changing your driving behaviour and improving your driving abilities. Imagine how good you will feel when you are driving safer with the confidence of knowing that you are driving within the law. All you must do is become more aware of your errors and violations and the circumstances under which you are taking risks due to stress and/or frustration. If you can do this you can change your driving habits.

Make a commitment to change the way you think and feel about your driving so that you can manage the risks you've identified. Start with a personal goal.

3.4 A Commitment to Change – Your Action Plan

MY GOAL IS:

.....

To achieve this, I will:

.....

My plan might not work because:

.....

The coping strategies I will use to overcome these barriers are:

.....

I will review my progress every:

.....

Keep reviewing your action plan to see how well you have achieved your goals and share it with someone you know to help you succeed.

Remember you can meet the challenge of changing your driving behaviour if you believe you can. When you understand how your beliefs about risk and your own driving abilities influence your driving behaviour, you can then take steps to become a safer driver and make safer decisions.

Safe driving!

There is no need to return this workbook, it is for your reference.

What Have You Learnt?

To successfully demonstrate your understanding, you should aim to answer the following questions correctly. It is important that you go through the workbook carefully before attempting the questions as all the information you need is there.

1. Talking on the mobile phone or using your music system whilst driving is: -

- a. Dangerous due to multi-tasking.
- b. Distracting because it's harder to process information from the road.
- c. Dangerous because you're more likely to make errors.
- d. All of the above.

2. Most people think they are better drivers than they really are. This is called: -

- a. Optimism bias.
- b. What's worked bias.
- c. Self enhancement bias.
- d. Overestimation bias.

3. Time pressure often leads to high risk driving such as speeding because: -

- a. Drivers worry about the consequences of being late and this is distracting.
- b. Drivers don't care about the consequences of being late.
- c. Drivers are worried about taking a risk.
- d. Drivers who deliberately speed are committing an error.

4. Which coping strategy leads to safer driving when you're under time pressure?

- a. Honk your horn so that other road users get out of your way.
- b. Reflect on your way of thinking about being late and slow down.
- c. Overtake as much as you can.
- d. Drive fast to be on time.

5. Another road user is tailgating you. What coping strategy should you use?

- a. Speed up.
- b. Slow down.
- c. Show them what you think of them and apply your brakes.
- d. Don't let it bother you and continue to drive normally.

6. Angry driving is dangerous because: -

- a. Drivers blame others and become hostile.
- b. Anger uses a lot of your brain's processing capacity.
- c. Anger leads to traffic offences and crashes.
- d. All of the above.

7. Drivers who are stressed may be distracted by: -

- a. Thoughts about their personal problems.
- b. Worries about work related problems.
- c. Worries about the traffic, hazards and the road environment.
- d. All of the above.

8. What is the best method to improve your hazard perception abilities?

- a. Keep your eyes moving for better situational awareness.
- b. Say out loud what hazards you can see as you're driving.
- c. Prioritise hazards as a situation develops.
- d. All of the above.

9. What are the two 'blanket' speed limits?

- a. 60mph and the National Speed Limit.
- b. 50mph and the National Speed Limit.
- c. 40mph and the National Speed Limit.
- d. 30mph and the National Speed Limit.

10. The presence of streetlights generally means: -

- a. There is a 30-mph speed limit unless otherwise specified.
- b. There is a 40-mph speed limit unless otherwise specified.
- c. There is a 50-mph speed limit unless otherwise specified.
- d. There is a 60-mph speed limit unless otherwise specified.



For further details on this course please contact:

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