

Test Day Tips: Dealing with Nerves

Nerves and confidence are major determining factors when it comes to success or failure in the practical driving test.

It is natural - and potentially even helpful - to experience a certain amount of nerves as you approach the test. The examiner is expecting this and will make some allowance for it, although it will not excuse dangerous or serious mistakes.

The best way to beat nerves is to be confident in your own ability. As such, the first thing you need to ensure is that you are actually ready to take the test. Insufficient preparation is the other principal cause of failure and it will have a bearing on your confidence going into the test. Your instructor is best placed to judge whether or not you are ready to take the practical test. Don't go against their advice, even if you suspect they merely wish to retain your custom. In the vast majority of cases this will not be true, and you will probably save money in the long run by waiting until you are deemed to have a realistic prospect of passing.

When you have developed sufficient confidence in your driving ability, make a test appointment early in the day. This will ensure you have less time to get worked up. Don't pay any attention, however, to myths about daily pass quotas or people only passing on a Monday etc. These are entirely untrue.

Try to make sure the test date does not clash with other stressful events such as school exams or wedding preparations, and don't let your friends know when you've got your test as this will only create additional pressure. Turn to parents or other family members for support.

In the week before the test

- Get as much practice as possible. Book extra lessons with your driving instructor. In your final sessions, ask the instructor to concentrate on the manoeuvres you find most tricky.
- Complete at least one 'mock test' in which your instructor ensures that conditions are as realistic as possible, providing a full debrief at the end of the session.
- Don't listen to the advice of your friends / family. They doubtless mean well, but their instructions may be confusing, misguided or otherwise unhelpful. Remember that your driving instructor has years of experience as well as a professional training.
- Ignore driving test horror stories. There are hundreds of them doing the rounds. A couple may even be true.

On the day before the test

- Don't drink any large amounts of alcohol
- Get a good night's sleep
- Get all the required documents together so that you are not rushing around looking for them just before you leave for the test centre.
- Make sure you know how to get to the test centre. Do a practice run if necessary.
- Plan what time you are going to get up, eat, leave home etc the following day.

On the day of the test

- Think positively from the moment you wake up. Tell yourself that you are going to get through the day calmly.
- Eat light meals at your normal mealtimes and ensure you get your regular fluid intake. Even if your test is early in the morning, it is important to have a good breakfast in order to boost your concentration levels. Try not to overeat, however, as this may make you uncomfortable or lethargic.
- Wear clothes that make you feel as comfortable as possible.
- Try not to think too much about the test until it is time to leave. Take the telephone off the hook and pre-occupy yourself with something else.
- Don't take pills to calm your nerves. They are likely to slow your reactions and negatively affect your performance.
- Do not drink any alcohol
- Leave for the test centre in plenty of time, allowing for the possibility of heavy traffic etc. You need to be there at least 10 minutes before your scheduled appointment time or you risk the test being cancelled.

On the hour before the test

- Concentrate on the matter in hand. Think about the test route you will be following and the important points you need to concentrate on.
- Use visualization techniques to practice driving in your head. Picture yourself performing particular manoeuvres and focus on the points at which you need to turn the wheel, change gear, apply the brakes etc.
- Listen to the last-minute advice of your instructor, and don't be afraid to ask him or her for clarification / reassurance on any matter.
- If you are driving to the test centre, do so to the best of your ability. Maintain the accuracy and observation levels you have been taught so that you are properly 'warmed-up' by the time you come to take the test.
- Just before the test, take a few slow breaths to relax. Clench and relax your muscles to get rid of any tension.
- Tell yourself that you can do it! 32 million people hold full driving licenses in the UK. We're sure you can too.

During the test

- Remember that some nervousness is normal. It can increase your alertness and improve your performance.
- Don't be intimidated by the examiner. He is merely a person doing a job. He is not a god and he will not be judging you as a person. He doesn't want you to fail your test and he will not try to trick you at any stage.
- Don't try to interact too much with the examiner. Silence is normal in the test car, and too much chit-chat could be distracting.
- Listen carefully to the examiner's instructions. Ask for repetition / clarification if necessary and act in good time.
- Bear in mind that the examiner just wants to see how you would normally drive - nothing you don't already know!
- Explain your decisions to the examiner if you feel you have done something that could be misjudged.
- If you come across a new situation, don't rush in. Stay calm and assess things carefully before you proceed. Be prepared to change your decision if necessary.
- Take a deep breath and exhale slowly if you feel you are getting a bit tense at any point in the test.
- Don't give up if you feel you have failed the test. You may be mistaken, so don't drop your concentration levels and risk committing errors that do cause you to fail.