10 Things You Should Do Before Your Driving Knowledge Exam

By Andrei Zakhareuski
Since we started Driving-Tests in 2010, we've heard from tens of thousands of recent test-takers who told us a lot about how their official knowledge exams went.

Many people do their best but still get to the DMV overconfident and underprepared because they fail to do some of the simple things that would allow them to pass easily. What we noticed was a discernible pattern behind the success of those who passed on their first try. If you do those same things, you will have a much better chance of passing your knowledge test, too.

What follows are the 10 steps that we believe every aspiring driver should take to prepare for his or her official knowledge exam.

The average knowledge test pass rate in the United States is a terrible 49%. If you want to dramatically improve your odds of passing, subscribe to our Premium program, which guarantees that you'll pass the first time. We'd love to help you be fully prepared and have complete peace of mind when it's time to take your official exam.
Get things in order
At least one week before the knowledge exam, gather everything you’ll need to take to the DMV with you.

**Gather everything you’ll need to take to the DMV with you**

Most states require you to bring proof of your identity, proof of residency in your state, a Social Security card if you’re eligible for a Social Security number, and a certificate of completion if you completed a driver’s education course. For the vision screening, you must bring your eyeglasses or contact lenses. If you are under 18 years of age, you must bring some form of proof that your parent or guardian has given you permission to start supervised driving. Your state may require your parent or guardian to accompany you to the DMV or have his or her signature notarized.

Check your state’s official driving manual or the DMV’s website to find out exactly what you are required to bring with you for testing. Then, collect those items so you can take them all with you when the time comes.
Prepare your mind and your body
If you don’t feel your best, you may not do your best. Although it may sound like common sense, you’d be surprised how many people ignore this obvious point. It never fails, does it! Just as a significant event (like taking the knowledge test) is about to occur, you get a bad cold or the flu or a severe migraine headache. Be honest with yourself: Can you still perform at your best? If not, consider postponing the knowledge exam. In many states, if you fail the knowledge exam, you must wait a certain amount of time before you may attempt it again. Hence, postponing the knowledge exam may not delay you any more than failing the exam would.

The night before the knowledge exam, make sure to get enough sleep. Do yourself a favor and say no to partying the night before your test. One study has found that going without sleep for 24 hours can impair your judgment, memory, and powers of concentration as much as being legally intoxicated! If you wouldn’t take the knowledge exam while you’re drunk, don’t take the exam without enough sleep either. The night before the exam, avoid stressing or stimulating yourself with suspenseful TV shows, exciting movies, video games, heated arguments on social media, or even the driving manual. Resting your mind will benefit you much more than cramming all night. When you go to bed, go to sleep. Sleep. Not watch TV or listen to the news.

Finally, set your alarm clock so you’ll wake up a couple of hours before the knowledge exam. There are a couple of other things you should do before the exam.

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Start your day off right
If you’ve taken the previous step, you should be well rested and awake this morning. Now start your day off right.

*Have a well-balanced, protein-packed breakfast*

Have a well-balanced, protein-packed breakfast to fuel your mind and body for the knowledge exam. But be careful with stimulants like caffeinated beverages. Too much caffeine can make you too jittery to concentrate. Instead, consider doing some mild, non-exhausting exercise to keep the blood flow surging to your brain.

Exercise can also help dissipate the nervousness that virtually everyone feels just before an important exam. However, if you’ve found that test anxiety causes you to freeze up and your mind to go blank during an exam, consider learning some relaxation techniques such as meditation or even seeking professional counseling before your knowledge exam is scheduled.

In short, pamper yourself and don’t take on anything that may add to your stress level. Try to avoid other sources of stress at this time so you can focus on passing the knowledge test.
Review your training materials one last time.
Take one last quick look at your state’s official driving manual to refresh your memory, especially of the topics you found trickiest.

The state manual includes a tremendous amount of information. You may wonder, How am I supposed to remember all this? You can often figure out the correct driving technique to use in a given instance. However, you’ll probably have to memorize state-specific facts such as speed limits, legal limits on alcohol consumption, how close you can legally park to a fire hydrant or crosswalk, and so on.

While you are scanning through the pages of the manual, jot down such specific facts. By the time that you are done scanning the manual, you will have compiled a list of the facts that are usually the hardest to remember. If you need to refresh your memory, you can go through the list rather than the entire manual again.

The knowledge test may have questions on a variety of traffic signs. But you certainly don’t have to memorize the meaning of each one separately. Know how to recognize the various types of signs by their colors and shapes. Know that those black arrows on regulatory or warning signs indicate paths of travel for vehicles. Know that on regulatory signs, a red circle and slash over the
indicated path of travel means that this path of travel is prohibited. Remember all this and you can often figure out what the specific sign means from the words and symbols on it.

Usually, the signs are the easiest part of the knowledge test. If you can answer all those questions correctly, you’ll be more likely to pass the knowledge test even if you miss a couple of harder questions. To help you learn the signs, use flash cards if necessary and ask a friend or relative to test you. You’ll need to know all about the signs once you’re behind the wheel, anyway!

The knowledge test will probably also include questions on the right-of-way rules. Take these rules seriously; once you’re behind the wheel, they’ll help you avoid driving conflicts that can lead to an accident. Each right-of-way rule applies to one kind of driving situation. To learn the rule, learn which type of situation it applies to. Try to visualize yourself driving a vehicle in that situation. To help you visualize it, make a quick sketch of the road or intersection. It doesn’t have to be too fancy or artistic. You can also use Google Maps’ Street View to view images of familiar roads and intersections near where you live. Think about how you would apply the right-of-way rules to driving there.

When you think you’ve done enough studying, take our practice tests to evaluate your understanding of the basics of driving. Dissatisfied with your performance on these practice tests? Don’t get discouraged. Note which questions you missed and resolve to study those topics some more.
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Wear appropriate clothing for the knowledge exam
You don’t want to become chilled or overheated during the knowledge test; either one can make you drowsy.

Dress in comfortable clothing that is appropriate for the ambient temperature. Pick out a comfortable outfit that isn’t constricting or annoying to sit in for long periods. Also, you might as well look presentable because if you pass the knowledge test at the DMV, you’ll probably have your picture taken for your instruction (learner’s) permit or driver’s license.

Don’t forget to take your state’s required items with you. And go to the bathroom just before the knowledge exam starts so you won’t have to later.

Now it’s time for the knowledge test – but there are some important steps you should take there as well.

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Read each exam question intelligently
Your eyes and mind work at different speeds. If you rush through a question, you might pick the wrong answer. No matter how simple the questions seem, be sure to read each one at least twice while keeping the following tips in mind.

Look out for negatives. These are keywords like “avoid,” “except,” or “not” that can invert the sense of the question. If you fail to spot these, you might interpret the question backward and choose a wrong answer.

You may encounter a question that appears to have two correct answers. What should you do? Logically, one answer must be better or more complete than the other one. Don't rush to pick the first plausible choice you find. There may be more than one plausible choice, but the correct answer is the best or most complete answer. Find a reason to prefer one answer over the other. Try to critique both answers. Is there a driving situation for which one answer is less appropriate than the other?

Watch for “All of the above” choices. If “All of the above” is true, then all the other choices are also true! If you don't notice the “All of the above” choice, you may pick one of the other true choices even though “All of the above” is the most complete answer.
Use the process of elimination
If you don’t know the correct answer to a test question, use the process of elimination to eliminate choices that you know are wrong and then make an educated guess from the remaining choices.

A test question may include one ridiculous or outlier choice, intended to catch test takers who guess completely randomly. Quickly identify and eliminate that choice.

For example, here is a question on the right-of-way from some of our permit practice tests:

If two vehicles arrive at an uncontrolled intersection (i.e., one without signs or signals) from different roadways at about the same time, the vehicle ______ has the right-of-way.

1. on the right
2. on the left
3. that weighs less
4. that signals first

This question has four answer choices. However, choice (3) is clearly absurd. There is no way that you can know how much every car on the road weighs. Eliminate this choice immediately.
If there are four choices and you can eliminate two of them, your chance of guessing correctly will rise from one in four to one in two. In the above question, choice (4) is only slightly less absurd than choice (3). When you’re approaching an intersection, you can’t be expected to know when the other vehicle first started to signal. Your state driving manual doesn’t advise you to keep track of this. Besides, the other vehicle may have just emerged from behind a building or other object that was obscuring its approach and its signal from you. Eliminate choice (4) too. Hence, the correct answer is either choice (1) or choice (2).

Note that if “All of the above” is one of the choices, you can eliminate it if you can eliminate at least one other choice as incorrect. (And similarly for “None of the above.”)

For example, here is a question on passing another vehicle from some of our permit practice tests:

**Before passing another vehicle, you should**
1. drive off the paved or traveled portion of the road.
2. look ahead for road conditions and traffic.
3. pass on the left if the driver is signaling a left turn.
4. do all of the above.

Choice (1) is clearly absurd and can be eliminated immediately. (Drive off a roadway that lacks a shoulder and you may find yourself stuck in a ditch – or worse.) Now you can eliminate choice (4) as well, meaning that the correct answer is either choice (2) or choice (3).
Take your best guess if necessary
If you still don't know the answer even after applying the process of elimination, don't get rattled or panicky. You don't have to get a perfect score to pass the knowledge exam.

After you’ve eliminated as many wrong choices as possible, calmly take your best guess from the remaining choices and move on to the next question.
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Double-check your answers
When you do know the correct answer to a question, select that answer. Before you move on to the next question, however, take a deep breath and double-check that you indeed selected that answer.

When a person is under pressure, he or she may accidentally pick the wrong choice even though he or she knows which choice is right.
Believe in yourself
Be confident in your ability to handle the challenge of passing the knowledge test. In fact, believing in yourself is necessary to succeed in handling any challenge!

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If you have done everything you could to prepare for your knowledge test, revel in thinking positively. Be proud of yourself for having prepared so well, and visualize yourself happily walking out of the testing facility after having passed the knowledge test with a high score. Remember, you can do it!

All the best!

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