

Observation is key to safe driving - but it is not good enough just to keep looking around; you need to understand, interpret and prioritise what you are seeing, and then effectively plan on how to deal with it.

This handout gives many examples of how good observation can help a driver plan more carefully their “What if?” scenario. These can help when carrying out a commentary drive. You should endeavour to consider these at every opportunity when driving yourself, and of course when coaching your pupils on anticipation. The **bold** text indicates the observation and the *italics* detail the potential meaning for the driver.

### Signs, Road Markings, Lights & Street Furniture

#### **Green traffic lights ahead but with queues of traffic waiting at side junctions**

*Our lights may change shortly*

#### **Amber light reflected from the shroud of opposing traffic lights**

*Our lights may change to green shortly, or the integrated pedestrian crossing may activate*

#### **Illuminated 'wait' signals on a light-controlled pedestrian crossing**

*Traffic lights will shortly change to red*

#### **Diversion signs**

*Confused and hesitant motorists*

#### **A sign with the name of a village whilst still travelling in a National Speed Limit area**

*Expect a reduction in speed limit, probably to 30 mph*

#### **Speed / Safety Camera Sign**

*Accident black spot area*

#### **Speed / Safety Camera**

*Vehicles ahead may brake suddenly/harshly*

#### **Junction sign**

*Vehicles may emerge*

#### **“Traffic Calming Scheme” sign**

*Possible speed limit change not too far down the road*

#### **“Turn left” or “Left only” sign placed on the central reservation of a dual carriageway**

*Side road on the left*

#### **Sign warning of low flying aircraft**

*Beware of sudden loud noise*

#### **Hospital sign (especially one for Accident & Emergency)**

*Emergency vehicles entering / exiting*

#### **Single street light along an otherwise unlit road**

*Signify a possible concealed junction (opposite the post)*

#### **Cluster of street lights**

*Roundabout / large junction ahead*

**Bus Stops**

*Possible bus around the corner, which may be stationary*

**No people at bus stop during peak periods**

*Bus ahead*

**People waiting at a bus stop on the right**

*Bus approaching – watch for overtaking vehicles*

**Convex mirror**

*Hidden driveway or entrance*

**Telegraph poles in the distance deviate sharply**

*Possible sharp bend ahead*

**A solid double white line which shortly becomes broken on your side (or to hazard or lane lines)**

*Vision should open up when you arrive at that point*

**No gap in a line of trees directly ahead**

*Road will bend to the left or right*

**A line of trees or hedge perpendicular to your road**

*Probable junction*

**Motorway exit slip road**

*Expect an entry slip road in a short distance*

**Cars & Their Drivers****Person in a parked car**

*Opens door / car could drive off*

**Car stopping**

*Driver / passengers could open door*

**Parked car with brake lights lit**

*Driver possibly has engine running and could pull away*

**Vehicle parked up with left signal on**

*Driver may have forgotten to cancel it – the vehicle may move off*

**Vehicle in front slowing down and driver's head looking left and right - looking for a house number?**

*Driver could suddenly stop, turn left or right, reverse or carry out a U-turn*

**Cars parked both sides of road by shops**

*Pedestrians crossing*

**Vehicle wandering**

*Tired / drunk driver*

**Approaching to overtake a vehicle on a dual-carriageway, the driver makes a head movement as if looking in interior or door mirror**

*They may start a lane-change*

**A series of vehicles coming towards you with headlights on for no apparent reason**

*Possible bank/patch of fog or heavy rain ahead*

**A car pulls up opposite a school entrance - in the morning, afternoon, or evening**

*Doors may open; one or more children may jump out and run across the road without looking*

**A car pulls up and reverses into a side road or entrance**

*It may promptly come out again, to drive off in the other direction*

**Driver using mobile phone / headset**

*They will not be concentrating as well as they should be – be aware*

### **Motorcyclists & Cyclists**

**One high speed motorcycle cutting corners, overtaking and riding recklessly**

*Another high-speed motorcycle riding in a similar fashion, following on close behind!*

**Cyclist dressed as a road racer**

*More cyclists - you can't race alone!*

**Cyclist with paper delivery bag**

*Cyclist could swerve due to unbalanced load or to get to next house on the paper round*

**Cyclist looks over his/her shoulder**

*Cyclist may be about to pull out or turn*

**Cyclist swerves suddenly**

*Possible pothole/sunken drain*

**Cyclist on footpath**

*Could suddenly move into the road, e.g. if their path is blocked by pedestrians or a vehicle reverses out of a driveway*

**Cyclist coming from opposite direction**

*Could wobble and force overtaking traffic to swerve into your path*

**Cyclists approaching around a bend on the right-hand side**

*Vehicles wishing to overtake them may become impatient and overtake without a clear view of you approaching*

**Postman's parked bike**

*Postman crossing the road*

**Cyclist or motorcyclist with manhole cover or drain ahead**

*Could change course to avoid slipping*

### **Other Vehicles**

**Person standing up inside a moving bus**

*Bus is about to stop*

**Bus waiting at a bus stop**

*Pedestrians crossing in front of bus*

**Bus waiting at bus stop but no visible signs of people boarding**

*Bus about to pull out / people crossing road*

**A brief flash of brake lights from a stationary bus**

*Bus very likely to move off*

**Large vehicle ahead starts to signal left**

*It is likely to swing out to the right before turning*

**You see in your mirror that a large vehicle travelling behind you is pulling out to the right**

*Its driver, having a higher vantage point, may have seen an obstruction on the nearside a long way ahead*

**Insecure load on the vehicle ahead**

*It may fall off*

**Taxi / Emergency Service Vehicle**

*May receive a call from the other direction so may do a sudden U-turn*

**Ice cream / Hot food / Fish & Chip van**

*Children and other pedestrians crossing without looking for oncoming vehicles – may be hidden by van*

**Postman's parked van**

*Postman crossing*

**Milk float**

*Milkman crossing*

**Emergency vehicle overtaking you in "response mode"**

*Possible crash ahead*

**Distant sound of emergency sirens**

*Watch out for stolen vehicles / criminals being pursued by police, they may cross red traffic light signals*

**Unusual number plates on vehicle**

*Possible foreign driver and not used to our roads or rules*

**Vehicle with flashing amber light ahead**

*Tractor / hedge cutter / roadworks / bin lorry or other slow moving vehicle*

**Delivery van in town**

*Could be about to stop*

**Height restrictions at a bridge**

*Larger vehicles could be approaching in the centre of the road.*

**Debris / Marks on the road and verges**

**Skid marks on the road**

*Many possible causes, but increase vision scans for the possible hazard which may have caused it, e.g. bend tightening up, hidden/concealed driveway/entrance etc. - someone else got it wrong there recently.*

**Wide tyre marks on verges**

*Lorry ahead*

**Edges of the road churned up/tyre marks**

*Vehicles have possibly had to go on the verge to pass each other, especially if wider vehicles use that road*

**Mud on road**

*Tractor / lorry ahead*

**Fresh mud tracks from a field exit**

*Tractor ahead*

**Straw in road**

*Straw lorry / bales in the road ahead*

**Grass cuttings or freshly shredded twigs/hedgerow debris on the road**

*Slow-moving tractor / hedge cutter ahead*

**Over grown vegetation on pavement**

*Pedestrians could be forced into the road*

**Manhole covers in the road**

*Expect more - they're following the trench. Could one be missing/sunken?*

**Rural road with battered verges**

*Heavy traffic uses the road - watch out for lorries*

**Pedestrians****Elderly / young pedestrian looking to cross**

*May walk into your path having misjudged speed and distance*

**Pedestrian carrying plastic bag**

*Bag splits & oranges / beer cans roll into road chased by owner*

**Pedestrian using mobile phone / earphones**

*Pedestrian may step out without looking due to distraction / inability to hear traffic*

**Child runs across the road**

*Others may follow*

**On a fast road where pedestrians are rare you see somebody walking along the verge**

*There may be a broken-down vehicle ahead (especially if the pedestrian is carrying a petrol can!)*

**Group of mothers standing with their children talking**

*One of the children may run into the road / possibly a school nearby*

**Pedestrian walking in rain with their hood up**

*Expect them to step out into the road due to lack of peripheral vision*

**Animals & Birds****Horse / Cow poo on the road**

*Animals in the road ahead*

**Dogs on the pavement either not on a lead or with lead attached to small child**

*The dog may not like cars (or bikes) and bolt, possibly pulling the child with it*

**An animal runs across the road**

*It may turn back / others may follow*

**On a country road, you see a flock of birds rise up some way ahead of you**

*They may have been startled by an approaching vehicle*

**Poor / no roadside fencing in rural area**

*Animals in the road*

**Buildings / Areas**

**Stables/Riding Schools**

*Horses on the road*

**Petrol station**

*Cars pulling in or out and/or spilt fuel on the road*

**Scaffolding on building**

*Debris falling / mud on road*

**Industrial site**

*Lorries / fork lift trucks manoeuvring*

**Balloons on gatepost**

*Children running around from party or drunken teenagers/adults around*

**Leisure park / Sports ground**

*Children chasing balls which have been kicked/hit into the road*

**Pub**

*Pedestrians emerging / Drunk drivers*

**Cluster of houses in the distance**

*Expect a 20/30 mph limit round the corner*

**Smells & Sounds**

**Smell of hedge cutting / cut grass**

*Hedge / grass cutter ahead*

**Smell of tar**

*Road works ahead*

**Smell of diesel**

*Slippery road*

**Sound of sirens - approach of emergency vehicle**

*Other drivers may panic and suddenly stop / other emergency vehicles coming from differing directions*

**Other Hazards**

**Wheelie Bins at the side of the road**

*Dustbin lorry / Refuse collectors could be in the road ahead*

**Ball bouncing into road**

*Children will follow*

**Builder's skip**

*Rubbish being thrown towards / over it / skip lorry approaching / mud on road*

## **Weather**

### **Flooded fields ahead**

*Likely to be water on the road ahead, possibly flooded*

### **Shady area in winter**

*Ice patches ('micro-climate')*

### **Rainbow ahead of you**

*Expect rain*

### **Oncoming drivers have sun visors down, or sun's bright low down in the sky behind you or in your mirror(s)**

*Sun probably dazzling oncoming drivers - make allowances*

### **Vehicle ahead throws up spray**

*Water on road - possibility of aquaplaning / steering difficulties*

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