

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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