



Gears...

Some drivers always change through the gears one-by-one (1,2,3,4,5 - 5,4,3,2,1).

This is a habit that has stuck with some older drivers from when they originally learned to drive and was commonly taught well into the late 1990s. But it's not generally good practice to use the gears in this way when driving modern cars.

Over the years, motor car design and engineering has improved. Compared with cars of even thirty years ago, modern vehicles are lighter, more powerful and more aerodynamic.

These changes (and others) mean that the driving method that was essential in older cars is not necessary for modern driving.

Because cars used to be heavy and braking systems were not as efficient as they now are, it was necessary to use the gears (or to be more precise, the engine compression) to help to slow the car down.

The combination of efficient braking systems and lighter vehicles now means that drivers can slow down without the need to change to a lower gear.

Gears to go!

Gear changes are only required when power is needed to keep the car moving. Specific gears can be used in different situations to vary the effect of the gas pedal on balance and handling.

This means that if you are stopping, you don't need to change gear until after you have stopped. This is the preferred method of the UK Driving Standards Agency and all advanced driving organisations.

Missing out gears

It is not necessary to change down gears in sequence.

For example: If you are driving along a main road at 60mph in 5th or 6th gear, and you intend to turn left into a side road, you will usually be able to do so without having to stop; more often than not you will be using 2nd gear to do this.

The old way required every gear, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, but this is no longer the case.

As you approach the junction, reduce your speed by releasing the gas pedal and braking until you are going slowly enough to negotiate the junction safely - then change gear.

It is only after you have slowed down to a safe speed for the turn by using the brakes, that you need to select the gear that will drive the car comfortably at the lower speed. In most cars the best gear for the job will be 2nd.

Move the gear lever into neutral position and then directly to second gear.

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You can occasionally skip gears when changing up but this is less common. A typical upward skip might be from 3rd to 5th on an open road.

Skilled drivers tend not to 'overlap' brakes and gears. This means that they finish braking and release the brake pedal before pressing the clutch and making the gear change - this leaves the right foot free for the gas pedal when the clutch is engaged.

The modern way

Modern motor cars are designed to be driven in the way outlined above.

Driving in this way is not only more economical, there are also several safety benefits relating to driver concentration, fatigue and vehicle control.

The combined benefits make this safer and more efficient method than the old one-by-one gear changing method.

Observation when changing gear



The fact that you are considering a gear change means that there must be:

A change in the road or traffic situation ahead

That you are planning to change speed

That you need more power to accelerate or climb a hill

Before you take action to deal with the changing situation ahead (or change speed) you must check the situation behind. In other words, every gear change must be preceded with a mirror check. This check may simply be to confirm that things have not changed since your last mirror check (which may have been only seconds before).

Remembering that you are changing gears to go. That is, using the engine power to maintain (initially) or increase speed it's essential to know whether other drivers are trying to overtake you otherwise you could find yourself in trouble!



Looking ahead

Although it may seem obvious that you should not look at the gear lever, many drivers glance down subconsciously.

Make sure that you always look well ahead when making gear changes. This becomes especially important if your gear change techniques are changing as your driving improves.

Initially, your new method of gear changing will not be an 'unconscious action' and so might become a distraction in itself...

Looking down could turn a minor distraction into a major problem!

The aim of these exercises is to make all of your gear changes smooth and controlled - your passengers shouldn't notice the fact that you are changing gear at all!

The subjects covered are:

Taking correct observation before changing gear

Coordinating the accelerator and clutch while changing gear

Making selective gear changes

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