Overcoming Driving Test Nerves

by Aaron Basedow

Article published on July 18th 2012 | Education

Some people feel completely calm at the prospect of taking their practical driving test and are confident theyâ€™ll breeze through effortlessly. If thatâ€™s you, then please feel free to skip this section, safe in the knowledge that the rest of us are teeth-grittingly envious of you.

If the prospect of taking your driving test makes you feel rather anxious, thatâ€™s perfectly understandable. Exams are nerve-wracking at the best of times, and driving tests can feel particularly harrowing. After all, with written exams if you get something wrong you can always go back and cross it out, whereas if you reverse into a bollard on your practical test then your fate is sealed. Knowing that someone is watching and judging your every move can feel pretty bizarre as well. It would be enough to make most people feel bumblingly self-conscious if they were just doing an everyday activity like folding laundry or eating beans on toast, let alone demonstrating a complex skill like driving.

Remember nerves donâ€™t mean failure. Most people are nervous. If the only people who passed tests took them in a state of zen-like calm, there would be very few people on the roads!

A degree of nervous tension is actually a good thing â€“ it releases adrenaline, helps you be extra-alert and on top of your game. But on the other hand, if you get too stressed out that can lead you to make silly mistakes. Basically itâ€™s a balancing act, but there are plenty of techniques available to help you get it right.

Mental strategies Visualisation â€“ visualisation is where you repeatedly imagine a positive situation and by doing so help it happen.

Seeing yourself as a driver. Sometimes people fail their tests because they donâ€™t feel theyâ€™re ready to be â€˜a real driverâ€™ yet.

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy â€“ if youâ€™ve got a tendency towards negative thinking and prophecies of doom (known in CBT as â€˜catastrophisingâ€™) then using CBT techniques can be really helpful. One approach involves looking at your fears around your test, bringing them down to a more realistic level and replacing them with a more positive viewpoint (called â€˜reframingâ€™).

The most effective anxiety-reducing advice of all...

The absolute, number one, top tip for being less nervous in the run-up to any exam is to get to be as good as you possibly can be at the skill youâ€™re going to be tested on.

Do everything you can to get to the highest standard possible before going in to take your test â€“ extra lessons, lots of practice and time spent reading the road as a passenger will all help you raise your game and feel more confident about your test.

Article Source:
http://www.articleside.com/education-articles/overcoming-driving-test-nerves.htm - Article Side

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Article Keywords:
Driving Lessons, Driving Instructor, Driving School

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