

MODULE 1:

Quick Start & Test Day Checklist

Lesson 1: What This Guide Covers (and What It Doesn't)

Written Explanation:

This guide focuses on two things: **passing the written test** and **passing the practical driving test**.

I won't be walking you through the initial paperwork or interview process — there's plenty of info out there for that, and honestly, that part is manageable. If you have an interpreter, they should be able to help you navigate those early steps without much trouble. Where people really struggle (and fail) is the actual tests. That's where I can help.

A little about me:

I took both tests in November 2025 at the Saitama driving center. On written test day, only **6 out of 19 people passed**. On practical test day, only **2 out of about 20 passed** — me and my wife. We both got through on our first try.

Oh, and lucky us — we got the updated 50-question written test that started in October 2025. Gone are the days of the easy 10-question test. So yes, everything in this guide is based on the harder, newer format. You're welcome.

I'm not saying any of this to brag. I'm saying it because the fail rates are brutal, and I want you to know that what I'm sharing actually worked. We studied strategically, took a refresher driving course, learned what the officers look for, and showed up more prepared than most people in the room. This guide is everything we did — and I hope it helps you just as much.

6/19

Written test pass rate

2/20

Practical test pass rate

What You'll Learn:

1

JAF Book Study Strategy

How to study the JAF book (it's thin — you can read the whole thing in a day, and I'll share what they actually asked from memory)

2

Tricky Question Patterns

Tricky question patterns that trip people up

3

Actual Test Questions

Actual questions I remember from my test

4

What They're Really Testing

What the driving test is really testing (hint: it's not real-world driving)

5

Passing Techniques

The techniques that pass the test: mirror checks, e-brake, right-of-way

6

Course Walk-Through

How to walk the course before your test

7

Essential Japanese Phrases

Essential Japanese phrases you'll want to memorize

8

Officer Communication

The exact phrase I said to the officer that seemed to put him at ease

A Few Things I Won't Be Covering:

Just so you know upfront — this guide stays focused on the tests themselves. I won't be going into the initial paperwork, the interview process, or how to book appointments. Those steps are pretty straightforward once you get started, especially with an interpreter to help.

- ❑ I also tested in Saitama, so some small details might be different in your prefecture. But the core strategies — how to study, how to drive for the test, what officers are looking for — should apply no matter where you are in Japan.

Take a Refresher Driving Course (Schedule This Now)

Let me be real with you: if you don't have a car to practice with, a refresher driving course is not optional. **It's a must.**

You cannot walk into the practical test having not driven in months (or years) and expect to pass. The techniques are too specific. The muscle memory matters. You need seat time.

If you do have a car and can practice on your own, you might be able to pass without a course — but I'd still recommend taking one. The instructor will know things you don't: prefecture-specific rules, what the officers are really looking for, and small details that can make or break your test. Even a single one-hour lesson can expose your weak spots before they cost you on exam day — maybe your mirror checks aren't obvious enough, or you're misjudging a turn. An instructor will catch these things immediately.

Here's the hard truth:

Only about **10% of people pass** the practical test. I watched nearly 20 people take the test the same day I did — only 2 of us passed.

If you fail, you'll have to reschedule and come back. Depending on availability, that could be weeks of waiting. More time off work. More stress. More money. And if your international permit or original license is about to expire, you might run out of time entirely and have to start the whole process over from scratch.

That almost happened to me. My California license was set to expire one week after my practical test. If I had failed, and there were no openings before it expired, I would have lost everything and had to restart — including the 4-month wait just to take the written test again.

Don't let that be you.

How to find a refresher course:

01

Search Google

Search Google for English-speaking driving instructors in your prefecture

02

Look for specialists

Look for instructors who specifically prep for "foreign license conversion" or "gaimen kirikae"

03

Ask the community

Ask in local expat Facebook groups or forums for recommendations

04

Check the test center

Some instructors hang around the test center — we met ours randomly there

Book it now — ideally a week or so before your practical test date, so the techniques are fresh. It's worth the cost. One lesson could save you from failing multiple times.

Lesson 2: Test Day Checklists



Test days are stressful enough without worrying about whether you forgot something important. This lesson gives you two simple checklists — one for the written test, one for the practical — so you can focus on what actually matters: passing.

A quick note on timing: arrive early. Earlier than you think. You don't want to be rushing, and there are things you can do with that extra time (especially on practical test day). I'll explain below.

Written Test Day Checklist

Documents

- Your foreign driver's license (original)
- Japanese translation of your license (from JAF)
- Residence card (在留カード)
- Passport
- Any paperwork from your initial interview/application

Support & Supplies

- Your interpreter (if needed — they can be with you during instructions, but must leave once the test starts)
- Pencil (they may provide one, but bring your own just in case — it's a scantron test)

Timing

Arrive at least 1 hour early

What to expect:

Our test was scheduled for 1pm. We arrived around 11:45am. Check-in started at 12:30pm. There's a waiting room with plenty of seats. Saitama had a cafeteria downstairs with food and snacks if you need to kill time. Parking was available and free at our location.

Practical Test Day Checklist

Critical Documents

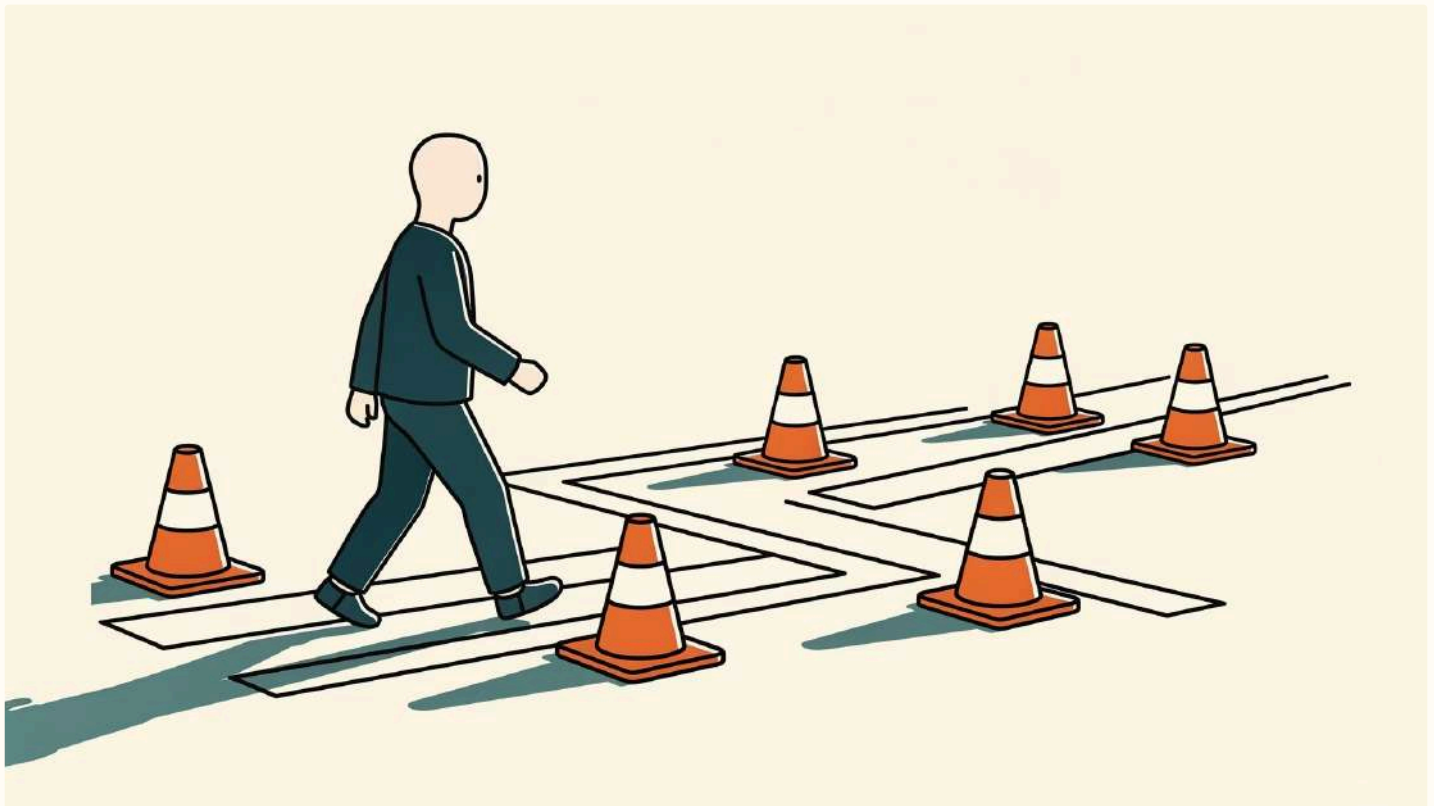
- Your foreign driver's license (original)
- **Your stamped paperwork from passing the written test — DO NOT LOSE THIS**
- Residence card (在留カード)
- Passport

Day-Of Essentials

- Your interpreter (they can help before the test, but are NOT allowed in the car during the test)
- Comfortable clothes and shoes you can drive in
- **Arrive at least 2+ hours early (seriously — I'll explain why)**

What to expect:

Our test was scheduled for 1pm. We arrived around 10:30am. We found the course number posted on the board, took a picture of the course layout, and walked the actual course multiple times during the lunch break when tests weren't running. Memorizing the course meant one less thing to worry about during the test. There's a waiting room upstairs. They'll call your number when it's time to go down to the car.



Pro Tips

Schedule your practical test for the afternoon if possible.

This gives you the morning to find out which course is being used that day, walk it, and visualize your drive before the test.

Don't take ticket #1.

When they put out numbered tickets for test order, grab #2 or later. The first person doesn't get to sit in the back and observe someone else's test. You want that preview — it's incredibly helpful.

Bring a snack.

The whole practical test process took us from 1pm to about 5pm (including getting the license made afterward). You'll be there a while.

Action Step:

Screenshot or print these checklists. Check everything off the night before your test. Don't be the person who gets turned away for forgetting something.

MODULE 2: Written Test Mastery

Lesson 1: The JAF Book Method (+ Bonus Study Sheet)



Written Explanation:

Here's the truth: there's more than one way to pass the written test.

I read the entire JAF book, highlighted the key points, and quizzed myself. My wife? She barely touched the book. Instead, she created a study sheet using AI — focused on key concepts, reasoning, and street signs. She studied that sheet, understood the logic behind the rules, and passed.

We both passed on our first try. Different methods, same result.

So I'm giving you both approaches — the AI study sheet is included as a separate file to this course.

Approach 1: The Full Book Method (What I Did)

The JAF book is thin — you can read the whole thing in a day if you focus. That's what I did. I crammed in about two days before the written test.

Here's the process:

01

Day 1: Read the entire book

As you read, highlight anything that feels like it could be a test question — signs, specific numbers (distances, speeds, times), and rules that have exceptions.

02

Day 2: Review your highlights and quiz yourself

If you have someone who can help, have them quiz you out loud. This forces you to recall the information, not just recognize it.

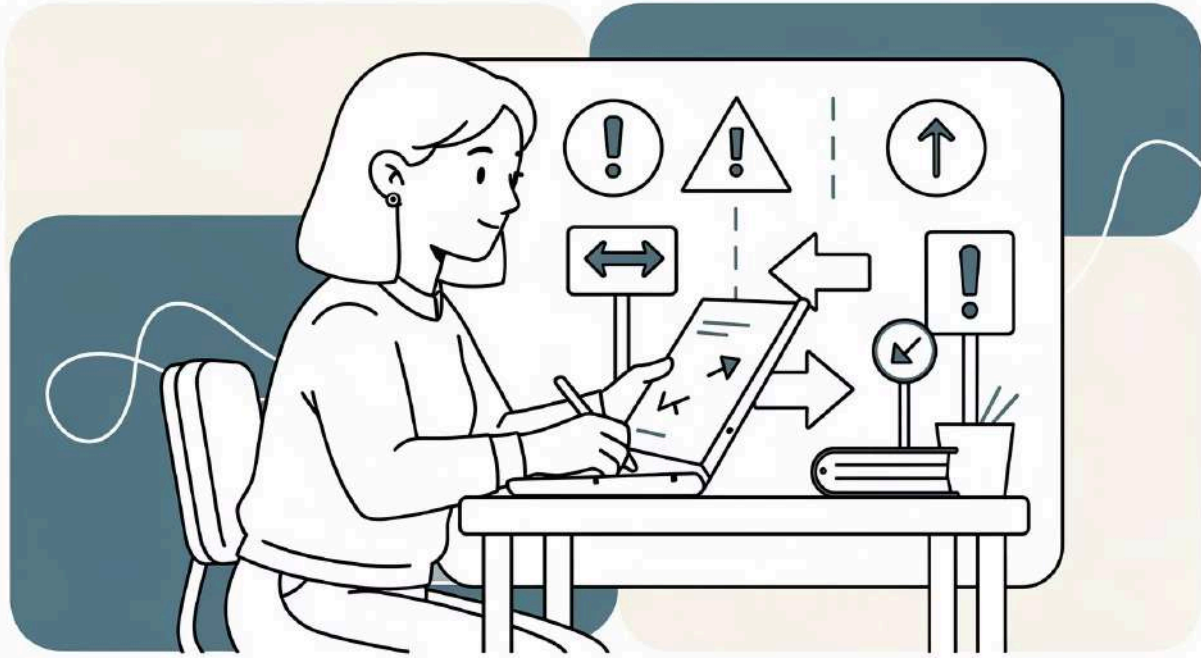
03

Day 3 (or night before): Focus on weak spots

Go back to anything you got wrong or felt unsure about. Re-read those sections.

This method works well if you're someone who likes to see the full picture and understand how everything connects.

Approach 2: The AI Study Sheet Method (What My Wife Did)



My wife doesn't have the patience to read an entire book. So she took a different approach.

She used AI to create a focused study sheet — pulling out the key concepts, common question types, and street signs. Then she studied that sheet until she understood the reasoning behind each rule.

She didn't memorize answers. She understood the logic.

And she passed.

BONUS: The AI Study Sheet (Included)

We've included the same AI-generated study sheet my wife used to pass the written test.

Think of it as a cheat code — a distilled version of what actually matters. It covers:

- Key traffic rules and the logic behind them
- Common question formats and how to think through them
- Street signs you need to know

Use it alongside the JAF book, or use it as your primary study tool. Either way, it's yours.

 **You'll find the study sheet in the bonus materials section.**

The Most Important Thing: Understand, Don't Just Memorize

Here's what I want you to take away from this lesson:

Don't just memorize answers. Understand the concepts.

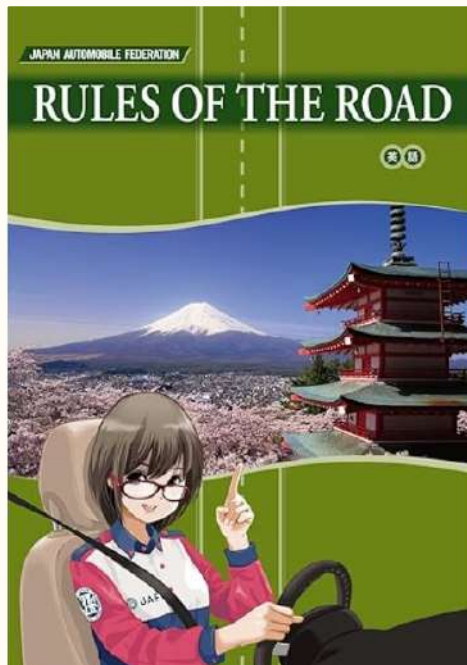
Yes, I've included specific questions I remember from my test. Those are helpful. But tests can change. Questions get rotated. What shows up on your test might be different from what showed up on mine.

If you only memorize my questions, you might get lucky — or you might not.

But if you understand why the rules exist and the logic behind them, you can answer any question they throw at you. You'll be able to reason through tricky wording and figure out the right answer, even if you've never seen that exact question before.

That's the goal. Not memorization — understanding.

Where to Get the JAF Book:



The official English version is called "Rules of the Road" and is published by JAF (Japan Automobile Federation). You can:

Buy it on Amazon Japan

That's where I got mine
— less than ¥1,500

Buy it at a JAF office

Visit a physical location to
purchase in person

Order it online from JAF's website

Direct purchase from the
official source

Make sure you get the most recent edition — rules can change.

A Note About the Questions:

Here's some good news: most of the questions on the written test are common sense.

If you've been driving for a while, a lot of it will feel obvious. "Should you speed through a school zone?" No. "Should you stop at a red light?" Yes. You'll breeze through those.

The questions I've included in this guide aren't the common sense ones. They're the tricky ones — the questions that catch people off guard because they test obscure rules or use confusing wording.

These are the ones that separate people who pass from people who fail. The common sense stuff won't trip you up. The obscure stuff will — unless you know it's coming.

That's why it's in this guide.

Action Step:

Choose your study approach:



Option A

Get the JAF book and read it cover to cover. Highlight key points. Quiz yourself.



Option B

Start with the bonus AI study sheet. Study the concepts and signs until you understand the logic. Use the JAF book as a reference if you need more detail.

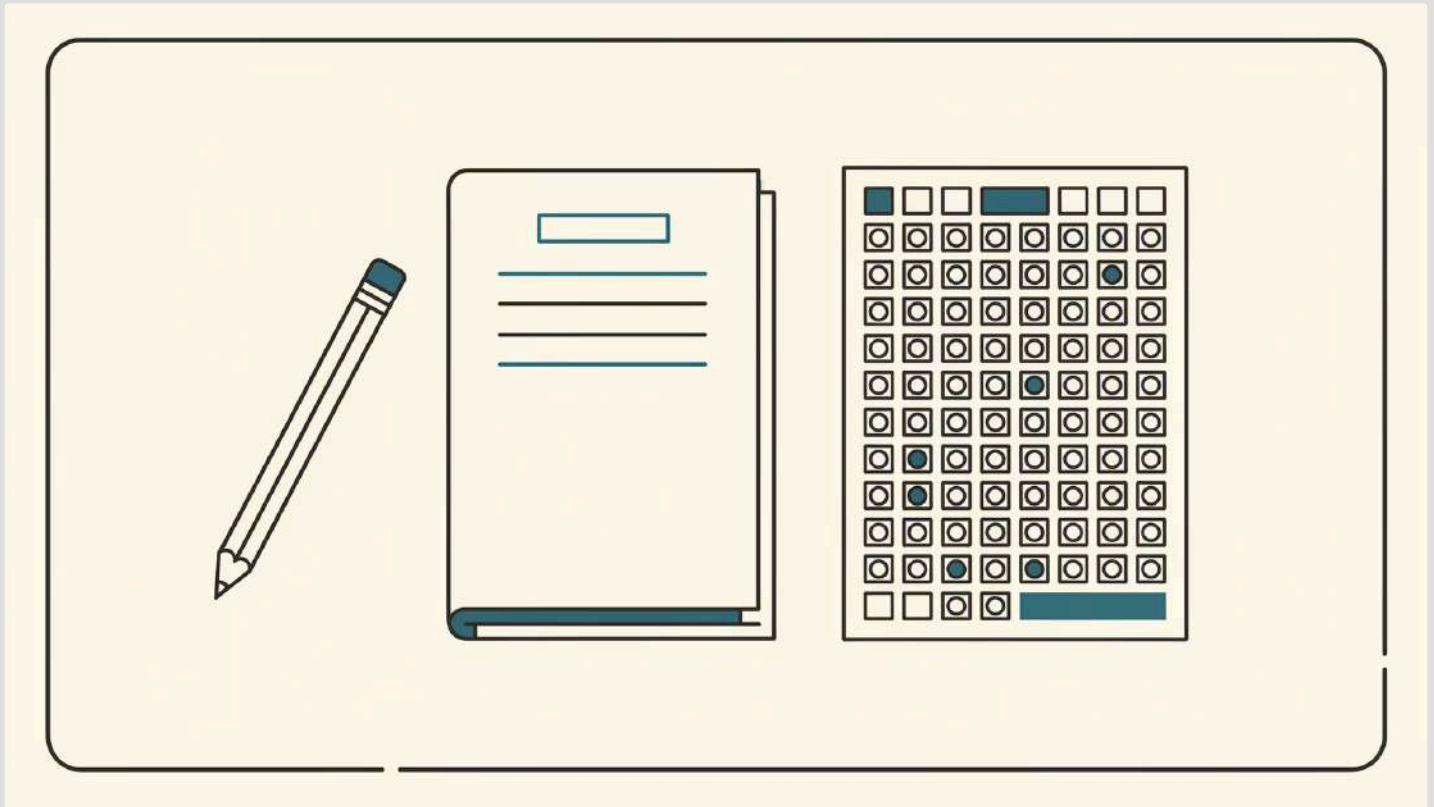


Option C

Do both — read the book AND use the study sheet to reinforce what matters most.

Whichever path you choose, remember: understand the reasoning, not just the answers.

Lesson 2: Tricky Question Patterns



Written Explanation:

The written test isn't just testing whether you know the rules. It's testing whether you can avoid getting tricked.

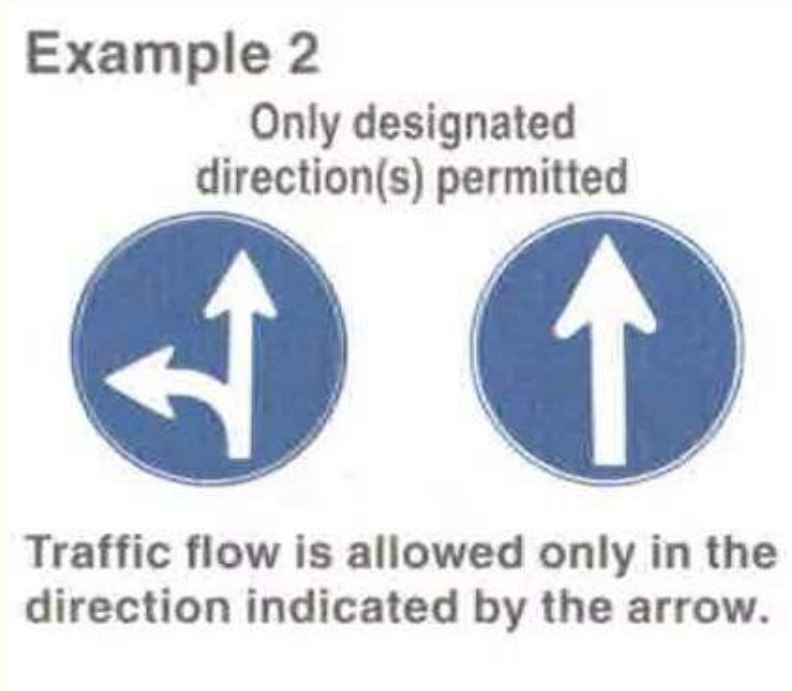
Quick format note: it's a multiple choice test — 50 questions in 30 minutes, scantron style (you fill in the bubbles with a pencil). You'll get a test booklet and a separate answer sheet. Do not touch the booklet until they tell you to — I saw people get yelled at for this. And you can't leave early even if you finish before time is up.

Many of the questions are designed to confuse you with careful wording, exceptions, or scenarios that seem straightforward but aren't. Once you recognize the patterns, they're much easier to spot. Here's what to watch for.

Pattern 1: Time-Based Questions

These questions show you a sign with time restrictions and then ask about a time outside those restrictions.

- ❑ **Example:** A sign shows a straight/left-turn arrow with "8-20" below it. The question asks, "Are you allowed to turn right at 12am?"



This picture doesn't show the "8-20" but in the test, it was there. Just pay special attention to details.

The trick: "8-20" means the restriction applies from 8am to 8pm. At 12am (midnight), the restriction doesn't apply — so yes, you can turn right. 0800 to 2000 military time.

How to beat it: Always do the math. If the time in the question falls outside the restricted hours, the rule doesn't apply.

Pattern 2: Motorcycle Questions on a Car Test

This surprised me. Even though I was testing for a car license, several questions were about motorcycles.



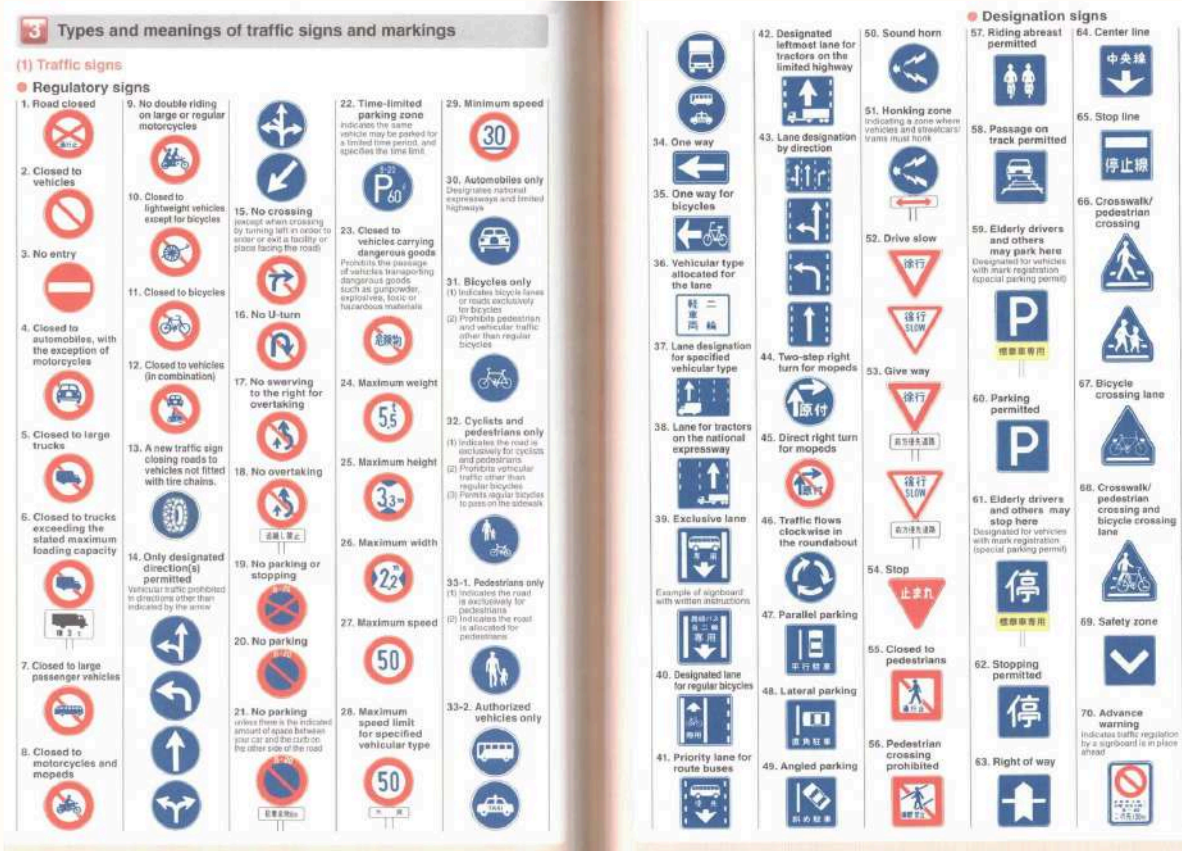
Topics included:

- Helmet requirements (must be rigid)
- Proper riding posture (feet forward, knees gripping tank)
- Lane splitting rules (don't do it)

How to beat it: Don't skip the motorcycle section of the JAF book just because you're getting a car license. Study it.

Pattern 3: Sign Identification

These are straightforward — they show you a sign and ask what it means. But there are a lot of signs, and some look similar.



Study the signs in the back of the JAF Book

Types I saw:

- Directional arrows
- One-way indicators
- Turn restrictions with time elements

How to beat it: Memorize the signs. Use flashcards if you need to. There's no trick here — you either know it or you don't.

Pattern 4: "What Should You Do?" Scenarios

These describe a situation and ask what the correct action is. They're testing whether you know the priority rules.

☐ **Example:** "A bus is approaching from behind in a priority bus lane. What should you do?"

The answer: Get out of the bus lane as soon as safely possible. Don't stay in it.

How to beat it: When in doubt, the safest and most yielding answer is usually correct. Give way. Don't block. Don't assume you have priority.

Pattern 5: Obscure But Testable Concepts

Some questions test whether you read the entire book, not just the obvious parts.

Examples:

The "evaporation phenomenon"

When oncoming headlights and your headlights combine to make a pedestrian invisible. They actually use this term.

Expressway drowsiness

They want you to acknowledge that highway driving can make you sleepy.

How to beat it: Read the whole JAF book. Highlight weird or specific terms. If it has a name, it might be on the test.

Pattern 6: Tricky Wording (Watch for "NOT")

Some questions flip the logic by using words like "NOT" or phrasing things opposite to what you'd expect. Read carefully.

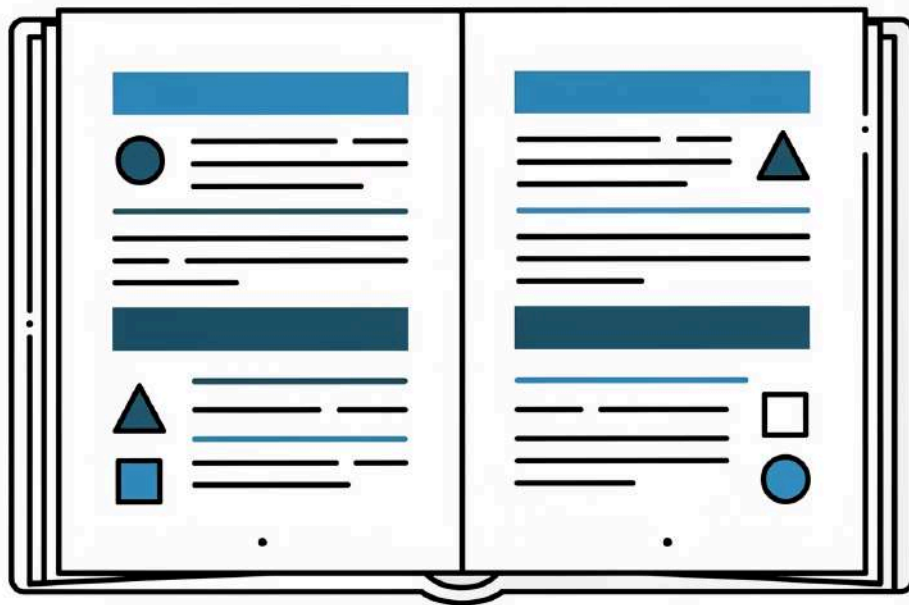
❏ **Example from my test:** The question said something like "Fast speeds on the highway make the driver NOT sleepy."

The answer is false — fast, monotonous highway driving absolutely can make you drowsy. But if you're reading quickly, you might miss the trick.

How to beat it: Read every question twice. Look for words like "NOT," "NEVER," "ALWAYS," or "EXCEPT." These small words change everything.

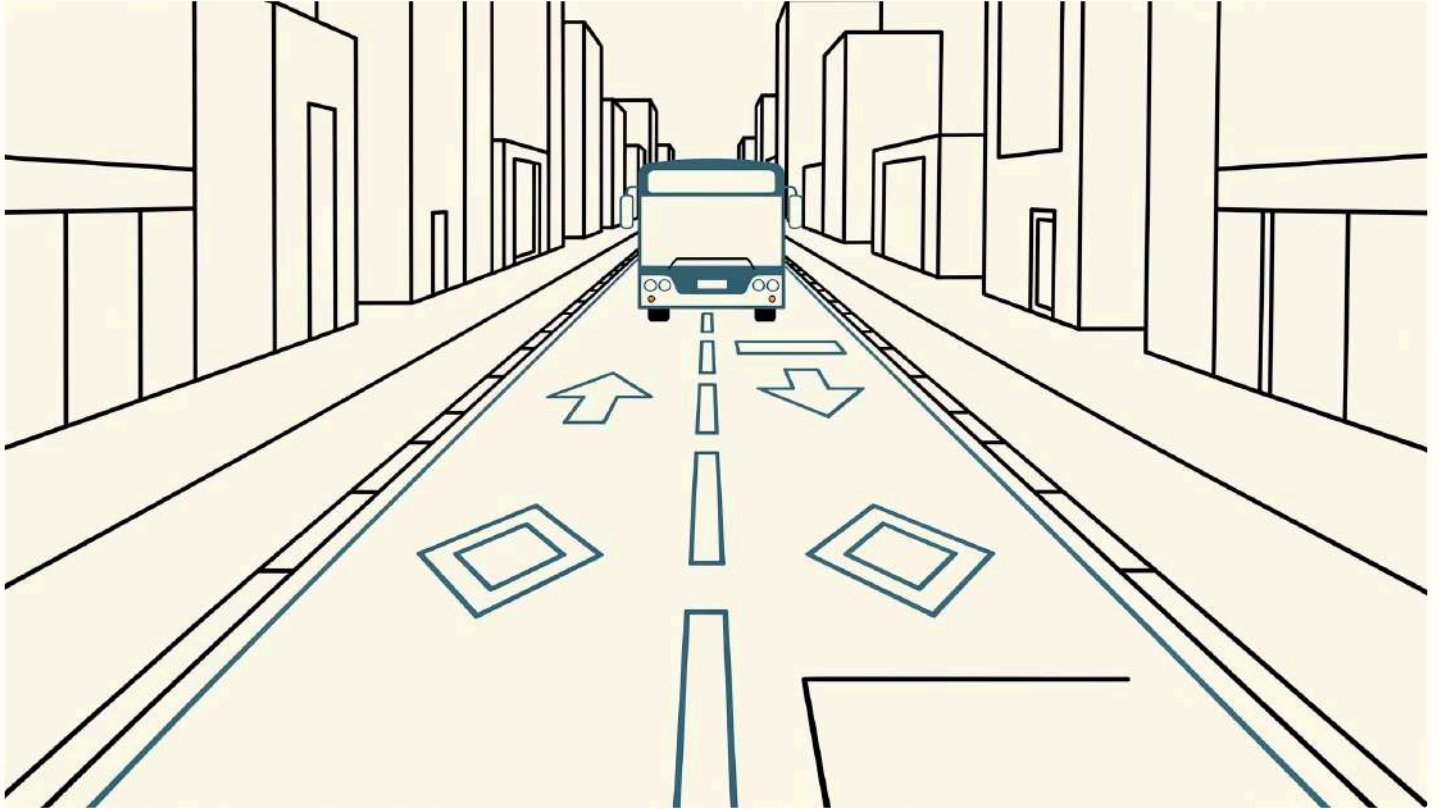
Actual Topics From My Test (With Page Numbers)

These are sections from the JAF book that showed up on my actual test. I've included the page numbers so you can find and study them directly.



❏ **Important:** Your test may vary. Questions get rotated. But these topics are fair game — and worth knowing.

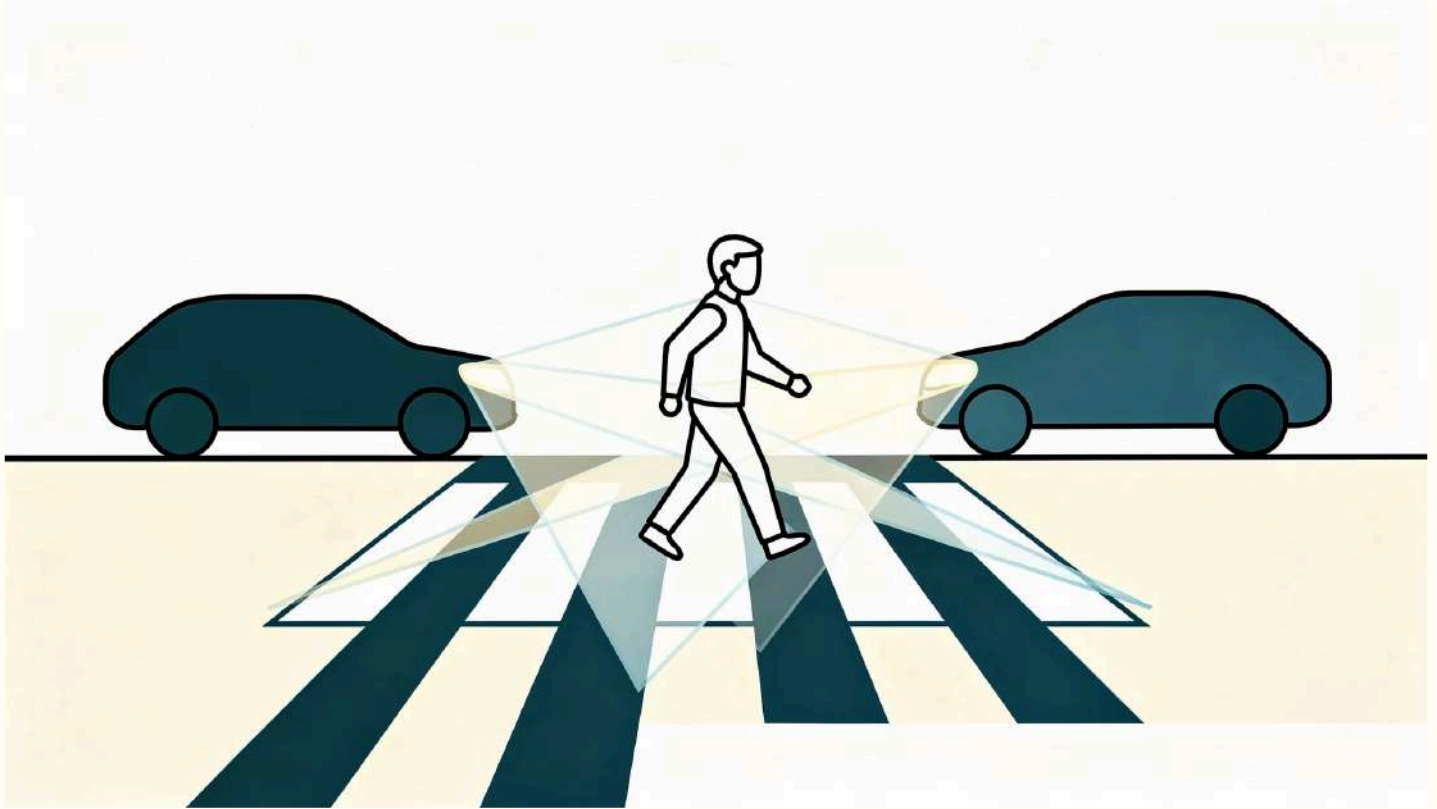
Page 25 — Bus/Priority Lanes



Vehicles traveling on priority lanes for buses or similar vehicles, indicated by a traffic sign or traffic marking, must give way immediately when such a vehicle is approaching. If you think traffic congestion could make it difficult for you to give way, avoid using that lane.

What to know: If a bus is coming up behind you in a bus priority lane, get out of the way immediately. And if traffic is heavy and you might not be able to move over, don't use the bus lane in the first place.

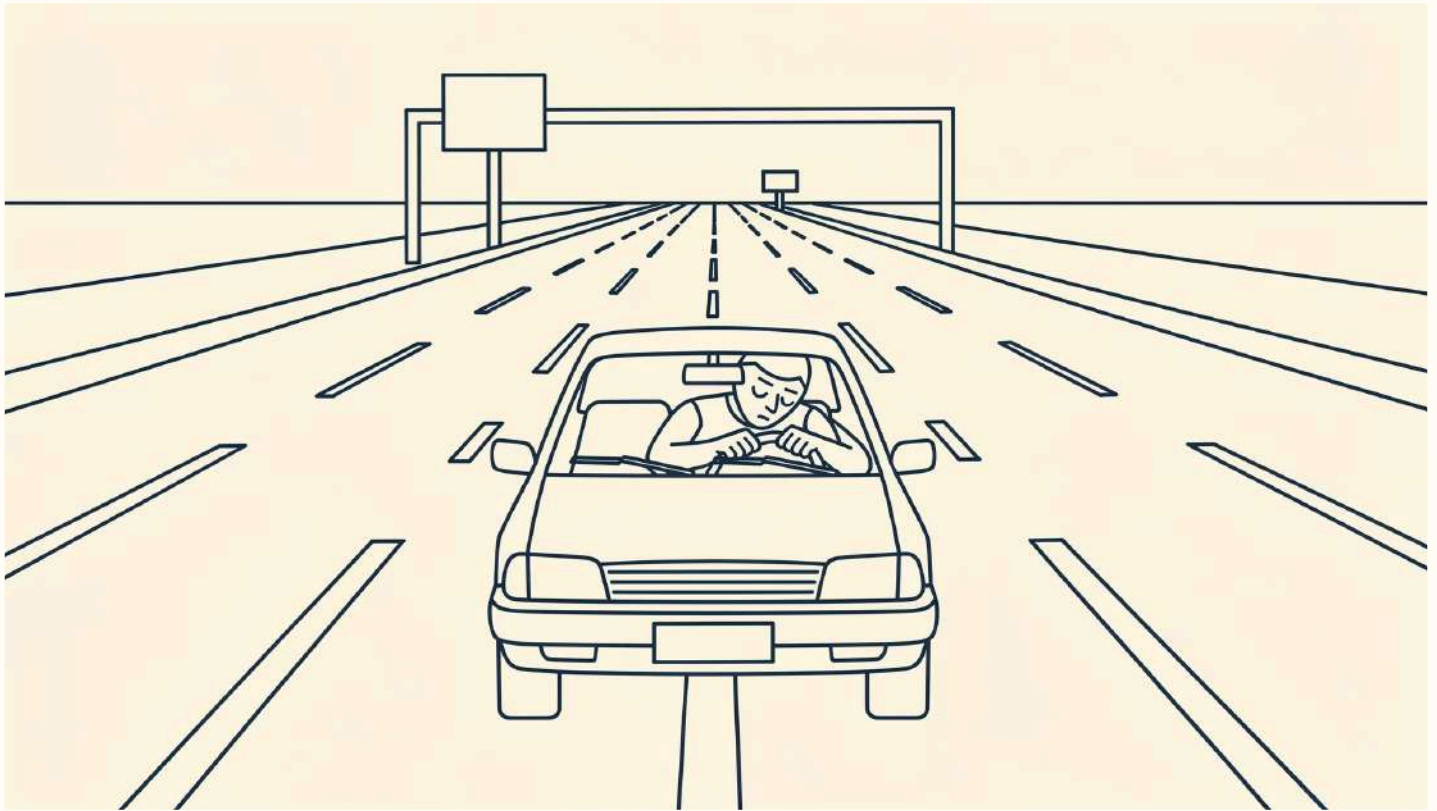
Page 47 — Evaporation Phenomenon



Take extra caution when driving at night, because you might lose sight of a pedestrian due to the evaporation phenomenon caused by the headlights of oncoming traffic and your own headlights.

What to know: This is a real term they use. When headlights from both directions overlap, a pedestrian in the middle can become invisible. Know the term "evaporation phenomenon."

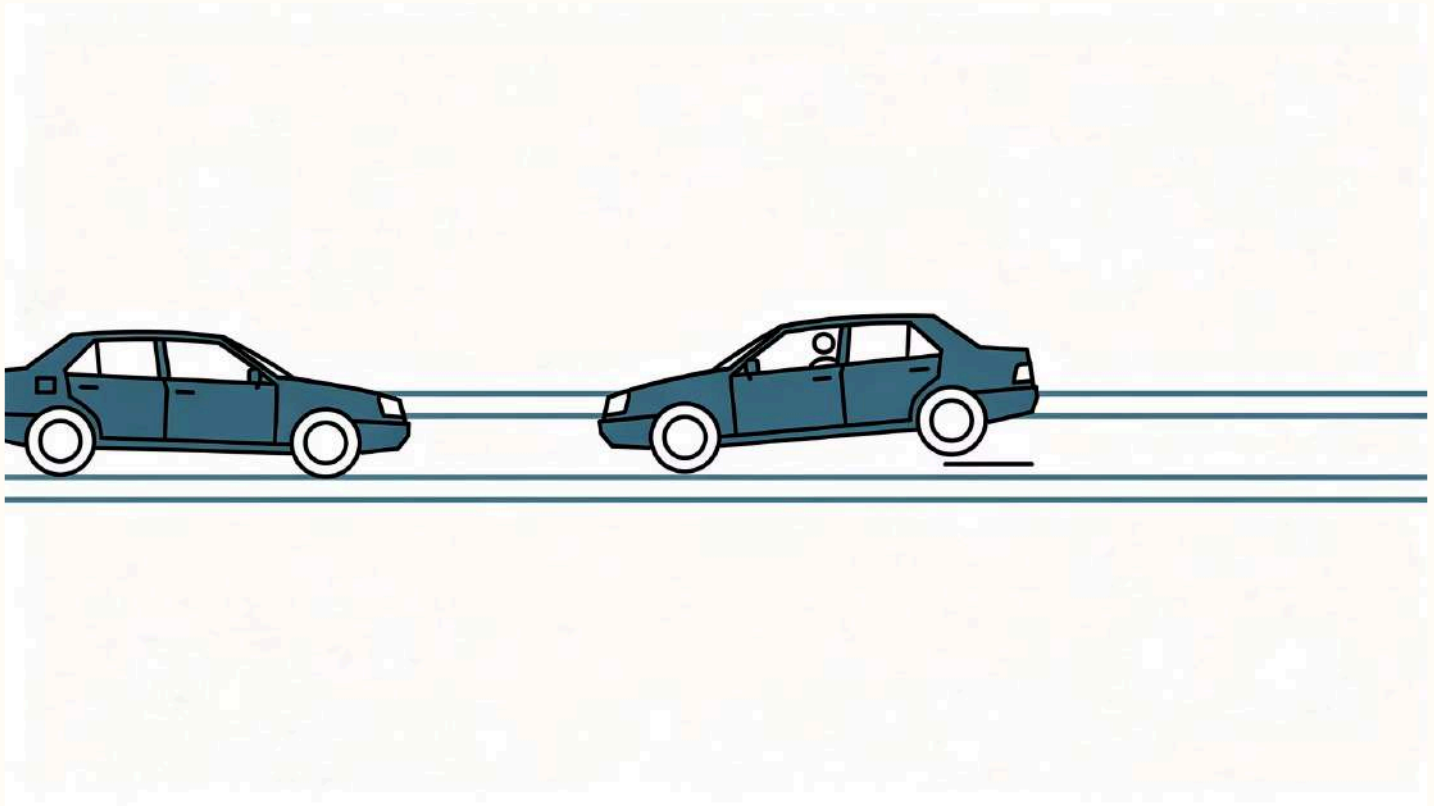
Page 47 — Highway Drowsiness



Long monotonous driving on highways can make a driver sleepy.

What to know: On my test, they tried to trick me by saying something like "fast speeds make the driver NOT sleepy." That's false. Highway driving absolutely can cause drowsiness. Watch for tricky wording.

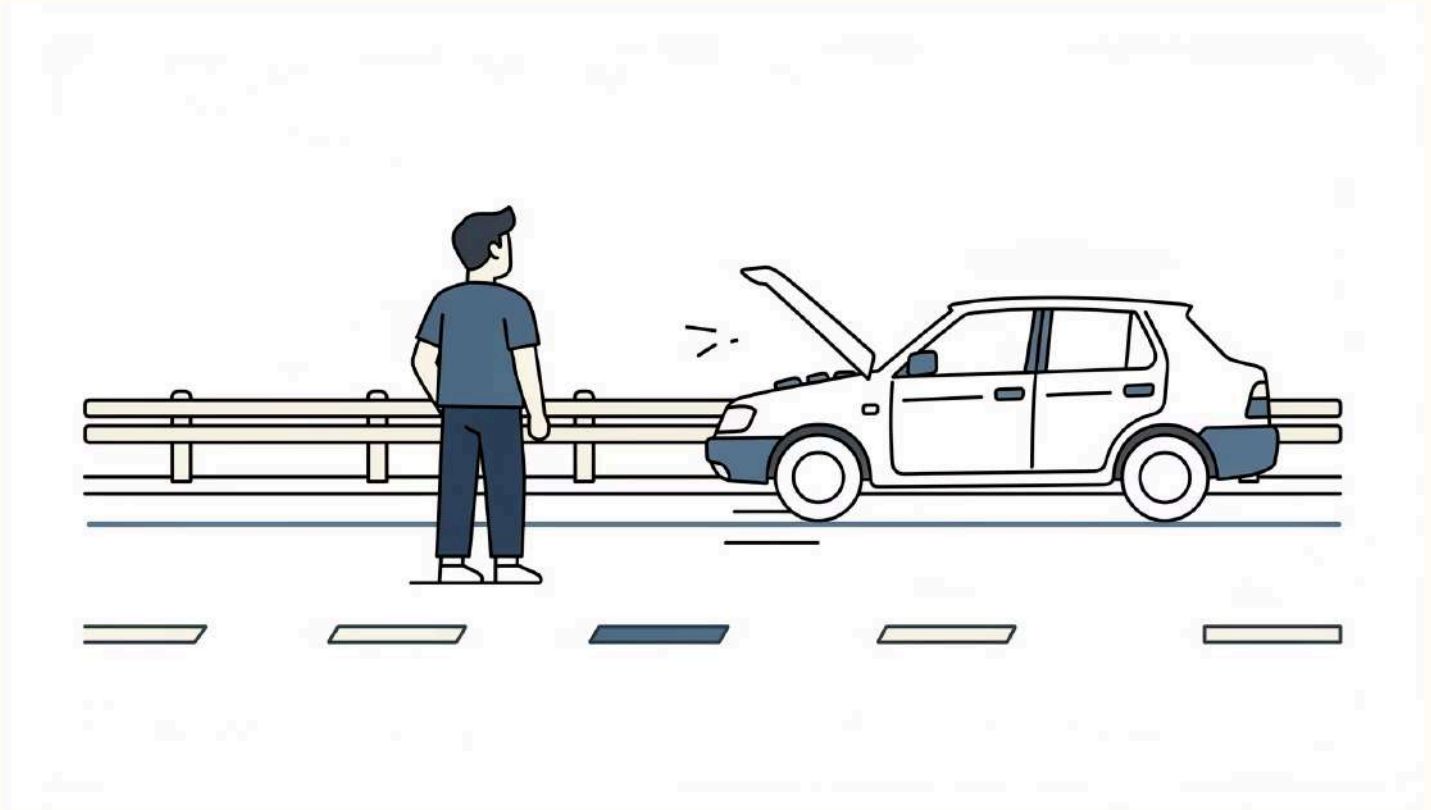
Page 49 — Head-On Collision Avoidance



If there is danger of a head-on collision with oncoming traffic, sound the horn, apply the brake pedal and pull over to the left as far as possible. Do not give up hope of avoiding a collision until the last moment, by effectively applying the brake pedal and hand brake. Do not hesitate to get off the road if you can do so safely.

What to know: In an emergency, do everything — horn, brakes, pull left, even leave the road if needed. Don't give up.

Page 54 — Expressway Breakdown Safety



It is extremely dangerous to stay inside the vehicle on the expressway while waiting for road service as you may be hit from behind. Once you take necessary measures, you should leave your vehicle and evacuate behind the guardrail or other safe place.

What to know: If your car breaks down on the expressway, don't sit inside it. Get out and get behind the guardrail. Staying in the car is dangerous.

Page 55 — Motorcycle Helmet Requirements

All motorcyclists must wear a crash helmet. Riders of large/regular motorcycles and mopeds must ensure their passengers wear a crash helmet. Wear an approved helmet with the PS (c) mark or JIS mark, and fasten the chinstrap firmly. Helmets designed for construction work are unacceptable.

What to know: Helmets must be approved (PS or JIS mark). Construction helmets don't count. Passengers need helmets too.

Page 57 — Motorcycle Riding Position



Place the arches of your feet on the footrests of the motorcycle and keep the soles of your shoes horizontal to the ground. Point your feet straight ahead, with your knees against the fuel tank.

What to know: Feet forward, knees gripping the tank. This is the proper riding posture for motorcycles — and yes, it's on the car test.

Page 57 — No Lane Splitting

You should not squeeze in between two lanes of traffic, zigzag in and out, overtake traffic abruptly, or cut in and out of traffic, even though the high maneuverability of motorcycles or mopeds may tempt you to do so.

What to know: Motorcycles should not lane split, zigzag, or cut through traffic — even though they technically could. Don't do it.

Practical Driving References (Also in the Book)

These are in the JAF book but apply more to the practical test. I've included them here for completeness.

Page 29 — Pump Your Brakes

Step on the brake several times. This method is particularly effective on a slippery road surface. Also by doing so, your brake lights will flicker, warning vehicles behind you and preventing rear-end collisions.

Page 46 — Engine Braking on Downhills

Effectively employ the braking power of the engine when you drive on a downhill road by shifting into lower gears (in case of automatic transmission vehicles, shift into the "2" or "L" [or "1"] position). Overuse of the foot brake on a long downhill road might cause the brake to overheat and fail suddenly, which is dangerous.

Action Step

As you study the JAF book, flag anything that fits these patterns:

- Rules with time restrictions
- Motorcycle-specific content
- Signs that look similar to each other
- Scenarios asking "what should you do?"
- Specific terminology or named phenomena
- Anything with tricky wording (NOT, NEVER, ALWAYS)



Use the page numbers above to find and review these exact sections. They showed up on my test — they might show up on yours.

Lesson 3: Written Test Cheat Sheet

Instructions: Review this the night before and morning of your test. This is not a replacement for studying the JAF book — it's a quick refresher of high-priority topics.

Signs to Know:

- Directional arrows — what does this sign mean?
- One-way arrows
- Turning arrows with time restrictions (e.g., "8-20" means 8am–8pm)

Tricky Question Topics:

- Time-based sign questions — do the math, check if the time falls outside the restriction
- Bus lane rules — if a bus is approaching from behind, get out of the lane
- Evaporation phenomenon — headlights making pedestrians invisible
- Expressway drowsiness — yes, it's a real hazard they test on

Motorcycle Questions (Yes, They're on the Car Test):

- Rigid helmet required
- Feet forward, knees grip the tank
- No lane splitting

Test Day Reminders:

- 50 questions, 30 minutes
- Multiple choice, scantron style (fill in bubbles with pencil)
- Do NOT touch the booklet until told
- You cannot leave early
- Results announced shortly after — about 15 minutes

MODULE 3: Practical Test Mastery

Lesson 1: The Mindset Shift



What is Gaimen Kirikae?

The process you're going through is officially called Gaimen Kirikae (外免切替) — which literally means "foreign license switch." It's Japan's official system for converting a valid foreign driver's license into a Japanese one.

The good news: you don't have to go through the full Japanese driving school process (which costs around ¥300,000 and takes months). The bad news: you still have to pass the written test and the practical driving test — and both got significantly harder in October 2025.

This guide is specifically designed to help you pass the Gaimen Kirikae tests.

What's on the Practical Driving Course?

The practical test takes place on a closed course at the licensing center — not on public roads. Every course is slightly different depending on your prefecture, but they all include the same core elements:

Standard Course Elements:

S-Curve (S字)

A winding S-shaped path that tests your ability to control the car through curves

Crank Turn (クランク)

Two tight 90-degree turns that simulate a very narrow road

Hill Start (坂道発進)

Stop on an uphill slope and start again without rolling backward

Railroad Crossing (踏切)

Stop, open your window, "listen" for trains, check both ways

Intersections

Some with traffic lights, some without; tests your right-of-way knowledge

Lane Changes

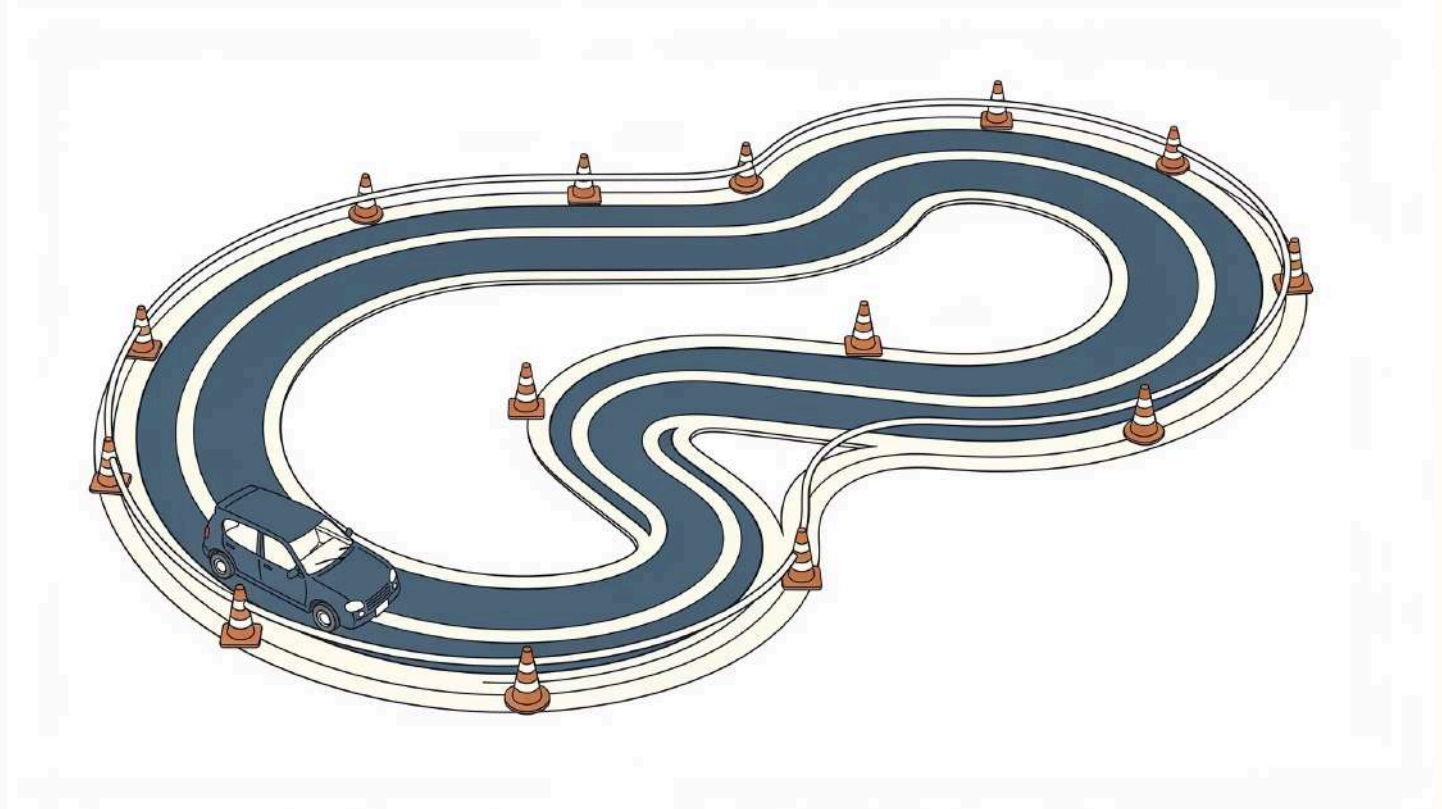
Tests your signaling, mirror checks, and blind spot awareness

Obstacle Avoidance

Cones simulating parked cars or road obstructions

Important Rules for S-Curves and Crank Turns

These are the sections where most people fail. Here's what you need to know:



Go very slowly — there's no time pressure

If you hit the curb (but don't go over it), you can stop and back up — this is allowed up to 3 times

If you drive over the curb, it's an automatic fail

If you hit the poles (simulating walls), it's an automatic fail

Every time you back up, check behind you visibly — failing to do this is a 10-point deduction

The key is: don't panic. If you mess up, stop, back up carefully, and try again. It's better to use one of your three allowed corrections than to force it and run over the curb.

What Officers Are Evaluating

The practical test is not just about whether you can drive safely. It's about whether you can demonstrate:



Safety checks

Mirrors, blind spots, surroundings



Proper signaling

At the right time, in the right order



Vehicle control

Smooth acceleration, braking, steering



Following rules

Stopping at lines, yielding right-of-way



Precise maneuvering

Navigating tight spaces without hitting anything

Think of it as a performance. You're not just driving — you're proving that you know the rules and can execute them perfectly.

The Trap for Experienced Drivers

You'd think that having years of driving experience would help you pass this test. It doesn't. In fact, it can hurt you.

Here's why:

After driving for years, you develop habits. You check mirrors with a quick eye movement instead of turning your head. You brake smoothly at the last moment because you know your car. You go when there's enough space. These habits keep you safe on real roads — but they'll fail you on this test.

I saw it firsthand. The guy who tested right before me drove fine. Nothing dangerous. But he failed. His head wasn't moving enough when he checked mirrors — so the officer couldn't tell if he was actually checking. His braking was a little jerky. He just... drove normally.

Normal isn't what they want. They want to see you following every rule, step by step, like you just learned yesterday.

How Scoring Works

You start with 100 points. You need **70 points or higher** to pass.

The examiner deducts points as you go:

- Small mistakes: 5 points
- Medium mistakes: 10 points
- Bigger mistakes: 20 points
- Some mistakes are automatic fails — like running over a curb or hitting poles

📌 **The test doesn't end when you park.** It ends when you step out of the car and close the door. I've heard of people losing points at the very last second for not checking their blind spot before opening the door.

The Right Mindset

Drive like you're in a crowded elementary school zone full of kids.



Slow



Careful



Aware of everything

It's not a race. Take your time.

One Thing That Can Save You

If you hit a curb — don't panic. In Saitama, as long as you don't run over the curb, you can stop, back up, and fix your mistake. Running over the curb is an automatic fail, but touching it and correcting is recoverable.

Ask your instructor about your specific prefecture's rules on this — they may differ.

Action Step:

Before your test, shift your mindset. Tell yourself: **"This is not real driving. This is a performance. I need to show every single thing I'm doing — visibly, slowly, deliberately."**



Exaggerate your
head turns



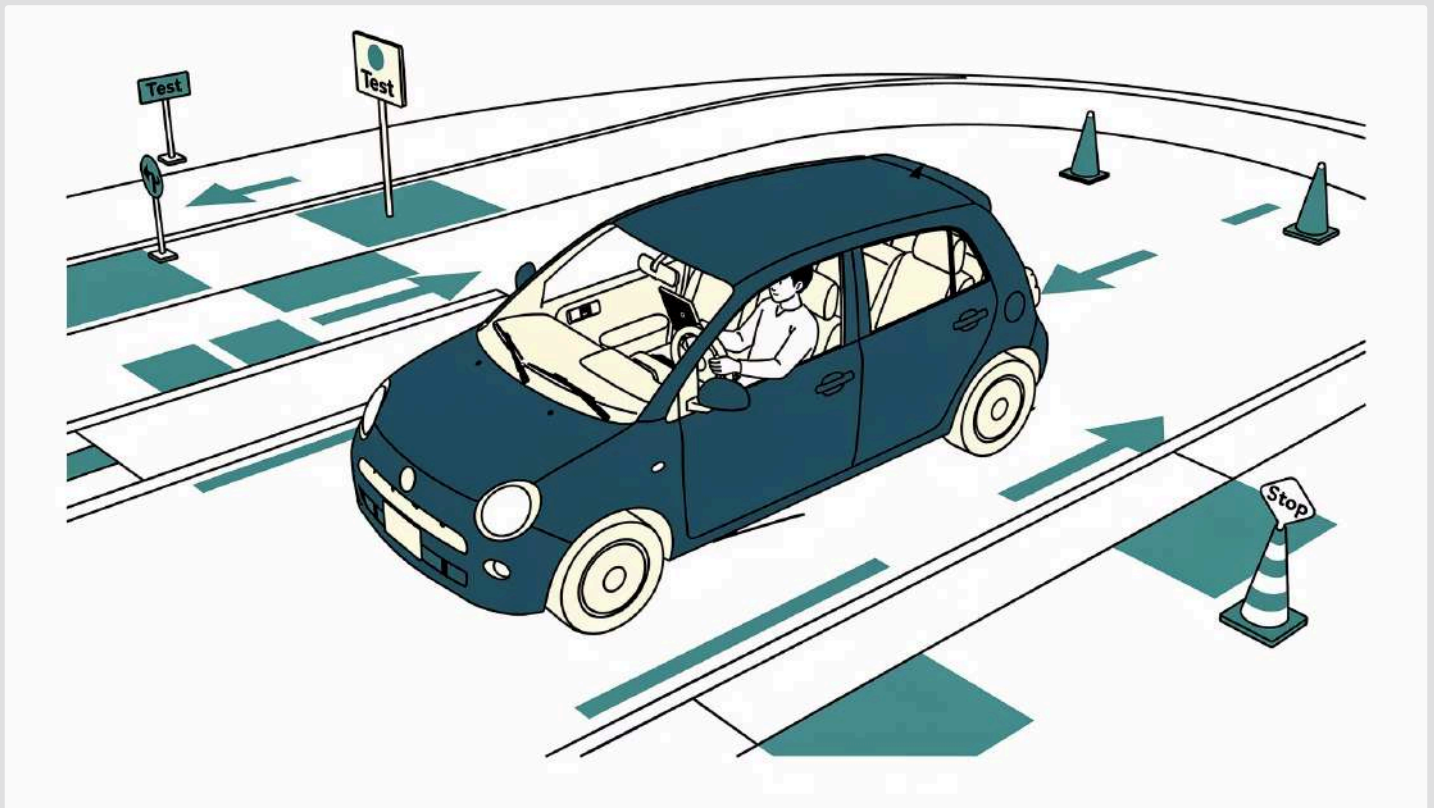
Narrate what you're
checking



Get used to how it
feels

Practice this in your head or in a parked car.

Lesson 2: Techniques That Pass the Test



This lesson is the meat of your practical test prep. These are the specific techniques our driving instructor taught us — the exact moves the officers are looking for. Master these and you'll be ahead of most people who walk in and just "drive."

Entering the Vehicle (The Test Starts Here)

The examiner is watching before you even start the engine. Here's the sequence:

01

Walk to the driver's side

Check behind you before opening the door (blind spot check)

02

Get in, close the door

Say "準備します" (junbi shimasu) — "I'll be getting ready"

03

Adjust your seat

Adjust your mirrors — use two hands on the rearview mirror

04

Put on your seatbelt

Do your checks

05

Say "準備できました"

(junbi dekimashita) — "I'm ready"

06

Wait for the officer's signal

Say "よろしくお願いします" (yoroshiku onegaishimasu) — right before you put the car in drive

07

Start driving

- ❏ **Note:** Some prefectures require you to check under the car before getting in. Saitama did not. Ask your instructor what your prefecture requires.

The 5-Point Check Before Every Turn or Lane Change

Our instructor drilled this into us. **Every single time you turn or change lanes:**

1. Signal

2. Check rearview mirror

3. Check side mirror
(left or right, depending on direction)

4. Check blind spot
(turn your head visibly)

5. Look forward, then execute the turn

Do this every time. No shortcuts. The officer needs to see each step.

The 1-2-3-4 Mirror Count (Expanded)

This technique helps you make your checks deliberate and visible — not rushed or sloppy.

Here's how it works. When you need to check your mirrors and blind spot, don't just dart your eyes around quickly. Instead, move your head to each checkpoint and mentally count:

1

Rearview mirror

(turn head slightly up and to the center)

2

Side mirror

(turn head toward the left or right mirror)

3

Blind spot

(turn your head further to look over your shoulder)

4

Forward

(eyes back on the road, ready to move)

Each count is about one second. Slow enough to actually see, and slow enough for the officer to see that you're checking.

The guy who tested before me failed partly because his checks were too fast. His eyes may have looked, but his head barely moved — so from the officer's perspective, it didn't happen.

Move your head. Make it obvious. Count 1-2-3-4.

At a Stop

The Complete Stop Sequence

- Come to a complete stop. No rolling.
- Count 3 seconds.
- Check right, left, then right again — with big head movements.
- Stop at the line — don't pass it, but don't stop too far behind it either.
- Do not creep up after stopping. The test center course is big. You can see plenty from where you stopped. Creeping forward looks like you didn't stop properly.

Braking Technique (Pump Your Brakes)

When slowing down for a turn or a stop, don't just press the brake smoothly and hold it. Instead, **pump your brakes a few times.**

Why? Two reasons:

Warning Signal

It makes your brake lights flicker — this warns vehicles behind you that you're slowing down and helps prevent rear-end collisions

Slippery Surface Technique

It's the recommended technique for slippery road surfaces — and they want to see that you know this

- ❏ I actually got this feedback directly from the officer after my test. My braking was smooth, but he told me I should pump my brakes so my lights would flicker. I still passed, but he wanted me to know. This is more for just the test. No one pumps their brakes in the real world.

Don't just glide to a stop. Pump the brakes. Let them see you slowing down.

Railroad Crossing

There's a simulated railroad crossing on the course. Here's how to handle it smoothly:



As you approach, locate the window button before you need it — get familiar with where it is so you don't have to look down



Start rolling your window down as you slow to a stop (so it's already down when you stop)



Come to a complete stop before the tracks



"Listen" for a train — this is symbolic, but they want to see you do it



Check right, then left



Once clear, start driving and roll your window back up as you go

The previous test taker stumbled here — fumbling for the window button, looking down, breaking the flow. I was smooth with it because I knew exactly where the button was and started rolling down before I stopped. It's a small thing, but it shows control.

Making Turns

Left turns:

- Stay tight to the left side
- Do not cross the center line
- Slow down before the turn, not during

Right turns:

- Position toward the center
- Yield to any oncoming traffic — even if you think there's enough space, let them pass first
- Cars approaching from the right always have right of way

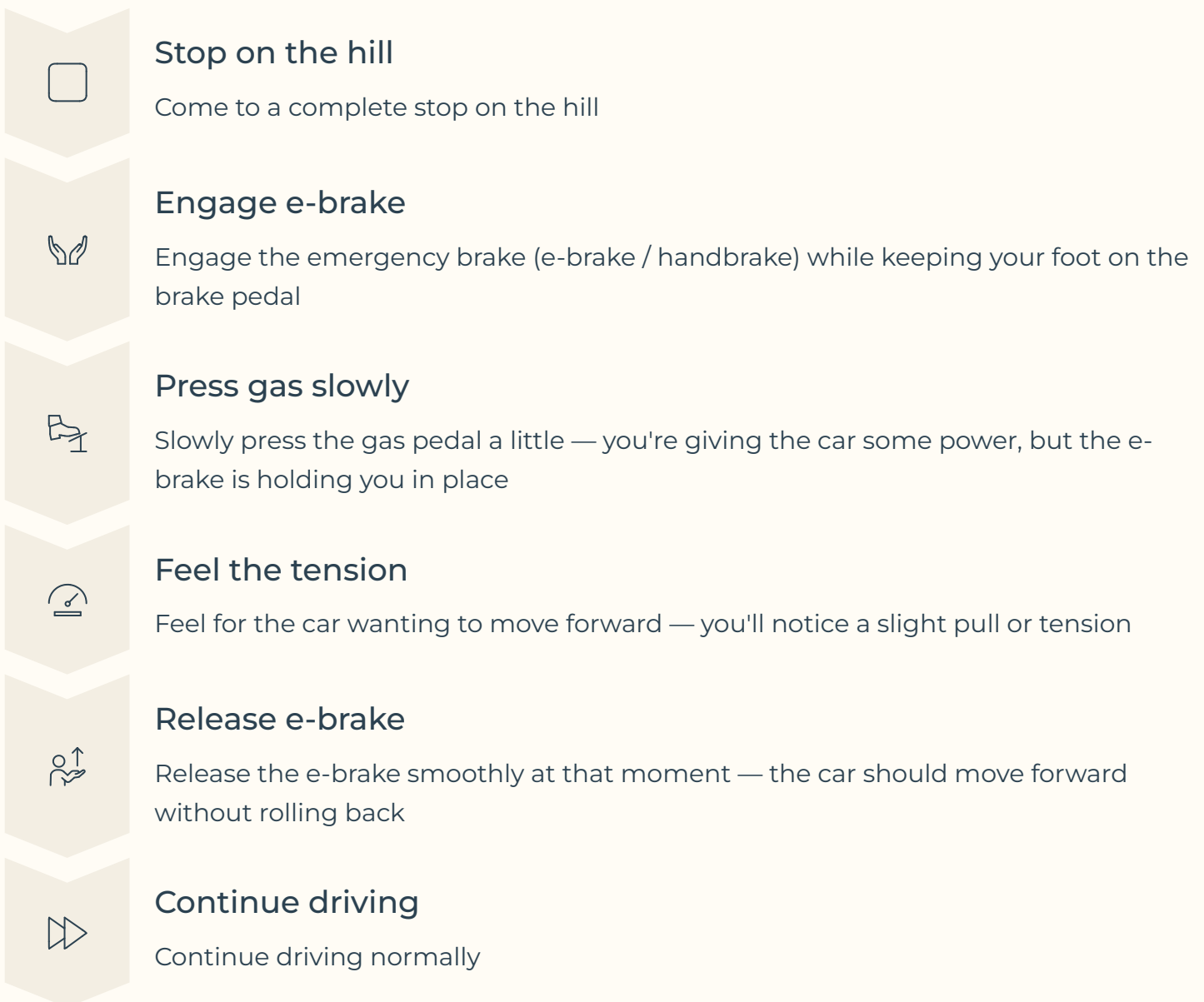
Don't Drive in the Parking Lane at the End of the Course

Even if the parking lane is empty, don't drive in it. Pretend there are parked cars there. Stay in the driving lane.

Uphill E-Brake Technique (+ Downhill Descent)

If you stop on an uphill section, they're testing whether you can start again without rolling backward. **Rolling back is a major point deduction — possibly 10-20 points — so you need to get this right.**

Going Up — The E-Brake Start:



It's a balancing act between the gas and the e-brake. Too little gas and you'll roll back when you release. Too much gas and you'll lurch forward awkwardly.

Going Down — Use a Lower Gear

After the uphill section, you'll descend. **Before you start going downhill, smoothly switch to a lower gear.** This gives you engine braking — the engine helps slow the car so you're not relying only on your brakes.

The key word here is **before**. Switch gears while you're still at the top or just starting the descent — not halfway down or near the bottom.

The guy who tested before me switched to a lower gear way too late — almost at the bottom of the hill. By then it didn't matter. I switched early, before descending, and the whole thing looked smooth and controlled.

Think ahead. Anticipate what's coming. That's what they want to see.

- ☐ Practice this before your test. Find a quiet hill or incline and do it a few times until the timing feels natural. You want the whole sequence — uphill stop, e-brake start, downhill descent — to flow smoothly.

Exiting the Vehicle (The Test Ends Here)

The test isn't over when you park. It's over when you close the door.

01

Put the car in park

02

Engage the e-brake

03

Turn off the engine

04

Check your blind spot

Check your blind spot before opening the door — this is the last thing the officer is watching

05

Say "ありがとうございます"

(arigato gozaimashita) —
"Thank you very much"

06

Open the door

The officer will usually call you back at this moment to tell you your result

07

Step out, close door

If he gives you your paperwork back →

You failed (reschedule your next test)

If he gives you your number card back →

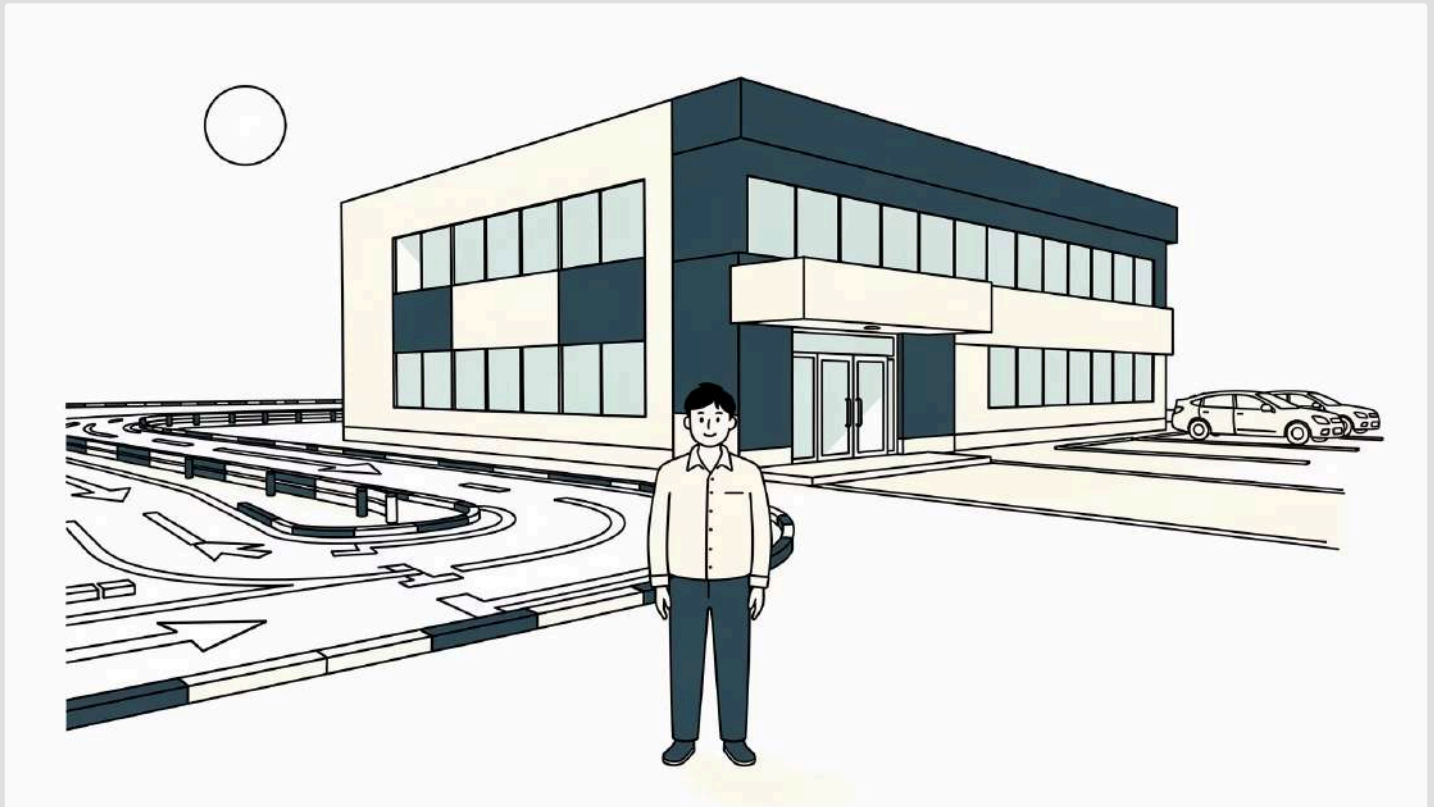
You passed!

Action Step:

Practice the entry and exit sequence at home — even without a car. Walk through the motions: open door, sit down, adjust seat, mirrors (two hands), seatbelt, say ready. Then practice the exit: e-brake, engine off, blind spot check, open door, step out.

These bookend moves are easy points to keep — or easy points to lose.

Lesson 3: The Day-Of Strategy



You've studied. You've practiced. Now it's test day. This lesson is about setting yourself up for success before you even get in the car. The people who pass aren't just better drivers — they're better prepared for the day itself.

Book an Afternoon Test (If Possible)

When you schedule your practical test, try to get an afternoon slot.

Why? Because the course number for the day is posted in the morning. If your test is in the afternoon, you have the entire morning to:

- Find out which course is being used
- Take a picture of the course layout
- Walk the actual course and visualize your drive

This is a huge advantage. Don't waste it.

Arrive Early — Way Early

Our test was at 1pm. We arrived at 10:30am.

That gave us time to:

- Find the course number posted on the board
- Take pictures of the course layout they provided
- Walk the course multiple times during the lunch break (when tests aren't running)
- Have a snack and relax before the test
- Memorize the course so we weren't stressed about understanding directions

Arriving early also means you're not rushing, not stressed about parking, and not walking in flustered.



Finding the Right Course Map

When you enter the practical test waiting area, a screen will display your assigned course number (Course 1, 2, or 3 in Saitama). But here's where it gets confusing - the walls are plastered with probably 30+ different course maps, and many of them share the same course number.

That's because there are separate courses for new beginners, truck drivers, motorcycles, and more - all with their own "Course 1," "Course 2," and "Course 3."

Look for the map labeled 外国免許切替 (Gaimen Kirikae / Foreign License Conversion). In Saitama, we found ours tucked in a corner. It was labeled in Japanese only.

We got confused at first why there were so many "Course 2" maps on the walls - then realized they're for completely different tests. Luckily we hadn't memorized anything yet. Don't make the same mistake - if you're not 100% sure you're looking at the right one, ask an officer or staff member before you start studying.

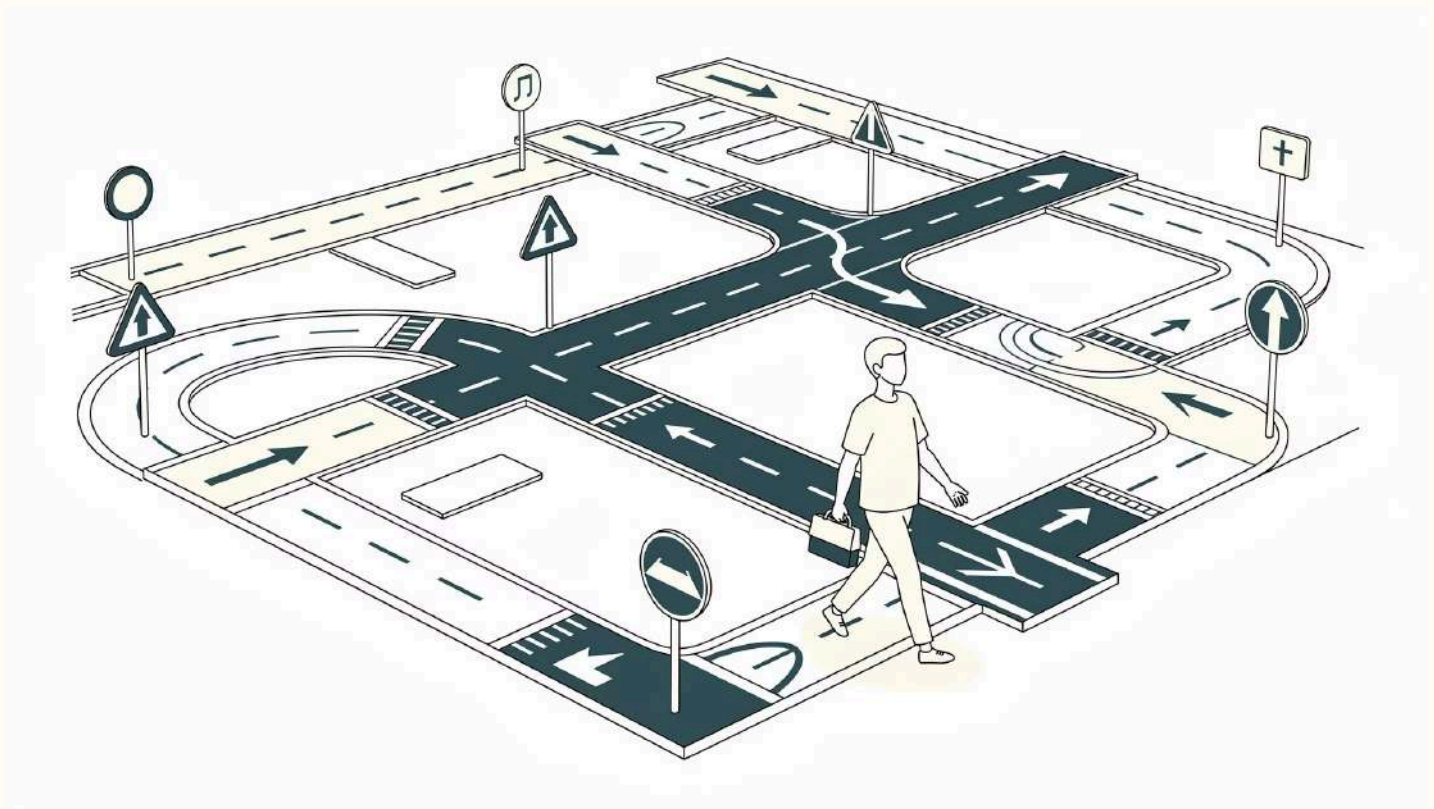
Walk the Course

This is one of the best things we did.

During the lunch break, we walked the actual driving course on foot — multiple times. As we walked, we visualized exactly what we'd do at each point: where to signal, where to check mirrors, where to stop, where the railroad crossing was.

By the time I got in the car, I already knew the course. When the officer gave directions in Japanese, I just had to acknowledge with "はい" (hai) — I didn't need to fully understand because I'd already memorized the route.

One less thing to worry about.



Get the Right Ticket Number

At our location (Saitama), they put out numbered tickets that determine the order of test takers. When they come out — pay attention and grab one.

Don't take ticket #1.

Here's why: there's always someone sitting in the back seat observing while another person takes the test. When the driver finishes (pass or fail), they leave the car. The person in the back moves up to the driver's seat to take their test, and a new person gets in the back to observe.

If you're #1, you don't get to observe anyone. You're going in blind.

If you're #2 or later, you get to sit in the back first and watch someone else take the test. You'll see:

- How the officer gives instructions
- What the course looks like from inside the car
- What mistakes the other person makes (so you don't make them)

I was #2. I watched the first guy fail. I learned from his mistakes — the jerky braking, the head that didn't move enough. When it was my turn, I knew exactly what not to do.

Bring a Snack

The whole process takes a while. Our test was at 1pm, and we didn't finish (including getting the license made) until about 5pm.

There's usually a cafeteria or vending machines, but bring something just in case. You don't want to be hungry and distracted.

Action Step:

When you book your practical test:

- Request an afternoon slot if possible
- Plan to arrive at least 2 hours early
- Book a refresher driving course before your test date — ideally a week before so the techniques are fresh

On test day: find the course, walk it, get a good ticket number, and relax

You've prepared. Now trust your preparation.



MODULE 4: The Insider Toolkit

Lesson 1: Essential Japanese for Test Day

Here's something that surprised me: interpreters are not allowed in the car during the practical test.

They can help you before the test — during check-in, instructions, and paperwork. But once you're in the driver's seat, it's just you and the officer. And the officer will speak Japanese.

Your prefecture might be different — if you can have an interpreter in the car, consider yourself lucky. But don't count on it. Prepare as if you'll be on your own.

Don't panic. You don't need to be fluent. You just need to know a handful of key phrases and numbers. Memorize these and you'll be fine. Believe me that I was stressed and filled with anxiety since I barely know Japanese.

Numbers (1–25)

The officer will give directions using numbers. "Turn left at 3." "Go straight to 10, then turn right." Your course might only go up to 15, or it might go higher — ours went to 24. Memorize at least 1–25 to be safe.

Number	Japanese	Pronunciation
1	一	ichi
2	二	ni
3	三	san
4	四	yon
5	五	go
6	六	roku
7	七	nana
8	八	hachi
9	九	kyuu
10	十	juu
11	十一	juu-ichi
12	十二	juu-ni
13	十三	juu-san
14	十四	juu-yon
15	十五	juu-go
16	十六	juu-roku
17	十七	juu-nana
18	十八	juu-hachi
19	十九	juu-kyuu
20	二十	ni-juu
21	二十一	ni-juu-ichi
22	二十二	ni-juu-ni
23	二十三	ni-juu-san
24	二十四	ni-juu-yon
25	二十五	ni-juu-go

Left and Right

Direction	Japanese	Pronunciation
Left	左	hidari
Right	右	migi

The officer will say things like "migi" (turn right) or "hidari" (turn left). Combined with numbers, you'll hear things like: "Juu-go, migi" — meaning "Turn right at 15."

Key Phrases for the Test

When to Say It	Japanese	Pronunciation	Meaning
Before you start your checks	準備します	junbi shimasu	"I'll be getting ready"
After you finish your checks	準備できました	junbi dekimashita	"I'm ready"
Right before you start driving	よろしくお願ひします	yoroshiku onegaishimasu	See explanation below
Every time the officer gives a direction	はい	hai	"Yes" / acknowledgment
At the end of the test	ありがとうございました	arigato gozaimashita	"Thank you very much"

About "yoroshiku onegaishimasu" Don't skip this one.

This phrase doesn't translate directly into English, but it's a polite, respectful greeting used before starting something. Think of it as saying "Thank you in advance" or "I'm in your hands."

It shows the officer you're being courteous — and that small gesture can set a positive tone for your test. When I said it, I noticed his mood shift slightly. Even though I couldn't speak Japanese, he seemed to appreciate the effort.

☐ よろしくお願ひします

yoroshiku onegaishimasu

About "hai"

Every time the officer gives you a direction, respond with "hai." Every single time. This lets him know you heard him and you're ready to follow the instruction. It also shows respect and attentiveness.

And here's the thing — if you've already memorized the course by walking it beforehand, his instructions aren't new information. They're just a quick refresher of what's coming next. You're not distracted trying to understand him. You already know the route. You just acknowledge with "hai" and keep driving.

If You Don't Understand Something

If the officer says something you don't understand, you can say:

Japanese	Pronunciation	Meaning
日本語話せません	nihongo hanasemasen	"I can't speak Japanese"

But honestly, if you've memorized the course beforehand, you won't need to fully understand every word. Just acknowledge with "hai" and follow the route you've already memorized.

Action Step:

Print these pages or screenshot it. Practice saying each phrase out loud until it feels natural.

Focus especially on:

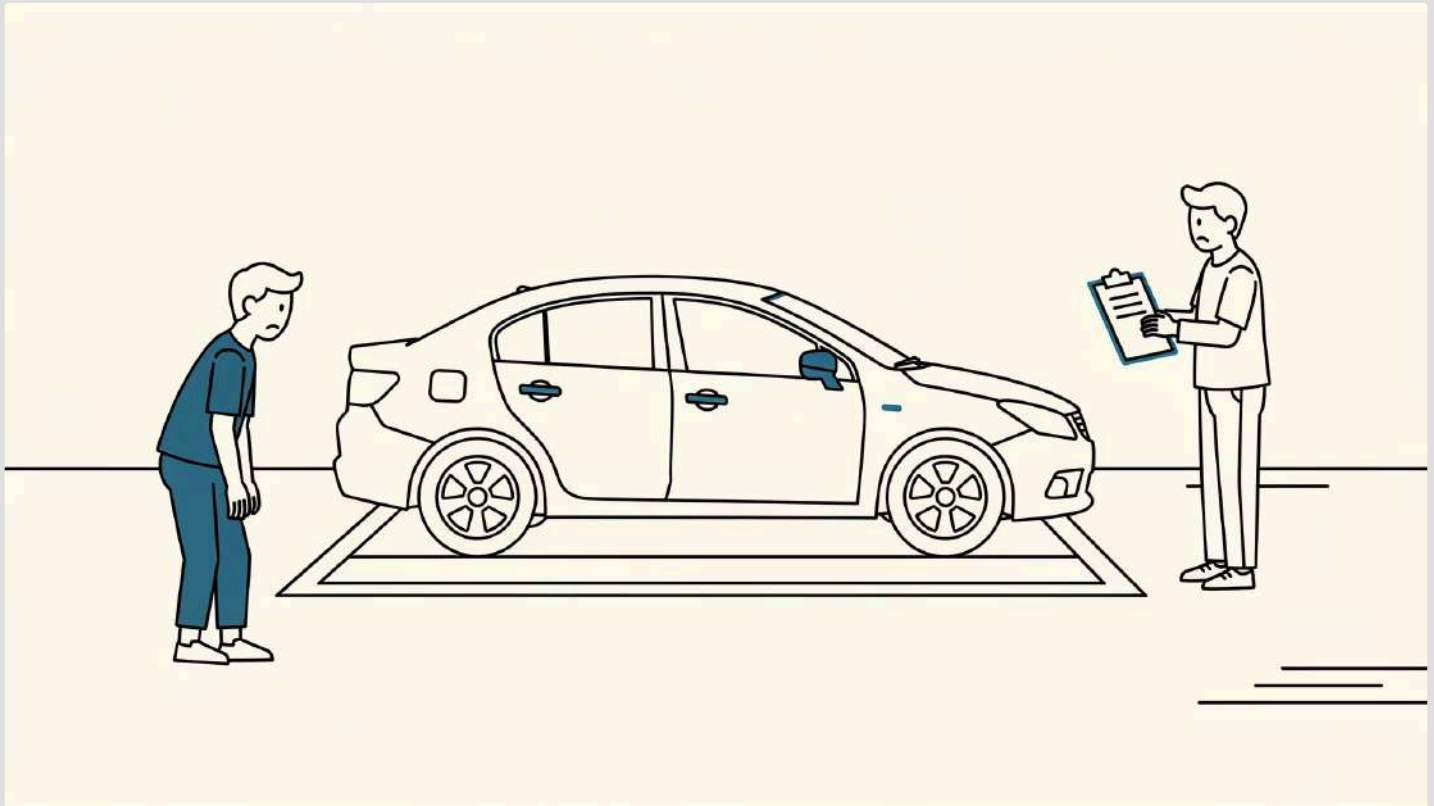
- Numbers 1–25
- Left (hidari) and right (migi)
- The 5 key phrases

Quiz yourself or have someone quiz you. You want these to come out automatically, without hesitation.

Lesson 2: What to Say to the Officer (+ Practical Test Cheat Sheet)

Written Explanation:

You've learned the phrases. Now let's put them into context — exactly when to say what, and why these small moments matter more than you'd think.



Why Small Human Moments Matter

The officer is going to test a lot of people that day. Most of them will get in the car, say nothing (or fumble nervously), and start driving. They treat it like a transaction — just get through it.

But here's the thing: **the officer is a human being.** A small gesture of respect can change the energy of the entire test.

Before I even got in the car, I told him I couldn't speak Japanese — humbly, not as an excuse. He said okay and told me to get in. Once inside, I didn't just silently adjust my seat and start driving. I told him I was getting ready. I told him when I was ready. And right before I put the car in drive, I said "yoroshiku onegaishimasu."

It's hard to explain, but I saw his demeanor soften — just slightly. He wasn't suddenly my best friend, but there was a shift. I went from being "another foreigner who can't speak Japanese" to "someone who's at least trying to be respectful."

Did it add points to my score? Probably not directly. But it set a tone. And when you're being judged on every little thing, **starting on a positive note can't hurt.**

The Full Script (What to Say and When)

Here's the exact sequence I followed, from approaching the car to getting out:

01

Before Getting In

- Approach the car
- Look at the officer and say humbly: **"すみません、日本語話せません"** (sumimasen, nihongo hanasemasen) — "Excuse me, I can't speak Japanese"
- This sets expectations upfront — he knows what he's working with
- Wait for his acknowledgment, then proceed

02

Getting In

- Check behind you before opening the door
- Get in, close the door

03

Before Your Checks

- Say: **"準備します"** (junbi shimasu) — "I'll be getting ready"
- Adjust seat, adjust mirrors (two hands), put on seatbelt, do your checks

04

After Your Checks

- Say: **"準備できました"** (junbi dekimashita) — "I'm ready"
- Wait for the officer's signal

05

Right Before You Start Driving

- Say: **"よろしくお願いします"** (yoroshiku onegaishimasu)
- This is the moment right before you put the car in drive and go — a final respectful acknowledgment before the test truly begins
- **This is when I noticed the officer's mood shift slightly**

06

During the Test

- Every time the officer gives a direction, respond: **"はい"** (hai)
- Keep your focus. You've memorized the course — his instructions are just confirmation.

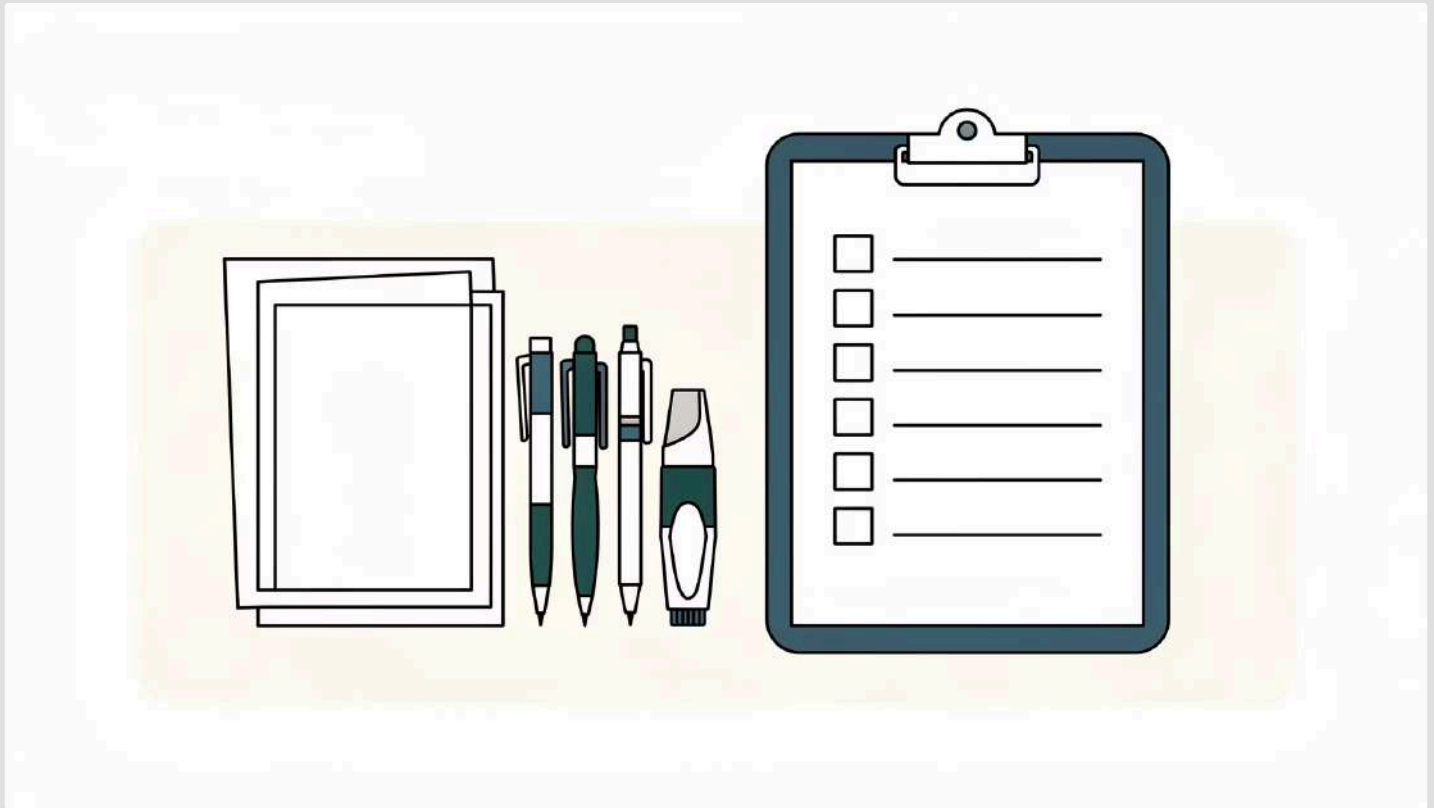
07

At the End

- Park the car, engage e-brake, turn off engine
- Check your blind spot before opening the door
- Say: **"ありがとうございました"** (arigato gozaimashita) — "Thank you very much"
- Open the door — the officer will usually call you back at this moment to tell you your result
- If he gives you your paperwork back → you failed (reschedule your next test)
- **If he gives you your number card back → you passed!**
- Step out, close door

Practical Test Cheat Sheet (Printable):

Print this and review it before you walk into the test center.



Before the Test:

- Arrive 2+ hours early
- Find the course number on the board
- Take a picture of the course layout (actual map picture of our course that day)



- Walk the course during lunch break — multiple times
- Don't take ticket #1 — grab #2 or later so you can observe first
- Use the bathroom before your number is called
- Bring a snack

Japanese Phrases to Memorize:

- すみません (**sumimasen**) — "Excuse me"
- 日本語話せません (**nihongo hanasemasen**) — "I can't speak Japanese"
- 準備します (**junbi shimasu**) — "I'll be getting ready"
- 準備できました (**junbi dekimashita**) — "I'm ready"
- よろしくお願ひします (**yoroshiku onegaishimasu**) — Polite greeting before starting
- はい (**hai**) — "Yes" (say this after every instruction)
- ありがとうございます (**arigato gozaimashita**) — "Thank you very much"
- Numbers 1-25, left (**hidari**), right (**migi**)

Entering the Vehicle:

01

Before getting in, say humbly:
"sumimasen, nihongo
hanasemasen"

02

Check behind you before opening
door

03

Get in, close door

04

Say "junbi shimasu"

05

Adjust seat

06

Adjust mirrors (two hands on
rearview)

07

Put on seatbelt

08

Do your checks

09

Say "junbi dekimashita"

10

Wait for signal

11

Say "yoroshiku onegaishimasu"

12

Put car in drive and start

During the Test:

Respond "hai" to every instruction

1-2-3-4 mirror count before every turn/lane change

Big head movements — make your checks visible

Full stops — count 3 seconds, check right-left-right

Stop at the line — don't pass it, but don't stop too far behind it either

Don't creep up after stopping

Don't drive in the parking lane — pretend cars are parked there

Left turns: stay tight, don't cross center line

Right turns: yield to oncoming traffic, even if there's space

Railroad crossing: window down before you stop, check right-left, window up as you drive away

Uphill: e-brake on, gas slightly, feel the pull, release e-brake smoothly

Drive like you're in a school zone full of kids — slow and careful

Exiting the Vehicle:

1

Park, engage e-brake, turn off engine

2

Check blind spot before opening door

3

Say "arigato gozaimashita"

4

Open door — the officer will usually call you back at this moment to tell you your result

If he gives you your paperwork back → you failed (reschedule upstairs)

If he gives you your number card back → you passed!

Step out, close door

Final Words:

I know this guide might feel like a lot. There are so many things to remember, so many small details, so much to practice. It can feel overwhelming.

But here's the thing: **you only have to pass once.**

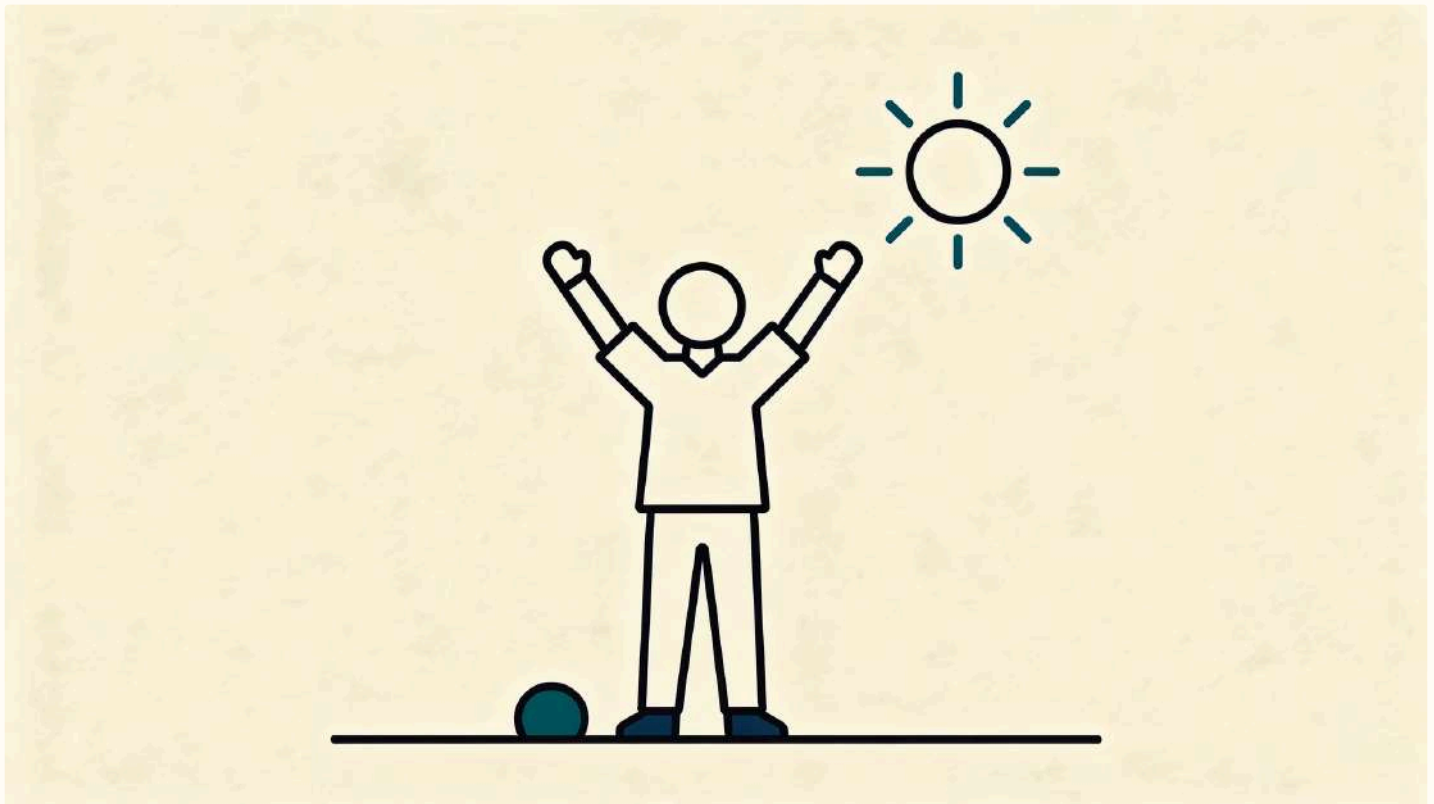
Once this is over, it's over. You'll have your Japanese license. You can drive however you want (safely, of course). You won't have to think about 1-2-3-4 mirror counts or exaggerated head movements or what to say to the officer. That's all just for the test — it's not how people actually drive in real life.

So practice. Practice until the techniques feel automatic. Practice until you're not thinking about what comes next — you just do it.

And on test day, remember: it's not a race. Take your time. All you need to show is that you have control of the car and that you're paying attention to your surroundings. **Safety is everything.** That's what they want to see.

You've got this. And once you pass — and you will — it'll all be worth it.

Now go get that license.



Action Step:

Print the cheat sheet. Review it the night before and the morning of your test. Go through the sequence in your head until it feels automatic.

You've done the work. Now go pass this thing.