



# Driving in the United States Toolkit

## PURPOSE

*We understand that driving in a new country can feel intimidating. This packet is designed to help you feel prepared and informed.*







## Overview of Driving in America

When living in the United States, driving is often a necessity. Car ownership is very common, and most middle-class families have one vehicle per adult. This is largely because public transportation is limited in many areas. The good news is that driving in the U.S. is often easier than you might expect.

Roads typically feature wide lanes, clear layouts, safe speed limits, and abundant road signage. Drivers generally follow traffic rules and tend to be courteous and predictable, making it easier to learn by observation.

With practice, you'll quickly adapt to sharing the road on American highways. Please review this packet to feel prepared and confident.

## In This Packet, You Will Learn How To:

-  Understand basic vehicle parts and essential driving fundamentals
-  Safely drive with children, including proper use of car seats
-  Use GPS and navigation tools effectively
-  Understand basic vehicle insurance requirements
-  Pump gas in the United States
-  Build confidence using helpful resources, including testimonials and additional advice for driving in the United States



Driving on new roads can feel scary. Dedicating time to study or practice can help build confidence.

*Doing some research early can help put you at ease and build confidence.*



This packet offers helpful resources to guide you through U.S. roads and driving regulations as you prepare for deployment.

## Becoming Familiar with Your Automobile

To drive safely and respond effectively to changing road conditions, it is essential to be familiar with the layout and operation of your vehicle. Key controls, such as turn signals, headlights, windshield wipers, and hazard lights, should be easily identifiable and operable as soon as you enter the vehicle.

Drivers must also understand the vehicle's instrument panel and be able to recognize and respond to dashboard indicators, warning lights, and system alerts. Sudden changes in traffic, weather, or roadway conditions can significantly affect driving, making quick and informed responses critical.

Before hitting the road, take time to learn the location and function of all interior controls and mechanisms.

Please familiarize yourself with your vehicle's owner's manual to understand its dashboard indicators and warning lights, controls, safety and driver-assistance features, operating limitations, emergency procedures, and manufacturer-recommended service and maintenance requirements.



## State Driving Manuals & Websites:

Start preparing to drive in your state by reviewing and studying the state's official driving manual. Each U.S. state publishes its own manual and maintains a Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) website with up-to-date driving laws and licensing information.

How to find state driving manuals and DMV websites: Search online for "[State Name] driver's manual" (for example, "Ohio driver's manual").

Visit the official state DMV website and look for sections such as Driver Manuals, New Drivers, or Licensing. Most manuals are available as free, downloadable PDFs.

To locate official DMV websites, search for "[State Name] DMV." Official government websites typically end in .gov.

It is also important to visit your state's DMV website to review the requirements for applying for a state driver's license. Questions to consider as you prepare:












- 🚗 How long is your international driver's license valid in your state?
- 🚗 While an international driver's license may be valid for up to one year, some states only recognize it for a limited period, such as 30 days after you establish residency.
- 🚗 What documents will you need to bring when applying for a driver's license? What fees are associated with applying?
- 🚗 Reviewing these details in advance will help ensure a smoother and less stressful licensing process.

## Unsure what state you will be in?

No problem! While each state has its own manual, the core driving rules and concepts are consistent across the United States. If you are unsure where you will be living, we recommend studying Ohio's driver's manual as a general reference until your state is confirmed. Topics commonly covered in all state driving manuals include:

- 🚗 **Traffic signals and signs** - Standard colors, shapes, warnings, and regulatory signs
- 🚗 **Driver's license information** - State point systems and insurance laws
- 🚗 **Communication with other drivers** - Proper use of horns, emergency signals, and lights
- 🚗 **Rules of the road** - Intersections, flashing lights, left turns, road markings, and lane usage
- 🚗 **Safe driving practices** - Staying alert, avoiding distractions, maintaining safe following distances, defensive driving, sharing the road, and child safety requirements such as car seats
- 🚗 **Protecting your driving privileges** - Moving violations and financial responsibilities

## Ways to Conquer Driving Anxiety

-  Familiarize yourself with your car while parked. Adjust the seat, mirrors, and controls before driving, and avoid using in-car features while the vehicle is moving.
-  Start with daytime driving. Drive during daylight hours when visibility is best, and consider practicing on a Sunday morning when traffic is usually lighter.
-  Gradually introduce night driving. Wait until you feel confident driving during the day before driving at night.
-  Silence your phone. Turning off notifications can reduce distractions and help you stay calm and focused.
-  Minimize passenger distractions. If conversation feels overwhelming, it's okay to ask passengers to be quiet so you can concentrate on driving.
-  Drive at your own pace. Don't let other drivers pressure you into speeding. If you are following the speed limit, you are driving responsibly.
-  Give yourself plenty of time. Allowing extra time to reach your destination can reduce stress and pressure.
-  Consider a Driver's Training Course. Professional instruction can help you feel more prepared for different driving situations.
-  Keep practicing, even when it feels challenging. Confidence grows with experience, and progress may be gradual.
-  Ease into highway driving. Begin on less busy highways during off-peak hours to build comfort.
-  Use music to stay relaxed. Soft music played at a low volume can help create a calm driving environment.



## How to Pump Gas in the USA

*In the United States, most gas stations are self-service, meaning drivers pump their own gas rather than having an attendant do it. If this is new to you, that is completely okay; many people feel unsure the first time. Below are simple, step-by-step instructions to help guide you through the process.*

1. Locate the gas cap. Look at the fuel gauge on your dashboard. There is usually a small arrow pointing to either the driver or passenger side. This arrow shows which side of your vehicle the gas tank is on, and that is the side you should line up with the gas pump.



2. **Important** - put the vehicle in Park and turn the engine off before getting out of the car.

3. Open the gas tank door. If you are unsure how to do this, you can check the vehicle's owner's manual for guidance. You can also do a quick internet search using the vehicle's year, make, and model. For example: "How to open gas cap on a 2025 Ford Explorer?"

4. Once the cover is open, you may see a gas cap, which twists on and off.

5. Paying for your gas - Gas stations require you to pay before the pump will activate. Its common to pay directly at the pump using a credit or debit card. If you prefer to pay with cash, go inside the store and tell the cashier which pump number you are parked at. The cashier will activate the pump for you. When paying at the pump, follow the instructions displayed on the screen to complete the payment process.

6. Choose your fuel type. Most passenger vehicles use regular unleaded gasoline. If you are unsure which fuel to use, check the label inside the gas tank door or refer to the vehicle's owner's manual.

7. Follow the instructions on the pump screen, then place the nozzle fully into your vehicle's gas tank opening.



8. Start Pumping Gas. Once the nozzle is fully inserted into the gas tank, squeeze the handle to begin pumping. You may feel a small movement or hear a sound as the gas starts to flow, which is normal. Most pumps have a small notch or lever on the handle that allows you to lock it in place so the gas continues flowing without you holding the handle the entire time. **The pump will automatically shut off when the tank is full, so you do not need to worry about overfilling**

9. When the pump shuts off, or when you reach your desired amount of fuel, gently remove the nozzle from the gas tank and place it back on the pump.

10. Complete the transaction - You may be asked if you would like a printed receipt. These are optional. If you are not interested, select "No" on the screen. The transaction will then close.

11. Make sure the gas cap is secured and the gas tank door is closed before driving away. Always double-check that the pump nozzle has been fully removed from your vehicle. Forgetting to remove the nozzle can cause damage to both the pump and the vehicle.

## Safely Driving With Children (Car Seats and Booster Seats)

Driving with children can feel overwhelming, especially when navigating new laws and safety standards in a new country. In the United States, child passenger safety is taken very seriously, and each state has specific rules in place to help protect children while traveling in a vehicle. Understanding these requirements can help you feel more confident and ensure your child's safety on the road.

Car seat and booster seat laws vary by state, so it is important to research the requirements for the state where you will be living and driving. You can find this information online or by contacting your local police station or fire department. Both are knowledgeable about state child passenger safety laws and can often help with proper car seat or booster seat installation if you need assistance.

While we are happy to provide general guidance and resources, the final decision about which car seat or booster seat to purchase is your responsibility. PassportUSA is not responsible for ensuring compliance with state laws or for the selection of a specific product.

For the most accurate and up-to-date information on car seat types, safety recommendations, and installation tips, we recommend reviewing your specific state's official transportation or public safety website, as well as trusted national safety organizations such as the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration along with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



## Employee Testimonials

*We've gathered a selection of testimonials from our employees, all of whom have gone through this same learning process. We hope you find their experiences helpful and reassuring. They've grown into confident drivers in the United States, and you can too.*

"What surprised me the most? Driving in the US is a lot less stressful than my home country. Although they have a lot of rules and regulations, it's pretty easy to learn and remember them. Just practice, practice, and practice! Be sure to study the rules!" - Sophia, NM

"What was I most surprised with in regards to driving in the USA? The smooth roads! Drivers in the USA are very responsible and they stick to their lanes, abide by the laws, and it makes driving a lot easier as compared to other countries. I found it safe here, actually. Also, a GPS is very useful to get around."  
- Maria, AL

"What was the most intimidating part of driving in the USA for me? There are a lot of patrol cars. They could just be behind you or stop beside you on traffic lights, but as long as you stick to speed limits and follow road signs, you don't have to worry." - Jaime, WA

"The most intimidating part of driving in the US would be driving on the highway. I pushed myself to drive on it every day so I would get used to it. I practiced looking over my shoulder when changing lanes because "blind spots" are really a thing! Seeing police cars next to my car or behind my car made me paranoid at first, but I realized that as long as I'm following the rules, there's really nothing to worry about. The application for the driver's license really scared me. So I watched YouTube to practice for the DMV driving test. I went to the DMV the night before the test just so I would be more comfortable going there the next day. A few months of driving and it will be second nature to you already." - Antonette, TX

"What surprised me about driving in the USA? The wide roads! I was mostly nervous about driving in the snow. I still dread it but I am not scared anymore. Getting tips and watching videos on how to drive in the snow helped." - Julie, PA

"Driving policies in the USA are strictly followed by U.S. drivers. Before I took the driving test, I read the manual over and over again and familiarized myself with the road, signs, and spoke to people who live here to get their opinions. It takes a lot of practice to overcome fear but I got there!" - Jaian, IA  
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"Driving on the busy freeways with lots of cars can be intimidating if you are not used to it. First, I observed the flow of traffic as a passenger and then after that I practiced during weekends or Sundays (less traffic). From there I built my confidence to drive anytime of the week." - Acemon, TX