

How to Drive a Car With an Automatic Transmission


Co-authored by Simon Miyerov 

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Cars with automatic transmissions are very popular for both new and experienced drivers, as they are generally simpler to operate than manual transmissions and can be more comfortable for long trips. These simple steps will guide you in learning to operate an automatic transmission, but remember: before operating any motor vehicle, please make sure you have a valid driver's license and understand all local traffic laws.

Part
1

Part 1 of 3: Preparing to Drive

- 1 Get into your car.** Unlock the vehicle with a clicker or key and climb into the driver's side.
- 2 Adjust the car to your needs.** Adjust your seat in any direction you are able to/find necessary so that you can comfortably reach any controls and see well out of windows. Move the mirrors so you can see behind and to the sides of the vehicle clearly. Identify the car's blind spots before you start driving so that you can check them before making any turns or lane changes.^[1] 

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- 3 Identify the controls.** It essential to find the accelerator and brake pedals, the steering wheel, the gear selector lever, the light controls, the defroster, and the windshield wipers before you begin.^[2]

- The brake and accelerator pedals are located at the bottom front of the area where your feet are. The brake pedal is on the left, the accelerator is on the right.
- The steering wheel is the large wheel in the center of the driver's console. Turn it to the left and right to turn the wheels of the vehicle.
- Located on the steering column (usually on the left side) is a small lever that has a rest position in the middle and two locking positions above and below. This is the turn signal. Often on the left side of the steering wheel mounted into the console or a knob on one of the levers on the steering column is the control which turns the headlights on and off.

- The gear selector lever will usually be in one of two places: it is either mounted to the right side of the steering column or in-between the driver's and passenger's seats. It will have a display showing gear indicators, usually marked with the letters "P", "R", "N", and "D" and a few numbers. On steering-column shifting levers, this display is usually located on the instrument panel, underneath the speedometer.

- 4 Fasten your seat belt.** Ensure that you and any passengers in your vehicle are wearing seat belts at all times.

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**Part
2**

Part 2 of 3:

Operating the Vehicle in "Drive"

- 1 Start the car.** Place your right foot on the brake pedal and push it down, then insert the key and turn it clockwise to start the vehicle.
- 2 Select your gear.** Keep your foot on the brake pedal and shift the gear lever into "Drive." This gear is marked with a "D" on the display panel, and will be highlighted when you've successfully selected it.^[3]
 - For shift levers mounted on the steering column, pull the lever towards you before moving it up and down to select a gear.
 - For shift levers mounted on the floor, there is usually a side button to unlock the lever. It can then be moved along its track into position.
- 3 Release the parking brake.** This is either a lever between the two front seats or a pedal on the far left side of the foot area. There may be a release lever above the lower parking brake or a button to push on the topside model before you can disengage it.
- 4 Check your surroundings.** Look all around the car, including blind spots, to see if there are any moving objects or beings in the vicinity. Make sure to keep your eyes mainly on the direction you're moving.
- 5 Get your car moving.** Slowly release pressure on the brake pedal and the car will start to move slowly. Take your foot off the brake, use the same foot to press the gas pedal gently, and the car will begin to move faster. There is no need to change gears in relation to speed in regular road driving.
- 6 Turn the steering wheel to turn the car.** In "drive," turn it to the left to turn the car left and turn it to the right to turn the car right.
- 7 Apply the brakes to slow or stop the car.** Take your right foot off the accelerator pedal and move it to the brake, applying gradual pressure so as not to jerk to a halt. When you wish to start again, switch your foot back to the accelerator.
- 8 Park the car.** When you have reached your destination, bring the vehicle to a complete stop by applying gradual pressure to the brake pedal and slide the shift lever back into

the "P" position. Turn off the engine by turning the key counter-clockwise. Don't forget to turn off the headlights and apply the parking brake before getting out of the car.

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**Part
3**

Part 3 of 3:
Operating Alternative Gears

1 Travel in Reverse. If you need to travel backward, make sure the vehicle is at a **complete** stop before changing gears in or out of "reverse." Slide the gear shift to select the gear marked "R" and check behind/ around you for any possible obstructions. Gently remove your foot from the brake and place it on the accelerator.

- When turning in Reverse, your car will turn in the same direction that you turn the wheel. You're just going backwards, so the end of the car will swing in that direction, rather than the front.^[4]

2 Use "neutral." The "neutral" gear is only to be used when you have no need to control the speed of your car, **not** when driving regularly. Examples of this include when idling parked for a short time or when being pushed/towed.^[5]

3 Use the lower gears. The gears marked "1," "2," and "3" are known as lower gears. These can work as a sort of in-engine brake system when you need to save your actual brakes. Going down steep hills is a good use of this technique. 1st gear, however, is only to be used when you must go very slowly. There is no need to stop when shifting between these gears and Drive.

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Community Q&A

Question

What is a semi-automatic car?

Simon Miyerov
Driving Instructor
Expert Answer



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you have to change gears
is mostly a matter of

Question**Is it better to use one foot for the brake and the other for the accelerator?**

Community Answer

No, this is not recommended at all. It can be very dangerous because, in the event of an accident or sudden stop, you don't necessarily have time to determine which foot is which. It's safer to just use one foot that can be quickly switched from pedal to pedal.

Question**Which gear should be for parking in an inclined position?**

Community Answer

Your gear should be in P because in a neutral gear without applying any breaks (pedal or handbrake), there is a high possibility that the car may move down depending on the angle of inclination.

Question**Can you keep on Neutral when driving down a hill?**

Community Answer

You can, but it is often illegal in some countries. When the car is in gear, the friction between the engine and the gearbox (as they are connected) will slow the car down (this is known as engine braking). However, in neutral, the engine and the gearbox are no longer connected, which means this friction no longer occurs. This means more braking power will be required to stop, which can be dangerous when going down hill as your speed will increase.

Question**Why must I drive with only one foot?**

Community Answer

For an automatic transmission, it is not necessary to use two feet, because you should never hit the brakes and the accelerator at the same time. Use the rest provided for your second foot.

Question**Will my car go in reverse if I use the brake?**

Community Answer

No. The brake slows down your forward momentum by converting kinetic energy from rotating wheels into heat, or in the case of hybrids, electrical potential energy to store in batteries. Once the car is slowed/stopped, you'd have to engage reverse gear to go into reverse.

Question**When stationary, where should the gear lever be positioned?**

Community Answer

If you are parked, place the lever in P (park). If you are stopped for a traffic signal or similar, leave the lever in D (drive) and keep your foot on the brake.

Question**Does the brake need to be depressed when putting the car in neutral?**

Community Answer

Yes, if you don't want the car to move.

Question

My flying wheel keeps breaking. What can be the cause? I often change to neutral in regular drive, in the name of saving fuel consumption, and do not stop completely before changing to drive/neutral/park. Could that be the cause of the flying wheel getting destroyed?

Community Answer

Going into park while the car is moving is a massive no-no. When you put the car into park, a prawl locks the output gear and prevents it from turning. If you engage park whilst the car is moving, you will destroy either the prawl or the output gear (which is a very expensive job to fix). Just leave the car in drive until you come to park up unless you're stuck in a traffic jam. You'll have more control of the car and in some situations leaving it in drive provides better fuel economy (in a modern car) as the engine will use the speed of the wheels to keep the engine rotating rather than providing fuel (in neutral it cannot do that).

Question

If I release the brake too quickly, will the car turn off? Like it does in a manual transmission when the clutch is released fast?

Community Answer

No. In a conventional automatic, a torque converter is used, which allows the engine to stay connected to the transmission so you can come to a complete stop without the car stalling.

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Tips

- Do **not** use one foot for the brake pedal and the other for the accelerator pedal. Use your right foot for both pedals and leave your left foot on the floor.
- Check your mirrors often.
- It is advised to keep from pressing the accelerator continuously if you want to optimize fuel consumption. It keeps the torque pressure to a lower level.

- Apply pressure to both the brake and accelerator pedals gently and gradually.
- Drive defensively and pay attention to your surroundings when you are operating any motor vehicle.
- Always pay attention to traffic signals.

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Warnings

- When changing from "R" to "D" or vice versa, the car must be completely stationary before selecting either "R" or "D" or else it could cause serious damage to the transmission.
- Keep your eyes on the road; don't text and drive.
- Follow all local traffic laws and always drive with a valid license.
- Lock your car when leaving it unattended.
- Never operate a vehicle while under the influence of alcohol.
- Always come to a complete stop before switching to "P" or serious transmission damage could result.

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References

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3. <https://carfromjapan.com/article/driving-tips/steps-learning-drive-automatic-car/>
4. <https://driversed.com/driving-information/driving-techniques/backing-up.aspx>
5. <https://carfromjapan.com/article/driving-tips/use-neutral-gear-automatic-transmission-car/>

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