

Developing Curriculum Guidelines for Driver Trainers

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BACKGROUND

In 1998 the Australian Driver Trainers Association in conjunction with the Australian Transport Safety Bureau completed the National Driver Competency Guidelines that, for the first time, set out a reference document from which all education, training and assessment systems for licensing procedures for all licence classes throughout Australia could be developed. These guidelines have been presented at earlier Road Safety Conferences and to the National Road Safety Strategy Panel in February 1999.

There is a clear recognition that the Licence Test has become a benchmark that is restricting any education and training to a low level, with applicants only doing the absolute minimum to pass the test. This has resulted in a very high crash rate amongst new drivers, who lack the experience to cope with the complex nature of driving.

Authorities in each State and Territory of Australia, recognise the problems and are trying a variety of counteractive measures to alleviate the problem. Of most interest is the South Australian system of Competency Based Training and Assessment or CBT&A which, in theory, provides a much better method of preparing new drivers than a driving test based system.

In practice the South Australian and other similar systems have inherent problems, which the National Driver Competency Guidelines were developed to address. These Curriculum Guidelines are the next step towards developing training packages from the National Driver Competency Guidelines.

GUIDELINES

The Guidelines contain 8 Units or sections which are needed to achieve the key purpose, which is to reflect the community, industry or organization's needs.

The 8 Units are as follows: -

1. Meet community expectations.
2. Carry out basic vehicle checks and breakdown procedures.
3. Apply safety aspects.
4. Read instruments and operate controls.
5. Perform driving procedures.
6. Drive in traffic.
7. Drive on the open road.
8. Manoeuvre the vehicle at slow speed.

The competencies have been prepared using the guidelines for National Competency Standards as prescribed by the National Training Board and are expressed in the required common format as follows: -

- Key purpose – needs to reflect the community, industry or organization's needs.
- Units of competency – are major components within a standard comprising a title and its constituent elements of competency together with their associated performance criteria.

- Elements of competency – are the basic building blocks of the unit of competency and contain the description of the key purpose of the unit.
- Performance criteria – are evaluative statements that specify the required level of performance.
- Range of variables – defines the ‘where’ and ‘when’ boundaries within which a given unit of competency and its associated performance criteria happen.
- Evidence guide – assists with the interpretation and assessment of the units in the competencies.

It is important to understand how this format works when progressing on to the next step which is to develop the Curriculum Guidelines.

Practical training throughout Australia has moved away from a Curriculum base to Competency Based Training and the development of Training Packages and Competency Standards, which provides the trainer with a method to conduct the training, in effect, to understand what to teach, how to teach and where to teach.

THE TRAINER

From this the trainer will be able to thoroughly plan the driving lesson, incorporating the introduction of new topics and practice sessions in the correct environment and to track student progress from “no competence” through different levels to “full competence”.

The process begins by sorting out the National Driver Competency Guidelines into the correct teaching sequence. The supporting “in class” component will need to be defined.

BUILDING BLOCKS OF DRIVING

One of the most important aspects is the sequencing of the teaching tasks. For example a hill start could not be attempted until the trainee could use the handbrake and the foot controls at a satisfactory level.

So advancement through a driving course will be done in sections, that start with fairly easy topics, through to topics with a much greater degree of complexity, with progress to each new section only occurring after a satisfactory level of competence has been reached in the earlier section. This is known as “the building blocks of driving”.

The teaching sequence is: -

1. Meet community expectations.
2. Carry out basic vehicle checks and breakdown procedures.
3. Read instruments and operate controls.
4. Apply safety aspects.
5. Perform driving procedures.
6. Drive in traffic.
7. Manoeuvre the vehicle.
8. Drive on the open road.

PRESENTATION

Once the topics have been arranged into the correct teaching sequence, the next step will be to develop a teaching strategy for each topic, that follows a recognised format or framework. This format is as follows: -

- Select the right location.
- Give an introduction and set the objectives.
- Give an explanation.
- Give a practical demonstration.
- Let the student try it out.
- Give feedback and use questions to check comprehension.
- Set up a practice regime to gain competence.

If this framework is not used correctly, training will be disorganised and the trainee will find comprehension of the topic extremely difficult, if not impossible.

EXAMPLE

Here is an example of how to use this framework for a three-point turn: -

- The right location will be a fairly wide, flat street (not wide enough for a U-turn), preferably with formed kerbs and gutters, in a quiet, low traffic area.
- An introduction will show the need to have the ability to turn the vehicle to face the opposite direction in all kinds of different situations and will include the objective that at the completion of the training the student will be able to correctly perform a three-point turn.
- The explanation will be done with the car stationary at the kerb and a good pre drawn diagram or a “construct as you go” diagram with maybe some text in dot point form to keep the explanation on track. It will need to include safety and traffic interaction procedures.
- The practical demonstration by the trainer in the driver’s seat will need to be done at slow speed with full commentary as it proceeds, followed by another demonstration at normal speed emphasising the important points.
- Let the student try it out in the driver’s seat with continuing explanation as needed. Use the dual controls to assist when necessary.
- Give feedback and use questions to check comprehension will focus on areas that were done well and not so well and questions should require the student to give an answer that shows the knowledge gained, eg “what traffic checks must be made before reversing in a three-point turn?”
- Set up a practice regime to gain competence recognises the importance of practice sessions in the training process. However three-point turns can be extremely tiring to the student and attempts should be restricted to maybe two or three in one street followed by another two or three in a different street ten minutes or so later.

Additional information can be given to the student in the form of notes or reference material to use before and after the lesson to enhance the learning process.

ASSESSMENT

The final step in the training package is to develop a competency assessment scale, that allows the student and the trainer to plot progress through the training. An example of this can be found on page x in the National Driver Competency Guidelines.

The scoring matrix needs to have enough levels to allow for the trainer's errors of judgement. In the example given there are five levels of competence but there can be more or less levels provided that each level can be clearly defined. More levels would allow the trainer more flexibility to work with, which is advantageous for students who require more time to learn.

These definitions refer to the amount of assistance the trainer has to provide, for example level 3 will require "occasional" intervention by the trainer and "acceptable, with effort" driver performance, while level 5 will require "No longer needed" intervention by the trainer and "Very well done, with no effort" driver performance. Trainers have to be particularly careful to recognise the student's correct level of competence.

In conclusion Driver Trainers who do not use this recognised system of training will find "getting the message over" extremely difficult, if not impossible. The Australian Driver Trainers Association has as its primary aim to press ahead with plans to promote the training packages Australia wide and will implement training seminars to help practitioners adopt the system.

AUDIT

Another ADTA initiative has been to develop a quality management system for driving schools known as the Model Driving School. This management system complies with international standard toward ISO 9002 and has already made a big difference to the way the accredited Schools run their organizations.

The Model Driving School provides an audit system for the training and can locate areas of low performance so that rectification procedures can be put into place. When Competency Based Training and Assessment is implemented a comprehensive auditing program is essential to its success and the Model Driving School simplifies the process.