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# A Series of Unfortunate Events

## My Standards Check and I

Finally, after a long time waiting I have undertaken my 'Standards Check'. Let me provide a bit of background to me and my relationship with the Standards Check. Then I will take you through my day and post-Check reflections in the hope that it will help others survive and succeed in the process.

### **In the Beginning....**

...there was a Check Test. On the 7th April 2014 the DVSA changed the format of the ongoing quality control for Driving Instructors. Running up to this there was worry and concern - nobody likes unknown change - as well as a lot of myth and misunderstandings forming. Training companies were launching courses throughout the industry, some before the official guidance was confirmed. Between this and the cost of investing in an event that might not happen for 4 years, I spoke to a lot of wary ADIs looking for a simple yet accurate overview. I sat down, gathered the facts and released my findings, which has helped form the guidance for 1000's of ADIs since. (Available at [www.badis.co.uk/dvsa\\_standardscheck\\_guide](http://www.badis.co.uk/dvsa_standardscheck_guide)) I knew it was only a matter of time before I would be reading through it with my own Standards Check in mind.

### **The Brown Letter of Doom**

The DVSA summons appeared. Basically it couldn't have been a worse time. My letter arrived after I ruptured the ACL (anterior cruciate ligament) in my knee. This required replacement and an unknown time off the road (probably 4-6 weeks). The NHS envelope, as expected, followed the DVSA's through the door a week later...

The DVSA were great! I called, provided evidence, and they rebooked me. Job done..... Then the NHS cancelled! I called the NHS who couldn't provide a specific date, they kept promising potential timeframes, but couldn't provide an appointment. **And then I made my**

**first mistake!** I was honest with the DVSA - I called to address the fact that the provisional date for my op was at the same time as the Standards Check, though I had no formal date through. Without a date they can't move it.

The DVSA said "It's better to get it out the way you know." I WANTED to take it! I'd been trying since March 2014 and been refused! I was frustrated and stressed, so I wrote them an email explaining:

I really want to take my SC.

I have cleared my diary twice for my op, so had no pupils.

I had no income.

I wanted to be judged on what I do, and treat the SC with some value.

I want to be proud of my result, and not be distracted.

I did NOT just want to 'get it out the way'!

They moved it.....(Thank you DVSA).....I got a date from the NHS.....They cancelled my operation!..... (Thank you NHS).....

*Top Tip:* I called the NHS and firmly but politely said that without a date the DVSA would take my badge, but before then I would be bankrupt! They immediately sent me privately, funded through the NHS.

The appointment came through to go privately..... The date was 1 week before my NEW SC date!..... I kept quiet! ..... I waited until I was bed ridden and emailed the DVSA. I provided evidence, plus the photo of my knee as support (and an invitation to follow #kneewatch on Facebook - they didn't), they moved it (Thank you DVSA and NHS!)

*The moral of all this?* **Deal with it, don't sit on it!** The DVSA are understanding and supportive with genuine issues. So are the NHS.

### **Test Planning and Preparation**

As mentioned, I'd done my homework - and published it for others - so I understood the process on paper and the marking sheet. I'd also recently followed Blaine Walsh through his video diary of his own experience. A real comfort to me as he is in a position I can relate to.

This is my version of a journal and I will try to be honest, even if it's not necessarily the 'right' thing to say.

It was time to plan, I sat and thought about it. I discussed it with people I trust and respect, *and* my business partner Ian ;), I came to a conclusion:

I didn't care.....

Let me be clear, I think the Standards Check is important. I think it has a role to play and does this reasonably well. But as an ADI personally I don't hold to DVSA values, I don't value the driving test, and a lot of what/how I teach is not 'mainstream' (in DVSA terms). I am far from an 'Instructor', but hate 'Coach' as a phrase. I searched for my niche inside of the Standards Check and couldn't find a way to feel like it mattered to me.

- Some told me I was under pressure to do well as I'd advised so many. I wasn't doing it for them, I was doing it for me.
- Some told me to 'play the game'. I valued what I did too much to deliver a 'fake' lesson.
- And some told me to 'just turn up and teach' - but that is an easy way to fail!

This left me struggling with how to approach it, but not as concerned as I felt I should be.

Lucky for me, I am Event Organiser (or some such title) for the SELKENT ADI group. So 'conveniently' I got my good friend Louise Walsh and husband Blaine along for the meeting before my Check date. I'd heard them discuss it before - but this time it was personal. The instructors in the room wanted to instruct. The coaches wanted to coach. And I wanted to be me....

It helped! **I found my plan, niche and comfort zone.** Which is what I took to the Standards Check. (I also arranged a back up, AND an emergency 'Mum, help!' plan in case it all fell apart.

## **Check Wednesday, Disaster Thursday**

It's the last lesson on Thursday (a new pupil! The one I'm taking to the Check) and I get a car fault. Not a little one, a proper Christmas tree impression. Bells, whistles, a procession of lights spiralling across the dash. Great! We limped through the lesson, and dumped it on the Peugeot forecourt. They had it in all Friday and repaired for a FULL Bank Holiday weekend of lessons and 11-17 training.... 1 hour into Saturday and it starts again! (When writing I am 1.5 weeks on and still awaiting a diagnosis and repair! n.b. It was finally fixed after 3 weeks!) The car returned to Peugeot Tuesday morning with orders I needed it for Wednesday under pain of death. Luckily I was able to use Ian's (business partner) car for the Standards Check, as long as he had a vehicle for himself. Sometimes you wonder if you've offended the God of ADIs - but then remember he left the industry to its own devices long ago! No added pressure!

## **The Day and All it Held**

My first plan worked - pupil was up, I arrived, I had a car. I even had a (vague) plan.

One of the suggestions I took from Louise's Q&A session was not to tell the pupil. I just told him it was the norm, examiners pick awesome lessons to sit in on and his was one. No pressure, and I felt more comfortable going to it.

Pupil profile:

George, 17 years old. Sensible, logical, intelligent, reasonably confident and reasonably chatty. For the NLPers he is very Audio Digital, liking processes, facts and figures.

2 hours experience pre-Standards Check - 'Moving off and Stopping', etc.

The pupil I got:

George, 17 years old. Sensible, logical, intelligent, NOT AT ALL confident and NOT AT ALL chatty.

I drove us to the test centre as pre-agreed. Chatted along the way about related information, but kept it laid back. I parked up and left George in the car while I found myself a SE....

It was my usual SE, Alison. I'd had Alison for my ADI2, ADI3, Check Test AND Fleet Check Test. She treated me as if the test was a formality that I just had to get through, which

was nice. (She knew about my operation - whether down to the grapevine or the cancellations I am not sure) I explained that George didn't know the details of the Standards Check, and that was fine with her. I told her he was 2 hours in and we were headed for a junctions lesson. We jumped in the car, she thanked George for allowing her to observe and I got stuck in. (Yes, I was now nervous, and straight back in my Part 3 test! But determined to remember it was a 'normal lesson'!)

### **The Lesson Began**

I asked George to recap the previous lesson. I didn't quite get the answer I expected, but the NLP-er (Neuro Linguistic Programming - Ian and I run a course for Instructors in understanding communication) in me believes "The meaning of the question is the answer it receives". George went verbally through the 'routine' he had learnt. Clutch down, 1st Gear, Set the Gas,.... This told me his concern was, as expected, the step by step. He was routine based, liked order and understanding and wanted it all to *make sense*.

I next asked him what he thought the next logical step in his learning would be. He said he wasn't sure. So I followed with "First lesson we tackled the car - how that worked, and what things did. Now you have a handle to that, what information will help you stay safe next?"

"How the roads work?" He said.

We agreed to go and tackle junctions, how they work, and how to drive them (in their simplest form). He asked me to drive to the location and I discussed the 'Signals' being given by other cars on the way.

We parked up, switched seats and I got George to drive the first stretch, stopping near an emerging junction. I reminded him I was there to help and asked what he needed from me. He asked for a full talk through. **I didn't**, he didn't need it. Many will tell you this is a way to fail, but what he was saying is 'I need support'. I just set him going and he took over. He did it perfectly, talked me through what he had learnt. and pulled away. We rounded a corner, and a mass of parked cars meant I had to give additional help.

**Error 1!** I **totally** missed a car reversing beyond the parked vehicles. (I am still kicking myself) First thing I knew was George saying "Should I brake for them?" I dealt with it, but I was mainly dealing with the fact I had just failed (In my head at least). I carried on, but was *very* conscious of the SEs presence and struggled to focus on the task in hand. Importantly I

pulled him over and we discussed it. (In hindsight I should've handled it much better.) We recapped what George had just done, and he was happy. So we moved on to junctions.

This approach is one I do with all my pupils. It gives a huge insight into how they think, what they know, and what they understand. It also covers a large chunk of the foundations of driving knowledge. Let me run you through it.

I draw an unmarked crossroads on my whiteboard. I then tell the pupil they have been given a job:

Last night cars were invented, conveniently there are these weird tarmac things everywhere (convenient!) and they have to set the rules on how they work. They can do anything, it doesn't have to be real life, it just has to work. I have had flying cars before on 3 layers! But squash them down and they work perfectly! Not that I was expecting anything like this from the logical and ordered George.

It was the hardest work this lesson has been! I was frantically drawing blood out of the stone, but we got there. A good bit of coaching through the decisions and choices. A lot of what if... questions. We got a result, and he showed genuine understanding by the end of it. (We are now 30 mins in) Next we discussed the approach to the junctions, George set a routine based on the 'Limited' approach introduced in lesson 1 - Look, Tell, Do (LTD) and went to practice. This was fine, mainly Q & A. **Error 2** The only issue was when he stalled in a meeting situation. In the debrief I was criticised for 'letting him stall'. In my world **STALL** stands for **S**top **T**hink **A**nd **L**earn a **L**esson, which we did. I agree I could've handled it better. I was struggling with the 1 hour (in fact less) structure, when I normally do 2 hours. I should've ignored the time and dug deeper.

We headed back but hit traffic! Nightmare! I thought we covered most of the issues while in traffic, so when back and I asked George for a quick recap, and left him to complete the 'Reflective Log' (Neil Beaver and Neil Snow) on the iPad. He knew how and we'd discussed that this reflective approach was for his benefit. **Error 3**. I clearly didn't make this obvious enough. Unfortunately I failed to notice this on the mark sheet until I had left, and saw no benefit in going back after the fact. I was marked down for lack of reflection. I don't see how I could do more, and think my understanding of reflection and its benefits differ from those of the DVSA, or at least my SE. Next time I will make more of an effort to make it obvious, or discuss it with the SE.

## **The Debrief**

As explained above Alison raised two issues specifically. The reversing car, and the stall. She also criticised my use of language - “Right of way” instead of “Priority” as they might ‘take it’ and cause issue. At the time I accepted it. In reflection I do not feel it an issue inside of my full and comprehensive training structure. The reflection wasn't mentioned, just marked and I spotted afterwards. The result was 45/52 and a Grade A.

## **In Reflection**

I went through a range of thoughts and emotions.

I wanted to deliver a ‘normal lesson’, I achieved this. I wanted to be true to what I do, I achieved this. I wanted an A, I got one. So I was happy.

If I was doing it again I might take a pupil with a few more hours under their belt. But he did brilliantly - if a little quieter than usual. My main want would be a different SE. Nothing against the one I had, I thought she was pretty spot on. It’s just our history, I’d like a fresh opinion and feedback on what I am doing. Also I feel like I’m back in my P3 every time!

## **My Advice to Others**

Get some advice or training from someone who understands the process. My experience with those that fail is often that they don’t agree with the examiner, or they don’t know what they did wrong.

Know the mark sheet. A wise ADI once told me when taking any test there are two criteria. 1. Know the marking criteria. 2. Be able to meet it.

Be honest to what you do. Get marked on your own style and lesson type.

Be aware, a ‘normal’ lesson won’t cut it. There are some things that need to be included, avoided or managed differently based on the Examiner in the back.

Don’t dismiss the result. The Standards Check is the best criteria we have had for the process. It may still have its flaws, but it’s pretty comprehensive. If learning is happening, you will be successful. If you don’t get the result you like, look at why and see what you could adapt. I have not yet met a ‘B’ for whom the relevant changes, if taken into their lessons, wouldn't improve from them. The same applies to many As too.

Good luck with yours, and I am happy to help if I can.

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