

Pre-MOT checklist

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QUICK ANSWER

This free pre-MOT checklist covers 28 checks you can do yourself in about 35 minutes, without tools. It targets the failures that are cheapest to prevent — lights, tyres, wipers, washers, warning lamps and number plates — so you are not paying for a retest over a blown bulb.

How to use it

Work through it about a week before the test, so there is time to fix anything you find. Each item says how to check it and what happens if you do not. None of it needs tools beyond a tyre pressure gauge, and most of it needs nothing at all.

One thing this generic list cannot know is what the tester already flagged on your car last time. Advisories are a written warning of what will fail next, and they are the single best guide to what to fix first. Build a checklist for your own vehicle to have those added automatically.

Lights

about 5 min

☐ Headlights, main beam and sidelights

Switch each on in turn and walk round the car. Check both dipped beams look the same brightness and colour.

One faded or mismatched bulb is a failure, and a pair that has aged differently is easy to miss from the driver's seat.

☐ Brake lights, including the high-level one

Reverse up to a window or garage door at dusk and press the pedal, or have someone watch.

Nothing on the dashboard tells you a brake light has failed, so this is the single most commonly missed check.

☐ Indicators, hazards and side repeaters

Try each side, then the hazards. A tell-tale flashing at double speed means a bulb has gone.

Indicators must flash between 60 and 120 times a minute, so a failed bulb fails the test even though the others still work.

☐ **Rear fog light and reversing lights**

Switch the rear fog on and check it from behind. Select reverse with the ignition on for the reversing lamps.
Rear fog lights are rarely used and often fail unnoticed for years.

☐ **Number plate light**

Look at the rear plate with the sidelights on.
A dead plate lamp is a failure, and it is the one nobody ever checks.

Tyres and wheels

about 10 min

☐ **Tread depth across the full width**

Check the inner edge, middle and outer edge of each tyre. A 20p coin works: if the outer band is hidden, you have more than 1.6mm.
The limit applies across the central three-quarters of the tyre, so plenty of tread in the middle will not save an edge worn to the cords.

☐ **Cuts, bulges and cracking**

Run your eye along both sidewalls, turning the wheels to full lock to see the inner faces.
A bulge or exposed cord is a dangerous defect, which means the car cannot legally be driven away from the test.

☐ **Tyre pressures**

Check when cold against the plate in the door shut or filler flap.
Under-inflation wears both shoulders and can trigger the pressure monitoring warning, which is itself a failure item.

☐ **Uneven wear across an edge**

Compare the inner and outer edges of each front tyre.
One-sided wear usually means alignment or a worn suspension joint, so a new tyre alone will go the same way.

Glass and visibility

about 5 min

☐ **Windscreen chips and cracks**

Sit in the driver's seat and look for damage in the area the wipers clear, especially directly ahead of you.
Anything over 10mm in the strip in front of the driver fails, and over 40mm elsewhere in the swept area.

☐ **Wiper blades**

Wet the screen and run them. Look for smearing, juddering or torn rubber.
Blades that do not clear the screen properly are a failure and cost a few pounds to replace.

☐ **Washer fluid**

Top the bottle up and check both jets actually reach the screen.
An empty washer bottle is a straight failure, and it is the most avoidable one on this list.

☐ **Mirrors**

Check all three are present, secure and not cracked.

A mirror hanging loose or missing its glass is a failure.

☐ **Anything stuck to the screen**

Remove satnav mounts, air fresheners, parking permits and stickers from the wiped area.

Obstructions in the driver's view are a failure and take seconds to remove.

Inside the car

about 5 min

☐ **Warning lamps**

Turn the ignition to the second position without starting. Watch the airbag, ABS, engine management, power steering and tyre pressure lamps illuminate, then start the engine and confirm they go out.

Any of those staying lit is a major defect. A bulb that never illuminates at all is also a failure, because it cannot warn you.

☐ **Seat belts**

Pull each belt fully out and look for fraying or cuts. Give each a sharp tug to check it locks, and check it retracts cleanly.

Every belt fitted to the car is tested, including the ones in the back that never get used.

☐ **Driver's seat**

Check it adjusts and locks firmly in position.

A seat that slides under braking is a failure.

☐ **Horn**

Press it.

It must be loud and continuous. Novelty multi-tone horns are not permitted.

☐ **Doors and boot**

Open and close each from inside and out, including the bonnet catch.

A door that will not latch securely, or a bonnet that only holds on the safety catch, is a failure.

Outside and under the bonnet

about 5 min

☐ **Number plates**

Check both are secure, clean, uncracked and correctly spaced with the standard font.

Rearranged spacing to make a private plate 'read' as a word is an immediate failure.

☐ **Brake fluid level**

Look at the reservoir under the bonnet against its minimum mark.

Below minimum is a major defect. A level that keeps dropping means a leak, which is more serious than the test result.

☐ **Engine oil and coolant**

Check the dipstick and the coolant expansion bottle.

Not a test item in itself, but the emissions test runs the engine hard and a low or filthy oil level makes a marginal result worse.

☐ **Obvious leaks**

Look under the car where it normally parks.

A significant fluid leak can fail the test, and brake fluid or oil on a disc is a serious safety matter.

☐ **Exhaust**

Start the engine and listen at the back for blowing, and check the tailpipe is not hanging loose.

A leaking or insecure exhaust fails, and a noisy one will not pass the noise assessment either.

Before you go

about 5 min

☐ **Clear the boot and the cabin**

Take out anything heavy or loose, especially over the rear axle.

The tester needs access to seat belts, the boot floor and the spare wheel well, and a loaded car can skew the brake test.

☐ **Put some fuel in it**

Make sure there is more than a splash in the tank.

The emissions test needs the engine run at speed, and a tester can refuse the test if the level is too low.

☐ **Take the locking wheel nut key**

Find it and leave it in the car.

Without it the wheels cannot come off, and a tester may be unable to complete parts of the inspection.

☐ **Bring last year's certificate**

Or at least know what was advised on it.

Last year's advisories are the tester telling you in writing what will fail next — they are the best possible guide to what to fix first.

Notes

Space to write down anything you find, and what it cost.
