

# How to Assess Driver Competence: The Four-Step Framework

A practical guide for safer, compliant fleets



Research-led solutions for safer driving



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## Why assessing competence matters?

Fleet collisions are rarely just “accidents” — they’re the result of predictable risks. To manage occupational road risk effectively, employers must ensure that every driver is fit, legal, and competent to drive safely.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) identifies four key pillars of driver competence. Together, they provide a structured approach that helps organisations comply with legislation, reduce collisions, and improve safety culture.

This guide explains each pillar and how to apply it in your fleet.



## 1. Licence and Certification Checks

Before assessing anything else, start with the basics — is every driver legally permitted and properly certified to operate the vehicle they drive?



- Verify the driver’s licence type matches the vehicle category.
- Conduct regular DVLA checks to confirm validity and flag penalty points or suspensions.
- Record any specialist qualifications such as Driver CPC, ADR (for hazardous goods), or machinery-specific certificates.
- Maintain up-to-date records of each driver’s licence, endorsements, and renewal dates.

### Top Tip

Automate licence checks through a third-party provider to reduce admin time and ensure nothing slips through the cracks.

## 2. Capability Assessment

A valid licence doesn't always mean a capable driver. The next step is to understand how well your drivers can actually perform behind the wheel.

- Use on-road assessments or virtual simulations to measure observation, awareness, and planning.
- Conduct safety audits or questionnaires to gauge knowledge and decision-making.
- Include a practical evaluation for new recruits and for drivers involved in incidents.
- Capture feedback from trainers and supervisors to identify common skill gaps.

### Include hazard perception testing

Beyond traditional driving assessments, a driver's ability to anticipate hazards, known as **hazard perception**, is the only cognitive skill that has been consistently linked to collision risk.



Video-based hazard perception assessments give fleet managers valuable insights into their drivers' awareness and decision-making utilising a safe and standardised format.

Combined with on-road training and observation, these tools provide help you identify those drivers who need further support in detecting and avoiding hazards, helping you to target training where it's most needed.

Remember: Competence includes perception, prediction, and decision-making — not just vehicle control.

## 3. Targeted Training and Development

Once you understand each driver's capability, you can tailor training accordingly.

Training should be both initial and ongoing, designed to prevent skill fade and maintain awareness.

- Offer site- and job-specific modules (urban delivery, long-haul motorway, etc.).
- Integrate refresher training into annual or biannual cycles.
- Use data from assessments — including hazard-perception results — to prioritise high-risk drivers or areas of weakness.
- Combine e-learning, workshops, and video-based training to reinforce real-world decision-making.

### Pro Tip

Link every training plan to measurable outcomes (e.g., reductions in collisions, fuel use, or insurance claims).

## 4. Maintain Records and Review Progress

Competence management is not a one-time exercise — it's an ongoing process. Every driver should have a training record that documents assessments, qualifications, and refresher dates.

- Store all data digitally for easy retrieval and audit compliance.
- Schedule reviews at least annually to track improvements and identify gaps.
- Use aggregated data to identify trends across your fleet — for example, common problem areas like following distance or lane discipline.



Create a proactive system that continuously improves, rather than only reacting after incidents occur.

## Modern Methods for Measuring Competence

Traditional checks and on-road observations remain essential, but new video-based tools, such as hazard perception and risk-taking assessments, enable fleets to measure awareness, decision-making, and risk attitude objectively.

These methods help identify potential problems before incidents happen, allowing targeted interventions that improve safety and efficiency across the fleet.

## The benefits of a structured approach

By implementing this four-step framework, fleet managers can:

- ✓ Demonstrate compliance with health and safety laws
- ✓ Reduce collision frequency and associated costs
- ✓ Target training resources more effectively
- ✓ Strengthen safety culture and driver accountability



This proactive approach transforms driver competence from an administrative task into a measurable safety strategy.

### Next Step

Discover where your fleet stands.

Use our [Fleet Safety Readiness Checklist](#) to benchmark your current driver assessment and training practices.

