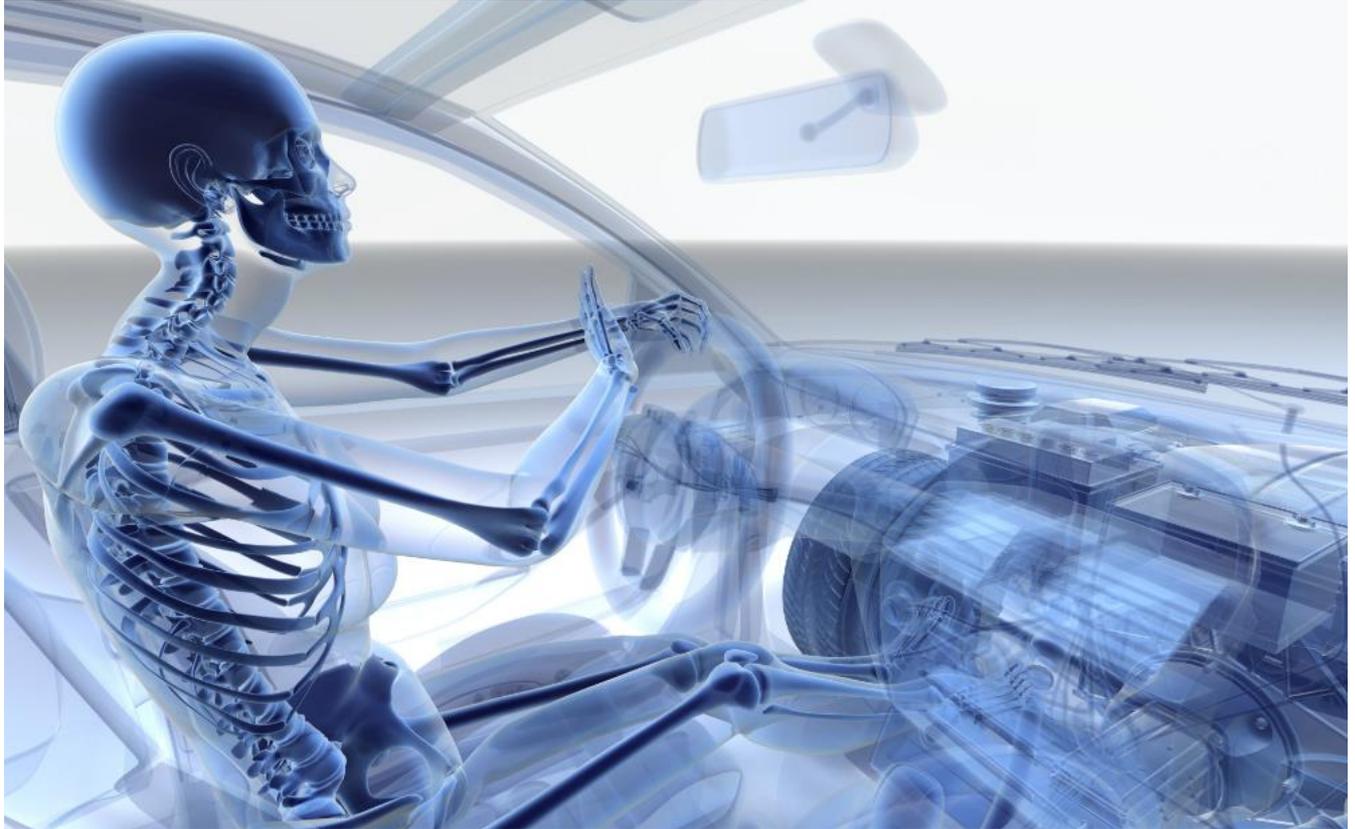




GAM GUIDANCE NOTE No. 5: HOW TO FIND THE BEST SEATING POSITION IN ANY CAR



Why worry about how you are sitting?

After all, it's something that comes naturally to us all the time.

Driving, though, is a bit different. You are not just sitting for comfort, although that's important. Sitting well is an essential part of driving safely and smoothly, and that means:

- Having full control over the car.
- Seeing everything you need to, inside the car, in front of you, at the side and behind.
- Minimising stress and staying alert, especially on long journeys.

And these all interact. If you do not have full control or vision, you will be stressed, and if you are in discomfort or even pain you will be just as stressed. And if you are stressed it's hard to drive smoothly and safely, let alone at your best. Sitting well contributes to each part of IPSGA.



Most modern cars have seats that can be adjusted in three or four or more directions, sometimes with the help of electricity. Most have a steering wheel that can be adjusted as well. All have mirrors that can be set. A few have adjustable pedals. But none have windows that you can move!

And your body? That's the tricky bit. It adjusts a bit, but for most of us it is more or less fixed by now, and not everyone has the same range of motion in their back, limbs and neck. Even having very small or very large feet can make a difference. So, getting it right for you can mean a bit of fiddling around, but it is worth it if you are going to be a safe, smooth driver and get out of the car after hours at the wheel still feeling fresh and alert.

What does "full control" mean?

- Being seated firmly, so you stay steady in your seat however much the car itself is moving.
- Being able to use all the pedals to the maximum travel needed for anything you have to do; usually how far down you need to push the clutch in a manual will be the key factor. In an automatic, it will usually be about the brake.
- Can you squeeze the brake and accelerator gently enough to get smooth stopping and motion, and fast enough if you need to stop or move quickly?
- Being able to move the steering wheel right round using push-pull from the quarter to three position and still keep some flex in your arms — and definitely without having to lean forward in your seat.
- Being able to reach the gear shift or auto transmission selector and move it to every position, again without leaning forward out of the seat.
- Do not forget the handbrake, although this can be tricky: there are some cars where you must reach back behind you if you are short and have got the seat in the right position for everything else. You are much less likely to need it in a hurry, so make sure the other things are right first.
- Secondary controls like the heater and infotainment controls.

"Seeing everything you need to"

- Your sitting position can have a big impact on what you can see; you cannot apply IPSSGA if you cannot see what is unfolding around you.
- Identify the key things you must be able to see.
- Inside the car: key instruments (especially the speedometer), some secondary controls that do not just fall to hand under muscle-memory (we do not usually have to look for the gearshift or the indicators). But what about your satnav if you need it?
- In front of you: the most important area. Does your seat position help you see not just a long way ahead, but quite close to the car (for example, for "tyres and tarmac")? Problems can be because you might have the seat too



low and the instrument panel, or the satnav, is creating blindspots. If you are very tall, you might need to move things around so that the top of the windscreen does not cut off your view as you go downhill or uphill.

- At the side, especially when you look over your shoulder: do you need to consider pillars that might be blocking something?
- Behind: this is normally the role of mirrors, and they can usually be adjusted when you have got everything else right.

“Minimising stress and staying alert”

- In the right position you will feel relaxed, you will be able to see around you and control the car without getting cramped or getting pins and needles, and you will not get pain when you need to move your hands, arms, legs or neck to control the car or see something that is not dead ahead.
- You will feel of a piece with the car (and at peace with the car), and not jostled or jerked around as the car moves.
- We are all different shapes and sizes, some of us have less mobility because of age or disability so allow for that: you may have to make some trade-offs to ensure control and vision, in which case take extra breaks to make sure you are controlling the physical stress.
- The least stressful position in a car may not feel entirely natural compared with how you sit anywhere else, but do not rush to change everything at once: see how it feels at the end of an hour or more driving.
- When you sit in the car, even if you haven't changed the seat or the controls, take a few seconds just to settle your body in firmly, flex your limbs and neck, practice your reach to all the controls and look out at the world around you with your driving head on.

So that's it. There are some detailed suggestions next for how to get there. But they are suggestions: in the end, it's about experimenting until you know you are in control, with good vision, and free from stress.

Oh, and one last thing. Remember: if someone else has driven the car, you will need to reset the seat and wheel to your own preference. And don't forget the mirrors!

A recommended adjustment sequence

Also have a look at Reg Local's video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VK2bEC1eqBc>

Note: Some cars have fewer seat adjustment mechanisms than others, but the same sequence should still be followed for best outcomes, even when there are fewer adjustment facilities.

1. Always ask the Associate to bring their car owner's handbook or manual with them on IAM observed runs, to help with explanation of specific driver controls and information systems and their car's particular driving features and their use.



2. Position the base of the back (bottom) right into and up against the bottom of the car seat backrest.
3. If available - raise the car seat as high as convenient and comfortable, ensuring a good all-round outside view with sufficient clear headroom.
4. Move the car seat forward or back so that both feet can be placed under the pedals in the foot well and the legs are not fully stretched when the clutch pedal (in a manual) is fully depressed.
5. If available - adjust the car seat cushion tilt mechanism so that the cushion is comfortably under both thighs with the feet at the bottom of the foot well or with the pedals fully depressed.
6. If available - adjust the car seat's movable squab forward so that it is extended to about 2 inches (or 2 or 3 fingers breadth) short of under the knee joints.
7. Adjust the car seat backrest tilt mechanism backwards for comfort and adjust for good lumbar support (if available) with the shoulders relaxed into the seat back.
8. Keeping the shoulders on the car seat backrest, extend both arms either side of the steering wheel with the wrists close to the rim at the widest point. If available, adjust the steering column in or out to bring it level with the extended wrists on both sides of the wheel rim.
9. If the steering column does not adjust, move the backrest tilt forward so that the extended wrists are in line with the steering wheel rim on each side.
10. If available - move the steering column up or down so that both main instrument dials are clearly visible and unobstructed - then clamp the steering column. If this adjustment is not available, try to achieve the same good view of the dials by adjusting the seat up or down.
11. With both shoulders comfortably back against the backrest, extend each arm in turn and close the hands lightly on the top centre of the steering wheel. If this extended grip is not comfortable and relaxed, adjust the backrest forward for full handling of the steering wheel.
12. Adjust the height and position of the headrest so that the top of the headrest is in line with the top of the head and the headrest is positioned about one inch behind the head in the normal driving position.
13. Check the new seating position for comfort with hands on the wheel at a quarter to three and check your ability to reach all the manual controls.
14. Adjust the rear view and side mirrors to ensure good rear vision with the nearside mirror tilted slightly down to allow sight of the kerb line in towns.
15. Put the seat belt on and adjust the height of seat belt's top anchor point adjustment mechanism for comfort over the shoulder.
16. Carry out a short test drive to check that all the adjustments you have made work well, are clicked safely in position and that the final position is comfortable. If you are happy, then lock into memory (if available) your personal seating position. If you don't have memory seats, then you can always use little stickers or even a marker pen to get it back quickly to how you need it.
17. When you get the chance, check how you feel after at least an hour at the wheel, and change on thing at a time until you get it right.



	<p>1. EMPTY YOUR POCKETS</p> <p>Bulky items affect your seating position, so put your wallet, 'phone or house keys safely elsewhere in the car so you can concentrate on getting comfortable.</p>
	<p>2. SIT BACK, SIT STRAIGHT</p> <p>Now make sure all of your back is touching the back of the seat. Then start adjusting the back of the seat so your spine and pelvis are straight.</p> <p>You do not want to feel as though you are leaning backwards or tipping forwards. It might feel different from what you're used to, but don't worry.</p>
<p>3. REST YOUR THIGHS</p> <p>For comfortable driving your thighs should be comfortably at rest on the seat and you shouldn't be able to feel any pressure points.</p>	
	<p>4. DISTANCE TO PEDALS</p> <p>Adjust the seat base backwards or forwards to set the distance from the pedals. Your knee should be slightly bent when the pedals are fully down</p>



5. ELBOWS – SLIGHTLY BENT

Your elbows should be slightly bent while reaching for the steering wheel. Avoid the temptation to sit hunched over the wheel.

You can adjust position of the wheel, but make sure you can see all the dashboard instruments clearly. Most steering columns can be adjusted for height and reach.



6. SHOULDERS IN CONTACT

Your shoulders should be in contact with the seat, even when you are turning the steering wheel. Sitting straight (point 3) will help you with this.

7. HEADREST HEIGHT

Adjust the headrest so it's at the same height as the top of your head. While some cars have sports seats that integrate the seat back and headrest, most will require you to put the head rest at the correct height.



8. ADJUST YOUR MIRRORS

Prevent neck strain by making sure your rear-view and side mirrors are properly adjusted. External mirrors can be adjusted horizontally and vertically.

It's easy to check that you've got this right: You should be able to see the traffic behind you without having to crane your neck.

9. TAKE BREAKS

Even when you're perfectly positioned in the driver's seat you'll still need a break on a longer journey. [The Highway Code](#), the UK's rules of the road, recommends stopping for at least 15 minutes every two hours. It's no good just pulling over for a moment. When you stop for a break you should change your position – get out of your car, go for a short walk. A few minutes away from the wheel can make all the difference; it will also improve your concentration, making your journey safer as well as more comfortable.



10. LUMBAR SUPPORT

If your car has adjustable lumbar support, set it so you feel an even pressure from your hips to your shoulders – it should comfortably fill the arch of your back.

On cars with electric lumbar support adjustment, you can use the front-back and up-down controls to find the most comfortable and supportive position. For cars with manual lumbar adjustment, turn the knob on the side of the seat to get the best position.

If your car doesn't have adjustable support, you can use a lumbar pillow. These are widely available from a range of suppliers. Some people also use these products to help them sit comfortably at a desk.

You can even use a rolled-up towel for temporary lumbar support. This isn't ideal as it will need to be adjusted every time you get in the car, but it's better than nothing.

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