

ECLIPSE

A Practical Guide to Digital Tachographs

For HGV Drivers

Driver Guidance: A practical driver guide covering digital and smart tachographs, manual entries, common mistakes, printouts and a short guide to analogue tachographs.

Professional Drivers. Properly Compliant.

Based on current DVSA/GOV.UK guidance as at September 2026. This guide is for practical guidance only and does not replace legislation or official guidance.

1. What Does a Tachograph Record?

A tachograph provides a legal record of a driver's activities and certain vehicle information. Depending on the equipment fitted, it can record:

- Driving time
- Other work
- Breaks and rest
- Periods of Availability (POA)
- Vehicle speed
- Distance travelled
- Certain vehicle and location information

Modern Smart Tachograph 2 units provide additional location and border-crossing functionality. The main tachograph types in use are analogue, digital, Smart Tachograph 1 and Smart Tachograph 2.

2. Your Driver Card

When driving an in-scope vehicle fitted with a digital or smart tachograph, you must use your own digital driver card.

- Only use your own card.
- Never allow another driver to use your card.
- Insert your card before moving the vehicle.
- Use Slot 1 when you are driving.
- Use Slot 2 when you are the second driver during multi-manning.
- Keep the card clean and protected from damage.
- Check that the information recorded against your card is accurate.

Important: Simply forgetting your driver card does not normally allow you to drive without it.

3. The Four Main Tachograph Modes

Driving – steering-wheel symbol

The tachograph normally selects driving automatically once the vehicle starts moving. This records time spent actually driving the vehicle.

Other Work – crossed-hammers symbol

Use this for work other than driving, including:

- Loading and unloading
- Vehicle checks
- Refuelling

- Cleaning
- Completing paperwork
- Warehouse or yard work
- Preparing the vehicle
- Waiting where you are required to perform work

Vehicle checks at the start of the shift are other work — not rest.

Period of Availability – POA

POA may be used when you are available for work but are not required to work and the duration of the waiting period is known in advance. It can also apply in specific multi-manning or ferry/train situations.

POA is not automatically a break and should not be used simply because the vehicle is stationary.

Break or Rest – bed symbol

Use this when you are genuinely taking a driving break, daily rest or weekly rest. During a break or rest you must not perform other work and must generally be able to dispose freely of your time.

4. Starting Your Shift

1. Carry out your normal vehicle checks.
2. Insert your driver card into Slot 1.
3. Allow the tachograph to read the card.
4. Check the date and time displayed.
5. Complete any required manual entry.
6. Confirm your start country when requested.
7. Select the correct activity.
8. Make sure the tachograph is ready before moving the vehicle.

Do not simply press through the questions without reading them. An incorrect manual entry can create a wrong record covering hours or even days.

5. Manual Entries

Manual entries are essential because the tachograph can only automatically record activity while your card is inserted and the equipment is in use. If you have carried out activities while your card was not inserted, those activities may need to be added manually.

Example

You finish work at 18:00 on Monday and start again at 06:00 on Tuesday. When you insert your card on Tuesday morning, the tachograph may ask what happened between removing the card and inserting it again. If you were genuinely off duty, the correct manual entry would be 18:00 Monday to 06:00 Tuesday as REST.

Manual entries may be required for:

- Other work before collecting the vehicle
- Other work after leaving a vehicle
- Daily or weekly rest
- Annual leave
- Sick leave
- Work undertaken away from the vehicle
- Periods of Availability
- Activities where the tachograph was unavailable

Golden rule: Do not automatically enter every unexplained period as rest. The entry must reflect what you were actually doing.

6. Working for More Than One Employer

This is particularly important for agency drivers. Your tachograph record must reflect your whole working day, not merely the hours worked for one company.

Example: 06:00–10:00 work for Employer A; 10:00–11:00 genuine break; 11:00–19:00 HGV driving for Employer B. The work for Employer A still counts and must be properly recorded.

Drivers must tell Eclipse and the client about any other work which could affect their legal driving or working time.

7. The 4½-Hour Driving Rule

Under the assimilated drivers' hours rules, you must normally take a break totalling at least 45 minutes after no more than 4 hours 30 minutes of driving.

The break can normally be taken as either 45 minutes continuously, or split into at least 15 minutes followed by at least 30 minutes, in that order. After completing the qualifying break, a new 4½-hour driving period begins.

8. Daily and Weekly Driving Limits

Rule	Limit
Normal daily driving	9 hours

Extended daily driving	10 hours, on no more than two days in a fixed week
Maximum in one fixed week	56 hours
Maximum over two consecutive fixed weeks	90 hours

A fixed week runs from 00:00 Monday to 24:00 Sunday.

9. Daily Rest

The normal daily rest requirement is 11 hours. A regular daily rest can also be split into at least 3 hours followed by at least 9 hours, giving a minimum total of 12 hours.

A reduced daily rest is at least 9 hours but less than 11 hours. Normally, no more than three reduced daily rests may be taken between two weekly rest periods.

10. Weekly Rest

A regular weekly rest is at least 45 consecutive hours. A reduced weekly rest is at least 24 consecutive hours but less than 45 hours and is subject to compensation requirements and other restrictions.

International operations have additional provisions, so drivers on international journeys must understand the rules applying to the particular journey.

11. Removing Your Card at the End of the Shift

1. Stop the vehicle safely.
2. Complete any necessary activities.
3. Select the correct mode.
4. Request card ejection.
5. Enter the country where your duty ends when required.
6. Check the information displayed.
7. Remove the card and keep it secure.

If you remove your card and then spend 30 minutes completing paperwork, your working day did not finish when the card came out. That time is other work and must still be accounted for.

12. Changing Vehicles During the Day

- Eject your card correctly from the first vehicle.
- Enter the finishing country if required.
- Insert your card into the next vehicle.
- Complete any necessary manual entries.

- Ensure there are no unexplained gaps.

13. Multi-Manning

Where two drivers are operating a vehicle, the driver normally uses Slot 1 and the second driver Slot 2. When drivers swap, the new driver must be recorded in Slot 1 and the second driver in Slot 2.

Some tachographs automatically record the second driver's time while the vehicle is moving as POA. Other work must still be correctly recorded.

14. What if You Make a Mistake?

Do not ignore it. Digital tachograph records generally cannot simply be deleted or altered after they have been recorded.

1. Take a tachograph printout as soon as practicable.
2. Clearly write the correct information on the printout.
3. Explain what happened.
4. Add your name or card details if required.
5. Sign the printout.
6. Keep the record with your tachograph records.
7. Tell the operator or agency where appropriate.

Important: A genuine mistake that has been properly documented is very different from deliberately falsifying a tachograph record.

15. Tachograph Printouts

Drivers should know how to produce a printout. Printouts may be required for:

- Correcting incorrect modes
- Recording unforeseen events
- Tachograph faults
- Driver-card faults
- Lost or stolen cards
- Roadside enforcement
- Explaining unusual activity

Always ensure that there is sufficient tachograph printer paper in the vehicle.

16. Lost, Stolen, Damaged or Faulty Driver Card

There are limited circumstances where a driver may continue driving without their card. This is not the same as forgetting the card at home.

Where the card is lost, stolen, damaged or malfunctioning, a driver may normally continue driving without it for up to 15 calendar days, or longer where necessary to return the vehicle to its premises, subject to the required procedures. The problem must be reported and a replacement applied for within the required timescale, normally seven calendar days.

If this happens, contact the operator or Eclipse immediately.

17. Driving Without a Card – Required Printouts

Where driving without a card is legally permitted, printouts will normally be required at the beginning and end of the driver's use of each vehicle. The driver should add:

- Driver's name
- Driver-card or driving-licence number
- Relevant manual activities
- Signature

18. Tachograph Faults

If the tachograph develops a fault, do not simply continue as normal without keeping records.

- Inform the operator immediately.
- Keep the required manual records.
- Record driving, other work, POA, breaks and rest as necessary.
- Use tachograph printout paper or an analogue record sheet where appropriate.
- Sign the records.

19. Border Crossings

Smart Tachograph 2 equipment has additional automatic location and border-crossing functionality. Older equipment may require the driver to manually record the country entered at the first suitable stopping place after crossing a border.

Drivers undertaking European work should understand the operation of the particular tachograph fitted to the vehicle before commencing the journey.

20. Records You Must Be Able to Produce

The record-production period depends on the journey. For many domestic or AETR situations, drivers must be able to produce records covering the current day and previous 28 calendar days. For qualifying international goods journeys between the UK and an EU member state, the period is 56 days.

- Digital driver-card records
- Analogue charts
- Manual records
- Tachograph printouts
- Other legally accepted records where applicable

21. Driver Card and Vehicle Downloads

Operators have separate responsibilities for downloading and analysing tachograph information. DVSA guidance indicates that driver cards should be downloaded at least every 28 days and vehicle units at least every 90 days.

Drivers must make their cards available when reasonably required so that operators can fulfil their legal responsibilities.

22. Smart Tachograph 2

Smart Tachograph 2 is becoming the standard equipment fitted to newer vehicles. It provides additional location and enforcement functionality.

From 1 July 2026, Smart Tachograph 2 requirements also apply to certain goods vehicles over 2.5 tonnes used for international hire-and-reward operations. Vehicles between 2.5 and 3.5 tonnes operating only within the UK generally remain outside this particular requirement.

For most HGV drivers, the basic principle remains the same: your complete activity record must be accurate.

23. Analogue or “Manual” Tachographs

Although increasingly rare, some older vehicles can still legally use an analogue tachograph. Instead of storing activities electronically, an analogue tachograph uses a circular wax-coated paper chart.

Styluses physically record speed, distance and driver activity. The driver must manually complete information on the chart, including:

- Name
- Start location
- Finish location

- Date
- Vehicle registration
- Odometer readings
- Vehicle changes where applicable

A chart must not normally be used for longer than 24 hours, and the correct type of chart must be used for the tachograph fitted to the vehicle.

Manual records on an analogue chart

Where activities take place away from the vehicle, the driver must manually record them, normally on the reverse of the chart. This can include other work, POA, breaks, daily rest, work before taking over the vehicle, work after leaving the vehicle and periods where the tachograph has malfunctioned.

The information must be clear and must not interfere with the tachograph's recorded traces. Used analogue charts must normally be returned to the operator within 42 days.

24. Out-of-Scope Driving

A vehicle may sometimes be used for work outside the assimilated or AETR tachograph rules. Where a digital or smart tachograph is fitted, DVSA recommends selecting OUT or Out of Scope where appropriate, although this is not always a legal requirement.

Do not select Out of Scope simply because you believe a journey should not count. If in doubt, check with the operator.

25. Common Tachograph Mistakes

- Forgetting to insert the driver card
- Moving the vehicle before the card has finished reading
- Selecting rest while actually working
- Leaving the tachograph on other work throughout a genuine break
- Failing to make manual entries
- Recording a whole weekend as rest without checking the actual times
- Forgetting other employment
- Forgetting work undertaken before collecting the vehicle
- Incorrectly using POA
- Forgetting start or finish country entries
- Failing to correct an incorrect mode
- Removing the card before the working day has genuinely finished
- Assuming a stationary vehicle means the driver is on break
- Ignoring tachograph warnings
- Failing to retain necessary printouts

26. The Golden Rule

If you are working, record work. If you are genuinely resting, record rest. If you are driving, the tachograph records driving. If the tachograph could not record what you were doing, make sure the missing activity is recorded manually.

Your tachograph should tell an accurate story of your working day. There should not be unexplained gaps, invented breaks or periods recorded as rest when you were actually working.

27. Before You Drive – Quick Checklist

- ☐ Is my driver card inserted?
- ☐ Am I in Slot 1?
- ☐ Have I completed my manual entry?
- ☐ Is my previous activity correctly recorded?
- ☐ Have I entered the correct start country?
- ☐ Is the tachograph showing the correct mode?
- ☐ Do I know how much driving time I have available?
- ☐ Do I know when my next break is required?
- ☐ Have I accounted for any other work undertaken today?
- ☐ Is there tachograph printer paper in the vehicle?

If the answer to any of these is no, sort it before setting off.

28. Eclipse Recruitment Driving Solutions

Professional Drivers. Properly Compliant.

Drivers supplied by Eclipse Recruitment Driving Solutions are expected to understand and comply with drivers' hours, Working Time and tachograph requirements.

If you are unsure how an activity should be recorded, or believe you may have made an incorrect tachograph entry, contact Eclipse or the vehicle operator before ignoring the issue or guessing.

It is much easier to correct and explain an honest mistake when it happens than to explain an incomplete or inaccurate tachograph record at a roadside inspection.

Official Guidance

For the full legal and operational requirements, refer to current GOV.UK and DVSA guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/drivers-hours-goods-vehicles/4-tachograph-rules>

<https://www.gov.uk/drivers-hours/eu-rules>

<https://www.gov.uk/tachographs>

Disclaimer: This guide is intended as practical guidance for professional drivers and does not replace legislation, official DVSA guidance or specific operator instructions. Different requirements may apply depending on the vehicle, journey, exemption, derogation and countries being visited.