

Texas Defensive Driving Guide



For First Time Moving Violators

by Troy Caesar



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Did you get pulled over and given a ticket or other moving violation and find the entire process confusing? Has it been a long time since your last ticket, or maybe your first time getting a ticket? If you answered yes to any of those questions I have created this guide for you!

For the majority of moving violations in Texas you have the option to take a driver safety course (a.k.a. defensive driving), but not all of them. For that reason we recommend that you **never take a defensive driving course before you first get the court's permission.**

Why take a state approved defensive driving course? Most take the course because it is less expensive than paying the entire fine amount. However, the most important reason should be to keep the ticket off of your driving record. Many people don't know this, but Texas has a points system. Driving infractions that go on your driving record have an associated point value, which can result in additional fines, surcharges or license suspension. It is always the best practice to keep your driving record as clean as possible by first not getting any tickets, but if you happen to get one it is advisable to take advantage of the defensive driving course option to keep the ticket off your record.

There is more to taking a defensive driving course than simply reducing penalties. You can also learn how to be a better driver and minimize your chances of being in a crash while creating a safer environment for yourself, your passengers and other drivers on the road. Taking a defensive driving course in Texas may also make you eligible for an auto insurance discount. Check with your insurance provider for eligibility details and procedures. Also, some employers require the completion of a course as a condition of future employment. This guide is really focused on the driver with a ticket, but regardless of your reason for taking the course, I hope you find this resource useful.



Summary

This defensive driving guide will discuss the steps you need to take after receiving a speeding ticket or other moving violation from a Texas police officer or state trooper. Outlined below are your options and an explanation on the steps needed to successfully complete and receive credit for a defensive driving course in Texas, specifically with www.texasdrivesafe.com.



Step 1

Read the paperwork carefully – After receiving your ticket from the officer, make sure you read it (front and back) and any other paperwork they provide for instructions. The two most important things to look for are the court contact information and appearance date.

Step 2

Choose the best option for handling the ticket – You must notify the court to alert them to how you want to handle the ticket on or before your appearance date. Follow the instructions on the ticket on how to properly notify them of your intentions. You should call the court if you are unsure or have any questions. Typically your options will include:

1. *Dispute the ticket* – Choose this option if you would like an opportunity to speak with a Judge about the ticket or believe that you should not have been given the ticket.
2. *Pay the fine and let the ticket go on your record* – The amount of the fine will depend on the specific type of infraction, but if you choose this option it will be reported to the State and put on your driving record. Points may be assessed per the Texas points system: (<http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/driverlicense/drp.htm>).
3. *Take a defensive driving course and keep the ticket off your record* – This option is contingent upon the court verifying your eligibility. Texas law allows drivers to take a defensive driving course once per 12 months for a ticket. Contact the specific court jurisdiction listed on the ticket to verify eligibility prior to registering for a defensive driving course. If you are eligible, you will have to pay a court fee (usually \$90 to \$120) and you are typically given 90 days from the day you received permission to successfully complete a state-approved defensive driving (a.k.a. driver safety) course and turn in the certificate and any other required paperwork to the court.

Step 3

Take the defensive driving course – Once you have notified the specific court of your intent to take a defensive driving course for the ticket and verified your eligibility, you can register for and complete the state-approved course online at www.texasdrivesafe.com. Choose the register / sign up button. The course price is \$25, which is the lowest price allowed by law. The online registration process allows you to access the course from anywhere with Internet access (including mobile devices) any time that is convenient for you (24 hours a day, 7 days a week).

Step 4

Order a driving record – It isn't always required, but many courts request a copy of your Texas driving record be turned in at the same time as your defensive driving completion certificate. Texas driving records can be ordered easily and inexpensively through the state's website: www.texas.gov. Choose the "Driver Records" option and fill out a Driver Record Request form. Order the Type 3A, which is a certified record by driver name and will show all accidents and violations. This can be printed off immediately online. Note that it can only be furnished to the licensee.



Step 5

Turn in your certificate of completion – Upon successful completion of the Texas defensive driving course, you will receive a certificate of completion. By Texas law, the certificate must be mailed (via standard mail is included in the \$25 course fee or express shipping for an additional charge). Certificates cannot be picked up in person. It is important that you complete the course with enough time to receive the certificate, then turn around and deliver it to the court before your completion deadline. You will receive a two-part certificate. The upper portion of the certificate is your "court" copy that you will sign and turn in to the court. The lower portion is the "insurance" copy and can be given to your auto insurance provider if it offers defensive driving discounts on your premium. If you are unable to turn in your certificate to the court in person, a suitable alternative is to mail your certificate via certified mail so that you can verify receipt by the court. If you turn in your certificate before the court-appointed deadline and have met all other requirements placed upon you by the court, the ticket will not appear on your driving record.

Conclusion

Taking a Texas defensive driving course can improve your driving skills, prevent blemishes from showing up on your driving record and may even help you reduce your auto insurance premium. If you have received a speeding ticket or similar driving violation in Texas, I highly recommend doing all you can to preserve a clean driving record if you are eligible by completing a Texas defensive driving program.

About the Author

Troy Caesar is Vice President for Driver Training Associates, Inc., a traffic safety course provider that helps improve driver abilities through in-person and online Texas defensive driving and other safety courses. DTA is a leader in driver education, defensive driving, and drug and alcohol education industries, and has been assisting Texas motorists improve their driving abilities since 2003.

