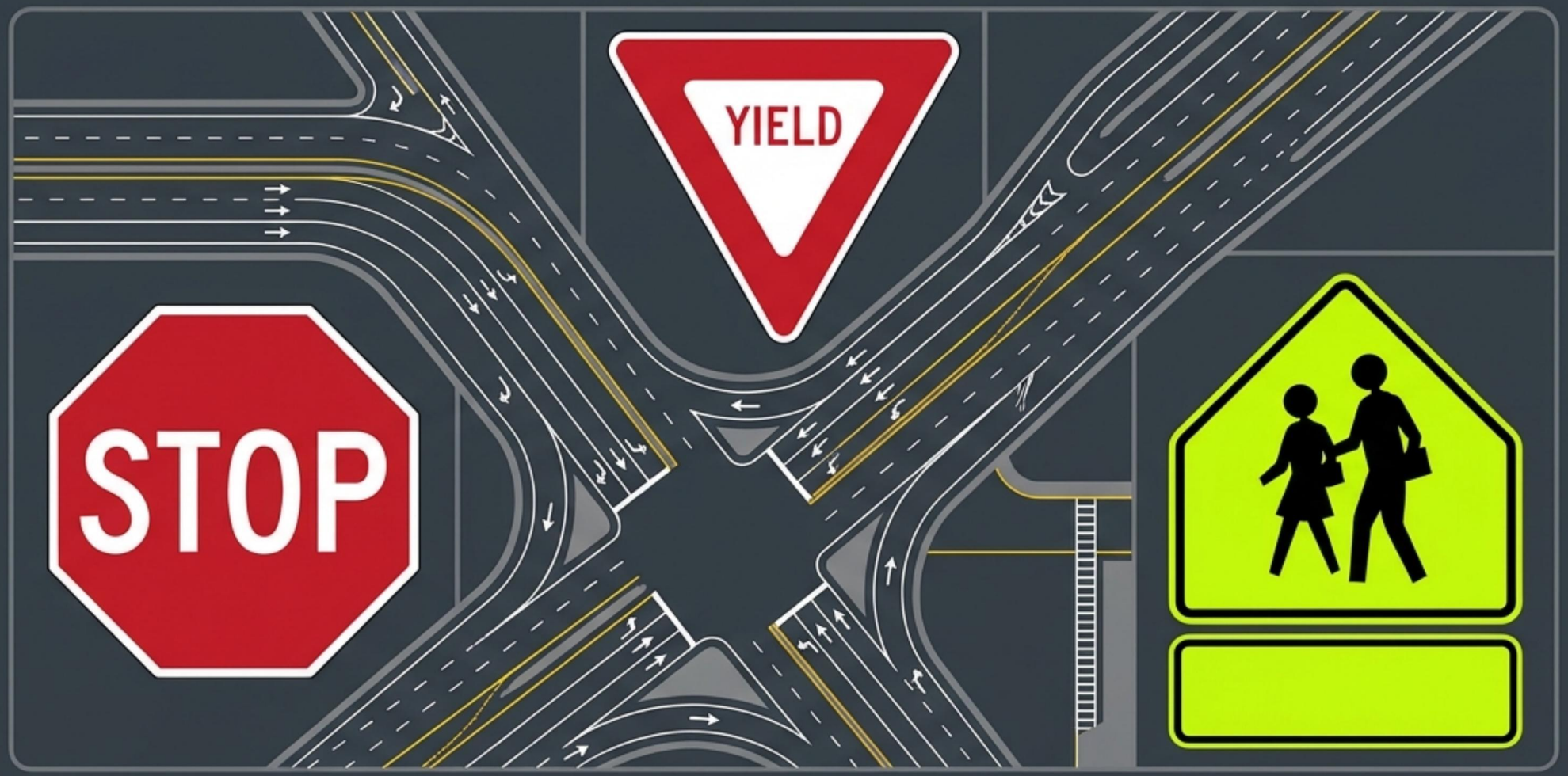
DECODING THE DRIVE:
THE WASHINGTON SIGNS & SIGNALS MASTER GUIDE

A visual masterclass for the Washington DOL Knowledge Test.



The Core Rule of the Road

40
Total Questions

32
Correct Answers Needed

80%
to Pass









Signs, signals, and markings run through the entire Washington DOL exam. Do not try to memorize a dictionary of road rules. Instead, learn the visual grammar of the road. If you know the shapes and the color families, you can read the environment before you ever read a word.

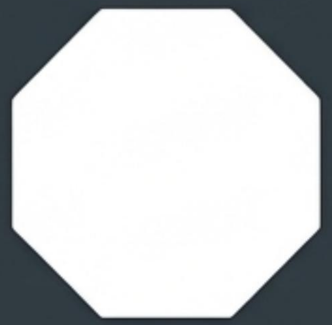








The Master Key Part 1: Shape



Octagon: STOP — Used for absolutely nothing else.



Point-Down Triangle: YIELD.



Diamond: WARNING — Hazard or condition ahead.



Pentagon: SCHOOL — Zone or crossing.



Pennant: **NO PASSING** — Zone begins.



Round: **RAILROAD ADVANCE** — Tracks are coming.



Crossbuck (X): **RAILROAD CROSSING** — The tracks themselves



Rectangles: Vertical = The Law / Horizontal = Directional Guidance

The Master Key Part 2: Color Code

Red: PROHIBITIVE
(Stop, Yield, Do Not Enter).

Orange: TEMPORARY
(Construction zones).

Yellow: WARNING
(General hazards).

Fluorescent Yellow-Green: PEDESTRIAN (Extra-bright school/bike/foot traffic).

White: REGULATORY
(The enforceable rules)

Green: GUIDE
(Directions and destinations)

Blue: SERVICES
(Fuel, food, lodging, hospitals)

Brown: RECREATION
(Cultural/historical)

Orange diamond? Brown rectangle? You already know the hazard and the location without reading a word.

Regulatory Signs: The Absolute Rules

Enforceable by law—not advice, but the absolute rule for that location.



Complete halt before the stop line, crosswalk, or where you can see traffic.



Slow down; duty to yield right-of-way is absolute. Stop if you cannot merge safely.



Marks one-way streets, exit ramps, and divided-highway crossroads.



You are going against traffic. Pull over and turn around safely IMMEDIATELY.

Warning Signs: Avoiding the Classic Exam Traps



The first bend drawn on a curve symbol is the first bend you drive. Wavy lines indicate slipping hazards, not winding roads.



Look at the Median (Shield shape). Median at TOP = Roadways splitting (Divided Highway BEGINS). Median at BOTTOM = Roadways joining (Divided Highway ENDS).

Temporary Zones & Highway Guides



Orange means temporary.
Key Rule: In Washington, fines are completely DOUBLED in work zones when workers are present.



Green guides you.
Mile markers show your exact location for navigation and emergency services.

Traffic Signals: The Logic & The Traps



Red: Stop. Right turn allowed after full stop (unless prohibited). Left turn allowed only onto a one-way street.

Yellow: Light is turning red. Stop safely; do not speed up to beat it.

Green: Go. Look for traffic and pedestrians before moving. Yield to oncoming traffic if turning left.



Reversible Lane Overheads:
Red X (never use), Green Arrow (open), Steady Yellow X (prepare to exit lane).

Flashing Lights

Flashing Red = Treat as a Stop Sign
Flashing Yellow = Yield, uncontrolled approach.

The WA Trap

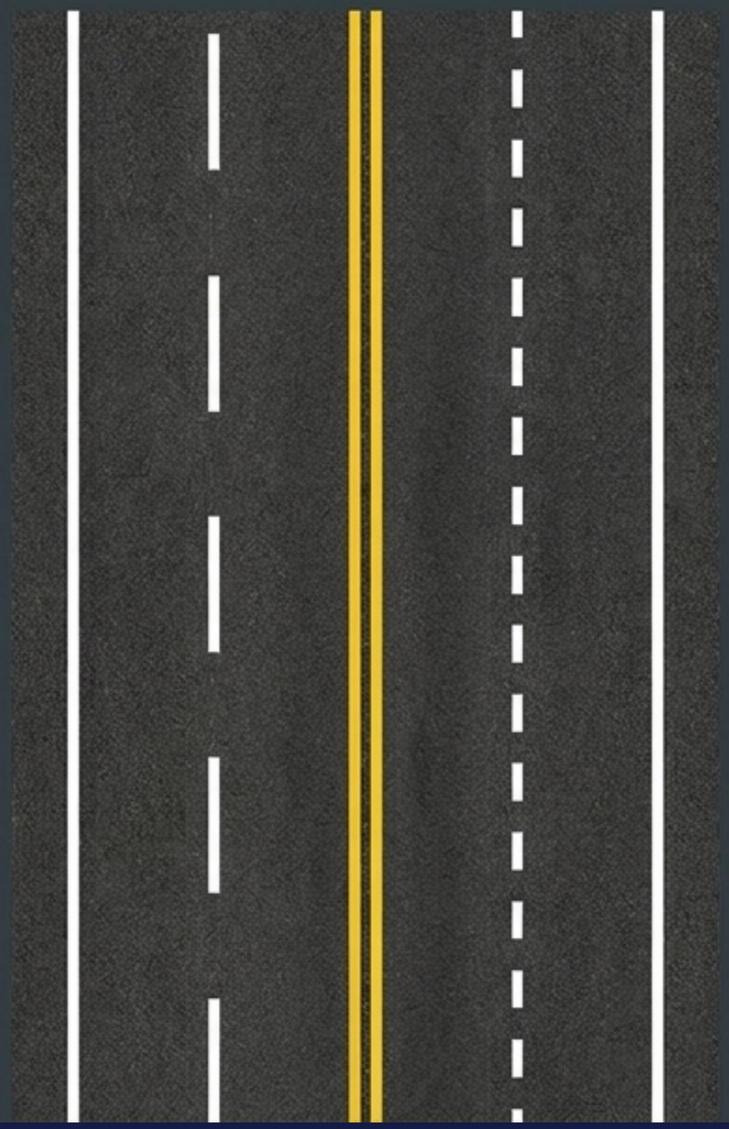
There is NO flashing green in Washington. If a test answer offers it, it's a trap.

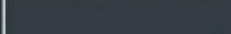
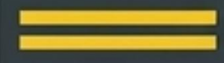
Dark/Broken Signal

Treat as a 4-Way Stop (Yield to the right).

Pavement Markings: The Painted Rules

Color Key	
	**White Lines:** Separate lanes moving in the same direction. (White separates friends).
	**Yellow Lines:** Separate traffic moving in opposite directions. (Yellow separates opponents)



Pattern Key	
	**Broken Lines:** You may cross when safe.
	**Solid Lines:** Guard the boundary; do not cross.
	**Double Solid Yellow:** Absolute boundary; NO passing in either direction.

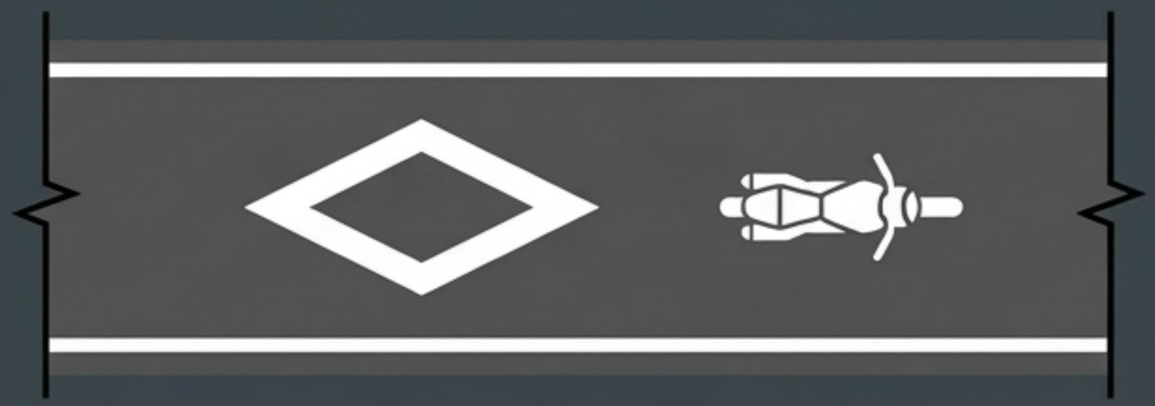
Special Use Lanes

Center Left-Turn Lane:



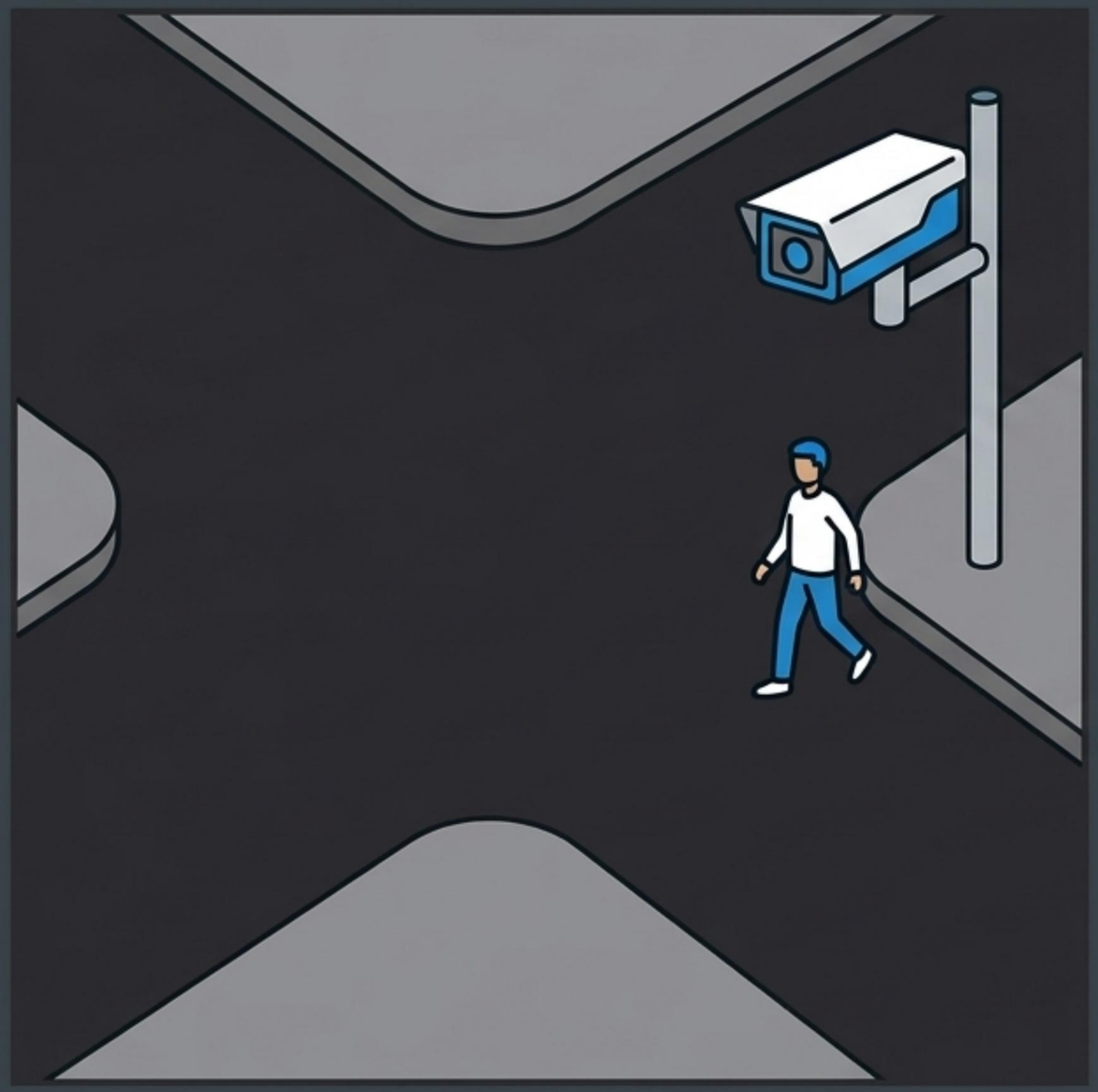
Shared by both directions for left turns only. You may NOT travel in it for more than 300 feet. It is never a passing lane.

HOV Lanes:



Marked with the diamond symbol. Reserved for carpools, transit, and motorcycles are allowed to use them.

Intersections, Crosswalks & Cameras



The Golden Rule

Every intersection is legally a crosswalk, marked or not. Pedestrians hold the right-of-way.

Automated Cameras

Washington uses marked cameras to automatically mail tickets to vehicle owners for three violations:

1. Red-light running.
2. Railroad-crossing violations.
3. School-zone speeding.

Hand Signals (Turn signal failure)



The 80% Synthesis Cheat Sheet

The Key Numbers

32 of 40: Score needed to pass (80%).

300 Feet: Maximum travel distance in a shared center turn lane.

2x Fines: Work zone penalties when workers are present.



4-Way Stop: How to treat a dark/broken traffic signal.



Zero: The number of flashing green lights in Washington.

The Master Keys

Shapes:



Octagon = Stop



Pentagon = School



Pennant = No Passing



X = Railroad Crossing

Colors:



Red = Prohibitive



Orange = Construction



White = Regulatory



Yellow-Green = Pedestrian/Bike

You know the visual grammar. You are ready to read the road.

Keep practicing — free, no sign-up

Washington Signs & Signals study guide, practice tests & flashcards:

drivinglicensetest.org/wa

Sources verified November 12, 2026