



Australian Unofficial Driving Etiquette Act, 2024

Setting the standard for
etiquette on our roads.



The Act.

What is it?

As of January 2021, there were more than 20 million registered motor vehicles in Australia.* To get behind the wheel, there are processes, laws and road rules in place, which ultimately aim to help keep drivers and community members safe.

But what about etiquette?

During February and March 2024, we surveyed 2,000 Australians across Queensland, Tasmania, New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory and uncovered the five most important signs of etiquette and politeness on our road.

Introducing...**The Australian Unofficial Driving Etiquette Act, 2024 (The Act)**. The Aussie approved guide to being well-liked on the road.

In this document, we uncover The Act, and share insights on Australian expectations when it comes to a respectful, unified driving experience.

** Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics – Motor Vehicle Census, Australia, January 2021*

Australian Unofficial Driving Etiquette Act, 2024

Following Australia's unofficial driving etiquette, these directives outline the expected behaviour for motorists. They cover displays of gratitude, communicating with other drivers and fundamental considerations to help ensure road safety and smooth traffic flow.

Rule 1 – Acknowledgement Mandate

Part 1 – In accordance with Australian road etiquette, motor vehicle operators are required to express gratitude when:

- (a) afforded the right of way, or
- (b) permitted to merge into a lane.

This formal gesture is performed by promptly executing a courteous wave as an acknowledgment of appreciation, where safe to do so.

Translation: when another driver goes out of their way to let you in or give way for you on the road, you give them a casual wave to say thanks.

For corresponding reference information, please see Appendix A.

Rule 2 – Salutation Mandate

Part 1 – This pertains to the act of extending the index finger from the steering wheel to salute an oncoming vehicle. It is colloquially referred to as the “One Finger Wave”.

Part 2 – This gesture is sufficient to display respect or acknowledgement between drivers on public roads.

Note: Refer to Rule 1 – Acknowledgment Mandate for examples of some instances where this gesture may also be deployed.

Translation: a simple lift of the index finger off the steering wheel is acceptable to say hi to passing motorists.

For corresponding reference information, please see Appendix B.

Rule 3 – Adherence to Zipper Merge Methods

Part 1 – In scenarios involving lane closure or traffic congestion, the recommended practice for merging is the Zipper Merge Method.

1A – Definition: Zipper Merge Method. This procedural requirement necessitates motorists to yield to merging vehicles into an open lane during a traffic jam.

Part 2 – It is incumbent upon drivers, in accordance with the stipulations of Australian traffic etiquette, to comprehend that the act of allowing one vehicle to merge in congested traffic does not impose an obligation to extend the same privilege to subsequent vehicles.

Translation: when in heavy traffic and cars are merging into your lane, you only need to let one car in at a time.

For corresponding reference information, please see Appendix C.

Rule 4 – Recognising Pedestrian Right of Way Regardless of Public Crossings

Part 1 – Motor vehicle operators must recognise the sacrosanct right of pedestrians to have the right of way, particularly;

(a) at marked crosswalks, where Australian road laws dictate that drivers should yield to pedestrians attempting to cross the road, and

(b) in the absence of designated crosswalk demarcations and a pedestrian is in the act of crossing the road or about to step out onto the road surface.

Translation: bring your car to a stop to let people cross the road safely, whether there's a marked crossing or not.

For corresponding reference information, please see Appendix D.

Rule 5 – Reverse Parallel Parking Edict

Part 1 – If a motorist engages in the act of reverse parallel parking, it is imperative for other road users to exercise circumspection, refraining from impeding the completion of said parking action.

Translation: wait for another driver to finish reversing into a car park before driving around them.

For corresponding reference information, please see Appendix E.

Appendix A: Rule 1

Acknowledgement Mandate

88%

of Australian drivers are aware of the etiquette to give another driver a wave as a 'thank you'.

60%

of Australian drivers (who are aware of the rule) engage in this driving etiquette every time.

48%

of Australian drivers get annoyed when other drivers do not give them a 'thank you' wave for courteous behaviour on the road.

Metro drivers

are more likely to be annoyed when other drivers do not give them a 'thank you' wave than regional drivers.

Appendix B: Rule 2

Salutation Mandate

65%

of Australian drivers are aware of the etiquette to say 'hello' to another driver.

33%

of Australian drivers (who are aware of the rule) engage in this driving etiquette every time.

30%

of Metro drivers get annoyed when others do not engage in this rule.

29%

of Australian drivers get annoyed when others do not engage in this rule.

Appendix C: Rule 3

Adherence to Zipper Merge Methods

73%

of Australian drivers are aware of the etiquette to let someone merge in congestion, without feeling obligated to let a second car in.

51%

of Australian drivers (who are aware of the rule) engage in this driving etiquette every time.

61%

of Australian drivers get annoyed when other drivers do not take turns merging into open lanes when stuck in a traffic jam.

62%

of drivers with over 10 years of experience get frustrated when others don't take turns merging into open lanes during traffic jams.

Appendix D: Rule 4

Recognising Pedestrian Right of Way Regardless of Public Crossings

53%

of Australian drivers are aware of the etiquette that, while pedestrians generally have the right of way at crosswalks, some areas may not have marked crosswalks. In these cases, drivers often yield to pedestrians attempting to cross the street.

39%

of Australian drivers (who are aware of the rule) engage in this driving etiquette every time.

14%

of Australian drivers get annoyed when other drivers do not engage in this etiquette.

15%

of Boomers (57-77) & Pre-Boomers (78+) get annoyed when other drivers do not engage in this etiquette.

Appendix E: Rule 5

Reverse Parallel Parking Edict

83%

of Australian drivers are aware of the etiquette that if a car pulls up to do a reverse parallel park, you should wait for this to be completed.

54%

of Australian drivers (who are aware of the rule) engage in this driving etiquette every time.

13%

of Australian drivers with 6-10 years experience get annoyed when other drivers don't engage in this etiquette.

10%

of millennials aged 28-41 years get annoyed when other drivers don't engage in this etiquette.

Understanding the generation gap on our roads

The research uncovers a knowledge gap amongst younger drivers and their driving etiquette – with the awareness of each rule varying from 12% to 25% between older and younger drivers. This indicates that these types of driving behaviours are a learned skill, and that the younger generation are moving on from traditional courtesies around what’s appropriate on the road.

The Act	Which of the below driving behaviours and etiquette are you aware of?		How frequently do you engage in the below driving behaviours and etiquette (for those who are aware of the rule)?	
	Gen Z (18-27)	Boomers (57-77) & Pre-Boomers (78+)	Gen Z (18-27)	Boomers (57-77) & Pre-Boomers (78+)
Rule 1: Acknowledgement Mandate	83% of drivers understand this driving behaviour and etiquette.	95% of drivers understand this driving behaviour and etiquette.	55% engage in this driving behaviour and etiquette every time.	62% engage in this driving behaviour and etiquette every time.
Rule 2: Salutation Mandate	56% of drivers understand this driving behaviour and etiquette.	70% of drivers understand this driving behaviour and etiquette.	33% engage in this driving behaviour and etiquette every time.	33% engage in this driving behaviour and etiquette every time.
Rule 3: Adherence to Zipper Merge Methods	57% of drivers understand this driving behaviour and etiquette.	82% of drivers understand this driving behaviour and etiquette.	37% engage in this driving behaviour and etiquette every time.	55% engage in this driving behaviour and etiquette every time.
Rule 4: Recognising Pedestrian Right of Way Regardless of Public Crossings	45% of drivers understand this driving behaviour and etiquette.	60% of drivers understand this driving behaviour and etiquette.	31% engage in this driving behaviour and etiquette every time.	40% engage in this driving behaviour and etiquette every time.
Rule 5: Reverse Parallel Parking Edict	68% of drivers understand this driving behaviour and etiquette.	91% of drivers understand this driving behaviour and etiquette.	43% engage in this driving behaviour and etiquette every time.	62% engage in this driving behaviour and etiquette every time.

State by state breakdown

There's a clear gap between drivers' awareness of the unofficial rules and their actions on the road, with motorists in states such as Queensland and South Australia aware that giving another driver a 'thank you' wave is a common courtesy (90%), but only 61% and 60% of these people respectively always engage in this behaviour, begging the question – do Aussies put their money where their mouth is when it comes to being courteous on the road?

Which of the below driving behaviours and etiquette are you aware of?

	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	Tas & NT
Giving another driver a wave as a 'thank you' (i.e. for letting you merge into their lane, give you right of way, etc.)	85%	89%	90%	89%	90%	92%
Giving another driver a wave 'hello' or acknowledgement	61%	60%	69%	74%	67%	67%
Taking turns merging into open lanes when stuck in a traffic jam	73%	69%	79%	70%	75%	73%
Yielding to pedestrians outside of pedestrian traffic lights or marked crossroads	54%	54%	56%	51%	49%	49%
Waiting for the car in front to complete reverse / parallel parking before driving past	84%	79%	88%	82%	81%	87%

How frequently do you engage in the below driving behaviours and etiquette?

For those who answered 'every time'	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	Tas & NT
Giving another driver a wave as a 'thank you' (i.e. for letting you merge into their lane, give you right of way, etc.)	60%	60%	61%	60%	60%	63%
Giving another driver a wave 'hello' or acknowledgement	32%	36%	34%	29%	33%	34%
Taking turns merging into open lanes when stuck in a traffic jam	51%	51%	51%	48%	41%	58%
Yielding to pedestrians outside of pedestrian traffic lights or marked cross roads	39%	35%	43%	44%	27%	56%
Waiting for the car in front to complete reverse / parallel parking before driving past	55%	53%	53%	56%	44%	63%



Additional supporting data

Gender

Drivers typically want to reach their destination as soon as possible, but our research reveals a gap between male and female driving behaviour indicating females are far more patient. For example, waiting for a driver to complete a reverse parallel park, females are 16% more likely to be patient and wait for the driver to finish parking before driving around them. While an average 83% of Aussies are aware that this is a common courtesy, an average of only 54% of these people (and mostly females) do it.

How frequently do you engage in the below driving behaviours and etiquette?

For those who answered 'every time'	Male	Female
Giving another driver a wave as a 'thank you' (i.e. for letting you merge into their lane, give you right of way, etc.)	54%	66%
Giving another driver a wave 'hello' or acknowledgement	31%	35%
Waiting for the car in front to complete reverse / parallel parking before driving past	50%	58%
Taking turns merging into open lanes when stuck in a traffic jam	45%	55%
Yielding to pedestrians outside of pedestrian traffic lights or marked crossroads	40%	38%

Additional supporting data

Metro and Regional

It's a common belief amongst Aussies that inner-city drivers are less patient or less likely to be friendly on the road compared to those in regional areas. But astonishingly, our research uncovered metro drivers are 16% more likely to give another driver a wave 'hello' or acknowledgement when compared to regional drivers. While an average 65% of people are aware of the rule, only 33% of people partake in the one finger wave. Are times changing?

How frequently do you engage in the below driving behaviours and etiquette?

For those who answered 'every time'	Metro	Regional
Giving another driver a wave as a 'thank you' (i.e. for letting you merge into their lane, give you right of way, etc.)	60%	61%
Waiting for the car in front to complete reverse / parallel parking before driving past	54%	53%
Taking turns merging into open lanes when stuck in a traffic jam	9%	13%
Giving another driver a wave 'hello' or acknowledgement	35%	30%
Yielding to pedestrians outside of pedestrian traffic lights or marked crossroads	38%	41%

 you.insured