

MULTI-POINT VEHICLE INSPECTION

FIELD GUIDE

A Self-Paced Walkthrough for First-Time Inspectors

Name: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____
 Vehicle Assigned: _____ Mileage: _____
 Year / Make / Model: _____

What Is a Multi-Point Inspection?

Every time you take a vehicle to a shop for *anything* — oil change, tire rotation, check-engine light — the technician will usually run a **multi-point inspection** and hand you a form that looks like the one posted in the shop. It is the **single most common document** you will encounter as a car owner.

Shops use a **traffic light system**: items are rated as **GREEN** (checked and OK), **YELLOW** (may require future attention), or **RED** (requires immediate attention). The form is designed to communicate honestly — but it is *also* a sales tool. Your job today is to learn to read it like an insider.



THE BIG IDEA

A multi-point inspection is a conversation between the shop and the customer. If you can't read the form, you're having that conversation with your eyes closed. After today, your eyes are open.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is self-paced. Work through each section at your own speed. Each section covers one area of the inspection form, tells you *what to look for*, *how to check it*, and *why it matters* from a consumer standpoint.

Tiered Structure

TIER 1 — EYES ONLY (Everyone completes this)

Visual-only checks you can do without touching anything. Walk around. Look. Record. This is the minimum standard for today.

TIER 2 — HANDS ON (Move here when Tier 1 is done)

Open the hood. Check fluid levels. Measure tread depth. Test lights and wipers. Requires basic interaction with the vehicle.

TIER 3 — GOING DEEPER (Challenge tier for those who finish early)

Research your specific vehicle's maintenance schedule online. Estimate costs for any yellow or red items you flagged. This is where consumer intelligence lives.

Rate every item you check:

✓ **OK** = No issues observed before driving ⚠ **WATCH** = Might need attention soon ✖ **NOW** = Needs attention

Section 1: Exterior Walk-Around

Tier 1 — Eyes Only • Estimated time: 10–15 minutes

Start at the driver's door and walk **clockwise** around the entire vehicle. You are looking at the car the way a buyer would — or the way a technician does before they even pop the hood.



CLASSIC VEHICLE NOTE

Older vehicles show their history more honestly than modern ones. Rust, repaint lines, and mismatched panels tell a story. On a classic, character is expected — but structural rust is still a deal-breaker.

Item	How to Check	Your Rating	Why It Matters
☐ Windshield	Stand 3 feet back and look across the glass at an angle. Chips smaller than a quarter can be repaired; cracks longer than 6 inches usually mean replacement.	OK / Watch / Now	A cracked windshield is an automatic fail in Oregon DEQ/safety inspections. Classic: Pre-1966 vehicles may have non-laminated glass. Replacement is expensive and rare.
☐ Body Panels	Look along each panel at a shallow angle (crouch to hood-level). Ripples, color mismatches, or orange-peel texture indicate prior bodywork.	OK / Watch / Now	Tells you if the car has been in a wreck — and whether it was repaired well. Classic: Expect patina. Look for bubbling under paint — that's rust coming from inside out.
☐ Lights (exterior)	Walk the full perimeter. Check headlights, taillights, brake lights (have a partner tap the pedal), turn signals, and reverse lights.	OK / Watch / Now	Non-functional lights are a traffic stop and a safety hazard. Bulbs are cheap; not replacing them is lazy. Classic: Sealed-beam headlights are one-piece — you replace the whole unit, not a bulb.
☐ Wiper Blades	Lift each blade off the glass. Look for cracking, tearing, or hardened rubber. If the rubber edge is anything other than smooth and flexible, it's done.	OK / Watch / Now	Bad wipers in Oregon rain = zero visibility. \$15–25 to replace; no excuse not to.
☐ Exhaust (visible)	Crouch behind the vehicle. Look at the tailpipe and any visible exhaust piping. Black soot, rust holes, or hanging components are red flags.	OK / Watch / Now	Exhaust leaks put carbon monoxide inside the cabin. This is

			a safety issue, not cosmetic.  Classic: <i>Classic cars may have aftermarket exhaust. Patina is fine; holes are not.</i>
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Your Notes:

Biggest concern on this vehicle's exterior:

Section 2: Tires & Wheels

Tier 1 (visual) + Tier 2 (measurement) • Estimated time: 10–15 minutes

Tires are the **single most important safety component** on any vehicle. They are your only contact with the road. Everything else — brakes, steering, suspension — works *through* the tires.

Tread Depth Thresholds

Depth	Rating	What It Means	The Penny Test
7/32" or greater	✓ OK	Good tread life remaining	Lincoln's head fully covered
4/32" to 6/32"	⚠ WATCH	Start shopping for tires now. Wet traction is reduced.	Top of Lincoln's head just visible
3/32" or less	✗ NOW	Unsafe. Hydroplaning risk is severe. Replace immediately.	All of Lincoln's head is showing

Wear Patterns — What Your Tires Are Telling You

Center wear only: Tires have been over-inflated. The middle of the tread contacts the road more than the edges.

Both edges worn: Tires have been under-inflated. The sidewalls flex too much and the edges carry the load.

One edge worn (inside or outside): Alignment is off. The wheels are pointing slightly sideways instead of straight. This is the most common pattern and the most *expensive* if ignored — because it kills tires fast.

Cupping / scalloping (wavy pattern): Worn shocks or struts. The tire is bouncing instead of rolling. Suspension work needed.



CONSUMER WISDOM

A shop that tells you to replace tires without mentioning the wear pattern is either lazy or hoping you'll be back in 20,000 miles. If your tires wore unevenly, fixing the tires without fixing the cause is throwing money away.

Your Tire Inspection

Position	Brand / Model	Tread Depth	Wear Pattern	Rating
Left Front (LF)				
Right Front (RF)				
Left Rear (LR)				
Right Rear (RR)				

Are all four tires the same brand and size? If not, explain:

Tire pressure observed (if TPMS or gauge available):

Your Notes:

Section 3: Under the Hood

Tier 2 — Hands On • Estimated time: 15–20 minutes

This is where most people get intimidated. Don't be. You are checking **fluid levels** and looking for **obvious problems**. You do not need to know how an engine works to spot a leak, read a dipstick, or notice a cracked hose.

SAFETY FIRST

Engine must be OFF and cool. Do not touch belts, fans, or exhaust manifolds. If the engine has been running, wait 10 minutes before opening the hood. On a hot day, the engine bay can exceed 200°F.

How to Open the Hood

1. Find the hood release inside the cabin (usually a lever near the driver's left knee or a pull-handle under the dash). **2.** The hood will pop up about an inch. Walk to the front and feel under the hood gap for a secondary latch — push, pull, or slide it. **3.** Lift the hood and secure it with the prop rod (if not hydraulic).

 **Classic:** Many pre-1980 vehicles have a front-facing hood latch visible from outside. Some open from the front, some from the rear. Look before you pull.

Item	How to Check	Your Rating	Why It Matters
☐ Engine Oil	Pull the dipstick, wipe it, reinsert fully, pull again. Oil level should be between the two marks. Color: honey/amber = fresh; dark brown = due for change; black and gritty = overdue; milky/gray = possible coolant contamination (serious).	OK / Watch / Now	Low oil = engine damage. Milky oil = head gasket failure. This single check can save you thousands.  Classic: Some classics don't have a dipstick (dry sump). Check the oil tank or sight glass instead.
☐ Coolant	Find the coolant reservoir (translucent plastic tank with MIN/MAX lines). Level should be between the marks when cold. Color should be consistent (green, orange, pink, or blue depending on type). Never open the radiator cap on a hot engine.	OK / Watch / Now	Low coolant = overheating risk. Mixed colors = someone topped off with the wrong type, which causes corrosion.  Classic: Classics may not have a reservoir. You check the radiator cap directly — cold only.
☐ Brake Fluid	Find the brake fluid reservoir (usually on the driver's side firewall, small rectangular cap). Level should be near MAX. Fluid should be clear to light amber. Dark brown or black = moisture contamination.	OK / Watch / Now	Brake fluid absorbs water over time. Contaminated fluid lowers the boiling point, which means brake fade on long downhills.

☐ Power Steering	Find the PS reservoir or dipstick (varies by vehicle). Check level. If the steering groans when you turn the wheel, it's probably low.	OK / Watch / Now	Low PS fluid = hard steering and potential pump damage. Listen for whining when turning.  Classic: Many classics use a remote reservoir with a dipstick built into the cap.
☐ Transmission Fluid	Some vehicles have a dipstick (check with engine running in park). Fluid should be pink/red and not smell burnt. Dark brown + burnt smell = transmission problems.	OK / Watch / Now	Transmission work is the most expensive single repair on most vehicles. This is your early warning system.  Classic: Manual transmissions don't have a dipstick. You check at the fill plug on the side of the case.
☐ Washer Fluid	Find the washer reservoir (usually blue cap with windshield icon). Fill if low. This is the one fluid you can top off yourself with zero risk.	OK / Watch / Now	Not a safety emergency, but you will appreciate full washer fluid the first time a truck sprays your windshield with mud on I-5.
☐ Belts & Hoses	Visually inspect the serpentine belt for cracks, fraying, or glazing (shiny smooth surface). Squeeze coolant hoses — they should be firm but flexible, not rock-hard or mushy.	OK / Watch / Now	A snapped belt kills power steering, alternator, and AC simultaneously. A burst hose dumps all your coolant in seconds.  Classic: Classics may have multiple V-belts instead of one serpentine. Check each one.
☐ Air Filter	Find the air filter housing (large plastic box with clips or screws). Open it and pull the filter. Hold it up to light — if you can't see light through it, it's restricted.	OK / Watch / Now	A clogged filter chokes the engine and reduces fuel economy. Replacement is \$10–25 and takes 2 minutes.  Classic: Classic round air cleaners are actually easier to

			<i>check — one wingnut on top.</i>
☐ Battery	Look at the terminals (+ and – posts). White/green/blue crusty buildup = corrosion. Check that the battery is secured (hold-down clamp). Note any bulging or cracking of the case.	OK / Watch / Now	A corroded terminal can leave you stranded with a perfectly good battery. Cleaning takes 5 minutes.  Classic: Classic 6V systems (pre-1955) use a positive-ground setup. Don't assume polarity.
☐ Leaks	Look at the ground under the engine and on the engine block surfaces. Fresh wet spots, drips, or stains indicate active leaks. Note the color: brown = oil, green/orange/pink = coolant, red = transmission or PS, clear = AC condensation (normal).	OK / Watch / Now	Identifying what's leaking tells you what system needs attention — and how urgently.  Classic: Classics leak. It's a question of how much, not whether. A few drops of oil is character; a puddle is a problem.

Your Notes:

Section 4: Brake System

Tier 1 (visual) + Tier 2 (measurement if wheel is off) • Estimated time: 10 minutes

The inspection form includes a brake lining diagram for all four corners of the vehicle. On a professional inspection, the tech measures pad thickness with a caliper. Today, you'll work with what you can see through the wheel spokes and what you can *feel* when the brakes are applied.

Brake Lining Thresholds

Disc Brakes	Drum Brakes	Rating	Action
Over 5mm (7/32")	Over 2mm (3/32")	✓ OK	No action needed
3–5mm (4/32"–7/32")	1–2mm (2/32"–3/32")	⚠ WATCH	Plan replacement within 3–6 months
Under 3mm (4/32")	Under 1mm (2/32")	✗ NOW	Replace before driving. Metal-on-metal destroys rotors.

What You Can Check Without Removing the Wheel

1. Look through the wheel spokes with a flashlight. You should see the **brake rotor** (the shiny disc) and the **brake caliper** (the clamp gripping the rotor). On many vehicles, you can see the edge of the pad.
2. Check the **brake fluid reservoir** (covered in Section 3). Low brake fluid often means the pads are thin — as pads wear, the caliper pistons extend further, displacing fluid from the reservoir.
3. With the vehicle running in park, **press the brake pedal**. It should feel firm and stop about halfway to the floor. If it sinks slowly, that's a leak. If it pulses, the rotors are warped.
4. Listen. With the window down at low speed, **grinding** = metal on metal (too late). **Squealing** = wear indicator tab is touching the rotor (replace soon). **Silence** = healthy.



CONSUMER WISDOM

A brake job on most vehicles costs \$150–\$400 per axle (parts + labor). If a shop quotes you over \$600 for one axle on a standard passenger vehicle, get a second quote. The markup on brake work is one of the highest in the industry.

Brake pedal feel (firm / soft / pulsing / sinks): _____

Visible pad thickness estimate: _____

Any sounds when braking: _____

Your Notes:

Section 5: Battery & Electrical

Tier 2 — Hands On • Estimated time: 5–10 minutes

The inspection form includes a **battery performance check** comparing *factory spec Cold Cranking Amps (CCA)* against the *actual measured CCA*. You won't have a battery tester today, but you can still evaluate the battery visually and by behavior.

What to Check

- ☐ Terminal corrosion *White/green/blue crusty buildup on the + or – posts*
- ☐ Secure mount *Battery should not shift when pushed. A loose battery can short against the hood.*
- ☐ Case condition *Look for bulging sides (overcharging), cracks, or leaking acid*
- ☐ Date code *Most batteries have a sticker or stamp. Typical battery life is 3–5 years.*
- ☐ Slow cranking *If the engine turns over slowly when starting, the battery is weak or the starter is failing.*



CONSUMER WISDOM

Auto parts stores (AutoZone, O'Reilly, NAPA) will test your battery for free. They'll also install a new one for free if you buy it there. A battery from an auto parts store is typically \$50–\$80 cheaper than the same battery installed at a dealership.

Battery brand and date code (if visible): _____

Terminal condition (clean / minor corrosion / heavy corrosion): _____

Your Notes:

Section 6: Steering & Suspension

Tier 1 (visual) + Tier 2 (bounce test) • Estimated time: 5–10 minutes

The Bounce Test

Stand at one corner of the vehicle. Push down hard on the fender or bumper and release. The vehicle should bounce **once** and settle. If it bounces two or more times, the **shock absorber or strut** at that corner is worn.

Repeat at all four corners. Record below.

Corner	Bounces (1 = OK)	Rating	Notes
Left Front			
Right Front			
Left Rear			
Right Rear			

Visual Checks

- ☐ Uneven tire wear *Already noted in Section 2 — this is a suspension symptom*
- ☐ Vehicle sits level *Look at the vehicle from 20 feet away. Does one corner sag?*

- ☐ **Steering wheel centered** *With the vehicle pointed straight on flat ground, is the wheel straight?*
- ☐ **Leaking shocks** *Wet or oily streaks on the shock body visible behind the wheel*

Your Notes:

Section 7: Tier 3 — The Consumer Challenge

Challenge tier — for students who complete Sections 1–6

You've inspected the vehicle. Now think like an **informed consumer**. Use your phone or a Chromebook to research the following for *your specific vehicle* (year, make, model).

CHALLENGE A: Maintenance Schedule Lookup

Search "[year] [make] [model] maintenance schedule" and find the manufacturer's recommended service intervals. How does the vehicle's apparent condition match what should have been done by this mileage?

CHALLENGE B: Cost Estimation

Pick the TWO most concerning items from your inspection (anything you rated WATCH or NOW). Look up the estimated repair cost on RepairPal.com for your specific vehicle. What would a shop charge? What would DIY parts cost?

CHALLENGE C: The Upsell Filter

Imagine a shop handed you this completed inspection and recommended \$2,500 in work. Based on what you now know, which items would you approve immediately, which would you defer 6 months, and which would you question? Write your reasoning.

Challenge completed (A / B / C / multiple):

Your Notes:

Final Assessment: Your Vehicle's Report Card

Review all your findings. Give this vehicle an overall condition rating and justify it.

☐ **GOOD**

I'd buy this car

☐ **FAIR**

Needs work but not urgent

☐ **POOR**

Walk away or negotiate hard

Justify your rating (100–200 words):

Your Notes:

If this were for sale, what would you offer? \$:

What repair would you demand the seller complete before purchase:
