Used car inspection checklist.

Go through the car **in daylight, on dry pavement, with the engine cold**. Mark every line OK, Watch or Problem, then bring the Watch and Problem lines to a mechanic.

Year / make / model _____ VIN _____ Mileage _____ Date _____

1 Exterior and body

WALK AROUND

	OK	WATCH	PROBLEM
Gaps around doors, hood and trunk are even; panels line up	☐	☐	☐
Paint color and shine match on every panel; no overspray on rubber or trim	☐	☐	☐
No dents, rust bubbles or fresh filler, especially at wheel arches and door bottoms	☐	☐	☐
Windshield and windows free of cracks and chips	☐	☐	☐
Headlights and taillights clear, not cracked, no water inside	☐	☐	☐
Doors, hood, trunk and fuel door open and close smoothly	☐	☐	☐
Sun damage: faded clear coat, cracked trim or rubber seals	☐	☐	☐

2 Tires and wheels

ALL FIVE

	OK	WATCH	PROBLEM
Tread even across each tire (tread gauge or the penny test)	☐	☐	☐
No cuts, bulges or cracks on the sidewalls	☐	☐	☐
Wear not heavier on the inside or outside edge (alignment or suspension)	☐	☐	☐
Four tires match in brand and size; note the date code on each	☐	☐	☐
Wheels not bent or cracked; all lug nuts in place	☐	☐	☐
Spare tire or inflator kit, jack and wheel-lock key are there	☐	☐	☐

3 Interior

SIT IN EVERY SEAT

	OK	WATCH	PROBLEM
No musty, moldy or smoky smell, no heavy air freshener covering one	☐	☐	☐
Carpet dry; no silt, rust or water lines under mats or in the trunk	☐	☐	☐
Warning lights come on with the key, then go out after the engine starts	☐	☐	☐
A/C blows cold and the heater blows hot	☐	☐	☐
Windows, locks, mirrors, wipers, horn and sunroof all work	☐	☐	☐
Screen, backup camera, speakers, USB and Bluetooth work	☐	☐	☐
Seat belts latch and retract; seats adjust	☐	☐	☐
Wear on pedals, seat and steering wheel fits the mileage	☐	☐	☐

4 Under the hood

ENGINE COLD

	OK	WATCH	PROBLEM
Hood is cold when you arrive, so you see a real cold start	☐	☐	☐
Oil level on the dipstick is in range; no milky film under the oil cap	☐	☐	☐
Coolant in the reservoir at the mark (never open a hot radiator cap)	☐	☐	☐
Belts and hoses not cracked, swollen or soft	☐	☐	☐
Battery terminals clean; look for a date on the battery	☐	☐	☐
No wet spots or fresh leaks; engine bay not steam-cleaned to hide them	☐	☐	☐
No smoke or burning smell after the engine runs a few minutes	☐	☐	☐

Bring: a flashlight, paper towels, a tread gauge or a penny, your phone for photos, and a friend. Take photos of the VIN, the odometer and anything marked Problem.

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Under the car, a short drive, papers.

Use a flashlight. For a full drive, use our **Test drive checklist**.

5 Under the car

FLASHLIGHT

	OK	WATCH	PROBLEM
No fresh drips: oil (brown/black), coolant (green, orange or pink), transmission fluid (red)	☐	☐	☐
No heavy rust, bent parts, welds or crumpled metal on the frame rails	☐	☐	☐
Exhaust has no holes or loud leaks; catalytic converter is in place	☐	☐	☐
Rubber boots behind the front wheels not torn or slinging grease	☐	☐	☐
Push down on each corner: the car settles quickly, no bouncing	☐	☐	☐

6 A short drive

RADIO OFF

	OK	WATCH	PROBLEM
Starts easily and idles smoothly; no warning light stays on	☐	☐	☐
Shifts smoothly, with no slipping, clunks or delay into gear	☐	☐	☐
Brakes stop straight, with no grinding or pulsing pedal	☐	☐	☐
Steering is centered and the car tracks straight	☐	☐	☐
No knocks over bumps, no vibration at freeway speed	☐	☐	☐
After the drive: no new drips, smoke or smells	☐	☐	☐

Walk away if...

- The seller won't let a mechanic of your choice look at the car
- The name or VIN on the title doesn't match the seller or the car
- A salvage or other title brand shows up that nobody mentioned
- You're pushed to pay today, in cash, or to wire a deposit before seeing the car

7 Paperwork and history

BEFORE MONEY

- ☐ California title (pink slip) in the seller's name; VIN on the title matches the dash and the door jamb
- ☐ Title brand checked: clean, or salvage, revived salvage, junk, flood or lemon law buyback
- ☐ Vehicle history report read (CARFAX or another NMVTIS-approved provider)
- ☐ Open recalls checked by VIN at **nhtsa.gov/recalls**
- ☐ Valid smog certificate from the seller when the sale requires one
- ☐ Service records, owner's manual and all keys
- ☐ Independent pre-purchase inspection by a mechanic **you** choose

My decision

☐ **Buy** ☐ **Negotiate** ☐ **Walk away**

Repairs to price in: $ _____

Notes

This checklist helps you notice things; it does not replace an inspection by a qualified mechanic. Not legal advice. Every car at Irvine Used Cars is smog checked before sale, and a CARFAX report is available on request.

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