2 EVALUATE

Before you start the car, give it an initial inspection

Inspect the exterior

Look for offset doors and fenders, cracks and differences in paint color, as this may indicate body damage—if you spot new paint, tap along the repainted areas; a change in the sound can reveal repairs and body work

Look for rust

Check underneath the car for rust—a used car with a rusted frame isn't structurally sound
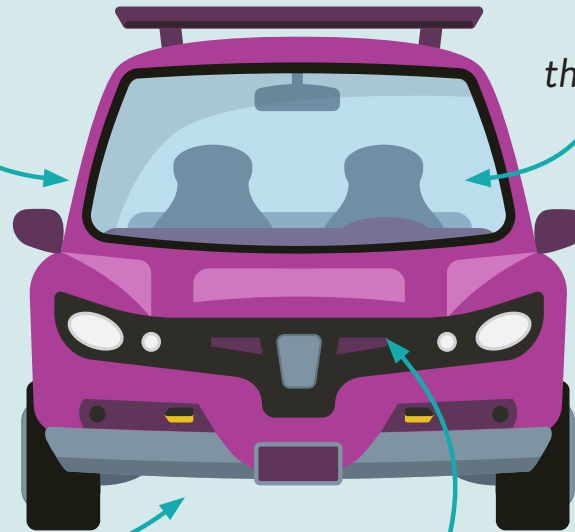
Check the interior

Inspect the interior for wear and tear and water damage, and check the the odometer—if it shows low mileage but the inside of the car is disheveled, the car may not be what it appears to be

Check the tires and wheels

Look for even tire wear—uneven wear could mean that the wheels or suspension are out of alignment

Look at the engine

If you see rounded or stripped nuts and bolt heads, it may indicate shoddy repair work; check for new spark plugs—it is a good sign that the car has undergone regular maintenance; make sure the coolant is clear and the oil, transmission fluid and brake fluid are all the correct colors

Now, *take the car for a test drive*

Be sure to drive it cold—a cold engine will tell you
a lot more than a warm engine will

Plan your route

Your test drive route should cover different types of roads—try to drive on highways, city streets and rural roads

Vary the terrain

Find a bumpy road to see how the car responds—if you feel like you're being thrown around, the shocks are likely worn out

Check the controls

Test the wipers, lights, turn indicators, stereo, and the heat and air-conditioning controllers

Now, *take the car for a test drive*

Check the alignment

While driving, momentarily take your hands off the steering wheel to see if the car pulls to the left or right

Check the gearbox

Gears should shift smoothly—if you hear any grinding noises, there is likely something wrong with the transmission

Check the brakes

Find an empty road, accelerate and hit the brakes hard—if the car pulls to one side, there may be a loose caliper

VEHICLE HISTORY REPORT

Get a comprehensive report of the vehicle's history—these reports often cost money, but they are worth it

For no charge, **carfax.com** will show you how many records are available for a specific Vehicle Identification Number (VIN); however, if you want to view the records, there is a charge