

Part 1: Exterior Inspection

Check overall condition, signs of previous accident, repairs, major framework or suspension work.

Front of the car

- Hoodlines
 - gaps going up and down the fender are equal on left and right side.
 - If not, the hood or the fender could be crumpled and the vehicle was in a major accident.
- feel the paint of the hood
- Windshield
 - chips or cracks
 - seals, signs of replacement, OEM logo
 - windshield washer nozzles, check paint lines
 - wiper blades, rubber intact
- Headlights
 - match and haven't been replaced
 - over damages, cracks, hazed headlights indicate lots of driving on highway
 - OEM logos or aftermarket components
 - they line up with the body of the car
 - overspray, paint at bottom of the headlight means the bumper was repainted
- Front bumper
 - stone chips (highway), scratches
 - fog lights, paint line

Left & right side of the car

- signs of respraying
 - feel the paint for scratches/ blemishes
 - signs of masking tape around fender
 - overspray on fender plastic panels around wheels
 - all body lines line up
 - every body gap is even all the way down if the door body gap is closer around the top than the bottom, either the door hinge was adjusted or body work done to the side of the car
 - paint and texture match between body panels, orange peel or mirror-like
- Doors
 - check the jams with door closed, if not lined up well, the door could be kicked out
 - every door opens and shuts smoothly
 - weather stripping, aged and shrunk can lead to leakage and wind noise
 - pull back weather stripping, check overspray inside
 - inside of doors
 - overspray, masking tape on the inside of doors
 - if welds don't look like factory, door skin could be replaced
 - door jam, signs of overspray
 - door jam, oily residue is good, rust proof
 - door jam, body plugs, drill a hole and insert wand for rust proof
 - door hinges, signs of tampering with fender bolts

- latch and bolts, signs of tempering
- bottom of door, rust and holes are not clogged
- Body moldings, signs of overspray, widows on sides, back and front
- Gas cap, signs of overspray

Back of the car

Look for signs of rear accidents

- Taillights
 - OEM logo
 - lines up properly along the body, rough spots and overspray, not aligning well with bumper mean the bumper could be replaced
- bumper aligns with the metal body, look for paint lines, if color matches between plastic bumper and metal body
- Rear fender, rust spots, body filler, paint chipping
- Rear bumper paints around license plate
- Bottom of the car at the back
 - frame rails
 - spare tire well, signs of major rear damage
 - exhaust, signs of overspray
- Trunk
 - body gaps between trunk lid and bumper, signs of misaligned bumper
 - body gaps of trunk lid up and down, if gaps are equal between left & right misalignment could indicate major rear end accident
 - trunk opens and closes smoothly
 - trunk hinges are intact and haven't been tampered with.
 - weather stripping are intact, no leaking or holes
 - weather stripping, any rough spots or debris inside pull plastic panels and trunk liner off
 - check for dents, crumpled areas
 - any weld areas, body work done to the rear
 - check spare tire area for 1) signs of rear end collision, 2) water, signs of leaks
 - feel the edge of the between bumper and trunk, check paint lines
- trunk liner, all fasteners are there, otherwise the trunk lid has been worked on

Roof

- feel the paint
- any dimples (hail damage), crumples/ waves (major accident)
- sunroof, paint evidence, rust spots (water)
- stone chips at front (highway travels)

Mirrors

- paint work
- stone chips

Under the car

- overspray
- frame rails, check damage, bends
- bite marks from the frame machine
- rust, exhaust components, brake lines
- oily residue is good, rust proofing
- under the front bumper, over spray

Under the hood

- safety latch works and releases properly
- hood open and close properly open hood
- feel the edges, paint line
- fender screws, if fender was replaced
- hood latch, check if lines up, bent, bolts were adjusted or replaced
- front radiator cradle, crumpled, welded areas
- support structure under the front radiator cradle, bent indicate possible front end collision
- inside of the bumper, if foam support is there (bumper repaired or replaced)
- bolts on both sides of fender are intact, not tampered with
- fender and grille are not loose
- rubbers along the windshield are intact, no debris along windshield cowl
- aftermarket wiring (wiring harness damaged and repaired)
- the original emission control sticker, air conditioner sticker (original hood)
- hood liner intact
- stickers for vacuum routing, spark plugs, original (toyota) stamp
- VIN stamp on the fender for some cars
- VIN code check
 - windshield
 - side of door
 - trunk
- tire loading information intact on the door jamb

Part 2: mechanical inspection

- motor oil
 - is it full

- color
 - clean and honey colored, good
 - dark and black, hasn't changed for a while
 - coffee/ creamy color with bubbles, coolant could be leaking through the had gasket
- oil cap, check valve cover for oil, sludge, under the cap if any sludge or milky residue
- Transmission oil
 - color
 - dark color, clutch packs are burning up
 - brownish, not too bad, could use an oil change
 - bright red and clean, freshly changed
 - smell burnt
- Battery
 - terminals, corrosion
 - sticker, age of battery (lasts 4-6y)
 - indicator to top up the fluid
- Coolant fluid
 - level and color
- Power steering fluid
 - color, red: freshly changed, brown/ black: needs a change
 - low level could be a leak
- Radiator cap
 - is it original
 - topped off
 - milky residue on the cap, oil leaks into coolant
- Fluid in master cylinder reservoir
 - color, dark: breaks could be overheating, rotors could be warped
 - level, low: brake pads could be worn
 - check brake lines and area underneath the master cylinder for leaking
- Remove engine cover
 - all connectors intact, nothing loose
 - fuel injectors are intact, no leak
 - if spark plugs accessible, check if clean and OEM
 - if tip of spark plug is black and crusty, car could be burning oil, running too lean or rich
- Radiator hoses, both, not mushy or soft, no cracks or leaking
- coolant fans spin free

- air condition line for dye or leaking
- the valve cover sealing the engine, leaks
- run finger along back of valve cover, check leaks
- is starter OEM
- is alternator OEM
- accessory belts, loose, frayed, cracked
- timing belts, replaced, sticker on timing cover, drivers door jam or dealers records
- dog bone engine mount, cracking
- top of the struct mount, clean bolts means struct probably recently replaced
- oil filter, no oil leaks, brand of the filter, some shops write the date
 - oil change stickers could tell the most recent oil change
- Remove air filter, see if it's clean
- check engine bay for loose connections or wiring
- radiator and air conditioner condenser, leaks, stone chips, rusts
- is washer fluid empty

Jack up the car

wheels

- rim, scratches, curb rash, bends
- brake dust on the inside of rim, caliper is seizing or replaced with cheap metallic brake pad
- grab on the tires at 9 or 3 o'clock and pull the wheel back and forth, check if tire rod ends are worn
- grab on the tire at 12 and 6 o'clock and pull it back and forth, ball joints are worn
- pull on other diagonal directions, wheel bearing
- struts and springs, broken strings, oil leaks from struts
- the rubber bellows and bump stops at the top
- Bounce up and down on each corner of the car to check the struts and then release, if the car bounces up more than one and a half times, that the strut could be blown

Tire worn out

- middle more worn out, over inflated.
- outer bands more worn out, under inflated.

- feel bumps, every other thread is going high and low, suspension/ struts are worn out. tires absorb the shock, noisy tires
- small cracks, tire is aging and will need to be replaced soon.
- tread depth
- dot code, week and year of manufactured (lasts 6-10y)
- make, model, and tire size, as well as the tread depth, matches on each axle of the car.

Under the car

- overall frame, rust, dents, scuff, frame machine marks, oils of rust proof
- oil pan, leaks, drain plug not rusting
- transmission pan, leaks
- rear main seal (between transmission and engine), leaks is expensive, have to remove the entire transmission to access the seal.
- exhaust system from top to the bottom, rust areas, holes, patchwork, flex pipe leak
- the CV axle where it meets the transmission, leaks
- steering rack, where it meets the inner tie rod, leaks

remove wheel to check brake

- brake caliper, rust, leaking from leader valve
- brake pad thickness less than backing material, needs to be replaced
- brake rotors, grooves and rusts, spots brake pad isn't touching (problems with calipers or warped rotors)
- brake hose, flex
- stabilizer linkage, grab onto it and pull really hard, see if loosen
- bushings get worn out, would cause a clucking noise when going over bumps
- inner drive shaft boot, inner tie rod, leakage
- stabilizer bar bushing where it attaches to the frame, tug make sure tight (loose can cause noise going over bumps)
- outer tie rod., no grease or leaking, the bushing is nice and soft, tug to make sure no looseness
- control arm bushing, make sure that there's no cracks (hard to take out, cause entire steering knuckle has to come off)
- lower ball joint, it's not leaking and that the bushing is filled with grease.
- the CV joints are intact and not leaking, (hard to replace) because often at times this axle gets seized to that bearing.
- rear engine mount, inspect the rubber around it because a lot of times this will fail first causing the other mounts to wear out.
- at the back, check the tire tread and the tire size to make sure it matches the other side.
- rotate it to make sure it moves freely and the parking brake is not catching.
- to wiggle it side to side to check for some play in the wheel bearing.
- look at the rear struts to make sure the springs are okay and the struts are not leaking.
- remove the rear wheel and inspect the brakes and the rotors.
- look at the gas tank on the car to make sure that there's no leaks. It's securely tied down and there's no rust spots.

start the car

start it up and listen out for any dry bearings or squeaky belts.

- all the gauges and lights are working and that when you start the car all of the warning lights disappear.
- Check the exhaust system after the car has just been started for any repairs or any leaks.
- Some steam and water on a cold start from the exhaust is okay, but if the smoke is coming out really black or blue, that could indicate the car is burning oil or the valve stem seals are leaking.
 - Sometimes you can also an oily residue on the bumper around the tailpipe.
- go around an engine and make sure that there's no strange noises.
 - a little bit of valve chatter is okay for an engine this old.
- put my hand on the engine and rev it a little, see how smooth the engine runs. If it's running rough, that means one of the cylinders are misfiring.
- check the engine blow-by. Usually if there's a lot of air coming out of here, that could indicate that the car has high mileage or that there's a cylinder that's misfiring or has bad compression.
- With the transmission in park and the vehicle level, check the transmission fluid and make sure it's on the cold mark if the engine is cold.
- run through the gears on the transmission to see how the engine moves. That could indicate if I've got a bad engine mount.
- turn on the air conditioner and listen for a change in the idle. Check that the AC clutch and the compressor is engaged. If it's turning on and off consistently, that means it's low on freon.
- Check that both of the radiator fans are working.
- Turn the steering wheel lock to lock and listen for any strange noises.
- Pump the brakes and make sure they become nice and firm and they don't sink down to the ground. That could indicate a bad master cylinder.
- Drive the engine and see how it sounds.
- Go through all the gears on the transmission and see how it shifts.
- do a quick load check on the starter and the battery.
- turn the headlights on, turn the radio on, turn the wipers on, turn the HVAC system up and then start the car and see how it behaves.
- have a look underneath the car while it's running to make sure there's nothing leaking.
- Have a look at the tailpipe residue. If there's a lot of black, thick residue, That means the engine is burning oil.
- Look where the car has been normally parked and see if you can find any oil residue where it's been leaking.

Part3: inside

- does the car smell like previous owner smoking, or the car has been in a flood?
- turn the ignition on. odometer reading should match condition of the car
- signs of wear on the brake and gas pedals. worn through indicates a high mileage car.
- signs of wear on the driver's side seat.
- signs for wear on the transmission shifter and also on the steering wheel.
- stickers on the door jams and the windshield indicate the odometer reading when the vehicle was last serviced.

check out all of the accessories on the car.

- all of the seat adjustments work, do the same thing on the passenger side.

- power windows work on both sides, both up and down.
 - If the window is slow to roll up that could mean that the regulator is on its way out.
- power door locks work on both sides, door handles are working properly.
- window lock.
- power mirrors work on both sides of the car.
- the steering wheel tilts properly.
- airbags: make sure they have not been tampered with, the cover is not warped or it looks different than the dashboard.
 - Otherwise the airbag has been replaced and the vehicle was in a major accident.
- door latches haven't been tampered with or the vehicle has been broken into.
- ignition key: any marks or scratches indicating a stolen vehicle

the telltale signs that the vehicle was in a flood.

- lifting up all of the floor mats and feeling the carpet for any wetness.
 - There's a thick carpet padding under here. If it gets wet, it will never dry and it will cause rusting in the floor pan.
- feel under the dash and the console for any wetness and look for a line.
 - Sometimes you can see a line of sediment where the water line was in the car.
- door pockets are nice and clean and don't have any wetness or sediment.
- the frame rails under the seat are not rusting.
- Look under the seat at the electrical connectors, all intact and not rusted out.
- the parking brake moves nice and freely.
- cup holders
- The traction control button and also the storage cubby.
- Pull up on the back seat and check underneath for any sediments or wetness
- the trunk release and the gas door release works.
- Turn the ignition on, all of the lights are working and none of the bulbs have been disconnected.
- start the vehicle and all the warning lights go out.
- all of the gauges are working correctly and there's no evidence that the odometer has been tampered with.
- the overdrive button and traction control button are working.
- the horn works.
- parking lights, headlights, fog lights, high beams and both indicators working.
- tail lights, license plate lights, and the brake lights and the reverse lights at the back of the vehicle.

- the gauges and all the dash lights light up properly when the lights are on.
- the windshield wipers are working in both low and high speed.
- the cruise control is working.
- the radio works on different channels in different modes.
- the CD player works.

the HVAC system.

- turn it on and check the blower motor to make sure that works.
- the air is coming out of the right area and that the modes work.
- the vents are moving and not broken
- the front defroster works.
 - Usually the air conditioner turns on with the defroster.
- the rear defroster works.
- air conditioner's working, blows nice and cold.
- the hot setting and blows nice and warm
- the clock is functional
- the hazard lights work
- Shift through all of the gears and make sure the gears are shifting smoothly.
- the cigarette lighter's been used.
- the ashtray has been smoked in.
- the power connections work and no fuses are blown.
- the glove box, the lock works and that it opens and closes nice and smoothly.
- the owner's manual is present.
- the auto-dimming mirror is working properly,
- the map light is working,
- the garage door opener
- sunroof
- the sun visors & vanity light
- the dome light works when you open the door.

- all the seatbelts work and none of them are worn or frayed.
 - when you latch them in, the seatbelt light on the dashboard comes off.
- the front seat slides properly and that it's not jammed.
- all the seat mechanism works for entrance to the rear seat.
- floor mats all present.
- back seat: the seatbelts and any vanity lights and accessories work, including the power doors, windows, and locks.

build quality of the vehicle.

- the wood grain dash and the soft touch dash materials and see how they're holding up.
- open the trunk. no evidence of sediment or water line.
- pull out the trunk liner.
- the jack tool and also the lug wrench is present.
- the jack is present and is secure.
- the tailgate or deterrent system is topped off and it's working.
- Jumper cables and bungee cords are always good to have.
- unscrew the spare tire, pull out the spare tire. look at the spare tire well.
- no welds or anything that could have indicated a collision damage before.
- no rust and dirt and debris and evidence of any water
 - that could have indicated the car was in a flood or that the seals are leaking.
- if drain ports look like they've been tampered with.
 - there was water here at some point and they've been drained out.

look at the spare tire.

- the condition of the wheel and the tire.
- has it been driven on
- the dog port on the side here to see the age.
 - If the vehicle is old and the tire is original, tire could expire due to time.
- check the tire pressure, the rim and tire size match the ones on the car.
- oily residue down where the jack is, is a good sign of rust proofed.
- the trunk locks properly and remote trunk popper it works .

Test drive

listen to the car at idle.

- engine: how smoothly it's running or if it's bogging down.
- any squeaky belts or dry bearings or any exhaust rattles.
- the dashboard no warning lights.

take this car for a drive.

how the engine's performing.

- on flat open road accelerate moderately: power of engine
- how smooth the engine's running. misfiring or bogging down or holding back, indicate a potential issue with the fuel system.

accelerate moderately and check transmission shifts.

- it doesn't shift at too high of an RPM, or it doesn't shift too hard because that could indicate major problems with the transmission that's very expensive to replace.
- put it in drive and drive forward, come to a complete stop, put it in reverse and see how long it takes to shift into reverse.
 - We want it to shift right away.
- put it into drive and see how long it takes to drive.
 - a delay could indicate an issue with the transmission.
- the cruise control works and it disengages when touch the brakes.
- the horn works
- On a straight flat road, slightly release the steering wheel and see if the car pulls to one side or another.
- if the steering wheel is straight.
 - indicate an issue with an alignment or a bad tire.
- take the vehicle over a couple of rough roads and listen to the suspension.
- any clunks or noises coming from the front end.
 - could indicate a stabilizer linkage that's loose or strut mounts that are popping, a broken spring or even the tie rods.
- the brakes work properly.
- step on the brakes firmly as get up to speed here and see how the car reacts.
- that the car isn't pulling off to one side or another.
 - If the pedal is vibrating, the rotors are warped and will need to be replaced.
 - If it's pulling to one side, the caliper is sticking and that will need to be replaced.
- checking for brake fade.
- accelerate to speed and stop and then accelerate again multiple times to get an idea of the consistency of the feel in the brake pedal.
 - Otherwise the pads and rotors are glazed and might need to be replaced.
- how the suspension is reacting to the road.

- If the suspension is bouncing up and down, especially a lot on the highway, indicate that the struts are blown.
- At a standstill, test how responsive the throttle of the car is.
- Accelerate really really hard to get an idea of the power of the car.
- see if it pulls to one side or another.
- under hard acceleration, look for blue smoke coming out the back of the tailpipe. the car is burning oil.
- bring it up to highway speed, release the steering wheel slightly and see if there's any vibrations.
 - low speed vibrations, the tires are bad and probably a belt is broken and need to be replaced.
 - high speed vibrations, an issue with tire balance or the tire rods are worn.
- on the highway, listen for wind noise coming from the doors or windows.
 - weather stripping is failing and it's not sealing properly
- listen for tire noise. tires get louder as they wear out
- find an empty parking lot to check the steering.
- turn the wheel lock to lock and listen for any noises or any clicking
 - clicking from a front wheel drive car, the CV joints are bad and will need to be replaced.
 - popping sound or clunking sound, probably the tie rod ends are loose or the strut mount bearings are defective.
- take the car through some turns
- steering is nice and smooth and decent feedback from the steering wheel.
- a good seating position, visibility is okay, okay with the road noise in the interior, okay with the power of the engine, and okay with overall how the car feels
- the parking brake holds the vehicle.