

THE COMPLETE CDL STUDY BUNDLE.

PREMIUM EDITION

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO PASS — IN ONE PDF.

Critical numbers · Pre-trip sequence · 9 endorsement cheat sheets
Questions everyone gets wrong · Day-before checklist · Full timeline

UPDATED MAY 2026

Verified against current FMCSA CDL manual, 49 CFR Parts 383, 391, 393, 395 & 172.

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Six sections, designed to be used in order or jumped to as you need them. Every fact has been verified against the federal CDL manual or the relevant section of 49 CFR.

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Zero to CDL, with realistic time estimates at each step. ELDT, CLP hold, skills test, licensing.

HOW TO USE THIS BUNDLE

Sections 1, 2, and 3 build your foundation. Read them once, then come back and quiz yourself on the numbers. Section 4 is where most people pick up the points they were going to lose. Sections 5 and 6 are for the day(s) before you test. **You can pass the General Knowledge test on this bundle alone.**

Verified against: Federal CDL Manual · 49 CFR Parts 383, 391, 393, 395 & 172 · 23 U.S.C. §127 · FMVSS 121 · FMCSA HOS rule (Sept 29, 2020) & ELDT rule (Feb 7, 2022).

1 CRITICAL NUMBERS

One page. The exact figures the General Knowledge and endorsement tests quiz on. Every number on this page is verified against the federal CDL manual or 49 CFR.

If you only memorize one page in this bundle, make it this one. These are the figures that show up on the multiple-choice tests as the 'exact' answer with three close decoys around it.

STOPPING DISTANCES – 55 MPH, GOOD CONDITIONS, LOADED

From the federal CDL manual, Section 2.6 (Speed and Stopping Distance) and Section 5.4 (Using Air Brakes).

Component	Distance	What it is
Perception distance	142 ft	Time for your eyes to see a hazard and brain to recognize it (about 1¼ seconds at 55 mph).
Reaction distance	61 ft	From brain telling foot to move until foot is pushing the brake (about ¾ second).
Brake lag distance	32 ft	Air-brake-only delay. Time for air to flow through the lines to the brake chambers (about ½ second).
Braking distance	216 ft	From the moment the brakes grab until the truck stops, dry pavement, good brakes.
TOTAL STOPPING DISTANCE	>450 ft	Perception + Reaction + Brake Lag + Braking. About 1½ football fields.

EMPTY VS LOADED

Empty trucks need **longer** stopping distances than loaded trucks, not shorter. Brakes, tires, springs and shocks are designed to work best at full load. Empty, you have less traction and the brakes can lock up easier – this is a frequently missed question.

AIR BRAKE PSI BENCHMARKS

Federal CDL manual, Section 5; FMVSS 121 requires the low-pressure warning below 60 psi.

Event	Pressure	What happens / what to verbalize
Governor cut-out	~125 psi	Compressor stops pumping air into tanks. Range is typically 120–140 psi; the manual says "about 125 psi."
Governor cut-in	~100 psi	Compressor starts pumping again. Range is roughly 20 psi below cut-out.
Low-pressure warning	Before 60 psi	Warning light, buzzer or wig-wag must activate before tank pressure drops below 60 psi.
Spring brake activation	20–45 psi	Parking-brake knob pops out automatically; spring brakes engage as final fail-safe.
Air-up rate (test)	85→100 psi in <45 sec	Dual air system at operating RPM. Slower = leak or compressor issue.

Air loss test (1 minute, fully charged)	Single vehicle	Combination
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Brakes released	≤ 2 psi/min	≤ 3 psi/min
Brakes applied (fully)	≤ 3 psi/min	≤ 4 psi/min

Source: federal CDL manual, Section 5. Exceeding these rates fails the brake-system check.

FEDERAL WEIGHT & SIZE LIMITS (INTERSTATE SYSTEM)

23 U.S.C. §127. States may set lower limits or grant grandfathered higher limits on certain routes. Confirm your state's limit before any load.

Dimension	Federal limit	Notes
Max gross vehicle weight (GVW)	80,000 lb	On the Interstate System. Bridge Formula B further restricts based on axle spacing.
Max single axle weight	20,000 lb	Single axle = wheel centers < 40 inches apart.
Max tandem axle weight	34,000 lb	Tandem = two axles 40-96 inches apart.
Max width	102 in (8'6")	Excludes mirrors and safety devices. Hawaii: 108 in.
Max height	No federal limit	Each state sets its own. Most allow 13'6" to 14'6". Check route clearances.
Trailer length (semitrailer)	Min 48 ft	Federal law sets a minimum that states must allow. Most states permit 53 ft on the National Network.
Doubles: each trailer	Min 28 ft	States must allow each trailing unit to be at least 28 ft on the National Network.

HAZMAT PLACARD THRESHOLDS

49 CFR 172.504. The single most-missed number on the HazMat test.

Material type	Placard required when...	Examples
Table 1 materials	Any quantity. No minimum – placard even one pound.	Mass explosives (Div 1.1, 1.2, 1.3), poison-inhalation gas (2.3), dangerous-when-wet (4.3), certain organic peroxides (5.2), PIH materials (6.1), some radioactive (Yellow III, 7).
Table 2 materials	Aggregate gross weight reaches 1,001 lb or more in non-bulk packaging on a single vehicle.	Most flammable liquids (3), flammable gases (2.1), non-flammable gases (2.2), flammable solids (4.1), oxidizers (5.1), corrosives (8), and most other classes.
Bulk packaging	Always placard , regardless of weight.	Cargo tanks, portable tanks, IBCs above bulk definition. Class 9 bulk: mark with UN ID number.

REMEMBER THE NUMBER

Table 2 threshold is **1,001 pounds** – not 1,000, not “over 1,000.” The number 1,001 is what will be in the multiple-choice answer.

HOURS OF SERVICE (PROPERTY-CARRYING DRIVERS)

49 CFR Part 395. Current rules effective since September 29, 2020.

Rule	Limit	Details
11-hour driving limit	11 hr max	Maximum driving in a duty period, after 10 consecutive hours off duty.
14-hour on-duty window	14 hr max	No driving after the 14th consecutive hour after coming on duty. Off-duty time does NOT extend this clock.
30-minute break	After 8 hr driving	Required after 8 consecutive hours of driving time. Off-duty, sleeper berth, or on-duty/not driving.
Required reset	10 hr off duty	Consecutive. Resets the 11- and 14-hour clocks.
60 hr / 7-day limit	60 hr max	For carriers not operating every day of the week.
70 hr / 8-day limit	70 hr max	For carriers operating every day. 34-hour off-duty period resets either limit.
Sleeper berth split	8/2 or 7/3	Split the 10-hour off-duty into two periods. The longer period (8 or 7 hr) must be in the sleeper. Neither period counts against the 14-hour window when paired.

FOLLOWING DISTANCE FORMULA

The rule: 1 second per 10 feet of vehicle length, plus 1 additional second over 40 mph.

Worked example: A 60-foot vehicle at 55 mph → 6 seconds (length) + 1 second (over 40 mph) = **7 seconds** minimum following distance.

Double the distance in bad weather. *Source: FMCSA – CMV Driving Tips, following too closely.*

TIRE TREAD DEPTH MINIMUMS

49 CFR 393.75. Measured in any major tread groove.

Position	Minimum tread
Steering axle (front)	4/32 of an inch
All other tires (drive & trailer)	2/32 of an inch

KNOWLEDGE TEST QUESTION COUNTS & PASSING SCORE

49 CFR 383.135 requires **at least 80% correct** on every CDL knowledge test. Question counts follow the AAMVA standard pool used by most states; a few states (notably Texas) use slightly different totals.

Test	Questions	Must answer correctly (80%)	Endorsement code
General Knowledge	50	40 of 50	– (required)
Air Brakes	25	20 of 25	removes L restriction
Combination Vehicles	20	16 of 20	required for Class A
Hazardous Materials	30	24 of 30	H endorsement
Tanker	20	16 of 20	N endorsement
Doubles / Triples	20	16 of 20	T endorsement
Passenger	20	16 of 20	P endorsement
School Bus	20	16 of 20	S (after P)

Time limits vary by state. Most do not impose a strict timer on the General Knowledge test. The test ends immediately when you have either passed or failed (that's by design, not a glitch).

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PRE-TRIP INSPECTION

The sequence and the defect thresholds in the exact order examiners expect. Study this the night before your skills test.

The pre-trip is a verbalized walk-around. You point at each item, say what you're checking, and say what would be a defect. Examiners are listening for the words, not just looking at the truck. Skip a verbalization and you lose the point even if the part is fine.

THE 7-STEP ORDER

1. Approach & overview – vehicle leaning, fluid puddles, area clearance.
2. Engine compartment – opened with engine off, parking brake set.
3. In-cab – gauges, controls, brake checks (air-brake-equipped vehicles).
4. Headlights & signals (with help, or by cycling controls).
5. Walk-around starting at the left front, working around the vehicle counter-clockwise.
6. Rear of vehicle – lights, reflectors, cargo doors, mud flaps, splash guards.
7. Final signal check from inside the cab.

STEP 1 – APPROACH AND OVERVIEW

Before you touch anything. Look at the whole truck from a distance.

- Vehicle lean** – any tilt suggests a flat tire, broken spring, or shifted load.
- Fluid puddles** – coolant (green), oil (brown/black), fuel (clear, smell). Note location.
- Hanging wires, hoses, parts.**
- Area clearance** – people, objects, low limbs, low wires above.

STEP 2 – ENGINE COMPARTMENT

Wheel chocks in (if needed), parking brake set, engine off, hood up. Verbalize each part, what you check, and what counts as a defect.

Component	What you check / verbalize	Defect criteria
Engine oil	Dipstick level – between MIN and MAX marks. No leaks at pan, valve cover.	Below MIN, or visible leak.
Coolant	Reservoir between MIN/MAX. No leaks at radiator or hoses.	Below MIN, or visible coolant.
Power steering	Reservoir at correct level. Hoses not chafed, leaking, or kinked.	Low fluid; leaks; cracked hose.
Belts & hoses	Belts: no more than 3/4" of free play, no cracks or frays. Hoses: no bulges, soft spots, or wear.	Cracks, fraying, glazing; soft/bulging hoses.
Alternator	Mounted secure, wiring tight, no corrosion at terminals.	Loose mount; broken wires.
Water pump	Secure, no leaks at the weep hole.	Drips, wet around weep hole.

Steering linkage	Pitman arm, drag link, tie rod, steering knuckle: all bolts, nuts, cotter keys present. No bends or cracks.	Missing cotter keys; bent or cracked components.
Suspension (front)	Springs not cracked or broken. Shocks not leaking. U-bolts, hangers, shackle pins all present.	Cracked/broken/missing springs; leaking shocks.
Brake chambers / slack adjusters	Secure; no cracks. Slack adjuster pushrod travel within manufacturer spec when brakes applied.	Cracked chamber; pushrod travel > 1" on standard chambers.

STEP 3 – CAB INTERIOR (ENGINE OFF, THEN ENGINE ON)

Get in. Engine off first to test warnings, then engine on for the full system check.

Item	Check
Seat belt	No tears, mount secure, latches firmly.
Mirrors	Both sides clean, adjusted, not cracked.
Windshield	No cracks in driver's view, wipers operational, washer fluid full.
Emergency equipment	Fire extinguisher (charged & secured), spare fuses (or circuit breakers), 3 reflective triangles.
Parking brake	Set. Try to pull forward in low gear – truck should not move.
Service brake	Roll forward 5 mph, press the brake firmly – truck stops without pulling left or right; pedal does not sink.
Steering wheel play	Maximum 10 degrees (about 2" of movement on a 20" wheel) before front wheels move.
Gauges & warning lights	Oil pressure, voltmeter, coolant temp, air pressure (both primary & secondary if dual system). All warning lights off after start.
Horn	Both city (electric) and air horn (if equipped) audible.
Heater / defroster	Both fans operate; air comes out of all vents and the defrost ducts.

THE AIR BRAKE TEST – THE SEQUENCE EXAMINERS LISTEN FOR

- 1. Charge the system.** Engine running, build to governor cut-out (~125 psi). Cut-out occurs.
- 2. Fan brakes to test cut-in.** Engine off, key on, fan brakes. Note: cut-in must occur at **~100 psi**.
- 3. Air loss rate, released.** Released brakes, watch the gauge for 1 minute. Loss must be ≤ 2 psi/min (single) or ≤ 3 psi/min (combination).
- 4. Air loss rate, applied.** Fully apply the brake pedal, hold, watch for 1 minute. Loss must be ≤ 3 psi/min (single) or ≤ 4 psi/min (combination).
- 5. Low-pressure warning.** Continue fanning. Warning **must** activate **before** 60 psi.
- 6. Spring brake activation.** Keep fanning. Parking-brake/tractor-protection knobs **must** pop out at 20-45 psi.

STEP 4 – LIGHTS & SIGNALS (ENGINE RUNNING)

With engine running, turn on the headlights (low, then high), four-way flashers, and parking lights. Walk to the front and verify each works. Then return to cab and engage each turn signal.

STEP 5 – WALK-AROUND, LEFT-FRONT COUNTER-CLOCKWISE

This is where most of the inspection happens. Same checks apply to each wheel position; verbalize for each one.

Station	Items & defect criteria
Left front wheel area	Tire: Proper inflation (no audible leaks). Tread depth at least 4/32" in any major groove (steering axle). No exposed cord, no cuts, no plugs/patches, no recap (recaps prohibited on steer tires). Rim: No cracks, bends, or rust streaks (rust streak = loose lug nut). Lug nuts: All present, no shiny threads or rust trails. Hub: Oil/grease seal not leaking, oil level visible if sight-glass equipped. Brake drum & shoes: No cracks; shoe lining at least $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick at thinnest point. Steering linkage: Confirm cotter keys, no bends. Suspension & shock: No leaks; mounts intact.
Left fuel tank area	Fuel tank: Mounted secure, cap on tight, no leaks at the mount or seam. Catwalk: No bends, breaks. Exhaust: Not leaking, secure to manifold; not touching wires, hoses, fuel lines. Frame: No cracks, no broken welds, no missing rivets, no bends.

Left rear tires & wheels	Tires: Tread at least 2/32" in any major groove (non-steer). Dual tires not touching each other. Both tires same size, same type (no mixing radial & bias). Lug nuts, hub, brake drum & shoes: Same checks as front. Spacer (if equipped): Centered, not bent.
Left rear & trailer lights	Marker, clearance, brake, tail, turn signal, reflectors – all clean and functional. Mud flaps not torn, not dragging.
Rear of vehicle	Lights: all functional. Reflectors: all present. License plate: secured, lit. Splash guards: not damaged. Cargo: properly secured, doors closed and latched.
Right side	Mirror image of the left side. Same checks in same order.

STEP 6 – COUPLING SYSTEM (COMBINATION VEHICLES)

Fifth wheel: Mounted secure, no cracks or missing bolts. Plate well-greased. **Locking jaws:** Closed around the kingpin shaft (not on the head). No visible gap between fifth wheel and trailer apron.

Kingpin / apron: Kingpin not bent. Apron flat against fifth wheel.

Release arm: Properly seated, safety latch engaged.

Air lines: Glad hands sealed, no cuts or chafing in the hoses, lines properly secured (not dragging).

Electrical line: Plugged in firmly, safety catch engaged, no cuts in the cable.

Sliding fifth wheel (if equipped): Locking pins fully engaged, no loose or missing pins.

Landing gear: Fully raised, crank handle stowed, no missing parts or damage.

STEP 7 – FINAL CHECK FROM THE CAB

Get back in. Engage signals, brake, then four-ways one more time and verify in the mirrors. Verbalize: *"All lights, signals, and reflectors checked and functional."*

CRITICAL DEFECT THRESHOLDS – MEMORIZE THESE

Item	Threshold	Source
Steer tire tread	≥ 4/32 of an inch	49 CFR 393.75(b)
All other tire tread	≥ 2/32 of an inch	49 CFR 393.75(c)
Brake shoe / lining	≥ ¼ of an inch at thinnest	CDL Manual S5
Steering wheel play	≤ 10° (~2" on 20" wheel)	FMCSA out-of-service criteria
Air loss, brakes released, single	≤ 2 psi/min	CDL Manual S5
Air loss, brakes released, combination	≤ 3 psi/min	CDL Manual S5
Air loss, brakes applied, single	≤ 3 psi/min	CDL Manual S5
Air loss, brakes applied, combination	≤ 4 psi/min	CDL Manual S5
Low-pressure warning	Activates before 60 psi	FMVSS 121
Spring brakes activate	Between 20–45 psi	CDL Manual S5

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9 ENDORSEMENT CHEAT SHEETS

One sheet per endorsement. The most-tested concepts only, written so you understand them – not just memorize them.

Each sheet is one page. Use them in two passes: read for understanding first, then come back the day before the test and read for memory.

CHEAT SHEET

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE

Endorsement code: Required for all CDLs

VEHICLE CLASSES (49 CFR 383.91)

- **Class A:** Any combination with GCWR **26,001 lb or more**, **provided** the towed unit's GVWR is over 10,000 lb.
- **Class B:** Single vehicle with GVWR **26,001 lb or more**; or such a vehicle towing one not over 10,000 lb.
- **Class C:** Doesn't meet A or B, but is either built for **16+ passengers** (including driver) OR carries placarded HazMat.

CDL DISQUALIFYING OFFENSES (49 CFR 383.51)

- **Major offenses** – 1-year minimum disqualification (3 years if HazMat-placarded): DUI of alcohol or controlled substance, BAC ≥ 0.04 in a CMV, refusing alcohol test, leaving the scene of an accident, using a CMV in a felony, driving while disqualified, causing a fatality through negligence.
- **Serious offenses** – second within 3 years = 60-day disqualification; third = 120-day. Includes speeding 15+ mph over, reckless driving, improper lane change, following too closely, texting/handheld phone use while driving a CMV, driving a CMV without proper class or endorsement.
- **Lifetime disqualification:** Using a CMV in a felony involving manufacture/distribution of a controlled substance; second major offense.

CARGO RULES

- Inspect cargo within first 50 miles, then every 150 miles or 3 hours (whichever comes first).
- Tie-downs: **at least 1 for every 10 feet** of cargo. Minimum **2 tie-downs for any cargo**.
- Center of gravity should be as low as possible, weight evenly distributed left-to-right.
- Over-the-axle weight: too little on drive axles = traction loss (a common test trap, people pick "brake wear" instead).

DRIVING SAFELY

- Following distance: **1 second per 10 ft** of vehicle length, +1 second over 40 mph.
- On wet roads, reduce speed by **about 1/3**; on packed snow, by $\frac{1}{2}$; ice = crawl.
- Black ice signs: vehicle ahead has no spray, wet-looking road but the temperature is below freezing, ice on mirrors or antennas.

- On long downgrades: low gear **before** starting down, use engine braking, snub-brake (brake firmly to slow 5 mph, then release until speed creeps back up).

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

- Tire failure (front): grip wheel tightly, stay off brake, let speed drop, then ease to shoulder.
- Brake failure: downshift, use parking brake gently, look for an escape ramp or runaway lane.
- Skids: **steer in the direction** you want the front to go, off the throttle, don't over-correct.
- Triangles after stopping: one within 10 ft behind, one 100 ft behind, one 100 ft ahead. On a divided highway, place the 100-ft and 200-ft triangles behind only.

MOST-MISSED ON THIS TEST

Off-tracking: When a long vehicle turns, the rear wheels follow a **tighter** path than the front. To clear the curb, swing wide AFTER you start the turn, not before. People often pick "wider path" for the rear wheels — wrong.

CHEAT SHEET

AIR BRAKES

Endorsement code: Removes L-restriction

HOW AIR BRAKES WORK (THE FAIL-SAFE DESIGN)

- Service brakes use **compressed air** – you press the pedal, air *applies* the brakes.
- Spring brakes are **held off by air pressure**. When pressure drops below 20–45 psi, the springs engage automatically. The system fails to **STOP**, not to roll.

KEY COMPONENTS

- **Air compressor** – pumps air; engine-driven via belt or gear.
- **Governor** – tells compressor when to start (cut-in ~100 psi) and stop (cut-out ~125 psi).
- **Air storage tanks (reservoirs)** – hold compressed air. Drain daily (or automatic drain valves) to remove water and oil.
- **Safety valve** – releases air at ~150 psi to prevent over-pressure.
- **Foot valve / brake pedal** – meters air to the brakes.
- **Brake chambers + slack adjusters + S-cams** – convert air pressure into mechanical brake-shoe pressure.
- **Spring brakes** – on drive and trailer axles only, never on the steer axle.
- **One-way check valve** – protects tanks if the compressor fails.

DUAL AIR SYSTEM (REQUIRED ON NEW VEHICLES)

- Two completely separate systems – **primary** and **secondary**.
- Each has its own gauge or a single dual-needle gauge.
- Wait until **both** systems reach 100 psi before driving.
- If one circuit fails, the other still gives you partial braking.

BRAKE FADE & SNUB BRAKING

- Fade = brakes overheating from continuous use, especially on long downgrades. Drums expand, lining hardens, stopping power drops.
- **Snub braking**: brake firmly to slow ~5 mph below your safe speed, then release. Repeat. Lets brakes cool between applications.
- **Never ride the brakes** – that's what causes fade.

MOST-MISSED ON THIS TEST

Brake lag time = about ½ second. That's the time for air to travel through the lines after you press the pedal. At 55 mph, this adds about 32 feet to your total stopping distance – making the air-brake total over 450 feet. People confuse brake lag with reaction time. They're different: reaction is your body, lag is the system.

CHEAT SHEET

COMBINATION VEHICLES

Endorsement code: Required for Class A

COUPLING – THE EXACT SEQUENCE

- 1. **Inspect the fifth wheel.** Plate greased, no cracks, jaws open, mount secure.
- 2. **Inspect area**, chock the trailer wheels if needed.
- 3. **Position tractor** directly in front of trailer, aligned. Don't back at an angle.
- 4. **Back slowly** until the fifth wheel **just touches** the trailer apron.
- 5. **Secure tractor**: parking brake on, neutral.
- 6. **Check trailer height.** Trailer should be low enough that the apron contacts the fifth wheel ramp.
- 7. **Connect air lines** (red emergency, blue service). Verify glad-hand seals.
- 8. **Supply air to trailer.** Push the trailer-supply valve in.
- 9. **Lock the trailer brakes.** Pull trailer air supply back out.
- 10. **Back under trailer** in low gear, slowly. Stop when the kingpin **clicks** into the jaws.
- 11. **Pull-test.** Release tractor brake, pull gently forward in low gear. The tractor should "buck" against the locked trailer brakes – this proves the kingpin is locked.
- 12. **Secure**: parking brake on, neutral, engine off, key in pocket.
- 13. **Inspect coupling with a flashlight**: no gap between fifth wheel and apron; jaws closed around kingpin **shaft**, not head; release arm seated; safety latch engaged.
- 14. **Connect electrical line**, secure safety catch.
- 15. **Raise landing gear** fully, stow crank.
- 16. **Remove chocks.**

UNCOUPLING – THE EXACT SEQUENCE

- 1. **Position** on level, solid ground; tractor and trailer in straight alignment.
- 2. **Ease pressure on the locking jaws**: lock trailer brakes (pull red knob), back tractor gently against the trailer.
- 3. **Set tractor brake**, transmission in neutral.
- 4. **Lower landing gear.** If empty: lower until firm contact. If loaded: continue cranking to take some weight off the fifth wheel.
- 5. **Disconnect air lines**, secure to back of cab. Disconnect electrical line, stow.
- 6. **Unlock fifth wheel**: release safety latch, pull release handle.
- 7. **Pull tractor clear**: release tractor brake, pull forward slowly until fifth wheel is out from under trailer. **Do not drive completely out** until you've stopped to lower landing gear if needed.
- 8. **Stop, set brakes, secure.**

OFF-TRACKING & ROLLOVER

- **Off-tracking**: Rear wheels follow a path **inside** the front wheels in a turn. The longer the wheelbase, the bigger the off-track. To clear the curb, take a wider path with the front, not narrower with the rear.
- **Rollover risk**: Combinations have a high center of gravity. Most rollovers happen on ramps and at low speeds, not on straight road. Slow down well before the curve, not in it.

- **Crack the whip:** When the tractor turns, the rear trailer of a double or triple swings out harder. Reduce speed, take wide turns.

CONVERTER DOLLY & PINTLE HOOK

- **Converter dolly:** A small axle with a fifth wheel on top. Used to connect a second (or third) trailer.
- **Pintle hook:** Connects the dolly tongue to the rear of the trailer ahead.
- Always couple the lead trailer to the tractor first, then connect the dolly, then the second trailer.

MOST-MISSED ON THIS TEST

Most common skills-test failure: Forgetting the pull-test, or doing it before locking trailer brakes. If you don't pull-test, the examiner has no way to confirm the kingpin is locked — automatic failure on most state checklists.

CHEAT SHEET

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

Endorsement code: H endorsement (requires TSA check)

THE 9 HAZARD CLASSES (FMCSA)

- **Class 1:** Explosives (Div 1.1–1.6). Dynamite, ammunition, fireworks.
- **Class 2:** Gases – 2.1 flammable (propane), 2.2 non-flammable (compressed air), 2.3 toxic (chlorine).
- **Class 3:** Flammable & combustible liquids. Gasoline, paint thinner.
- **Class 4:** Flammable solids – 4.1 (matches), 4.2 spontaneously combustible, 4.3 dangerous when wet.
- **Class 5:** Oxidizers & organic peroxides – 5.1 (ammonium nitrate), 5.2.
- **Class 6:** Toxic substances & infectious substances (poisons, medical waste).
- **Class 7:** Radioactive materials. Three label categories: I, II, III (Yellow III is most regulated).
- **Class 8:** Corrosives. Sulfuric acid, sodium hydroxide.
- **Class 9:** Miscellaneous. Lithium batteries, dry ice, asbestos.

PLACARD RULES (49 CFR 172.504)

- **Table 1 materials:** Placard for **any quantity**. Includes Div 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 explosives; 2.3 toxic gas; 4.3 dangerous when wet; some 5.2 organic peroxides; 6.1 poison-inhalation; Yellow III radioactive.
- **Table 2 materials:** Placard when aggregate gross weight reaches **1,001 lb or more** in non-bulk packaging.
- **Bulk packaging:** Placard **always**, regardless of weight.
- Placards must be placed on **all 4 sides** of the vehicle, readable from outside.
- A 'DANGEROUS' placard may replace separate placards for non-bulk Table 2 materials in 2+ classes – but not if 2,205 lb or more was loaded at one facility of one material.

SHIPPING PAPERS

- Must accompany the shipment at all times.
- Must list proper shipping name, hazard class, UN/NA ID number, packing group, total quantity.
- **Location while driving:** Within reach (driver's seat area), in a pouch on the driver's door, OR on the seat.
- **Location when out of vehicle:** Driver's seat OR on the door pouch.
- Emergency response info must be readily accessible (Emergency Response Guidebook).

SEGREGATION, PARKING, FORBIDDEN

- Some materials cannot be loaded together (Segregation Chart in 49 CFR 177.848).
- Examples: cyanides cannot ride with acids; oxidizers cannot ride with flammables in many cases.
- **Parking rules:** Never within 5 feet of traveled road. Avoid bridges, tunnels (some prohibited). Attended at all times unless in a safe haven.
- **Forbidden materials** – never transport: certain explosives in passenger-carrying vehicles; materials of trade exceptions don't apply to forbidden list.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE & SECURITY

- If there's a leak or spill: **park**, secure the area, **warn others**, call for help (CHEMTREC 1-800-424-9300; in Canada CANUTEC).
- Use the **Emergency Response Guidebook (ERG)** – look up by UN number or material name.
- TSA background check (HazMat Threat Assessment) required for the H endorsement – takes 30-60 days.

MOST-MISSED ON THIS TEST

The 1,001-pound trap. People answer "1,000 lb" or "over 1,000 lb" – the correct answer is exactly **1,001 lb** (the threshold AT which placarding becomes required for Table 2 materials in non-bulk packaging).

CHEAT SHEET

TANKER

Endorsement code: N endorsement

WHAT MAKES TANKERS DIFFERENT – SURGE

- **Surge** is liquid sloshing back and forth in the tank. When you brake, the liquid surges forward, then back, then forward again – pushing the tractor toward the hazard you tried to avoid.
- **Brake earlier and more gradually** than with a solid-cargo trailer.
- Expect **longer stopping distances**, especially with smooth-bore (unbaffled) tanks.
- Avoid quick lane changes – the side-to-side slosh can cause rollover.

BAFFLED vs SMOOTH-BORE (UNBAFFLED) TANKS

- **Baffled tanks** have partial bulkheads with holes inside. They **reduce front-to-back surge**, the kind that affects braking. They **do NOT prevent side-to-side slosh** in curves.
- **Smooth-bore (unbaffled) tanks** have no internal divisions. Used for food-grade liquids (milk, juice) and some specialty chemicals because they're easier to clean. Surge is worst in these.
- **Common trap on test:** "Baffles prevent all slosh." FALSE – they only help front-to-back.

OUTAGE & HIGH CENTER OF GRAVITY

- **Outage** is the empty space left at the top of the tank to allow the liquid to expand with heat. Different liquids need different outages – never fill 100%.
- Tankers have a **high center of gravity**: liquid weight sits well above the chassis. Rollover risk in curves and ramps is much higher than for a flatbed.
- **Take ramps and curves slower than the posted speed.** Posted speed is for cars, not loaded tankers.

INSPECTION POINTS UNIQUE TO TANKERS

- **Manhole covers:** Sealed, not leaking; safety latches in place.
- **Vents:** Open and clear (a clogged vent can collapse the tank from vacuum).
- **Emergency shutoff:** Tested, accessible from outside the tank.
- **Vapor recovery equipment** (if equipped, e.g., gasoline tankers): connected, no leaks.
- **Valves:** Bottom unloading valves closed and secured.
- **Special placarding** may apply if the tank contains HazMat residue even when 'empty.'

MOST-MISSED ON THIS TEST

The N endorsement is required for any liquid tank over 1,000 gallons, whether or not the cargo is hazardous. People miss this because they assume tanker = HazMat. It's about the design of the trailer, not just the contents.

CHEAT SHEET

DOUBLES & TRIPLES

Endorsement code: T endorsement

COUPLING A DOUBLE – ORDER MATTERS

- 1. Couple tractor to **first trailer normally** (full coupling sequence from Section 3c).
- 2. Position converter dolly behind first trailer.
- 3. Connect dolly to first trailer: pintle hook + safety chains.
- 4. Connect dolly air & electrical lines.
- 5. Position **second trailer** in front of the dolly fifth wheel.
- 6. Back the first trailer + dolly under the second trailer, locking kingpin into dolly fifth wheel.
- 7. **Pull-test the second coupling.**
- 8. Connect air & electrical lines between trailers.
- 9. Charge the air system on both trailers, verify brake function before driving.

PINTLE HOOK vs FIFTH WHEEL

- **Fifth wheel:** Tractor-to-trailer connection. Kingpin drops into locking jaws on a horizontal plate.
- **Pintle hook:** Used between the rear of one trailer and a converter dolly. Hook-and-eye design; safety chains required.

WHY DOUBLES/TRIPLES ARE MORE UNSTABLE

- **Crack the whip:** A small steering input at the tractor amplifies as it travels back. The rear trailer can swing several feet wider than the front.
- **Higher rollover risk** on the rear trailer, especially in evasive maneuvers.
- **Longer total length** – more off-tracking; more space needed for lane changes.
- **More connection points to fail** – more pre-trip inspection time.

INSPECTION DIFFERENCES

- Inspect **each** trailer (lights, tires, suspension, brakes) individually.
- Inspect the converter dolly: tires, lights, brakes, fifth wheel, pintle hook, safety chains.
- Verify air connections at **every** trailer-to-trailer junction.
- Verify electrical at every junction.

EMERGENCY BRAKING

- Stopping distances are significantly longer than for a single trailer at the same speed.
- Use steady braking, not hard braking. Hard braking can jackknife the rear trailer.
- If you start to skid, release brakes and counter-steer until the rig is straight, then re-apply.

STATES THAT ALLOW TRIPLES vs DOUBLES

- **All states** permit standard doubles (28' + 28') on the Interstate System.
- **Triples are not permitted in most states.** They're typically allowed only on specific turnpikes and western states (e.g., Indiana toll road, Kansas Turnpike, Ohio Turnpike, and routes in Utah, Nevada, Oregon, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota).
- Always check the state-specific Western Regional Heavy Vehicle network maps before a triple haul.

MOST-MISSED ON THIS TEST

People who fail this test usually fail on the order of coupling. The rule: **back trailer last**. Coupling out of order can put you in a situation where you can't safely move the rig.

CHEAT SHEET

PASSENGER VEHICLES

Endorsement code: P endorsement

LOADING & UNLOADING

- Pull over fully to the right; come to a complete stop before allowing passengers to board or exit.
- Never load passengers in the roadway lane.
- Watch traffic in mirrors while passengers are getting off.
- Verify standees are **behind** the standee line (a marked line at the front of the bus).
- Wait until passengers are fully clear of the bus before pulling away.

PROHIBITED PASSENGER PRACTICES

- Standees forward of the standee line.
- Anyone in the driver's seat or operating area.
- Anyone blocking emergency exits.
- Carrying explosives (Class 1), flammable gases or liquids (Class 2.1 or 3), or other restricted HazMat – with limited exceptions (small arms ammunition, medical supplies, etc.).

EMERGENCY EXITS

- Most buses have a **rear emergency door** plus side windows that can be released.
- Some have a **roof hatch**.
- Pre-trip: verify all emergency exits open from inside and outside.
- Verify exit signs are lit and warning buzzers function (door open while engine on = buzzer).

EVACUATION PROCEDURES

- **Evacuate** the bus if: fire or threat of fire; danger of collision (rail crossing, intersection); the bus is in or near unsafe surroundings (water, electrical hazard, gas).
- **Stay on the bus** when: the bus is stopped in a safe location; there's no immediate threat; help is on the way.
- Take the passenger manifest (if commercial bus) when evacuating.

ALCOHOL, SMOKING, AND DISCIPLINE

- **Alcohol**: 4 hours before driving and during driving. Even possession of an open container in the bus is prohibited unless it's for a paying passenger.
- **Smoking**: prohibited if it's a safety risk, in fueling areas, or during loading/unloading.
- Manage unruly passengers calmly; pull over and contact authorities if needed. Don't engage in arguments while driving.

PRE-TRIP DIFFERENCES FOR BUSES

- All passenger seat belts (if equipped) operational.
- Emergency exits all functional, no obstructions.

- Interior – aisles clear, handrails secure, no broken seats.
- Roof escape hatches function.
- Destination signs & route signs correct.

MOST-MISSED ON THIS TEST

You must hold the P endorsement BEFORE you can take the school bus (S) test. Many people miss this and try to schedule S directly. The state will refuse to test you.

CHEAT SHEET

SCHOOL BUS

Endorsement code: S endorsement (requires P first)

DANGER ZONE

- The area around the bus where children are at the highest risk of being hit.
- **Front:** up to **30 feet** from the front bumper (the first 10 feet is the most dangerous).
- **Sides:** 10 feet from the left and right of the bus.
- **Rear:** 10 feet behind the rear bumper.
- The **left side** is always considered dangerous because of passing cars.
- *Some state manuals use 12 ft for sides and rear – follow your state's manual.*

THE 6 MIRRORS

- **Left outside flat mirror** – rear of the bus, traffic behind on left.
- **Left outside convex mirror** – wider view of left side and rear, including blind spots.
- **Right outside flat mirror** – rear and far side traffic.
- **Right outside convex mirror** – right blind spot, sidewalk area where children gather.
- **Left crossover mirror** (front of bus, left side) – ground in front of bus, left side danger zone.
- **Right crossover mirror** (front of bus, right side) – ground in front of bus, right side danger zone.
- Adjust mirrors before every shift. Crossover mirrors should let you see the area immediately in front of the bumper.

LOADING SEQUENCE (AT A BUS STOP)

1. Activate **flashing amber warning lights** approximately 200–300 feet before the stop (state-dependent).
2. Pull as far right as possible.
3. Stop with the front bumper **at least 10 feet** from where students will board – this forces them to walk to the bus where you can see them.
4. Transmission in **Park** (or Neutral with parking brake set if no Park).
5. Activate **red flashing lights** and extend the stop arm.
6. Verify all traffic has stopped.
7. Open the door and signal students to approach.

UNLOADING SEQUENCE

- Same lights and stop-arm procedure as loading.
- After unloading, tell students to walk **at least 15 feet ahead** of the bus where you can see them, then cross.
- Wait for an exiting student to be at least 15 feet from the bus and on the sidewalk before closing the door and moving.
- **Always do a post-trip walk-through** – check for sleeping children and items left behind.

RAILROAD CROSSINGS

- Mandatory stop **between 15 and 50 feet** from the nearest rail.
- Transmission in Park (or Neutral with brake set).
- Turn off all noisy equipment, silence passengers.
- **Open the service door and driver's window. Look both ways. Listen.**
- If clear, close the door and proceed in low gear – **do not change gears while on the tracks.**
- Don't stop on or within 15 feet of the tracks.
- If gates come down after you've started across, drive through.

STROBE LIGHT & EMERGENCY EXIT RULES

- Strobe light (where allowed) – used in reduced visibility (fog, rain, snow). Not allowed in all states.
- **Required emergency exits** vary by bus design. Pre-trip: open and close each one, verify warning buzzer.

MOST-MISSED ON THIS TEST

Most missed: The 15-to-50 ft window at railroad crossings. People answer "within 15 feet" or "at least 50 feet." The exact answer is **not closer than 15 feet and not farther than 50 feet** from the nearest rail.

CHEAT SHEET

PRE-TRIP INSPECTION

Endorsement code: Section 2 fast-review card

THE 7-STEP ORDER

- 1. Approach & overview.
- 2. Engine compartment (engine OFF, hood up).
- 3. In-cab (engine off, then on).
- 4. Headlights / signals.
- 5. Walk-around (left-front, counter-clockwise).
- 6. Rear of vehicle.
- 7. Final signal check from cab.

KEY NUMBERS – AIR BRAKES

- Cut-out: ~125 psi.
- Cut-in: ~100 psi.
- Low-pressure warning: **before** 60 psi.
- Spring brake activation: 20–45 psi.
- Air loss, released: ≤ 2 psi/min single, ≤ 3 psi/min combination.
- Air loss, applied: ≤ 3 psi/min single, ≤ 4 psi/min combination.
- Air-up rate: 85→100 psi in < 45 seconds.
- Brake lag: about ½ second (~32 ft at 55 mph).

KEY NUMBERS – TIRES & STEERING

- Steer tire tread: $\geq 4/32$ ".
- All other tires: $\geq 2/32$ ".
- Steering wheel play: $\leq 10^\circ$ (~2" on a 20" wheel).
- Brake shoe / lining thickness: $\geq 1/4$ " at thinnest point.
- Slack adjuster pushrod travel: ≤ 1 " on standard chambers.

COMMONLY MISSED DEFECTS

- **Rust streaks** on a lug nut = loose lug nut.
- **Recapped tires** on the steer axle = automatic out-of-service.
- **Cotter keys missing** on steering linkage.
- **Exhaust touching wires or fuel lines.**
- **Cracks in spring leaves** or any leaf displaced.
- **Audible leak** in any air line, glad hand, or chamber.
- **Mismatched tires** on the same axle (radial + bias = OOS).

- **Brake shoe lining** too thin or contaminated with oil.

CRITICAL VERBALIZATIONS

- Examiners listen for the **defect criteria**, not just “it’s good.”
- Say what the defect WOULD be at each component, even if everything is fine.
- Example: *“Tire – checking for proper inflation, no audible leaks, tread depth at least 4/32 of an inch on a steer tire, no cuts or exposed cord, no recap.”*
- If you miss the verbalization, you miss the point even if you point at it.

MOST-MISSED ON THIS TEST

The biggest single fix for people who keep failing the pre-trip: rehearse out loud in your driveway. Walk around your own vehicle saying every item you would on the test. Once it’s muscle memory, the rest is easy.

4

QUESTIONS EVERYONE GETS WRONG

The specific questions that trip up the most test-takers. With the correct answer and an honest explanation of why the wrong answer looks convincing.

Most people don't fail the CDL knowledge test because they didn't study. They fail because the test writers know exactly where the easy-to-confuse details are, and they build wrong answers that match what you think you know.

This section covers the 10 questions that trip up the most test-takers, with the correct answer and an honest explanation of why the wrong answer feels right.

#01 · COMMONLY MISSED

AIR BRAKE LAG TIME AT 55 MPH

WHAT MOST PEOPLE PICK

About 1½ seconds (or "same as reaction time")

CORRECT ANSWER

About ½ **second** (adds ~32 ft to stopping distance at 55 mph)

Why the wrong answer looks right: People confuse brake lag with reaction time. Reaction time (¾ sec) is your body responding. Brake lag is the AIR system – the time for compressed air to travel from the pedal valve through the lines and into the brake chambers. Hydraulic brakes (cars) have effectively zero lag. Air brakes lag **about ½ second**, which at 55 mph means the truck travels ~32 feet before the brakes even start grabbing.

#02 · COMMONLY MISSED

HAZMAT PLACARD THRESHOLD FOR TABLE 2 MATERIALS

WHAT MOST PEOPLE PICK

1,000 lb, or "over 1,000 lb"

CORRECT ANSWER

1,001 pounds aggregate gross weight in non-bulk packaging

Why the wrong answer looks right: The regulation is in 49 CFR 172.504. The exception applies *below* 1,001 lb – so placarding is required **at and above 1,001 lb**. The test writers know "1,000" feels right (round number) but the actual threshold is one pound higher. Different from Table 1 materials, which require placarding for **any quantity**.

#03 · COMMONLY MISSED

FOLLOWING DISTANCE FOR A 60-FOOT VEHICLE AT 55 MPH

WHAT MOST PEOPLE PICK

6 seconds (or just "2 seconds")

CORRECT ANSWER

7 seconds (6 for length + 1 for being over 40 mph)

Why the wrong answer looks right: The formula: 1 second per 10 feet of vehicle length, **PLUS** 1 additional second if traveling over 40 mph. People remember the length rule but forget the speed addition. Or they apply the passenger-car "2-second rule," which is wildly inadequate for a CMV.

#04 · COMMONLY MISSED

WEIGHT ON THE DRIVE AXLE – WHAT HAPPENS IF IT'S TOO LIGHT?

WHAT MOST PEOPLE PICK

Brake wear / overheating

CORRECT ANSWER

Traction loss

Why the wrong answer looks right: Drive wheels need weight to grip the road. Too little weight on the drive axle = spinning in rain, snow, and on grades. Brake wear isn't the issue (in fact, lighter loads usually reduce brake wear). This is consistently missed because "brake wear" sounds like a technical answer.

#05 · COMMONLY MISSED

SPRING BRAKES – WHAT HOLDS THEM OFF?

WHAT MOST PEOPLE PICK

Hydraulic pressure, or "the parking brake knob"

CORRECT ANSWER

Compressed air pressure

Why the wrong answer looks right: Spring brakes are designed as a fail-safe: powerful springs are held compressed (off) by air pressure. When air drops below 20–45 psi, the springs release and APPLY the brakes. This is what makes them fail-safe – if you lose air, the truck stops. Hydraulic systems work the opposite way (you push fluid TO apply), which is why many people get this backwards.

#06 · COMMONLY MISSED

DOES THE 14-HOUR CLOCK PAUSE IF I TAKE A 2-HOUR BREAK?

WHAT MOST PEOPLE PICK

Yes, you get those 2 hours back at the end of the day

CORRECT ANSWER

No. Off-duty time inside the 14-hour window does **NOT** extend it

Why the wrong answer looks right: The 14-hour clock runs continuously from the moment you come on duty after a 10-hour reset. Off-duty breaks during the day count *against* your driving day – they don't pause it. **The only exception** is a qualifying sleeper-berth split (8/2 or 7/3), which *does* pause the 14-hour clock for the longer segment. People miss this because their car-driver intuition says "break = time stops counting."

#07 · COMMONLY MISSED

BAFFLED VS UNBAFFLED TANKS – WHICH HANDLES FORWARD SLOSH BETTER?

WHAT MOST PEOPLE PICK

Unbaffled (smooth bore) tanks

CORRECT ANSWER

Baffled tanks

Why the wrong answer looks right: Baffles are partial bulkheads inside the tank. They **reduce front-to-back surge** (the kind that happens when you brake). They do **NOT** stop side-to-side slosh in curves. Smooth-bore tanks are used for food-grade liquids (milk, juice) because they're easier to clean – not because they handle better. People reverse this answer because they vaguely remember "something to do with baffles" – but the test will offer both choices and you have to know which way.

#08 · COMMONLY MISSED

MINIMUM TIRE TREAD DEPTH – STEER VS OTHER TIRES

WHAT MOST PEOPLE PICK

Same for all tires (2/32" or 4/32")

CORRECT ANSWER

Steer: **4/32 of an inch**. All other tires: **2/32 of an inch**.

Why the wrong answer looks right: 49 CFR 393.75. Steer tires get the stricter standard because they handle the truck's directional control – less tread depth on the steer means hydroplaning risk and reduced braking authority. Drive and trailer tires can have less tread because they don't steer. The penny test – if you can see Lincoln's head, you're below 2/32".

#09 · COMMONLY MISSED

PRE-TRIP SEQUENCE – WHAT COMES FIRST?

WHAT MOST PEOPLE PICK

Get in the cab and check the gauges

CORRECT ANSWER

Approach & overview, then **engine compartment**, THEN cab

Why the wrong answer looks right: Examiners want the sequence in the order from the federal CDL Skills Testing Standards. Engine compartment (with engine OFF and hood up) comes **before** the in-cab inspection. People who learned by watching YouTube videos often pick up the wrong order, because many trainers just start in the cab to save time. On the test, that costs points.

#10 · COMMONLY MISSED

OFF-TRACKING – DO REAR WHEELS TRACK INSIDE OR OUTSIDE THE FRONT?

WHAT MOST PEOPLE PICK

Outside (rear wheels swing wider)

CORRECT ANSWER

Inside (rear wheels follow a tighter path than the front)

Why the wrong answer looks right: When a long vehicle turns, the rear wheels "cut the corner" – they take a tighter radius than the front wheels. To clear a curb, you have to swing wide with the FRONT of the tractor (the "button hook" or "jug handle" turn). Counterintuitive: the longer the vehicle, the worse the off-tracking. People answer "outside" because they're thinking about the rear of a tractor-trailer swinging during a tight turn – but that's tail swing, not off-tracking.

5

DAY-BEFORE CHECKLIST

Practical, not textbook. What to actually do in the 24 hours before your CDL knowledge test.

The 24 hours before your test matter more than most people realize. What you do tonight and tomorrow morning shapes how you walk into that testing terminal.

TONIGHT – THE NIGHT BEFORE

DO

- **Review weak areas from practice tests, not the full manual.** If you've been missing HazMat placard questions, drill the Table 1 vs Table 2 distinction. Don't re-read everything – that'll just make you tired.
- **Re-read the 'Questions Everyone Gets Wrong' section** of this bundle.
- **Eat a normal dinner.** Don't skip food.
- **Put your documents in your bag tonight.** So you don't scramble in the morning.
- **Set two alarms.** Phone and a backup.
- **Sleep at least 7 hours.** Sleep deprivation hurts your performance on multiple-choice tests more than not studying for one more hour would help.

DON'T

- **Don't cram.** If you don't know it by now, one more all-nighter won't fix it.
- **Don't take a new practice test you've never taken before.** A bad score the night before will rattle you.
- **Don't drink alcohol.** Even one beer affects sleep quality.
- **Don't stay up past your normal time.** Your body keeps time better than you think.

WHAT TO BRING TO THE DMV

Specific documents vary by state, but the core items are consistent. **Confirm with your state DMV before you go.**

Item	Why
Proof of identity	Driver's license, passport, or state-issued ID.
Social Security card or proof of SSN	Required by REAL ID. Most states need this.
Proof of residency (2 items)	Utility bill, lease, mortgage statement, mail in your name to your home address.
Proof of legal presence (if not US citizen)	Permanent resident card, work authorization, etc.
Medical Examiner's Certificate (Form MCSA-5876)	From a certified examiner on the FMCSA National Registry. Valid up to 24 months.
ELDT training certificate	If applying for first-time CDL (after Feb 7, 2022). Provider submits this to the state – verify it's on file before you go.
CLP (if testing for skills)	Your Commercial Learner's Permit. Required for the skills test, not the knowledge test.

Cash or card for fees	Knowledge test, license issuance, endorsement fees. Amounts vary by state (\$30-\$120 range).
Glasses or contacts (if required)	If you wear them, bring them. Vision test at the DMV.

WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE TESTING TERMINAL

- **Computer-based test.** Almost all states use a touchscreen kiosk or PC. Questions one at a time. You can't go back to a previous question in most systems.
- **The test ends automatically** as soon as you have either passed (40 correct on General Knowledge) OR can no longer pass (11 wrong). It's not a glitch. It's saving you time.
- **Read every question twice.** Look for "not," "except," "always," "never." A single word changes the answer.
- **Don't talk during the test.** Don't use your phone. Don't look at notes. Even pulling out your phone in some states is grounds for the test to be voided.
- **Most states don't have a hard time limit** on the knowledge test. You can go at your own pace.
- **You'll get your result immediately.** Either you walk out with documentation that you passed, or you walk out knowing exactly what to study before the retake.

THE 'NOT' TRAP

Watch every question for these words: **NOT, EXCEPT, NEVER, ONLY, ALWAYS**. One word changes the entire question. Example: "Which of the following is NOT a Class 1 hazard?" vs "Which of the following IS a Class 1 hazard?" – opposite answers. Slow down and read it twice every time you see one of these words.

IF YOU DON'T PASS

It happens. Here's exactly what to do:

- 1. Request your score breakdown.** Most states will tell you which sections you missed (e.g., "cargo securement", "driving safely"). Some give you the missed questions. Ask the clerk.
- 2. Wait the mandatory retake period.** Varies by state – usually 1 to 7 days. Some states let you retake the same day after a 1-hour wait. Check yours.
- 3. Focus study time on your weak sections only.** Don't start over from page 1 of the manual. Drill what you missed.
- 4. Take 2-3 full practice tests** at FreeCDLTests.com before you retake. Score 90%+ consistently before scheduling the retake.
- 5. You typically get 3 attempts** before you have to re-apply and re-pay. Check your state's specific rule.

6

CDL PROCESS TIMELINE

The full sequence from zero to CDL, with realistic time estimates at each step.

If you're starting today, plan on 2 to 6 months from first study session to a CDL in your wallet, depending on state DMV backlog and whether you do training part-time or full-time. The mandatory federal waits are short. The slowest steps are usually scheduling.

1

COMPLETE ELDT THEORY

1-4 days

Federal requirement (49 CFR Part 380, Subpart F) for any first-time Class A/B applicant. Online courses through an FMCSA-registered Training Provider Registry (TPR) provider. Required **before** you can take the knowledge test for first-time Class A/B or for HazMat. The provider submits your completion to FMCSA, which then notifies your state.

2

DOT PHYSICAL & MEDICAL EXAMINER'S CERTIFICATE

1 day

Schedule with a certified examiner on the FMCSA National Registry. Most cost \$80-\$150. The MEC (Form MCSA-5876) is valid up to **24 months**. As of June 23, 2025, examiners electronically transmit results directly to FMCSA, which forwards them to your state DMV.

3

BOOK DMV KNOWLEDGE TEST APPOINTMENT

1-3 weeks

Wait time depends entirely on your state and local DMV office. Phoenix, Houston, and Dallas metros often have 2-3 week waits; rural offices may have same-week availability. Book this as soon as you start studying — you can always reschedule.

4

PASS KNOWLEDGE TESTS, RECEIVE CLP

Same day

General Knowledge + any endorsement knowledge tests you want (Air Brakes, Combination, HazMat, etc.). Pass all (80% minimum) and you walk out with your **Commercial Learner's Permit** the same day. Some states issue it on the spot; others mail it within a few business days but give you a paper permit.

5

MANDATORY 14-DAY CLP HOLD PERIOD

14 days

Federal rule (49 CFR 383.25). You cannot take the skills test until you've held the CLP for at least 14 days. *FMCSA has proposed eliminating this hold, but as of 2026 it is still in force.* Use this time to practice driving with a CDL holder in the cab.

6

BEHIND-THE-WHEEL TRAINING (IF NOT DONE YET)

3-8 weeks

ELDT requires completing BTW training before the skills test. Full-time CDL school: 3-4 weeks. Part-time evening/weekend: 6-8 weeks. Costs range \$3,000-\$7,000 for private school; some companies pay for training in exchange for a 1-2 year contract.

7

BOOK SKILLS TEST APPOINTMENT

1-2 weeks

Skills test has 3 parts: pre-trip inspection (verbal), basic vehicle control (off-street maneuvers), and on-road driving. State DMV or a third-party tester. Book as soon as you start BTW — you can almost always reschedule if you're not ready.

8

PASS SKILLS TEST, CDL ISSUED**3-10 business days**

Pass all three parts of the skills test and you've earned your CDL. Most states issue the physical card by mail within 3-10 business days. You'll get a paper interim license to drive on until the real one arrives.

REALISTIC TOTAL TIMELINES

Path	Total time	Notes
Full-time CDL school	6-10 weeks	3-4 weeks of school + 2-3 weeks of scheduling waits + 14-day CLP hold (which usually overlaps with school).
Part-time, working full-time	3-6 months	Studying evenings, training on weekends, fitting around your job.
Company-sponsored	4-8 weeks	Company pays for school, often guarantees a job after passing. 1-2 year contract typical.
Already drive intrastate, adding endorsement	1-4 weeks	HazMat = TSA background check is the long pole (30-60 days). Others can be added in days.

YOU CAN DO THIS

The CDL process is structured to be passable by anyone willing to study. Federal rules set the floor at 80% on every knowledge test – that's not a high bar if you've worked through this bundle. Good luck on the road.

FreeCDLTests.com

Free practice tests for every endorsement, every state. If you found this bundle helpful, share it with a friend who's studying.

Bundle version: May 2026. Sources verified against current FMCSA CDL manual, 49 CFR Parts 383, 391, 393, 395, 172, FMVSS 121, and the Hours of Service final rule effective September 29, 2020.