

Is there an age requirement to be a truck driver?

You must be 18 years old to drive in-state with a CDL license. You must be 21 years old for interstate driving. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) currently has a national pilot program for CDL holders under 21. Check the FMCSA website to learn more.

Do I need a high school or college diploma?

Most schools will require a GED or high school diploma.

Does it matter where I live?

Yes. Many companies have hiring areas or regions they will or will not hire from. You should be aware of this before you set your heart on one or the other. Additionally, getting home time and safe truck parking for your equipment will be easier if you live near a terminal. Some companies have terminals in several states and we encourage you to research these in order to make an informed decision.

What's the difference between a commercial driver's license (CDL) and a commercial driver's permit (CDP)?

A CLP is a learner's permit, a CDL is the actual license. You may only hold one (1) CDL at a time. The terminology CDL's as plural is incorrect. You should only have one CDL and refer to it as singular.

Class A, B, and C – what's the difference and why does it matter?

Each class (A, B, or C) represents the type of vehicle you will be certified to drive. Class is defined by weight or Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR). For example:

Class A: Class A authorizes you to drive single vehicles or a combination of vehicles with a GVWR of 26,001 pounds and haul trailers that exceed 10,000 pounds. These include semis and tanker trucks and generally these are the type of trucks used for long-haul.

Class B: Allows drivers to operate a large single vehicle, including those with a GVWR over 26,000 lbs. or designed to transport 24 or more passengers including the driver. A Class B CDL also allows drivers to tow a vehicle or detachable cargo holder with a GVWR less than 10,001 pounds. Some examples of Class B vehicles include large buses, dump trucks with small trailers, delivery trucks and straight trucks.

Class C: Single vehicles fewer than 26,001 pounds or towing a trailer with a GVWR fewer than 20,001 lbs.

*Smaller delivery type trucks like Amazon do not require a CDL license.

If I have a Class A license, do I need a Class B and/or Class C if I'm driving one of those smaller vehicles?

No. If you have a Class A license you can drive a Class B or Class C unless you are driving a passenger bus. In that case you will need a passenger endorsement on your Class A license.

How often do I need to renew my license and how much does it cost? Will/should my employer pay for it?

Your CDL will need to be renewed periodically depending on your state. It's usually every two years. Your employer likely will not pay for it. CDL renewal is more expensive than a regular driver's license. Check with your state DMV for pricing.

If you have a HazMat endorsement this will need to be renewed every two years and includes new fingerprinting and FBI background check. This takes time to complete so it's important to plan according. Some employers will pay for this but you should check in advance because there is no guarantee. Costs about \$200.00.

What if I move?

When you move, you will not need to take another written or driving skills test for your CDL. However, you will need to take refresher tests for any endorsements you have on your CDL. You may also need to show residency to qualify for a CDL in your new state. Check with your DMV as every state is different.

If you move to another state you will have to redo your HazMat to move the endorsement.

Where should I go to CDL school?

Check with your local community college. You will get better training that is likely less expensive than a private CDL school. The college's financial aid office can provide information about state and federal grants that may be available to offset some (or all) of your tuition. Some local unemployment offices offer grants for CDL training such as the Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA) grant. These grants can be used at various CDL training schools, but it is up to you to select a good school to use it by doing good research.

What about company-sponsored CDL training programs?

Often, company-sponsored CDL training programs require participants to sign a labor contract. If you do not complete the labor contract you may be blacklisted from being employed elsewhere and end up with a CDL that is useless. It's imperative to research companies before you sign such a contract and make sure you keep a copy for your records.

Company-sponsored CDL Training programs can be a lifeline for those experiencing homeless or are leaving a domestic violence situation where you need an immediate solution. That being said, we caution women who do select these training programs. Incidents of rape are reported most often when team driving is a required phase of this training.

It's also important to know that truck drivers can be compensated by their employers for recruiting new trainees with little to no regard for your long-term success.

We urge you to take the time to research companies you are considering for training. (Google: Sexual misconduct in CDL training, CDL labor contracts, ??)

How should I pick my training company?

Find out how many hours the training company requires for your Certificate of Completion. Many CDL schools only give 160 hours which will not fill the requirement of the preferred starter company you have your eye on. Ideally, you will choose a 320-hour course though they are difficult to find at a private CDL School.

You'll want to find a starter company where you can stay put and drive for 1-2 years. This will demonstrate that you are insurable when it's time for you to move on to a more experienced-level trucking company which ultimately, should pay more and have better benefits. For this reason, you should check out prospective starter companies first to learn what their hiring requirements are first before signing a contract for your CDL School.

We strongly encourage ladies considering a career in trucking to avoid starter companies that require team driving as a phase of training. Higher instances of sexual harassment and assault have been directly linked to these work environments.

How much can I expect to make in my first-year driving?

On average, we've found that first-year drivers can earn between \$35,000 - \$45,000. Unfortunately, this seems to contradict much of what's being advertised.

Hopefully, you look at trucking as the opportunity for a long-term, financially sound career. During your first year you should focus on learning as much as possible and becoming a safe driver. This will greatly improve opportunities for you to move into a higher-paying job with a reputable carrier.

I hear advertisements for dedicated driver, team driving, and solo driving. What's the difference?

Dedicated drivers run for one company that their carrier has a contract with. Dedicated routes are more consistent and often are "drop and hook" which are easier wait times since the trailer is already loaded and you do not have to wait for it to be unloaded. However, there are some hard dedicated accounts like Dollar General in which you will have to maneuver into a small store parking lot not designed for a 53 ft trailer and you will have to hand unload the trailer yourself. Make sure you understand all of the responsibilities you will have for a dedicated account.

Team-driving means one driver sleeps while the other drives, and vice-versa. This is usually advertised as a very lucrative opportunity and can be for established teams like mothers/daughters or significant others. For individuals who are not on a team, companies will pair you up with another driver. Often, student drivers are partnered with more experienced drivers as a cost-saving measure. Though advertised as a lucrative opportunity this is often not the case. Here's why, you might see a recruiting ad that has a picture of a man and woman you perceive as a married couple and the ad says they made "up to" \$55,000.00. What is doesn't say is that they split that amount and since they are married, they have one household to support. If you are two unrelated people, you are taking a huge risk of team driving for \$30,000.00/year and pay attention to the "up to" in recruiting ads. That phrase means you might or might not make that much.

Solo driving is you and your truck on the open road. You are in control of your vehicle at all times. You can have peace of mind knowing you control where you start, stop, and sleep and for how long each day. There's no need to worry about trying to sleep while the truck is in motion, nor are you relying on another's judgement navigating any number of potential hazards including poor weather, construction sites, or animals.

A week or two of team driving in the final part of your training can be a good experience, but it's important to note that most instances of sexual harassment and sexual assault against women are reported in the early weeks of team-driving training. Real Women in Trucking cautions women to consider the risks before committing to team-driving.

What should I bring when I'm on the road?

See Travel Checklist on our Resources tab for a comprehensive list of items from medication to clothing, shower shoes to a deck of cards. Our REAL Women in Trucking members have created a basic list to help ensure you'll pack efficiently and be prepared for your travels!

What if I don't feel safe on my trainer's truck?

If you are in physical danger, always call 911 and/or local law enforcement.

Sexual violence and harassment against women during truck driver training is, unfortunately, not uncommon. The perpetrator can be a fellow student, co-driver, CDL school staff, or in-house employee. Both men and women can commit sexual violence and harassment against women. It is not gender specific. If you have experienced sexual violence, harassment, or any behaviors that makes you feel unsafe contact both your Human Resources and Safety departments. It is your legal right to contact law enforcement, even if your company tells you not to.

It's imperative for you to document EVERYTHING about the incident – emails, text messages, recordings, phone calls, and pictures as well as the responding officer's name, phone number and case number of your complaint (if law enforcement was called). Include all interactions you have with both your employer and the perpetrator. Avoid phone calls discussing the incident and if you do need to speak to someone on the telephone, we encourage you to record the conversation. Many times, reports like these end up being he said/she said and the more information you have to support your claim (i.e., a paper trail), the better.

If you experience any kind of physical violence or assault, we also recommend you reaching out to RAINN at rainn.org or 800-656-HOPE.