



TEN EASY STEPS TO A C.D.L.

(For Self-Study CDL applicants)

1. OBTAIN A CDL MANUAL: Pick up a copy of the Montana CDL manual at your local County Driver's License office. The most current version of the Montana CDL manual is also available online here: [Montana CDL Manual](#).

You can download the PDF file to your phone, computer, or tablet, or obtain a paper manual.

2. REVIEW MEDICAL REQUIREMENTS AND OBTAINING DOT MEDICAL CARD: Read the applicable pages in Chapter One of the CDL manual to see if you are required to have a medical examiner's certificate for the driving you intend to do. MOST commercial driving activities require a Medical Certificate.

A Department of Transportation (DOT) physical examination is conducted by a licensed medical provider and may be valid for up to 24 months. The examiner may also issue a medical examiner's certificate for less than 24 months when it is desirable to monitor a medical condition. The provider must be listed on the "National Registry of Certified Medical Examiners". A list of National Registry certified providers in your area can be found here:

<https://nationalregistry.fmcsa.dot.gov/home>

3. STUDY THE REQUIRED PORTIONS OF THE CDL MANUAL: Near the front of the CDL manual is a chart that will tell you what chapters to study for the Commercial Driver License and related endorsement(s) you desire. Your equipment combination will dictate what you need to study and test for.

4. GO TO A COUNTY DRIVER'S LICENSING OFFICE: Schedule an appointment at your local County Driver's License Office or go here to schedule written test: [Schedule an Appointment Online](#).

A. START THE CDL PROCESS: Tell the Examiner you are there to begin the process of obtaining a CDL. They will have you complete an application for a CDL and will help you declare a driving category—a Federal rule to determine whether you plan to drive only in Montana or Interstate, and whether a medical card is required ("non-exempt") or not required ("exempt").

B. BRING YOUR MEDICAL CERTIFICATE: If you are required to have a medical certificate, obtain it as soon as possible and take it with you to MVD. They will scan a copy of your medical certificate card to be incorporated into your driving record. All commercial drivers who are "non-exempt" must submit a medical certificate to your County MVD when obtained and upon each renewal.

If you are for some reason ineligible to obtain a DOT Medical, you *CANNOT* drive a commercial vehicle in interstate commerce, unless you plan to work for a government agency or other exempt interstate category. This website contains more information about CDL medical requirements:

<http://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/rules-regulations/topics/medical/medical.htm>

C. BRING YOUR BIRTH CERTIFICATE, US PASSPORT, or OTHER PROOF OF PERMANENT LEGAL PRESENCE IN THE UNITED STATES: Federal rules require all applicants for a Commercial Learner's Permit or CDL to present proof of legal presence in the United States to the MVD to be entered on the driver's record. This will only need to be done one time.



CDL applicants who do not have a Montana standard driver license (Non-CDL) or who are converting an out-of-state CDL must provide:

The Required Documents

- Proof of identity.
- Proof of Montana residency.
- Proof of authorized presence.
- Proof of Social Security number.
- Valid Medical Examiner's Certificate (MEC).

CDL applicants who do have a Montana standard driver license (Non-CDL) must provide:

- Proof of Social Security number.
- Proof of authorized presence.
- Valid Department of Transportation (DOT) physical examination certificate.

Please bring all required documents with you to your appointment. You must pass all applicable written tests before you can schedule a road test. Once you have passed the written tests, you will be issued a Commercial Learner's Permit, which you must have for 14 days before you can take a road test. All driver exam stations require appointments for CDL testing; you can schedule your CDL written test through appointment scheduling: [Schedule an Appointment Online](#).

D. TAKE THE REQUIRED KNOWLEDGE TESTS: When you are ready, take your written knowledge tests. The CDL Licensing fee can be found [here](#) when first applying for your CDL permit and will be good unless you fail the process 3 times. Then you will have to pay the fee again to continue.

You should take and pass the General Knowledge test before attempting to take other tests. While it is permissible to do so, most applicants should not attempt to take multiple tests on the same day. Test results remain valid for one year from the date they were passed- if you don't obtain your CDL in that year you must re-take all the written tests. If you fail a test, you can re-test the next day.

E. SKILLS TEST: All knowledge tests required for the license you are seeking must be passed before the skills test can be administered.

F. OBTAIN A COMMERCIAL LEARNER'S PERMIT: You must obtain a Commercial Learner's Permit (CLP) to obtain or upgrade a commercial license. It allows you to drive a truck or bus on public streets to practice driving a commercial vehicle. You must have a licensed CDL driver rated to drive the equipment you are practicing in riding with you at all times when on public streets. The licensed driver must be sitting in the right seat (trucks) or in the row behind the driver (busses) with you when you are practicing on public streets. Federal Rules require you hold a CLP for at least 14 days before you can take a skills test.

5. COMPLETE ENTRY LEVEL DRIVER TRAINING: As of February 7, 2022, all applicants must comply with Entry-Level Driver Training (ELDT) regulations. These rules require that all entry-level drivers of commercial motor vehicles (CMVs) receive training from a provider listed on FMCSA's Training Provider Registry. To be eligible to take required skills tests (driving portion), commercial driver's license (CDL) applicants must have completed applicable



Entry Level Driver Training from a registered training provider. LEARN MORE at: <https://tpr.fmcsa.dot.gov/> MDT is a FMCSA training provider.

6. PRACTICE THE VEHICLE INSPECTION: Before taking your skills test (driving portion) practice and prepare for your test. The pre-trip vehicle inspection must be done on any commercial vehicle you test in, regardless of size or type. Most applicants who fail the skills test do so by not preparing well enough for the pre-trip inspection. Do the following before attempting to take your skills test:

A. STUDY Section 11 THOROUGHLY: If a component is on your vehicle and in Section 11, you need to memorize it for the test. There are plenty of components you are required to memorize, so concentrate on those items. It is imperative that you know how to do the brake test on the vehicle you will be testing in. Doing the brake check improperly will result in failing the test. You will have 45 minutes to complete your pre-trip inspection on test day.

7. PRACTICE THE BACKING MANEUVERS DESCRIBED IN CHAPTER 12: Refer to the diagrams and measurements shown in Chapter 12 and set up a practice course in a suitable area if possible.

- The “Forward Stop” “Straight line back” “Forward offset tracking”, and “Reverse Offset Backing” maneuvers are required of all applicants.
- Time Limits on the tests are designed to allow sufficient time for beginning drivers (who have practiced) to complete the maneuvers without penalty. Unprepared applicants who go over the time limit will have points added to their score and may not pass the exercise.
- Use “looks”, pull ups, and reference markers as described in the manual if you need them during the test. Just like in the “real world”, pulling up your vehicle or getting out to check your position during backing is less costly than running into something!
- Excessive pull-ups are deducted from your score, but the deduction for pulling up is less than that of crossing a boundary line or cone and causing an encroachment.

8. PREPARE FOR THE ROAD TEST: For the road test, review Chapter 13 in the CDL manual.

- Make sure you know how to conduct a proper “Stop/Start” exercise, as described in the manual.
- Know where to stop at intersections.
- If taking a school bus test, you will need to study the student discharge requirements in Chapter 10.
- Make sure you move your head as you check your mirrors, pass through intersections, etc. so the examiner can see that you are checking for traffic and hazards.
- Maintain frequent checks in your mirrors.
- Keep both hands on the wheel unless you are shifting.
- Know how your vehicle off-tracks. Running over curbs or other objects will result in failing the test.
- Know how to shift the vehicle you are driving. Practice until you can shift smoothly.
- Obey all traffic laws and travel at the speed limit unless weather or traffic requires an adjustment.
- Pay attention to highway signs that a commercial driver should observe. You will be tested on them!



9. SCHEDULE & TAKE THE SKILLS TEST: Contact one of the CDL Skills Test Examiners in your area to make an appointment or go online here: [Schedule an Appointment Online](#). Appointments are usually 6 or more weeks out so schedule early.

Important Notes:

- FMCSA rules require that you hold your Commercial Learner's Permit for 14 days minimum before testing, even if you have a CDL and are just upgrading your license.
- **BRING THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT TO THE TEST! MANY VEHICLES WILL RESULT IN A RESTRICTED LICENSE**

Restrictions:

- No Manual Transmission Restriction (NM) will be added to every license that is taken in a CMV with an automatic transmission. This prohibits the operation of a commercial vehicle that is equipped with a manual transmission unless the driver has passed the required examinations (written, pre-trip, basic skills and road tests) to show that he is qualified to operate a manual transmission equipped vehicle.
- NT Restriction will be placed on every Class A license if an applicant performs the skills test in a combination vehicle for a Group A CDL with the power unit and towed unit connected with a pintle hook or other non-fifth wheel connection. NT restriction prohibits the operation of a tractor/trailer unit (i.e., No Tractor/Trailer).
- Air Brake Restriction is a restriction placed on a Commercial Driver License prohibiting the operation of airbrake equipped vehicles unless the driver has passed the required examinations (written, pre-trip, basic skills and road tests) to show that he is qualified to operate an airbrake equipped vehicle.

Have a CDL licensed driver go with you to the test site unless you can legally drive your commercial vehicle there under a farm or other exemption.

Don't forget your: Driver's license, commercial learner's permit, registration for truck and trailer, and proof of insurance.

Make sure your vehicle's lights and equipment are working properly, or you cannot take the test in that vehicle. Our examiners appreciate it if the interior of your truck or bus is reasonably clean on test day.

10. OBTAIN & ADD TO YOUR CDL: Once you pass the skills test, the examiner will transmit your test results to MVD for processing.

- You MUST return to the county MVD to have your new Commercial License issued. It's good for 4 years.
- Once you have your "base" CDL, you can later add endorsements as needed.
- Some endorsements (or removal of restrictions) will require additional skills tests.