



CDL Starter Checklist

Use this before you pay a school, sign a company-training contract, or count on a first job. Check the official rules for your state because fees and procedures change.

NAME

STATE

TARGET CDL: A / B

TARGET START DATE

1. Confirm your CDL path

- ☐ Choose Class A for the broadest tractor-trailer path.
- ☐ Choose Class B for straight trucks, buses, waste, concrete, local delivery, or similar work.
- ☐ Write down any endorsements you may need: HazMat, tanker, passenger, school bus, or doubles/triples.
- ☐ Check real job postings near you before choosing a license class or endorsement.

2. Verify the requirements before paying

- ☐ Open your state licensing agency's official CDL page and confirm age, identity documents, fees, permit steps, and testing rules.
- ☐ Confirm whether Entry-Level Driver Training (ELDT) applies to your license class or endorsement.
- ☐ Look up the exact school and training type in the FMCSA Training Provider Registry.
- ☐ Use a medical examiner listed in the FMCSA National Registry and confirm how your medical certificate reaches the state.
- ☐ Ask the state what vehicle you must bring for the skills test and what restrictions could be added to your license.

STOP BEFORE YOU PAY	If a school is not listed for the training you need, cannot explain the total price, or will not put promises in writing, pause and compare another option.
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3. Ask every school these questions

- [] What is the all-in cost, including permit fees, medical exam, materials, testing, retests, travel, and loan fees?
- [] How many hours will I drive in the yard and on public roads? How many students share each truck?
- [] Who schedules the skills test, where is it held, and what truck will I use?
- [] What are the refund rules if I quit, fail, cannot pass the medical exam, or the class date changes?
- [] What does job placement include? Ask for the latest written placement and completion data.
- [] Which restrictions could appear on my license based on the training vehicle?

School comparison

ITEM	OPTION 1	OPTION 2	OPTION 3
School / program			
All-in price	\$	\$	\$
Road-driving hours			
Students per truck			
Skills test included?			
Refund deadline			
Financing total	\$	\$	\$

4. Run the full cost math

- [] Add tuition, fees, supplies, travel, lodging, lost wages, financing cost, and possible retest fees.
- [] Estimate weeks from enrollment to the first full paycheck, not just the graduation date.
- [] Test a cautious first-year pay scenario. Do not use a recruiter's best-case number as your baseline.
- [] Compare the total with company-paid training, grants, community-college programs, and paying cash.

TOTAL SCHOOL COST

LOST WAGES

WEEKS TO FIRST PAYCHECK

5. Treat paid training like a contract

- [] Get the full agreement before traveling or starting orientation.
- [] Mark the service commitment, repayment amount, payroll deductions, and every event that triggers repayment.
- [] Confirm training pay, hotel, meals, transportation, and what happens if you fail or leave early.
- [] Ask whether the job, route type, home time, and operating region are guaranteed in writing.
- [] Calculate what you could owe in a bad-case exit after 30, 60, or 90 days.

6. Reality-check the first job

- [] Verify the position on the carrier's own careers site and read the experience requirement.
- [] Write down pay type, realistic weekly miles or hours, unpaid time, home-time schedule, and benefit deductions.
- [] Ask how training pay works, how long training usually lasts, and what can extend it.
- [] Confirm where orientation happens and who pays for travel if you are sent home.
- [] Avoid lease-purchase until you can model fixed costs, fuel, maintenance, downtime, taxes, and exit terms.

Final decision check

GREEN LIGHT	Official rules checked; provider verified; total cost known; written terms reviewed; cautious pay math still works.
PAUSE	Pressure to sign today; unclear refund or repayment terms; verbal job guarantees; missing road hours; unexplained fees.

Official verification links

FMCSA Training Provider Registry: tpr.fmcsa.dot.gov

FMCSA National Registry of Medical Examiners: nationalregistry.fmcsa.dot.gov

FMCSA CDL overview: fmcsa.dot.gov/registration/commercial-drivers-license

CDL Pathway state guides and calculators: cdlpathway.com

CDL Pathway is an informational website, not a school, motor carrier, lender, medical provider, law firm, or government agency. Verify current requirements with official agencies and get every financial or employment promise in writing.