

**TRUCKING
MASTERY**

TRUCKING MASTERY



**TRUCKING
MADE EASY**



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By Jim Purcell

Trucking Mastery

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About This Guide

I'm Jim Purcell, the author of *Trucking Mastery*. I've driven big trucks for over 20 years, totaling approximately 3 million miles. *Trucking Mastery* covers just about every aspect of the job and life of a professional trucker. You'll find practical advice about how to drive a tractor-trailer over the long haul, plus information designed to complement and supplement, not replace, the education received at an approved truck driving school.

I'll talk about areas of a trucker's life which are rarely mentioned in traditional truck driver training programs, although they're just as important as more commonly taught subjects.

To fully appreciate the information concerning the life of a truck driver, it helps to have first gone through an approved truck driving school, and possibly even started driving with a trucking company. But if you haven't yet attended school, you'll still find this guide extremely informative, and it will possibly further reinforce your decision to become a truck driver, as well as give you an idea of all that's involved in a trucker's life.

There's much more to trucking than just driving a truck!

Unfortunately, not all trucking schools are concerned about helping you with issues important to you and your future: your safety, health, financial prosperity, your family, continuing education possibilities, and even your overall happiness and well-being.

Just about every truck driving school focuses on teaching you how to drive a truck. After all, that's what we were paid to do, right? Drive a truck. On the road, most people only see us when we are driving. Even the titles "truck driver" and "trucker" suggest that ALL we do is drive a truck.

Unfortunately, most truck drivers only see themselves as someone who gets paid to drive a truck up and down the road.

When a person finishes truck driver school, and gets their CDL, they must then find a trucking company to work for. At that point, the company may send them out, usually for a few weeks, with an experienced driver, who *should* be proficient in all aspects of truck driving.

But there's *so* much involved in being a professional truck driver, that this short period of on-the-job training, though beneficial, is just not enough.

There are other websites and a few trucking guides which claim to offer guidance for the trucker, but only teach you how to go about getting your CDL. There are some sites which go a bit further, and give information and/or education about acquiring truck driving skills (or where to go for such training).

However, *Trucking Mastery* is the only guide which trains you for the trucking life... and trucking IS a way of life. There's so much more involved in trucking than simply getting your license, learning some basic skills, and then heading down the road.

What is possible in trucking

When a driver has acquired a high level of competence, professionalism, expertise, knowledge, and skills, that driver will have a world of opportunities available to them. *Trucking Mastery* can help *you* attain this high level.

Trucking is unique in that you can be the kind of truck driver you want to be and use trucking to go where you want to go in life. You can be an over-the-road trucker who gets home every two to three weeks, a local driver who gets home every day, an independent owner-operator, or eventually,

an owner with many trucks. You could even be a driver who uses trucking as a stepping stone to other opportunities, unrelated to trucking.

Whether you're a veteran driver or just starting your first job, you *will* learn something new in this book to help you find trucking success.

I'll discuss techniques that will help you:

- make more money
- save time
- improve efficiency
- go down the road in a peaceful, enjoyable way
- improve your mood
- minimize stress
- open your eyes to more possibilities within trucking
- and more!

Always be open to learning new things. Don't be one of those people who knows it all by the time they're in their mid-twenties! Just because you have some experience driving down the road, maybe understanding your niche within the industry, try to keep an open mind. Appreciate any new thing you learn, and thank whoever was good enough to dispense knowledge and wisdom to you.

Keeping your information organized

Throughout these guides, wherever I say to use a "notepad" or "write this down," you may find it easier to use an app such as [Evernote](#). (I sometimes just use the abbreviation EN.). You can use it on your desktop computer, laptop, or use the app on your phone. I've gone almost entirely paperless.

With EN, you can write notes about anything, access the information again easily using tags and folders, and even use the audio recorder to record and store info directly into EN as a note. This is great for whenever you're driving down the road and need to keep your hands on the steering wheel!

Note: Part of *Trucking Mastery* was co-written with my wife Sarah, while not a trucker, is a genuine road warrior over many hundreds of thousands of miles under difficult circumstances. She gives a female perspective to an otherwise mostly male-dominated profession, as well as to any family oriented matters of concern to truck drivers.

Whenever I got the chance, I'd take Sarah and our kids out on the road, and together we'd get the job done. It was never easy, and I wouldn't recommend this approach to every driver, but if you're interested in trying it out, you'll find a lot of advice sprinkled throughout this guide plus *Trucking Lifestyles*.



Chapter 1: Trip Preparations: Getting Ready to Go



Trucking Essentials to Take with You

There are many essential items truckers need on the road. There are those supplies which are needed for the performance of the trucker's job, as well as personal items drivers need every day.

What should you take with you on the road? It depends on:

- The type of trucking you do...flatbed, van, etc.
- How long you'll be on the road...this could be just a few days or several weeks at a time.
- How *self-contained* you plan to be. You could...
 - Always eat your meals in truck stops
 - Bring food supplies to eat in the truck

- Or, a combination of the two

There are, of course, many other things to consider. Because of the reasons just listed, I can't cover *every* type of trucking, and *every* item drivers could have, in this guide. But, the added resource *The Trucking Supply Guide* includes all but the most specialized types of trucking supplies!

You might not need to take along *each* of the supplies listed in this section, especially if you end up driving local or regional. Adjust what *you* take with you in the truck according to *your* needs.

Check out this [video](#) that goes in-depth on what to bring to truck driving school. The items included are the about same as what *any* truck driver should take with them on the road.



It's important to work out the following:

- **Where to locate needed supplies.** (Supplies are grouped into lists by trucking categories, with pictures of each item, and quick web links provided to the best resources online).
- **How to utilize essential supplies.** (Suggestions and ideas included).

- **How to fit supplies in the truck and keep them organized.**
- **How to organize and create to-do lists to save time and aggravation.**
- **How to avoid getting (and saving ill-spent money on) the wrong or overpriced supplies.**

Being proficient in trip preparations will give you a great chance of having trucking success.

Personal Items

When choosing what you take with you on the road, think of all the personal items you'd need if you were going on a vacation. But you'll need more, because you'll probably be sleeping in the truck's sleeper, and not in a hotel.

With each item type, take more than you think you'll need. Because, stuff happens!

- ☐ **Wallet, money, credit cards.** Keep a stash of cash somewhere just in case you lose your wallet.
- ☐ **Trucking clothes:** Select clothing that is comfortable, but tough. Pack enough shirts, pants, and shorts to get your driving and other work-related duties done.
- ☐ **Off-duty clothes for relaxation:** Even *more* comfortable clothing, and you can leave off the tough part. Think sweatpants, soft shorts, etc. so your free time is more enjoyable.
- ☐ **Toiletries:** Any articles used in washing and taking care of one's body, such as soap, shampoo, and toothpaste. [Additional resource.](#)
- ☐ **Outerwear:** Coats, jackets, sweatshirts, flannel shirts.

- ☐ **Underwear and Socks:** Take more than you think you need. If going anywhere cold, also take thermal underwear.
- ☐ **Footwear:** Sneakers, running shoes, work boots, cowboy boots.
- ☐ **Headgear:** Hats, caps, bandanas, visors, etc.
- ☐ **Inclement and/or extreme weather gear:** Rain and winter weather gear.
- ☐ **Bedding:** Includes sheets, pillow, pillow case, blankets, fleece or heated blanket.
- ☐ **First-aid kit.**
- ☐ **Portable toilet.** Sounds crazy, but there are many times truckers just have no choice. More info [here](#).

Work-Related Items

The following items will help you accomplish many trucking related tasks.

- ☐ **Basic tools:** Store tools in a compact tool box; hammer, screwdriver, pliers, adjustable wrench, tape measure, crowbar, multi-tool, knife, duct tape, zip ties, etc.
- ☐ **Driving tools:** Smartphone, wallet, CB radio, CB antenna, motor-carrier atlas, truck stop guide, sunglasses, coffee/travel mug, cigarettes, e-cigarettes, vape pen, related accessories, etc.
- ☐ **Tools for common trucking tasks:** Tire thumper, fifth-wheel pin puller, shovel, bungee cords, camera, etc.
- ☐ **Load securement:** Equipment for different types of trucking, like flatbed or household moving.
- ☐ **In-Cab Gear:** Travel Cooler, hot-water pot, plastic cups (solo cups, if you prefer disposable) microwave, kitchen utensils, can opener, etc.
- ☐ **Food and Beverages:** Coffee (instant or grounds), tea, peanut butter and jelly, lunch meat, bread, non-refrigerated snacks (shoot for healthier!) like protein or granola bars, fruit, water, soda, etc.

Entertainment

- ☐ **Reading:** E-reader, magazines, newspapers, books.
- ☐ **Listening:** Audiobooks, podcasts through mp3, music players, online through Spotify, etc.
- ☐ **Watching:** Movies/DVDs, documentaries, YouTube, etc.
- ☐ **Playing:** Video games (online or game console), crossword puzzles, trivia, cards, board games, etc.
- ☐ **Computing:** Laptop, tablet, etc.
- ☐ **Learning/Hobbies:** Art, photography, writing, learning a foreign language, music theory, playing an instrument, other educational aspirations, working towards a degree, etc.

Check Out the Trucking Supply Guide

We've included just about every item imaginable to help you perform the trucking job and live life out on the road. *Look for this guide in the downloads included in the TME package.*

The Trucking Supply Guide includes:

- Personal Items to Take with You
- Trucking Equipment and Supplies
- Food and Beverage Supplies. In-cab kitchen tools, accessories, self-contained essentials.
- Computers and Electronic Accessories
- Trip Planning Efficiency
- In-Cab Essentials. In-reach driving essentials, electronics and appliances, organization and efficiency tools.
- Entertainment Options for Truckers
- Basic Tools for Drivers

- Load Securement and Protection
- Household Moving Supplies
- Equipment and Supplies for the Truck

Use To-Do lists to Keep Organized

You might feel that it's a waste of time to pull out a checklist to help accomplish the tasks that are involved in the everyday life as a trucker. However, statistically, truck drivers are more likely to be injured or to cause injury than pilots, no matter which type of plane that was flown.

For more detailed information on organizing the truck, see [keeping the truck clean and organized](#) later in this chapter.

Pilots go through a checklist before every evolution in their workday to assure they've given each detail its proper attention. Truckers should do the same.

Checklists, even for the most obvious things, protect against the complacency of becoming somewhat automated in your actions as you become more comfortable in your daily routines as a driver.

You can use these checklists as they are, add to them, or make up your own. You could put several of these checklists on one page, and then print out the page and use it in your truck.

If mentioning some of the following items seem too obvious, well, not locking the keys in the car is obvious too, but most of us have done it!

To-do list ideas and examples

- **Starting the day.** Sometimes it's tough starting the day and remembering everything you need to do. Here's a sample to get you started on starting your day:
 - ☐ coffee, tea, water, etc.
 - ☐ take keys and lock doors if leaving the truck
 - ☐ eat breakfast (list details here, if needed)
 - ☐ use restrooms and take care of hygiene
 - ☐ quick stretching routine and/or exercise
 - ☐ analyze map, complete log book, etc.
 - ☐ check on weather along route
 - ☐ make necessary phone calls, check-ins, etc.
 - ☐ do pre-trip inspection
- **Things to do each time you stop the truck.**
- **Delivery and pickup procedures.**
- **Weighing the truck procedure.**
- **Restocking the truck as needed list (call this inventory/supplies?).**
- **Routine for when you're finished for the day.**

- **What to do when you get back home.**

- ☐ Laundry. While cleaning the clothes you used while on the road, remember to keep your road clothes separate, saving yourself time from getting them together each time they're cleaned.
- ☐ Activities you want to do with your family.
- ☐ Shopping. If you can, taking enough to last an entire trip will save you time and headache of having to get things on the road, possibly at the last minute. Down time on the road is best spent resting and enjoying the times you don't have to drive.
- ☐ Add your own items to list here...

Try to think of any other tasks or routine you might need help remembering, then create each to-do list for yourself.

Getting the Truck Ready for the Trip



Maintenance, repairs, and services

Much depends upon how your company does maintenance and services. It will save you a lot of downtime if you can have this done when you're off-duty, at home or on layovers on the road. Unfortunately, in trucking, things can't always be on the schedule of your choice. Often, you don't know about repairs that need to be done until the moment they break down.

Having regular preventative maintenance and services done will help to prevent the equipment from breaking down as often, helping you avoid additional downtime. A full (PM) service must be done on the truck every 15,000 to 25,000 miles, but exactly how often depends upon the company. If you can have these done while you're at home or laid over, do so and you'll save time.

But if you must do it on the road, services only take up to a couple of hours, provided there are not major problems. Try to do this at non-peak hours to avoid delays. For example, you might want to service and wash the truck on the weekend, or whenever your down time happens to be.

Remember, the more miles you drive, the more money you should make. When you're assigned to a new load, you'll have many other things to do, so try to at least have your truck serviced and ready to go, ahead of time.

Becoming familiar with the tractor

Become extremely familiar with all the controls on your truck *before* you need to use them out on the road.

Air horn



You should be able to immediately be able to locate and blow the air horn, because, in some situations, you will only have a split-second to react... you *don't* have time to think about where it is!

Cruise control

Use the cruise control whatever you need to maintain the same speed for long periods of time. This will keep your speed consistent, and will free you from having to regularly monitor the speedometer. Use of the cruise control will also increase your fuel efficiency. Don't, however, use the cruise control under most mountain, city, and adverse conditions.

Axle differential

Use the axle-differential whenever you have a loss of traction, often when there's an uneven, muddy, slippery surface, or when traveling over 30 mph. Do not turn it on when your wheels are spinning. Instead, stop, turn it on, *then* resume driving.

Engine/Idle Shutdown

On tractors equipped with an idle shutdown, the computer will shut the engine off after a set period of time, usually a couple of minutes. On most systems, you can override this feature by waiting the first couple of minutes

or until the engine light comes on. When this happens, just tap the brakes or push in the clutch, which will override the system until the next time you let the truck idle. Idle up the truck to 900 or 1000 RPM's, depending on the engine manufacturer's recommendations.

Only do this if you need the truck to continue running to allow the air conditioner or heater to operate, or if you have a cooler which may run down a battery in a short time. Some motor carriers will be more lenient in their idle time policy than others, so ask about this first.

Engine Brake

For complete information on the engine brake, or engine brake, see the section under [Braking Essentials](#).

Manual Engine Fan

In the mountains, turn on the engine fan (if so equipped) if you're climbing an especially steep hill or mountain. This may result in a temporary loss of power, but it's better than overheating. Again, this depends on the engine, as newer models may not require this, and may handle it automatically.

Manual Air Suspension

Note: This is a personal preference, and depends on your situation, often reserved for when you're under a heavy load. See this discussion on [TruckersReport](#).

This is commonly called, "dropping the air bags," which lowers the tractor's suspension system. When you need to uncouple your tractor from the trailer, dropping the air bags will enable you to pull out from underneath the trailer more smoothly. Just remember to stop as soon as you're away from the trailer, and flip the switch back to normal, re-inflating the air

bags. If you don't, you'll soon wonder why you're having such a bumpy ride going down the road.

Trucks with Governed Speeds

Most trucking companies govern, or limit the truck's maximum road speed. This is done for safety, and for fuel efficiency (better MPGs). Keep in mind what your top speed is when you're considering passing another vehicle. You may end up *slowly* passing another vehicle, or turtle racing, which is frustrating for *all* involved.

See more about this, including comments on governed trucks, in [Driving on the Big Road](#).

The sliding fifth-wheel



For the most part, sliding the fifth-wheel is done for weight distribution purposes. But there are other reasons to slide the fifth-wheel. Sliding the fifth-wheel forward decreases the distance between the back of the tractor and the front of the trailer. This results in less wind resistance and greater fuel savings. However, with the fifth-wheel in this position, you will not be able to turn as sharply, which will make it more difficult to maneuver in many customer locations, etc. Also, this increases the risk of the corner of your trailer doing damage to the side of your tractor if you do try to turn too sharply.

If you're having trouble getting the fifth-wheel to slide, there are a few things you can try:

- Make sure you're on a flat, smooth surface, if possible.
- Try rocking the tractor gently back and forth. Sometimes the fifth-wheel mechanism gets stuck because of too much dirt or is frozen, and just needs to be freed.
- If you're trying to slide the fifth-wheel and you're pulling or pushing the trailer along instead, put the trailer landing gear down and try again.

The brakes

- Service brakes: depressing the brake pedal supplies air to the brake chamber which starts a process which causes brake linings to contact the brake drum, resulting in friction which slows down the vehicle. When bobtailing, this system uses tractor brakes alone; when connected to a trailer, it uses a combination of the tractor and trailer brakes.
- Parking brakes: to park the vehicle, the driver must pull the valve button for the tractor and/or the trailer. The yellow valve sets the tractor brakes (applies or engages the brakes), and the red valve sets the trailer brakes. On level ground, most drivers simply set the tractor brake.
- Emergency brakes: when the air pressure drops below 45 psi (in most tractors), the brakes are automatically engaged.

The ELD Device



Courtesy: Omnitrac

Skip ahead for [more information](#) on the use of an electronic logging device (the ELD).

Keeping the truck clean and organized

Truck washes

For more information on truck washes, see the information in the [section discussing truck stops services and amenities](#).

Mirrors, windshields and windows



Visibility is KEY! Before moving the tractor, clean all the glass, inside and out. You should have glass cleaner in your cab (check the *The Trucking Supply Guide*), as well as a squeegee, and paper towels. When you're at a truck stop, use the supplies provided on the fuel island.

Squeegee with sponge/scrubber and spray bottle with window washer:

- This item is essential for maintaining good visibility, as you can't always wait to get to a truck stop to clean the windshield.
- In the winter, you may go through many areas that get a lot of snow. When the snow is melting, it seems like you're constantly washing your windows from all the spray from other vehicles.
- Make sure you carry extra window washer fluid. You can use the squeegee to clean the entire windshield, including areas which the wipers don't reach, your door windows, and of course, the mirrors.

- In the summer, the bugs always seem to find your windshield. Those bugs can sometimes be difficult to remove, so a good scrubber will come in handy. Occasionally, you'll have to clean out your squeegee sponge. You can do this, either at home, or at a truck stop fuel island.

Replace the wipers when they start to wear out. When this happens, you'll notice that not all of the water is wiped away, and/or there are still streaks left. Use an all-weather type which will be of stronger material and better suited to wipe away snow and ice in the winter.



[Rain-X](#) is an excellent choice for washer fluid, although it is a little more expensive (check with your company before you buy it...they might not reimburse you for the added expense). The water beads on contact, so visibility is much better than with ordinary fluid. Also comes in a de-icer, and as a bug remover.

Clean the windows *inside* the tractor. If you slip seat (get assigned to any tractor on any given day), or are getting in a new and different tractor, make sure you do this before you drive. If the previous driver was a smoker (and most truckers are), you'll notice a big difference.

Mirror heaters are a big help in cold or foggy weather. This saves you from having to get out to wipe or scrape the mirrors. Most newer tractors have them as standard equipment.

Make sure you carry plenty of windshield wiper fluid in the truck. When the weather is warmer, there is an increase in insects flying around. Of course, they tend to make a mess out of your windshield as you're going down the road.

Don't overdo the windshield cleaning. Yes, I said that visibility is key, but some drivers seem to take the concept overboard, as they *always* need to have their windshield perfectly clean. You must ask yourself, why am I using my wipers? Is it because my visibility is impaired, or just because a few bugs annoy me?

Just trying to clean some bugs off your windshield using the wipers can take up to a quart of wiper fluid. Sometimes, it's best to wait a while before you turn on your wipers. **But do what you must to make sure you can see clearly!**

Keep the interior clean and organized



Many truck drivers are extremely diligent about washing the exterior of their trucks but totally neglect the interior. The interior is your home away from home, where you spend most of the day.

[Here's a great online resource](#) that includes the video "Truck Driver Tips: How to Organize a Semi Truck".

The interior is your home away from home, where you spend most of the day.

- Take pride in your truck's appearance, both inside and out. Invest in some cleaning supplies, a small vacuum cleaner, and possibly some organizational items.
- **Some sleeper berths have more cabinet space and shelving than others.** There may be a place designed for your cooler/refrigerator, television, microwave, etc., each with an accessory power connection (cigarette lighter).
- **Try to keep your clothes folded or up on hangers.** Keep items together with other similar items.
- Keep your local maps, atlas, and trucking guide all together.
- Get a small file box and/or a briefcase to help in keeping your paperwork together: shipping papers, trip sheets, pay stubs, etc.
- Keep trash bags in bins in easy reach locations and empty, or dispose of, the bags when they are full.

Inspecting the truck

Pre-trip inspection advice

Do pre-trip inspections as if you're life depended upon it, because it does. It's your life and your livelihood at stake!

When you do your daily pre-trip inspection, do a quick once over of the overall condition of the tractor and trailer that you have been assigned to. Damage can often happen without your knowledge, possibly while you're in a truck stop or inside a customer's facility. Truck stops are notorious for little incidents and accidents, especially the closer together the parking spaces are. A truck could sideswipe your truck and just take off, and you might not notice any damage until you're long gone.

The pre-trip inspection on a newly assigned truck

The first time you are assigned a new truck, it is important to do a special pre-assignment inspection.

Thoroughly inspect every little thing on the tractor. Jot down all damage that you find; any obvious dents or scratches on the body, broken or missing lights, etc.

Once you're officially assigned the tractor, and get started on a trip, you can be held responsible (financially and driving record-wise) for any damage found that you did not initially report. Notify the person who you report to, your supervisor or dispatcher, about the damage. Most companies should have a damage report which you can fill out.

Make a list of everything and anything that needs to be done to the truck: repairs, service, cleaning, modifications and/or additions of any kind.

Driver's daily checklist

Visual inspection on approach:

- ☐ Check the vehicle's overall condition: the body, windows, mirrors, and lights.
- ☐ Look underneath the vehicle. Look for any type of leaks.
- ☐ Look for anything obvious like damage, missing or loose parts.

Inspect under the hood (or cab) before starting the vehicle:

- ☐ Check all the fluid levels and top off, if necessary: oil, engine coolant, power steering fluid, and windshield washer fluid.
- ☐ Check out the engine belts, brake lines and hoses, and all other controls, and wires.

- ☐ Drain the fuel/water separator.

Inspect the storage compartment:

- ☐ Make sure you have your fire extinguisher, and that it's properly charged.
- ☐ Make sure you have your road emergency equipment.

Thorough outside inspection:

- ☐ Check out tires for overall condition and inflation, and make sure wheel studs and load nuts are secure, and not rusted. Also check the front wheel bearing lube level.
- ☐ Check the springs or any other suspension parts for any damage.
- ☐ Check the condition of the parking brakes. Make sure your turn signals are operating properly, and there are no lights out. Replace bulbs if necessary.
- ☐ Check your emergency flashers.
- ☐ Check the condition of the fuel tanks, and their mounting hardware, the fuel level, and the tightness of the fuel tank caps.
- ☐ Check the air cleaner and muffler, and make sure they're not loose.
- ☐ Check the trailer electrical and air connections, and make sure there are no air leaks.
- ☐ If there's a trailer spare wheel, make sure it's in good condition, inflated, and secure.

- ☐ Check the fifth-wheel, and the kingpin. Make sure they're connected securely. Check to see that the sliding fifth-wheel is locked.
- ☐ Make sure the landing gear is up, and set in place.
- ☐ Drain moisture from the air supply tanks.

Inspecting the inside of the cab:

- ☐ If this is a different truck than the one you drove previously, adjust the seats, steering column, and adjust the mirrors.
- ☐ If you have a partner, or passengers in the vehicle, check the sleeper restraint system.

Starting the truck (in temperatures 50° or greater):

- ☐ Make sure the parking brake is set, and the transmission is in neutral.
- ☐ Depress the clutch, and start the vehicle.
- ☐ Immediately check the oil pressure gauge.
- ☐ The pressure should rise within a few seconds (check your vehicle's manual for the actual pressure. If it doesn't rise, turn off the engine, and find out what your problem is).
- ☐ Slowly release the clutch once the engine has started.
- ☐ Warm up the vehicle, but don't idle the engine more than 1000 RPMs (but check your truck's engine recommendations).

Note: For information on starting the truck in colder temperatures, see the section “winter driving” in [Driving Through Adverse Conditions](#).

Coupling and uncoupling: procedures, problems, and solutions

Making the connection:

(Make sure you do this procedure the same way each time to avoid the problems we’ll discuss later.)

- ☐ Approach with the trailer on your left, until the front of your tractor is at the front corner of the trailer, then turn hard to the right and line up the tractor and trailer. In your mirror, line the tractor up so that the tires are just within the sides of the trailer on both sides.
- ☐ Stop the tractor just as the fifth-wheel has touched the trailer, set the brakes, and get out and inspect. The front, underside of the trailer should touch the bottom quarter of the back of the fifth-wheel. If it’s more than halfway up (or if there’s air between the bottom of the trailer and the fifth-wheel), you’ll need to lower the trailer (crank it down). Alternatively, if the bottom of the trailer is too low down on the fifth-wheel, you’ll have to raise the trailer. Connect the air and electrical connections before backing under.
- ☐ When you’re backing into the trailer, do so slowly. Don’t slam the fifth-wheel into the kingpin, or you can do serious damage to the equipment. Open the driver’s window to be able to hear the connection. Then, test the connection by attempting to pull forward (do so two times, in a low gear). Apply the tractor brake, and get out to check the connection. You want to make

sure that the jaws of the fifth-wheel have locked around the kingpin. Also ensure that the fifth-wheel release arm is all the way in (locked), not still pulled out (unlocked). Now you can raise the landing gear.

If you miss the connection to the kingpin:

- ☐ It's possible for the fifth-wheel to miss the kingpin by going underneath it. This is called a "high hook." There is another, rarer "high hook" which occurs when the jaws of the fifth-wheel catch only the bottom of the kingpin. These sometimes go unnoticed until it's too late and you've had the trailer fall to the ground. These missed connections can happen if the trailer's landing gear was cranked up too high, or if you dumped the tractor air bags too low before backing up (which is one reason why you probably shouldn't drop the bags at this point). The fifth-wheel can then frequently pop back up behind the kingpin, and you're unable to pull back out.
- ☐ If this has happened, first raise the trailer (crank up the landing gear) up as high as it will go. If the trailer is loaded heavy, you may have to put the crank in low gear and then crank for a while. Then, drop the air bags (lower the suspension). You should then be able to pull out.
- ☐ You may also be able to get out of this by trying to angle back out, after going back and forth a few times. Another possible solution is having a forklift raise the front of the trailer (if there's one available), and you can then drive out from under the trailer, and adjust the heights accordingly.

Problems getting the fifth-wheel pin to pull out:

- ☐ If you encounter this problem, get back in the tractor, release the tractor brakes, and back up slowly until you can't go any further.
- ☐ While still holding down the service brake, set the tractor brakes again, then release the service brake.
- ☐ Get back out and try to pull the pin again. It should come out easily this time. If not, repeat the process again, except go forward and back again, with a rocking motion.

Dropping the trailer

Inspect the ground the trailer is being dropped on

If the ground is dirt or another soft material (sand, soggy grass, etc.), place some wood planks under the landing gear first, then lower the landing gear and drop the trailer, especially if the trailer is loaded heavy. There is a real danger of the trailer sinking too low in the ground, and being unable to get your tractor under it again.

Get a kingpin lock

A kingpin lock should be used whenever you drop the trailer in a truck stop or an unsecure location, to prevent someone from stealing it. Another tractor can simply hook up to your trailer and take it away, and that would be *bad*.

After you've uncoupled, the lock is placed around the kingpin and locked with a key. With this lock in place, another tractor cannot hook up to the trailer (the jaws of the fifth-wheel won't be able to lock around the kingpin).

A kingpin lock should NOT to be used when you're dropping the trailer in a typical drop and hook situation, where another driver will eventually pick it up, unless you've arranged that with them beforehand!

Chapter 2: Trip Planning



Getting the Load Assignment

Depending on the company you work for, and its procedures, you may or may not know your next load assignment before you get to the terminal (or company yard, or wherever you pick up your truck). Some drivers prefer to know in advance where they're going to next. But this is not always possible in the real world of trucking. You may have to just get used to not knowing where you're going until the last minute, or when you can expect to get back home.

There are many variables at work here. You may already know most of them, or none at them. You may work for a private carrier which hauls its own product, in which case you'll be familiar with the shipper. Or you may haul a dedicated load from the same shipper every week.

In either case, the load assignment or trip information gives you all the necessary information you need to know about your next load. For more trip planning resources,

Trip information will often include:

- The origin (shipper/s) and destination (receiver/s) information.
- Name, address, and phone # of shippers and receivers, etc.
- Date and time of pickup (multiple pickups?).
- Date and time of deliveries (multiple drops?).
- The type of load you're picking up (cargo, commodity, etc.).
- The amount or quantity of the load.
- Pickup number/s.

Different types of load assignments:

1. **Pre-loaded trailer at the terminal, customer (shipper) or other location.** When you're on the road, this is usually a “drop and hook”, where you leave your original (empty or loaded) trailer at the same location.
2. **Having the trailer loaded *live* at the shipper.** You may have to load the trailer yourself (although this is rare in most types of trucking), supervise the loading process, or wait in the driver's area or in your truck.

Practical Map Reading for Truckers

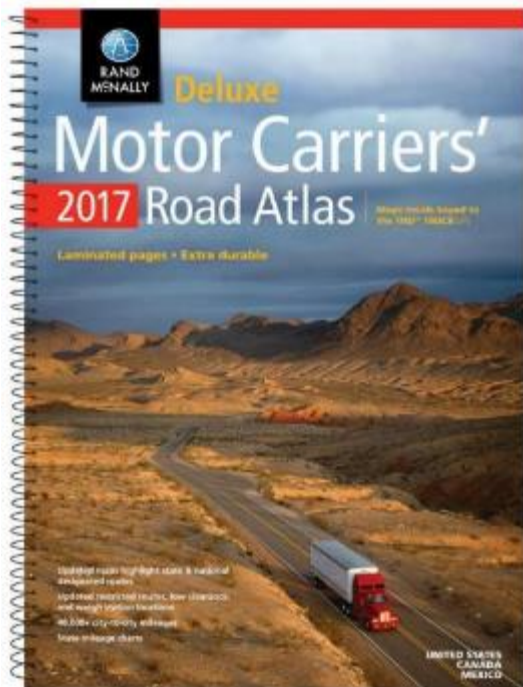
Of course, some of the information here is the “old-school” way of map reading. Now, everyone wants an app and/or GPS, and I recommend both. Here's a few good [GPS units on Amazon](#) that may work quite nicely. Just make sure you read the user reviews under the description.

Quick word of advice. Don't rely too heavily on GPS. Use your own eyes and judgment. Many a trucker has been “told” by GPS that a certain route was ok, then plowed into a low bridge that was only 10'6”.

[Check this video out](#), to see for yourself. Pay special attention to their commentary on how the unit works for *truck drivers* and if the GPS database includes a comprehensive listing of bridge heights.

Using maps and atlases

The Trucker's Road Atlas:



The best atlas for truckers is the [Rand McNally Motor Carriers Road Atlas](#). Get the laminated, large scale version, which costs more, but will last a much longer time. If necessary, you can even write on it with dry-erase markers to highlight a specific route, and clean it off after each trip.

The Trucker's Road Atlas includes essential information which is specifically for truck drivers:

- Large map of the United States, Canada, and Mexico, showing all major Interstates and highways;

- Individual state and province maps;
- Restricted routes, low clearance locations, weigh station locations, permit information, and more.
- For the Trucker's Road Atlas, plus other trip planning books, go to www.truckercountry.com/trip-planning.html

Local maps:

It will be a big help to have a collection of local maps, especially for areas of the country in which you frequently travel. If you carry a laptop computer, and have access to the internet, you can print out directions and maps online.

Map reading essentials

This may sound obvious, but it's surprising how many people don't know:

- how to locate a point on a map,
- how to get to that point from where they are, and
- maybe most importantly, the number of resources at your disposal to help you figure out how to get where you're going.

On a trip through Florida, for example, I heard another driver on the CB, asking for directions to a cold storage location in Miami. I was about an hour north of Miami, and he was directly behind me. He asked me if I knew how to get to where he was going, but I told him I was sorry, but I didn't know that destination.

After thinking about it, I thought, "Wait a minute, I could find out where that is easily, and then give him that information myself."

The driver continued asking other drivers if they knew how to get to the cold storage company while I...

- Used my phone to dial 411 and got the phone number and was automatically connected to the cold storage location.
- Talked with someone there to get directions to their location.
- Got back on the CB and gave the directions to the driver.

Other truckers can be a great source of information, especially local drivers, but if no one knows, then obviously they can't help.

The last thing you want to do is put yourself in this type of position. You may already be running late due to circumstances beyond your control, and now you're nearly at the customer, in very unfamiliar territory, and don't know how to get there. You're not even sure what streets are safe to drive on with a big truck. It's not worth the stress or aggravation.

The best way to avoid this is to take the time to figure out exactly where you're going, using whatever methods work for you, as soon as you find out either the name or address (or both) of your customer. That way, if there is a problem, (wrong number, wrong address, maybe even wrong customer!) you'll find out immediately, with plenty of time to work it out.

In this situation, I gave the information I had found, quickly and efficiently, to a very grateful driver. This is a great example of the growing importance of cell phones, and of technological options in general, for truck drivers. Besides 411 Information, you can call the customers, your dispatcher, the broker; there are so many ways to get this type of information. I used to call my wife and had her look up directions online when I was unable to get in touch with a customer, but that was *before* we all had smartphones.

These days, most companies have their own websites that give directions to any of their locations. With a laptop and either cell phone web access or through a truck stop's internet access, you can look up either the company or a website specializing in maps and directions (Rand McNally, MapQuest, Yahoo, for example). You can contact your company with your Qualcomm, if your truck has it installed.

Despite the benefits of having cell phones and/or laptops, the trucker I helped could have avoided his situation by stopping earlier in the day and calling his customer or his dispatch, or Information from any pay phone, at a rest area or truck stop. He could even have bought a map of Miami, but for that to be useful, he needed two kinds of information: the address of the customer, *and* how to read a map.

Get the big picture, then narrow it down, step-by-step

Start with the biggest picture and narrow it down, each time getting more local. For example, suppose you've been assigned a trip that picks up in Los Angeles, Ca., and delivers in New York City. I'm assuming you're now using the recommended Rand McNally Motor Carriers Road Atlas.

Start with the map of the United States, and imagine a straight line between the two cities, or use a long transparent ruler. Connect the two cities (mentally or with the ruler), and use this image to give you an idea of what routes you're going to have to take.

When you have that in mind, you can look at each state map along the way (as you progress), looking for pertinent information in each state (weigh stations, major cities and their maps, mountains, etc.), and finally, local city or county maps. You may or may not have these, and it may not be reasonable to expect anyone to have a whole stack of local maps for the whole country – therefore, **these days you must have a laptop on the road with you.** You'll either get online and look up the local map (there

are a number of different services), or use certain software programs which have most local maps in the country. Usually, for local information, you'll get directions from a broker or a receiver directly to your destination, but having a local map will be extremely helpful. You don't want to be in a situation where, if you make one wrong turn, you have no idea where you are, or how to get where you need to be, or even worse, find that you're trapped in a dead-end situation that may be incredibly difficult to back out of, or you'll be faced with low clearances you can't get past.

How to decide which roads to take

- Point 'A' is where you're starting a leg of the trip
- Point 'B' is the destination.

This could be the whole trip if all you have is one pickup and one delivery. But often there are multiple "stops" and "drops". In this case, you'll have to do separate routing for each "leg" of the trip, with a Point 'A' and a Point 'B' for each.

For each leg of the trip, establish your Point 'A' and Point 'B'. Then, either visualize a straight line between the two points or use a clear 12" ruler to connect the two points. For long distances (especially inter-state), try to concentrate on the Interstate and major U.S. Highways. See which roads will follow most closely to that straight line.

When deciding which routes to take to your destination, the decision often comes down to taking the Interstate or going off-route (secondary routes). All things being equal, take the Interstate.

Advantages of taking the Interstate

- No stopping at traffic lights,
- No slowdowns in cities or towns,

- Usually better maintained roads,
- Flatter terrain (Interstate grades can be up to 7%, while secondary roads can be up to 10% or more).

Very often, smaller roads will be the shortest route from Point 'A' to Point 'B'. However, the shortest route is not always the quickest route, unless it happens to be the Interstate. You may have to experience it one way for yourself (going off-route to save a few miles), then decide differently the next time you have a similar decision to make. It's often easier, as well as quicker, to go an extra 50 miles on a 500-mile trip than to go the shorter route (often a secondary road going through 30 towns along the way).

Then again, don't shy away from going off-route when it's necessary, which may be often. There are many "off-route" motor carriers who specialize in taking shipments to less common destinations, where an Interstate doesn't go near. Even when your whole trip is "off-route", you'll still have to decide which roads to take, with the same type of reasoning to be done.

Looking for an unknown city or town

In the back of the atlas, there is an index section which gives an alphabetized listing of counties, cities, and towns within each state, which are also listed alphabetically. When you find the city, note the code given. This is the location of the city on the appropriate state map. Look for the letter on the left or right sides of the map, and the number on the top or bottom of the map. Imagine columns coming out from these two points, extending all the way through the map. The city you're looking for is located at the intersection of these two columns.

The city or town you're looking for may not always be listed in the index. One reason may be that the town is considered too small to be listed, although it may be on the map itself. Another reason is that it is in a bigger metropolitan area. If you know the town or suburban area is in a particular

city, you may be able to find it by looking on the appropriate city map (either in the atlas itself, or on a separate map altogether). You may have to wait until you talk to the shipper and get directions to find the city.

Understanding map symbols

The smaller the road or highway looks on the atlas, the more questionable it will be for big trucks. The thinner (often the color pink) roads are usually acceptable for trucks, but it's advisable to check the restricted routes table just to make sure.

The gray colored roads

You're not going to travel these roads on the normal course of your route (unless you thoroughly know an area). But these roads become a viable option, and sometimes an absolute necessity when you need to go the final few miles to a customer. Check to see if the secondary route is listed in the "restricted routes" section of the atlas to see if trucks are prohibited.

The **dark/solid gray roads** are paved roads often suitable for big trucks, and often totally restricted. I have been on these roads when all of a sudden, either they just ended, or there was a sign that says there is a problem ahead (a bridge is out, road construction, a sign saying that there is a low clearance ahead, etc.) You don't really know what to expect when you're on some of these roads for the first time. But you cannot just automatically discount these roads, as they may be the only road going to a customer.

You must find out if you can travel the road, by asking customers and/or getting complete directions from a reliable source (customer, broker, etc.), or by other truckers by asking for "local information" on the CB.

Light Gray or Slightly Transparent Roads

These roads may be paved or they could be totally unpaved gravel or dirt. These are not advisable for big trucks, unless you know the road, or if you have no choice, like if they're the only way to get to a customer. Just take it very slow if you must take these roads.

Suitability of smaller roads

Much depends on the state and the terrain. For example, in many parts of Texas, many of what seems to be the very smallest roads, or roads that aren't even on the map are perfectly acceptable for big trucks. However, if you're in a mountainous area, a U.S. highway may be the smallest road you should take for any considerable distance.

The Interstate Highway numbering system



The Interstate numbers, mile markers, and exit numbers

Interstate highways which go north-south are odd numbered, and have one or two digits. They start in the west at I-5 and get higher as they go east, ending with I-95 on the East Coast. As you travel north within each state on these north-south highways, the mile markers get higher. In addition, exit numbers correspond to the mile markers. For example, an exit between mile markers 9 and 10 will be exit # 9 (which would be approximately 9 miles north of the south border of the state).

Interstate highways which go east-west are even numbered, and have one or two digits. They start in the south with I-10 (actually, I-8 Southern California and Arizona, and I-4 in Central Florida) and get higher as they go north, ending with I-90 and I-94. As you travel east within each state on these east-west highways, the mile markers get higher. In addition, exit numbers correspond to the mile markers. For example, an exit between mile markers 4 and 5 will be exit # 4 (which would be approximately 4 miles east of the west border of the state).

The mile markers are very useful to truck drivers as they can help them to determine how far they've driven within, or how far they need to drive through, a state.

Figuring out the total Interstate miles within one state is pretty straightforward (figuring *off-route* miles is easier if you go by your odometer):

- For north-south highways, find the northern-most exit and add any extra miles to the north border for the total state miles.
- For east-west highways, find the eastern most exit and add any miles to the east border for the total state miles.

Beltways, loops and spurs



When the Interstate is coming into a major city, beltways (or loops) around the city still have the Interstate symbol, but carry three-digit numbers instead of two. They have an even first number followed by the number of the Interstate from where it came. These routes go through or around the city, eventually meeting back up with the Interstate it left, *or* sometimes with a different Interstate.

A spur (or business spur) also carries the three-digit number, but with an odd first number. These routes spur off into a city area, never meeting back up with the original Interstate, although sometimes they meet a different Interstate.

For an education on loops and spurs, study the map of the Los Angeles metropolitan area.



For example, I-110 and I-710 are spurs off of I-10. The 110 goes south, ending in San Pedro, and the 710 goes south, ending in Long Beach. I-405 and I-210 are loops off of I-5 and I-10, respectively. The 405 loops off of I-5 and eventually meets back up with it again, while the 210 loops off of I-10 and meets up with I-5.

Recognizing restricted routes

Many routes restrict all use by motor carriers, either entirely, or at certain points along the route. There are many possible reasons for the restrictions:

- state or local laws may have prohibited trucks,
- bridges may have low weight capacities,
- there are tunnels with certain limitations, or
- there are low clearances (if a low clearance is one of the reasons why a route is restricted, it is NOT also included in the low clearance locations table in the Motor Carriers' Road Atlas).

Determining travel times and distances

As a professional truck driver, you must leave *nothing* to guesswork. You must take the time to analyze several different factors when determining things like: establishing an ETA (estimated time of arrival), how far you'll get and where you'll be able to stop before running out of driving hours, etc.

For example, you've driven six hours already, you are at point A, and you are going to Point B. Using your map, you calculate that you have X number of miles to go – take X, divide that by the speed limit (or the speed you're traveling), and you'll have the number of hours it'll take to get there. Then, see how many hours you have available (in this example, you've driven six hours, therefore you can drive up to five more hours -- maximum driving hours in a row is 11, before having to take a 10-hour break.)

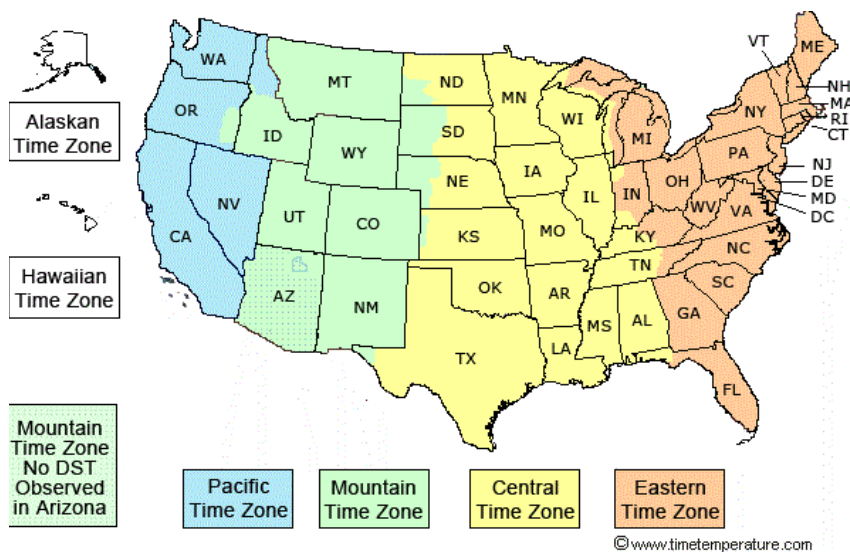
With this information, you'll know if you can make it to your destination this driving shift, before you're required to stop. This info will also help you decide on where you're going to stop for the

night. Look for a truck stop that's before where you'll run out of available driving hours.

To continue this example, suppose it's two o'clock in the afternoon, and you don't have to deliver until eight o'clock the next morning. Depending on your circumstances, you may have many options at your disposal. First, you could continue driving, getting there early in the evening, with enough time to go to sleep, and get a full night's rest. Or, if you are at a good truck stop, you can stop for a few hours, and maybe take a nap. Or, you could go inside the truck stop, eat a meal, or even take a shower. You can get back on the road, and still get to your destination before midnight.

Don't take a break long enough to where you'll get to your destination just in time. It's best to try to get there early, because you never know when there may be delays, breakdowns, etc. You also need to consider that you may be assigned your next load immediately after you get unloaded. You need to be fully rested and ready to go if that's the case.

Time zones



If, for example, Pacific time is 12 PM, then:

- Mountain time is 1 PM
- Central time is 2 PM
- Eastern time is 3 PM

Note: Arizona does NOT observe DST (Daylight Savings Time) except in the Navajo Indian Nation.

To find what times zone you're in look on the atlas; the time zone boundary is delineated by a red dotted line which starts up in Canada, and goes down into Mexico or into the Gulf of Mexico.

It's important to remember that all times, whether for pickup, delivery, or giving ETA's, are on **that customer's local time**. Also remember what time zone you're in when you set your alarm!

Military time

When you're given a time (appointment time, an ETA, etc.), by a dispatcher, on the Qualcomm, or by a customer, it might be given in military time. You should get familiar with how this works. Fortunately, it's an easy system to learn.



The main difference between regular and military time is how hours are expressed. Regular time uses numbers 1 to 12 to identify each of the 24 hours in a day. In military time, the hours are numbered from 00 to 24. Under this system, midnight is 2400, 1 AM is 0100, 1 PM is 1300, and so on.

Regular and military time express minutes and seconds in exactly the same way. When converting from regular to military time and vice versa, the minutes and seconds do not change. Regular time requires the use of AM and PM to clearly identify the time of day. Since military time uses a unique two- digit number to identify each of the 24 hours in a day, AM and PM are unnecessary.

1:55 AM is 0155 hours. 2:00 PM is 1400 hours.

Here's an easy way to remember this: After 1:00 PM subtract 12 hours. Example: 1300 is 1:00 PM. ($13 - 12 = 1:00$ PM)

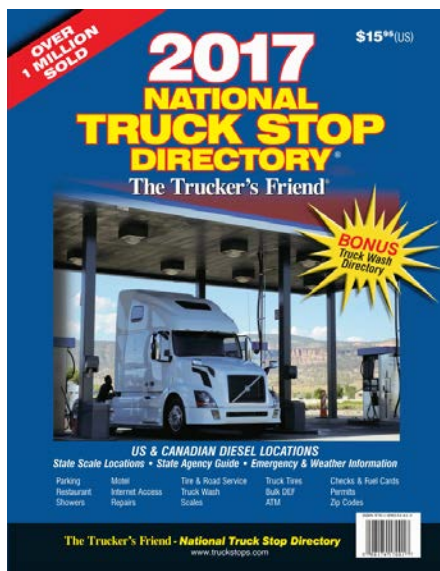
Consider All Factors When Planning the Trip

An OTR driver must consider many factors when estimating the distance and duration of a trip. It's essential to be able to quickly and closely estimate travel times and ETA's, etc.

Making stops are not only necessary, but recommended for many reasons. This section analyzes the different stopping scenarios effecting truck drivers including – stopping for fuel, eating, using restrooms, showering, service and repairs, etc. – all of which need to be taken into consideration.

Making necessary stops on the road

Fuel planning using the atlas and the truck stop guide:



A good truck stop guide is indispensable out on the road. A good one is “The National Truck Stop Directory”, subtitled “[The Trucker’s Friend](#)”. This book gives you a state-by-state listing of all known, recognized truck stops. These get updated annually, so try to get the latest version.

Considering fueling options, companies operate in a manner which suits *their* situation best. There are many different methods of operation which they use:

Some companies will fuel at *any* location, perhaps based on price alone. Their drivers may receive a fuel card which can be used at any location.

Other companies fuel only at a specific truck stop chain with a network of locations across a region. The company benefits because they receive discounts for purchasing fuel in greater quantities. Given this method, the driver can also benefit by receiving frequent fueler discounts.

Which method used affects how drivers must plan their fueling locations. The more fueling locations a driver can choose from, the easier it will be to plan ahead, and find one.

There are enough unknowns out there that truckers have to deal with on a daily basis. Don't wait until you're getting low on fuel before you attempt to find the nearest truck stop. See the section "[Running out of fuel...it even happens to truckers!](#)" for more information.

Figure out how far a full load of fuel will take you, then find a fueling location a good distance *before* you reach that point. If you know how many miles-per-gallon (MPG) your truck gets, use that figure (remember to factor in wind resistance, hills or mountains to climb, etc... all of which lower your fuel efficiency). If you don't know your truck's MPG, use a sufficiently low miles-per-gallon figure. For example, take 5 MPG X 200 gallons (2x 100-gallon tanks) = 1000 total miles you can get before running out of fuel.

Look at your trucker's atlas (go back to the section on [map reading](#)) and find out approximately where the 1000-mile point is on your route. Pick an area approximately 100 miles *before* that point and find it in your truck

stop guide. Then, simply choose one based upon whatever criteria you have been given by your company.

Note: There are many other reasons for drivers to stop while mid-trip. These are discussed in more detail in the chapter [Sometimes, You Need to Stop the Truck!](#)

Planning for expenses while on the road

There are many possible expenses you'll need to be able to pay for while out on the road. There are business expenses as well as personal expenses you must be able to pay. Some drivers just get the cash in the form of cash advances at truck stops, but it's best to be prepared with some cash before you even leave home. For your personal expenses,

Common expenses you'll need to be prepared for

- Truck scale fees: (About \$10.00 plus re-weigh fees for each load).
- Tolls: turnpikes, bridges, tunnels, etc.
- Food: meals at restaurants (if you eat 3 meals at restaurants, figure on at least \$20.00 to \$40.00 per day) or food you've brought in the truck (check *Trucking Lifestyles* for more on "the self-contained trucker"), snacks, beverages, etc.
- Lumpers: loading and unloading fees.
- Parking lot fees: (more common in busy, city area truck stops, typically \$5.00 to \$10.00 if you don't fuel... see "[truck stops](#)").
- Supplies: some may be reimbursed by your company, others will not. Either way, essential supplies will constantly have to be re-stocked.
- You'll also need a cash reserve for other unexpected expenses.

It's important for you to have enough cash for expenses while you're out on the road. You can probably pay for most expenses with a

debit/credit card, but I've found I spend less money if I use cash. Also, certain expenses like tolls, parking lot fees, and others, must be paid in cash, unless you have [E-ZPass](#). Get enough cash out while you're at home, because you'll typically spend a few bucks each time you take cash out of an ATM machine on the road. Many drivers prefer to take cash advances while on the road. Personally, I'd much prefer a full paycheck the following week, but when you're brand-new, you might have no choice.

Should you take the Interstate or go off-route?

Much depends upon whether your company dictates the route you must take or leaves it up to you. If you're given this responsibility, you must choose the *most practical route* by considering several factors. The most important of these are saving time (how long it takes to drive to the destination), saving fuel (getting better MPGs), and limiting the wear and tear on the vehicle. However, there are many occasions when taking the most practical route will take you "out of route" (see below).

There are many companies who will let you choose your own route, but this discretionary power is limited. A company may want you to take the shortest route, regardless of which is the most practical route to take.

If you exceed a certain number of miles over and beyond a set number of miles (calculated by [PC Miler](#), or a similar mileage method)...

- you won't be paid for those miles, and
- you could receive disciplinary action if it continues. These extra miles are considered "out of route" miles.

Therefore, some companies take the responsibility of planning the route away from the drivers. These companies will give you a detailed route, showing exactly what move to make, at each step along the way. If you

drive for a company which does this, use this information for the convenience it offers. But it's very important that you know how to read your map, and how to plan your route. If you always just rely on this information being provided *for* you, it could handicap you in the long run, leaving you unable to do it when you really need to.

If you're a company driver, you'll either be *given* your route or be expected to determine and take the shortest one. At times, it may be impossible to stay *in route*, depending upon which mileage calculation system is used.

If you're an owner-operator, take the most practical route. You'll save time, money, and wear and tear on your truck, which is more important than just saving a few miles or minutes.

Trailer weight effect on trip planning

The gross weight, specifically the weight of your trailer, often has a big impact on your overall travel time. Under *normal* driving conditions, driving with a lighter load is preferable because of the time you'll save.

Advantage of a light trailer

- In many states which have the weigh-in-motion system installed before many scales, you'll often get the signal to bypass the scale, if your gross weight is well under your maximum capacity. This will possibly save you a significant amount of time.
- The ability to go up and down mountains and hills much faster. Just having a relatively light trailer can save hours of time if you have to drive through the mountains.
- The ability to gain speed faster after slowdowns or stops.

Disadvantage of a light trailer

- In winter driving conditions, hauling heavier loads is preferable because it is safer (as well as a potential time saver), because of the extra traction provided by the heavy weight.
- In addition, a heavy wind can make driving difficult as you're constantly trying to keep the truck in the lane, and if bad enough, it can knock over a lightly loaded trailer, taking you and the tractor right over with it.

Weather factors

Winter-weather conditions, especially in the mountains, can cause a 200-mile stretch of road to take all day, or worse. Many Interstates totally shut down, as is often the case on I-80 in Wyoming due to blowing snow conditions. Also, if you're taking secondary roads in those same winter conditions, keep in mind that they're not plowed or sanded as often or quickly as on the Interstate.

Construction and work zones along the way

It seems that in some states, construction is never going to end. Sometimes it can travel the length of the Interstate all through the state, though often intermittently. The speed limit in these zones is usually between 45 and 60 MPH, depending on how close to the workers and equipment you are and how bad the road condition is. You may have to add an extra hour to your trip planning for each state that has excessive construction.

Traffic: going through cities, rush hours, etc.

Plan to go through or around major cities at times other than morning or evening rush hours, if possible. You may have to get up earlier than you'd prefer (if possible with your [HOS](#)), or take a meal break at a different time

to accommodate your plans, but the total time it'll save should make up for any inconvenience.

Mountains, hills, and curves

Major mountain passes will add a lot of time to your trip, that time often depending on:

- Your gross weight
- Whether you're on the Interstate or secondary roads
- The existing weather conditions

Even when the roads are in good condition, some of the steep passes can only be climbed (and usually descended) at 30-45 MPH, or less. The curves can be frequent (especially on secondary roads), and you'll have to take them slow, sometimes dropping down to as little as 15 miles per hour.

Hours of service

When you plan your trip, you must consider the hours of service (HOS) you have remaining, both daily and the total for the week. One good thing about the new rules is that if you have 34 consecutive hours off (any good length of days off, or even layovers), you get a fresh 70 hours in 8 days on your log book. This is the ideal way to start a new load assignment, not handicapped by the 70-hour rule (at least not for several days).

See current HOS regulations [here](#) and updated Final Rule for Truck Drivers [here](#).

However, you'll still have to factor your 11-hour allowable driving hours as well as the 10 hours you'll have to take off before you can resume driving, into your trip planning. One thing a shipper may not know (although some shippers will ask you when you pick up the load) is how many hours you

have available to drive to a location by a specific time (but your dispatcher should be aware of this).

If you think you'll have to drive illegally to achieve a shipping goal, don't hesitate to inform your dispatcher of the HOS you have remaining before accepting the load. They may be responsible for several drivers, and could have your available drive time hours confused with another driver's.

Expecting the unexpected

Don't underestimate how long each step in the trip will take. When estimating how long it will take to travel a certain distance, or to unload, or another similar task, add a certain percentage (approximately 10- 20%) to the estimated time to account for delays of any kind (weather or other conditions), unscheduled stops, etc.

And, very importantly, leave extra early! Doing so will prevent you from having to rush (*never* rush), take risks, or attempt to skip things and/or take shortcuts.

Check for alternate routes in case of accidents, road closures, reports of bad weather conditions, etc. If there's a problem on the Interstate, you can usually take another route to go around the problem area. The better you know the area you're going through, the more likely you'll be able to do this successfully. When you're planning your trip, check the possibility of a secondary state highway that parallels the Interstate, just so you'll have that information in the back of your mind.

If you miss a turn (as could happen when looking for a business, customer, truck stop, etc.), you'll need to find a way *back* to where you *need* to be. Go as slowly as you safely can (considering the type of road you are on), so you can avoid these situations whenever possible. If it's a two-lane highway or wider highway, you may have to make a u-turn to get turned around. If you're in a city, use your judgment to determine which street would be best

to go down to get back to where you need to be, or maybe you can simply go around the block (first look down the road to see that it's big enough, and that there's another intersecting road not too far away which can take you around the block).

Four-wheelers in the area may be aggravated by your slow speed as you make careful choices about where you need to go. Don't worry about that! Just keep in mind that they'll be a heck of a lot more upset if they have to back up or stop completely to allow you the time and opportunity to get yourself out of a mess you could have avoided with a just a little more time to evaluate where you were going to begin with. Phew!

Customer (Shippers and Receivers) Information

What to do *before* calling the customer

- Google search the shipper address (or consult the Atlas) to get a general idea about where the city is: what route it's on or near, and what other cities it's near.
- Take a look on satellite and/or street view to get an even better idea of the layout of the shipper.
- Have a “customer directions sheet” to help you keep things organized, and to write down the routes and/or streets (use a local map if you have one) that will take you as close as possible to the shipper.
- Optionally, get out your atlas or local map and your notepad/information sheet, and have it available when you call the shipper.

Calling the customer, getting directions, and other pertinent information

Call the customer on the phone:

If it's a larger company, you may have to ask for the shipping and/or receiving department. If you get an answering machine, leave a message, especially if the customer is a smaller business. They may prefer to listen to messages or screen calls, and then return the call.

Gather accurate direction information:

Get directions from multiple sources, if possible. When getting directions, be sure to get street names, not just landmarks, (although these are very useful to supplement the directions you do get).

Some people like to give or get directions this way:

Go south on US 59 for 5 miles, look for the **red church** and turn right, go down two blocks, turn left, and go to our building. This will usually work, but if you make **one wrong turn**, you could be in trouble. **Always** get street names, and street addresses. If they want to add how many blocks to go, and other helpful landmarks and advice, that's fine. It will help you know you're on the right track.

Use trucker shorthand:

Use a notepad, and write down each step and route you'll have to take in each state in your trip. For example, write down:

- US 62 E -- US 44 W -- Route 7 E --81 N --29 E -- 35 N --19 E.
 - E for East, W for West, etc.

- Create any other abbreviations that you will easily remember:
 - X -exit, B4 -before, TS -truck stop, R-right, L-left, SS-stop sign, McD -McDonald's, WM-Walmart, etc.

Use your own trucker shorthand for directions and other important notes. Invent these yourself to make it easier for you to interpret and understand. Using shorthand like this will make it much easier and faster for you when you're taking down notes, getting directions from customers, etc. However, don't hesitate to read the instructions back to the person or ask them to repeat any part of it. If you can't find them, neither of you is going to be very happy!

Find out if you're required to bring your own pallets

Depending on the type of load, many shippers expect you to bring your own pallets. You will either *have* empty pallets from your last delivery or you'll need to pick up pallets at a local pallet provider. If you need to get pallets yourself, the shipper should be able to tell you where to pick them up (if you weren't informed by your dispatcher or broker).

How do you find the customer?

It is not safe to take your eyes off the road for any length of time, but when you are looking for a place that's unfamiliar, sometimes there's no choice.

Here are some things you can do to make it safer and easier:

- Get good directions beforehand, with as much detail and specifics (like landmarks) as possible.
- Memorize as much of the directions as possible.

- Keep the written directions sheet or notepad on a clipboard in front of you.
- Go at a time when there's not so much traffic around to bother or distract you, or make you feel like you have to rush, like very early in the morning.
- Drive slowly; put on your four-way flashers to help other drivers notice you and alert them to your slower speed.
- A dry-erase marker, the non-permanent kind, which will allow you to mark the route on a laminated atlas, find what you need more quickly, and keep your eyes on the road.
- If you have a street address of the location you're looking for, note whether it's an odd or even number. You can usually spot a pattern, like all the even numbers are all on the west side of the road, and the odd numbers are all on the east side of the road. *FYI: most of the country's streets follow this pattern.*
- There are major motor carriers who give detailed route and direction information via Qualcomm. For practically every location (shipper, receiver, etc.) a driver goes, there is a canned message with directions to that location. Just be careful. You're getting these directions secondhand, and don't know if the person giving the directions or the person who received the directions (and entered the information into Qualcomm), knew what they were doing. If any part of it is unclear, call the customer yourself and verify the directions.
- And, of course, GPS. This one's a life saver! These days, practically everyone has a smart phone with GPS installed.

Have it out and within view as you travel down the road, preferably hands-free.

Arriving late to a customer

The most important thing is to call as far ahead in advance as possible, usually as soon as you know you're going to be late. First of all, it's important that you keep everyone informed. This is for your benefit as well as theirs, as it could save you several hours, depending on the customer's appointment procedures.

If the customer knows you're almost there, they may hold your appointment slot. However, they could put you at the bottom of the list of trucks waiting to get loaded or unloaded if you don't let them know.

Chapter 3: Picking Up the Load



Procedures at the Shipper

Since customers all have their own way of doing things, I'll just explain some of the more common procedures. It's best to get as much information as possible when you're on the phone with the customer getting directions, or from your dispatcher or other truck drivers who've been at the customer before.

Note: Not *every* procedure for *every* type of trucking is described here. The following is for more *general* pick up information. But even though some terminology may not describe a certain type of trucking (household, tanker, livestock, or other type of customer without loading docks), there will almost certainly be some commonalities that you'll recognize and be able to apply. For example, [Livestock Hauling](#) is a completely different type of animal! ☺

*Quick Test. Do you know how to load a moving truck?
Well, you wait for it to stop moving, of course!*

Checking in



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At the entrance to the customer there may be a guard shack, or a gate, with a security guard telling drivers where to check in. Alternatively, there may be signs directing drivers where to go. Then there are customers that give drivers no help at all. If this is the case, you must look for where to check in on your own.

First, look for dock doors, other trucks, or any activity at all, and park your truck close to that point. Or, just park your truck either in a place designated for trucks waiting for dock, or temporarily park your truck on the side or out of the way. Try not to block any other vehicles in with the truck. It can sometimes take you 10-15 minutes just to find the shipping/receiving office!

Go inside, and look for the shipping/receiving office or window. Once you find it, tell the personnel on duty who you are, what you're picking up, and/or what your pickup number is (if applicable, mostly at larger businesses) or just where the load is headed. After you sign in, you'll either be given a dock door to back in to immediately, or told that you'll have to wait.

Waiting for a dock to get loaded

Notify your dispatcher if you're told you'll have to wait to get loaded. Try to get as much information as you can from the shipper... The reason for the delay, the shipper's revised time of loading, etc. The delay, if long enough, could affect the planning for the trip, and the ETA to the receiver.

If you're told you'll have to wait, you'll either be instructed to:

- Wait in your truck until the shipper calls you on the CB, or knocks on your door.
- Wait in the driver's lounge.
- Come back at a certain time.

When you know how long it's going to be before loading, you can do other things. It doesn't have to be wasted time. Figure out a way to be productive. You could clean the inside of the tractor, organize things, or catch up on paperwork, just to name a few things.

While waiting, you could get something to eat. If you have food supplies in the truck, great. If not, you could ask the shipper, or other truckers, if they know of any food places nearby (or maybe there's a grocery store nearby where you could stock up on food supplies). Some shippers will let you drop the trailer in the dock or somewhere else, so you can easily bobtail down the road, and get into places you couldn't if you still had the trailer.

Of course, this all depends upon if your trailer is backed into the dock, if they've started the loading process (or unloading, if at the receiver), and whether you've been instructed (by the customer or by your company) to remain with your trailer at all times.

Other options include different types of entertainment. You could watch a movie or television in the sleeper, read a good book, or play some type of game. If you have a laptop, you may have more options.

You could also just wait in the driver's lounge, or T.V. room or you could just take a nap, so you'll be ready to drive when you get loaded.

Backing up to the dock



If you have swing back doors on the back of your trailer (called “bat wings” by some drivers), you must open them and properly secure them to the sides of the trailer before backing into the dock. Watch them as you back up, as some are prone to come loose and swing out, with the possibility of causing damage to vehicles or other property.

Roll-up doors do not usually have to be opened until you've backed up to the dock and are at the back of the trailer on the dock.

Sliding the trailer tandems to the rear

At some shippers and receivers, this is a safety requirement. When the tandems are set to the rear, there is less of a dip and less movement in the rear of the trailer when the forklift goes in and out.

When the loading is complete and you're ready to go, you can put the tandems back where they were if you wish. Just remember, you'll probably have to slide the tandems again after you weigh the truck to properly distribute the weight.

Safety Procedures

Chocking the wheels



Also, a safety precaution, wheels often have to be “chocked.” A chock is usually a triangular shaped piece of rubber or metal, that’s placed in front of one or both trailer tandems to keep the trailer snug to the dock.

The danger is that the forklift, with its heavy weight will, as it enters the trailer, push the trailer forward and fall several feet to the ground. There have been many cases of forklift drivers being injured (sometimes fatally) because of this danger.

Dock Light and Locks



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Alternatively, various types of “dock locks” are used to keep the trailer tight to the loading dock. Many will have a red and green light system to let driver know when the lock is activated. Or the lights may be separate from a dock lock system.

If it seems like you can’t pull forward when you’re loaded, and have released the brakes, then you’ve probably not been “let go” by the dock lock. Tell someone on the loading dock and they’ll *set you free*.

Other Methods of Protecting Forklift Drivers

Some customers have other methods designed to protect the forklift drivers including: chocking 2 wheels, taking the truck keys, using an air line lock, not allowing idling, and disconnecting tractor from trailer and moving forward.

Handling Delays and Other Problems

There are 2 main types of delays you may experience when loading or unloading.

- Detention: usually an hourly amount assessed to the shipper or receiver that is paid to the driver for extended wait-time, charged to the shipper or receiver, whoever caused the delay.
- Layover: a flat rate which is paid to a driver for being delayed by a shipper or receiver for one or more days, usually paid for by the company and reimbursed to the company by the shipper or receiver, whoever caused the delay.

For more on the differences between these delays, check out [this discussion](#).

You're told "there is no load" or "your pickup number is incorrect"

Whatever the problem, don't panic. Tell the customer you understand, then call your dispatcher. Let your company handle the problem instead of arguing with a customer. That wastes your time and money, and arguing with the customer is one of the things you *don't* get paid for!

The "It'll be just another hour" routine

I'm sure much of the following will be familiar to many truck drivers. I had to pick up a load in Dallas, TX. The scheduled pickup time was 1:30 PM. When I called the shipper, I was told that they could probably load me early. I showed up at 7:30 AM. Then they started this routine of saying they would load me in "about an hour". My trailer didn't end up getting loaded until that evening, *then* the shipper expected me to drive all night after being up all day.

As soon as you realize you're getting delayed, as with any other problem, you should call your dispatcher and inform them of the situation. They could contact the shipper, see what the problem is, and possibly resolve the situation a lot sooner.

Remember, never drive when you're sleepy and/or when low on or out of hours!

Essentials When Loading

Control the loading process:

Note: *The following pertains only to certain types of loads or situations, like if you're an owner-operator. Some companies don't want their drivers controlling much of anything, except for driving. When you get more experience, you'll know when to apply these methods.*

No matter how the shipper wants things done, make sure to learn how you want your trailer loaded, then make sure it gets loaded that way.

Ultimately, you're the one responsible for how it's loaded, plus any possible damage to freight, etc. The shipper may tell you to just go in your truck, and they'll tell you when it's loaded. If drivers aren't allowed on the dock, which is often the case, then at least tell the person loading how you want it loaded.

For example, if you're loading a heavy load, it's often best to place a single pallet in the nose (the front) of the trailer, especially if you pull a reefer trailer (reefer units weigh over 1200 lbs.), rather than the entire load being packed into the front of your trailer. Keep in mind how many pounds each axle can legally handle, and be certain the load is distributed in your trailer appropriately.

Different load accountability methods

Shipper load and count (SLC)

The easiest, and most preferable method of loading for drivers is the shipper load and count. This means that the shipper loaded the trailer themselves, and that any damage done during loading or any shortages or

overages are the responsibility of the shipper. Of course, there would have to be a determination as to whether the damage was done during loading or during transit.

When you sign the Bill of Lading, note how the loading was done. If it was a shipper load and count, write down SLC next to your signature or in an easy to notice location on the front page.

If you are told to wait in your truck or in another location while the trailer is loaded, make sure ahead of time that the loading method is "shipper load and count" and be sure to make the notation "SLC" on the paperwork. If the shipper has a problem with this, then you need to be present on the dock, load or observe the loading process yourself, and count the pieces.

Shipper load, driver count (SLDC)

If you're present on the dock while your trailer is being loaded, it is likely is a "shipper load and driver count". If you're required to count the load, it will help (and it's often required) to use a tally sheet. On this sheet, you write down the number of pieces on each pallet, and the total number of pallets. Usually, the easiest way is to figure out how many pieces or boxes are on each row, rather than just count rows on each pallet to get the total.

For example, you figure (or the loader tells you) that there are eight boxes in each row. Therefore, if you have six rows on the pallet, then $6 \times 8 = 48$ total pieces on the pallet. Once loading is complete, you add the totals from each pallet together to get the total piece count for the shipment.

Obviously, it can get more complicated than this, but this is the basic method which is used. This type of loading is common in both the dry van and refrigerated types of shipments.

Note: A useful item to simplify this tally process is a clipboard with a calculator attached. You can find these in most truck stops. Or, get a simple app on your smartphone to help you keep track.

These last two methods of accountability are seldom used, as it's as not common for drivers to load their own trailers. However, they *are* used occasionally, so don't be surprised when it happens. These are self-explanatory.

Driver load and count (DLC)

Driver load, shipper count (DLSC)

What to Do When the Trailer's Loaded

Pulling away from the dock

As mentioned before in [Backing Up to the Dock and Safety Procedures](#) earlier in this chapter, if there is a red and green light system, there is probably a mechanical restraint system (a “dock lock”), securing the back of your trailer to the dock. Make sure you have the green light (if available) before pulling away from the dock. Pulling away when the dock lock is still attached could cause major damage, to your vehicle or to the dock itself.

Even if the light is green, it is a good idea to walk to the back of the trailer (you have to go back to remove the wheel chocks anyway), and look to see if the dock lock has actually released, and that the loading is complete. It is possible for there to be a *false* green light.

Most docks at smaller businesses have no lights to guide truckers. When you are still on the dock, tell the person who loaded the truck when you're about to leave. They may be the same person who gives you the bills of lading/paperwork for the shipment, so you'll both be aware that the process is complete. Just be sure to check the trailer one last time before you get in the truck and pull forward.

Take the dock plate off your truck or make sure it's back in position (if it's the mechanical kind of plate). Un-chock the wheels when you get out to your truck, and then pull forward slowly. Move far enough ahead to have room to close the trailer doors (unless you have the roll-up kind of doors common with food service and other delivery trailers, in which case you should close the doors while you're still on the dock). You may have to clear the front of the other trucks first, if applicable, before you'll be able to close the doors.

Collecting the shipping paperwork



Getty Images

The *Bill of Lading (BOL)* is the shipping documentation which must accompany every load you haul. Usually, you'll receive this paperwork once you're loaded and ready to go.

Whether or not you need to sign the BOL, and how copies are distributed, depend on the shipper. Many times, the shipper will have you sign the BOL, give you a copy, and they'll keep a copy for themselves. They may just give you one copy for your records or to send to your company along with the rest of your paperwork.

The shipper will not always be present and may just leave the BOL in a certain location, which you will have been informed about. The paperwork may be at the guard shack at the front gate.

There are other times when you'll pick up a loaded trailer at a *drop yard*. In this situation, unless you've received other instructions, the (BOL) will be either in the back of the trailer on the floor, in one of the last pallets of cargo at the back of the trailer, in the back door's vent door (usually found on reefer trailers -- this is where the [pulp thermometer](#) is often placed in a screen), or possibly in the registration holder at the front of the trailer. Either way, the customer should let you know.

Note: This is where you'll usually find the paperwork in any "drop and hook" situation.

There may be two weights for the load; one is called the *net* weight which is the weight of the cargo *not* including pallets. The other is the *total* weight of the cargo including pallets. It is important to make this distinction because pallets weigh on average about 50 pounds each. A trailer loaded with 22 pallets can have a total of at least 1100 pounds in pallets alone. This can be a significant factor when keeping within legal weight limits.

“Sealing” the load



There are various types of seals placed on the rear trailer doors once closed after the completion of loading.

The most common type of seal is a metal or plastic band which is numbered for documentation purposes. Either the driver is given the seal at the time they sign the paperwork, or the shipper seals the load themselves. The seal is usually placed on the right-side trailer door, once it is closed.

Once underway, if the seal is broken, it cannot be reconnected. It is to remain in place until the load arrives at the destination and the receiver removes it (or the receiver tells the driver to remove it). This ensures that the trailer doors were not opened at any time in transit, and that the load is as it was when loaded.

The seal number should be written on the Bill of Lading before it's signed. When all of this is done properly, it protects the driver from false or improper missing or damage claims.

Before you leave the shipper

Even before you're driving down the road, keep in mind what type of load you have, and how it's secured to your trailer. How will the load react as you make turns, stop abruptly, or drive over bumpy roads? Is the load especially fragile or sensitive? If so, you may have to drive more slowly than most of the other trucks on the road.

Much of the rest of this *Trucking Mastery* will be spent discussing the most efficient, professional, and safest way to get the load to its destination.

Chapter 4: Keeping It Legal



Weighing the Truck

Just about every driver needs to become adept at weighing their truck. The truck is very often loaded to capacity and there is a wide margin of error. Fines are heavy if the truck is overweight, and most companies will not pay for them. Drivers are responsible for ensuring the truck is within legal weight limits, and are usually responsible for any fines incurred.

Fortunately, weighing the truck isn't a complicated process.

Essential weighing information

Know your truck's empty weight

The first thing the driver should do when they are assigned a new truck (one unfamiliar to them), is to weigh the tractor and trailer when empty, noting how much fuel is in the tank. This is considered the "tare" weight. It's advisable to weigh the units when the fuel tanks are full. This way, the driver can know the maximum amount of weight they can load.

Understanding Gross Weight

Gross weight is the total combined weight of the tractor, trailer, and the load. This is the first thing you must ensure is legal. If the gross is overweight, there are no adjustments that can make it legal. 80,000 pounds is the maximum gross weight for most tractor-trailer combinations in the US (with some exceptions, see a motor carrier's atlas for more information).

When the loading of your truck is complete, you go to check out and sign your paperwork. On this paperwork should be the total weight of the load. Sometimes this amount includes the pallets, sometimes not (when it does not, it's considered the "net weight"). Pallet weight alone could be 1500 to 2000 pounds. You must make sure you know the "actual" weight of your load.

If the load is too heavy and you can't make it legal by making adjustments, you should inform your dispatcher of the situation. Dispatch will likely direct you go return to the shipper (if you've already left) and have them take off enough product to get legal. There may occasionally be situations when you'll have to go *light* (only fill fuel tank half way, for example) on fuel to stay legal on weight (gross or axle) for the trip.

Understanding Axle Weights

The driver also must ensure that each axle or set of axles (tandem axles) are within legal limits as well. Off the Interstate Highway System, states may set their own commercial vehicle weight standards.

Federal commercial vehicle maximum standards on the Interstate Highway System are:

- Single Axle: 20,000 pounds
- Tandem Axle: 34,000 pounds

- Gross Vehicle Weight: 80,000 pounds (20,000 per axle for split tandems on some trailers)

Note: drivers must be aware of certain length restrictions known as "interior bridge" laws (the atlas lists these state and provincial weight and size limits). Certain states limit the distance between the kingpin and the center of the rearmost axle. In California, for example, 40 feet is the maximum length. So, when driving in California, the tandems cannot be set too far back, or the distance between kingpin and rear axle would be over 40 feet. For this reason, the rear of the trailer cannot be loaded as heavily in California.

For more info on legal weight, length, and width, [see the FHWA](#).

Instructional Video: [How to Slide Tandems and Fifth-wheel and How to be "California Legal"](#)

Where to weigh the truck

There are basically two options when it's time to weigh your truck:

- Weigh the truck at the shipper's location, if there's one available.
- Use a third-party scale (one that charges a fee and is not connected in any way to the transaction).

Scales at the shipper



The bigger shippers will usually have their own scales on site. The process is usually to weigh the truck empty, then to load the truck accordingly. For example, if the truck and trailer weigh 35,000 pounds empty, then the shipper knows they can load up to 45,000 pounds of product.

If the shipper doesn't have an on-site scale, ask them where the closest one is (if you don't already know). This may seem obvious, but sometimes a scale is difficult to locate. The [truck stop guide](#) I recommend has the locations of most truck stops, but sometimes this still isn't enough to really help you find a close scale.

For example, a while back, I loaded in the San Francisco area, and the shipper had no scale. The nearest convenient truck stop scale was located 20 miles south of the shipper. In San Francisco traffic, that could take an hour or more. If the truck was overweight, I would've had to return to the shipper to take some of the load off. In addition, there was a DOT Weigh Station between the shipper and the truck stop. If overweight, this would have been costly.

Instead of being stressed out and unsure, simply ask the shipper. Usually there is a scale in close proximity to the shipper. Make sure you get good directions and/or a map of the area.

Getting lost, especially on big city streets, is not fun. Unless you're into that kind of thing!

CAT Scales



CAT Scales are public scales, usually located at truck stops. These are the most reliable type, and they carry a guarantee that their weights are accurate. The price to weigh at some of these locations is now up to \$11.00, with an additional \$2.00 to re-weigh (some scales won't charge you for the first re-weigh).

Some scales weigh axles or tandem axles separately. This type of scale is not as common. A person, usually at the fuel desk of the truck stop, will tell you on the intercom or on the CB when to proceed onto the next axle.

The other type of scales weigh the whole tractor-trailer at once. Pull all the way onto the scale, usually set up to have your steer axle, drive axles, and trailer tandems on separate platforms.

There is usually a speaker located just outside of the driver's window to speak to the person in charge of weighing the truck. If there's no speaker, there will probably be a sign telling drivers what CB channel to be on.

Observe [this video from CAT Scales](#), which will show you how to go across like a pro.

On either type of scale, inform the fuel desk (when you're on the scale, before you go inside to pick up, and pay for the scale ticket) of the following:

1. Your company name and truck number (and possibly the trailer number).
2. Whether it's your first weigh or re-weigh.

When they've weighed your truck, they'll tell you to park and come inside to the fuel desk. Go to the fuel desk, and pay for your scale ticket. Then see if you're legal on gross and axle weights (on many scale tickets, the steer, drive, and trailer axles are listed as axles one, two, and three). If you're not

legal, then you'll have to redistribute the weight (next section). When you've redistributed the weight, then you'll need to come back to re-weigh.

Weight distribution essentials

For example, if the weight of the drives (drive axles) are 36,000 lbs., and the trailer tandems are 31,000 lbs., you'll need to redistribute the weight so that each set of axles are under 34,000 pounds (see below).

Sliding the trailer tandem axles

Most trailers are equipped with a sliding mechanism (a slider) which enables the trailer tandems to slide, redistributing weight between the drive axles and the trailer tandems.

Part of the sliding mechanism includes a rail which is mounted horizontally underneath the trailer. There are holes spaced evenly along the rail which allow a pin from the slider to enter, locking the slider in position.

On **older trailers**, there is a release arm on the slider which the driver pulls to release the pin, unlocking the slider, allowing the tandems to slide.

Many **newer trailers** have air-release tandems. Instead of pulling the release bar, there is a valve or button (located at the tandems) to pull out which releases the air, causing the pins to go back in.

You will be able to redistribute so many pounds per hole. Use 250-300 pounds per hole as a guide, but it can be up to 500 pounds or more, depending on the weight of the load.

- Find a parking space in the truck stop that is level, paved, and dry (if possible) where you can slide the tandems. Sliding the tandems on ice is nearly impossible, so find a surface with some

traction. Do not slide the tandems on the scales or on a fuel island. Make sure you park with the tractor and the trailer in a straight line.

- Set the brakes and walk back to the side of the trailer which has the release arm (usually located on the driver side). Make a mark with a piece of chalk at the hole where the pins are located. This is to help you know how exactly many holes you moved when you're done sliding the tandems.
- Pull out the release arm (or pull out the valve/button) until it locks in place, and the pins have been pulled out of the holes. To lock the arm in place, move it left or raise it while you're pulling it out.

If the release arm will not pull out:

- Make sure you're parked in a straight line, and are level.
- Make sure the pin is in the center of the hole. You may have to keep the trailer brakes set, release the tractor brakes, and move forward or backward to better align the pin within the hole.
- Get another driver to try to pull the release arm (or pull the valve/button) while you move the truck forward or backward (while the trailer brakes are still set).

Once the pins have retracted, get back in the tractor, keep the trailer brakes set, and release the tractor brakes. You're now ready to slide the tandems.

Direction to slide the trailer tandems:

- You must back up in order to slide the trailer tandems forward. This transfers weight from the drive axles to the trailer tandems. You will do this when you have too much weight on the drive axles. For example, if your drive axles are 36,000 pounds, then you'll need to transfer at least 2000 pounds to the trailer tandems (2000 pounds would be at least seven or eight holes).
- You must move forward in order to slide the trailer tandems back. This transfers weight from the trailer tandems to the drive axles.

Watch your trailer tires in the mirror while you're moving forward or backing up. It may take you a couple of attempts before you can get the tandems to slide. Let the clutch out slowly or you can easily kill the engine. Make sure you're not dragging or pushing the trailer tandems.

If the trailer tandems will not slide along the rails:

- Spray lubricant along the rails (I have also heard other drivers say to spray water along the rails, and still others say they use soapy water, or liquid dish soap).
- Rock the truck back and forth to get the tandems to slide.

Once the tandems are sliding, move them a short distance, then get out and check to see how far you've gone (how many holes you moved). You may have to slide the tandems a few times before you can get the pins near the holes you want.

Once you have the pins either in the desired rail hole, or just in front of it or behind it, push on the release arm (or push the button/valve) to allow it to go back in (you can usually just quickly tap up

on it and it should snap back into place). If the pins are not in the holes yet, get back in the tractor and move forward or backward until you hear the metal sound of the pins going back into the holes and the truck suddenly jerk to a stop.

Get out and check both sides of the trailer (Get Out And Look, GOAL) to make sure the pin has gone into place.

See the following videos for a good demonstration:

[How to Slide Your Trailer Tandems – Manual.](#)

[How to Slide Your Trailer Tandems – Automatic.](#)

Sliding the fifth-wheel

By sliding the fifth-wheel, you're transferring the weight between the steer axle and the drive axles. This is not as common as sliding the trailer tandems. Many drivers simply find a middle-of-the-road setting which allows them to stay legal on the drive axles. On a heavy load, sliding the fifth-wheel transfers about 150-200 pounds per notch.

- Find a parking space that is level and paved, and park in a straight line.
- Set the brakes, and get out and put the landing gear down. This will take some of the weight off of the fifth-wheel, and allow it to slide easier.
- Make a mark with a piece of chalk (or just scratch where the dirt is) where the pin is currently.
- Get back in the truck and drop the air bags (air suspension) and unlock the fifth-wheel by pressing the appropriate switches on the

dashboard. Keep the trailer brakes set, and release the tractor brakes.

Which direction to slide the fifth-wheel:

You need to back up to slide the fifth-wheel up. This moves weight from the drive axles to the steer axle. When the fifth-wheel is in this position, the back of the cab is very close to the trailer. The advantage of this position is less wind resistance which results in greater fuel economy. The disadvantage is the decreased turning radius. If you turn too sharply, it's very easy to damage the tractor, trailer, catwalk, and/or reefer unit when the fifth-wheel is in this position.

You need to move forward to slide the fifth-wheel back, which transfers weight from the steer axle to the drive axles. This position increases your turning radius, but decreases your fuel efficiency.

Weigh Stations



Weigh stations are operated by the DOT to ensure that all truck drivers and the trucks they operate are fully compliant with the law. Like the name

suggests, weigh stations exist primarily to weigh the tractor and trailer. Additionally, weigh stations check to see that the vehicles are properly registered, licensed, insured, and permitted. Also, the drivers themselves can be checked for compliance; specifically, their CDL and their log book.

Every commercial vehicle is required to proceed to the weigh station, including bobtails (tractor without the trailer). Bobtails are required to enter weigh stations, even when driving for personal use while at home, for example. However, unless you have to fuel the tractor or do some other work-related duty (in which case you have to log driving and on-duty not driving time), you usually do not have to log the driving time. In most cases, you can log it as off-duty (unless a certain weigh station informs you otherwise).

Here's more helpful information about weigh stations by Steve Vaughn, National Director of Field Operations at HELP Inc.:

Professional drivers encounter law enforcement personnel when they are pulled into a weigh station for weighing and inspections. The driver plays a large role in how pleasant — or unpleasant — that interaction will be. Setting a professional, respectful tone right from the start will go a long way toward making any inspection faster and less stressful.

One of the key things for drivers to remember when pulling into the inspection facility is to comply with all posted signs and verbal instructions. Throughout the entire process at the facility, law enforcement's primary concern is the safety of themselves, drivers and others in the area, so attentiveness to protocol on the driver's part is key.

Once the vehicle is stopped at the designated location, drivers should remain visible to the officer or inspector at all times. As with any enforcement vehicle stop, it is generally recommended that drivers

keep their hands where they can be seen. In today's social environment, officers and inspectors must be concerned about possible threats and typically those threats most likely to come from the hands. Remain calm and assume positive intent, and the officer or inspector will reciprocate.

Upon reaching the truck, weigh station personnel will normally ask for certain documents including the CDL, truck registration information and details about the load. It's a good practice for all drivers to always have all materials organized and ready to hand to the officer or inspector. It might seem like such a simple thing, but presenting the material in an organized manner will often set a positive tone, and make the whole interaction much more efficient for both sides. Having documentation neat and ready to be reviewed is one easy maneuver that could get a driver back on the road much quicker.

When the officer or inspector makes the initial interaction, he or she might not have made the decision to perform a full inspection of the vehicle at that point. It is entirely possible that his or her only intent is to talk to the driver. Driver cooperation, friendliness and having documentation organized could go a long way toward making a good impression. Conversely, delays in responding, a lack of organization and even a poor attitude could perhaps drop a driver down a notch as a candidate for thorough inspection.

Overall, it's important to treat officers the way we want to be treated: with professionalism. Remember that officers and inspectors are there to do a job, and drivers should not intentionally interfere with or impede them in the performance of that job. For example, making agitated comments like, "What the heck did you pull me in for?" will not go very far in creating a cooperative environment. On the other hand, driver courtesy and adherence to instructions is quickly recognized by weigh station personnel and will build a far better

foundation for the inspection to go smoothly. In the end, aren't we all looking for mutual respect and a smooth interaction?

The different types of scales

Portable scales



Trooper Brian McNally weighs a truck on portable scales at the I-95 South Rowley weigh station. (Peter DeMarco/Globe Photo)

Almost every U.S. state, all Canadian provinces, the Northwest territories, and the Yukon Territory has portable scales. These are scales which can be literally pulled out of the trunk of a vehicle, and set up in a rarely used weigh station, a rest area, picnic area, or any parking area just off of the Interstate or other highway.

Truck drivers never know when or where a portable scale has been set up. This is another reason for the driver to always be running legally (within legal operating limits), with their log book current.

Permanent weigh stations

The Motor Carriers' Road Atlas gives the locations of all permanent weight stations. The rest of this section gives key information on permanent weigh stations truck drivers need to be familiar with.

Scales which weigh the tractor and trailer at the same time

Some weigh stations have scales which weigh the entire truck at once (some of which weigh your gross weight only, some including axle weights). Before pulling onto a scale, some weigh stations direct you to turn off your CB; others may tell you to turn to a particular CB channel to listen to the scale personnel. Turn off your truck's radio and roll down your window partially to listen to the intercom.

There is often a sign which tells you to wait for the previous truck to completely leave the scale before you can pull up onto it. When it's clear, pull up onto the scale, looking in your mirror to see that your trailer tandems are completely on the scale. Make sure you don't pull up so far that your steering axle is off the scale.

Once you're on the scale completely, stop and watch the signals (often a digital sign telling you to what to do next:

You may be directed to: "pull up", "stop", "park and come inside", "go ahead", or even get the preferred "thanks, bye!"

Scales which weigh the axles (or tandem axles) separately

There are other scales which weigh the axles separately. On these scales, pull only your steering axle onto the scale. Again, follow the signals or listen to the intercom telling you to pull the next set of axles onto the scale.

Scales which direct you to split the drive axles at yellow line

In this situation, there will be a yellow line painted on the scale itself. Pull up, pass the yellow line with your steer tires, and look out of the window or look at your convex mirror. Stop when your forward drive axle just passes the yellow line, and your rear drive axle is still behind it. Go slow, because it can be difficult to do this *just right*.

Note: In some states, you'll be directed to split the drive tires on two small scales instead of at the yellow line.

Weigh station procedures

Check to see if the weigh station is open

When crossing the border of a new state, truckers are usually confronted with a weigh station (commonly referred to as *scales*). In addition to these scales, which are usually open, truckers may have to enter several more scales while going across the state.

Each state operates independently, and have their own schedules. Some are regularly closed between late night and early morning. Others will have many scales along the Interstate or highway, all of which are open 24 hours.



Many Western states have what are known as **Ports of Entry**. After you've been weighed, you'll usually be directed to enter the facility and you're your paperwork and CDL checked, etc.

Watch for the signs before the scales telling truckers if the scales are open. Some states have signs telling trucks to enter the scales if it's lights are flashing.

Weigh-In-Motion



Many states now have a [weigh-in-motion](#) setup which enables scales to monitor your gross weight while you're still on the Interstate. Then you'll see a sign (usually a digital one) telling you what to do. Often, if you're close to maximum gross weight, you'll probably get the "truck must enter scales" sign. If not, you'll get the "truck OK to bypass scales" sign.

Watch for full off-ramps, as some states have signs telling you to bypass scales if the ramp is full. Don't listen to the truckers who'll tell you to bypass the scales if the ramp is full regardless of the signs. If you bypass the scales without being directed to, you might be chased down by highway patrol and brought back, ticketed, thoroughly inspected, and generally, put through the ringer.

Note: Be careful not to get confused as some states have very different signals. For example, in Texas, there are signs which say to **enter** the scales if the lights are flashing. In Louisiana, the next state to the east, the signs say to **bypass** the scales if the lights are flashing.

Speaking of Louisiana.... [Here's a video](#) showing:

- 1) *The terrible roads in Louisiana (have they changed recently? If so, it's about time!) and,*
- 2) *How weigh-in-motion weigh stations work.*

Pull into weigh station

Once you pull off the highway, immediately slow down to the posted speed limit. Try to determine which type of setup the weigh station has.

When you see that there is a weigh station up ahead, and are unsure about how to proceed, try to let other trucks get ahead of you so that you can follow them into the weigh station, and *mirror* what they do (unless they're doing something illegal or crazy!).

However, be sure to follow the direction of the scale house and/or signs telling you what to do, because the driver ahead of you may have a different situation than you (heavier or lighter gross weight or axle weights, permit problems, etc.).

The “PrePass” System

PrePass is a device installed in the truck through which the scales can tell you to enter or to bypass the scales. These can save truckers a good deal of time, fuel, and money.

How the “PrePass” system works:

- Approximately one mile before a weigh station, the PrePass transponder sends a signal to the weigh station, which identifies and weighs the truck.
- Truck credentials are then verified.
- If the truck is verified, then a green light and audible beep from the windshield-mounted transponder tells the driver to bypass the station. If credentials are not verified, the driver is directed to pull into the weigh station.

You can get more information on PrePass at www.prepass.com.

[Here's a good video](#) showing you how weigh stations work, live from a trucker's viewpoint! It was taken in Tennessee, but it's typical of scales across the country. Only the first 5 minutes show the scale crossing, the rest is optional viewing! The scale also had PrePass, but for whatever reason, the driver couldn't take advantage of it.

Approach the scales

There are stations which do an initial moving gross weight of your truck. You may be directed to a bypass lane, usually if your gross weight isn't close to the legal limit. If this is the case, follow the bypass speed limits (often 35-45 MPH), and keep a good distance between trucks (100-200 feet).

If the sign says to maintain (some *don't* include the word "maintain") 45 mph, GO 45 mph. Don't go 20 mph and delay the trucks behind you. You're not going to gain any extra points from the weigh station personnel by going more slowly. You're just going to draw attention to yourself, which you *don't* want to do!

Otherwise, you'll be directed to the scales. Some states have separate scale lanes, one for empty trucks, one for loaded. Each lane may have a separate speed limit. In California, for example, loaded trucks may have a speed limit of 3 mph, and empty trucks a speed limit of 5 mph).

At nighttime, when you get close to the scale house (usually right in front of the scales), it's often a trucker courtesy to dim your headlights, but keep your parking lights turned on. Of course, only do this if there's enough light to see everything. You don't want to crash!

Pull onto the scale slowly

There is often a stop sign just before the scale starts. If there's no truck on the scale, most truckers just slowly drive onto the scale without stopping. I prefer to stop briefly and then slowly pull onto the scales; you don't want to give the officers in the scale house a reason to check you out more closely or have you come inside just because they can.

As you're pulling onto the scale, you'll probably be able to see the officer inside. Wave at the officer if you want to, although some officers may not be very receptive. Stop once you're all the way onto the scale (make sure your steer tires are still on the scale, and look to see that your trailer tandems are on the scale).

There are typically lights indicating what to do: green for proceed, red for stop, yellow for come inside, etc., depending upon the state. I like to stop briefly even if the sign says to proceed, because it may change to "stop" once you're on the scale (see next section).

Proceed as directed

As previously discussed, many things could happen at this point.

Here are some of those possibilities and the procedures for each.

1. "Park and come inside"

Pull your truck ahead and park, then go inside with your credentials and all necessary paperwork and documentation. Bring in your permit book, which should include your registration, IFTA, and insurance. Also bring in your bills of lading, driver's license, and log book. Of course, make sure your log book is legal, and up to date (or just make sure you're legal if your company is [ELD compliant](#)).

Inside the scale house you must show respect to the officers in charge. Besides being the right thing to do, it's also in your best interest, so that you can keep rolling down the road. Say "yes sir/ma'am, no sir/ma'am", etc. Do not argue with them, just do what they ask, and then you can get back on the road.

Note: Don't always try to be right or correct. Most people you'll meet and never see again, so what's the point? If you DO prove yourself right, you may feel better about yourself. But, does it really matter what this person thinks? Do their opinions really matter at all? Who really wins if the officer feels offended, then reviews your paperwork more closely, discovering something you're NOT right about?

2. "Pull ahead and be inspected"

Occasionally, the truck is subject to a DOT inspection. These inspections are often performed randomly, but are often done on vehicles because they had other infractions (weighed too heavy, log book violations, broken or missing lights, etc.). Usually you'll remain in the truck and listen to instructions during the inspection, while the officer performs the inspection.

A DOT inspection can be done at any weigh station or portable scale location, but some weigh stations are also official inspection stations, where a more thorough inspection takes place, sometimes randomly, other times only if a violation was noticed.

ELD Sticker: A sticker on the truck advertising use of the ELD system. This sticker can help drivers not get pulled into office at weigh stations. If your company doesn't yet participate, you have a greater likelihood of getting checked.

There are different types of inspections:

A **Level 1** inspection is a full inspection in which your log book, paperwork, licenses and permits are checked. Then your equipment (the tractor and trailer) must go through an inspection. If your vehicle passes inspection, many states (usually in the western states) place a sticker on the passenger side indicating that the vehicle passes a level 1 inspection. These are often color coded to indicate when the inspection was done (this will usually be good for several months during which time you won't have to get inspected again in those states which do the sticker system). When you go across the scales in the future, the officers will see the sticker and know it's passed inspection, and wave you on across the scale.

A **Level II** inspection is a walk-around driver/vehicle inspection. This one's not as exhaustive as a Level I. Much less to worry about!

For an explanation on ALL the different inspections (Levels I through VII), the CVSA has an [informative page](#).

3. Show credentials from inside the truck

Some states either have a window which you pull up to while you're on the scale (Arizona, is one state), or you will be directed to hold up credentials for scale personnel to see (the New Mexico cab card is a common one you'll need to show).

4. You're instructed to "Go ahead", or "Thanks", "Bye", etc.

If **everything is in order**, you'll be directed to resume driving down the road.

If **any infraction at all is found**, everything will get checked. That's why it's so important for you to have everything in order and to be ready for inspection.

Do dirty trucks get looked at more closely?

Some truckers claim that you should “keep the truck clean and polished to avoid getting pulled into the scale house.” But, is this based on reality?

I've heard drivers talk about, and even read certain advice in trucking magazines, claiming that, if you keep your truck clean and extra polished, you're less likely to get pulled into the scale house. Weigh station personnel (and any law enforcement, for that matter) are similar, in that they all have a job to do a certain way. Within their job description, are slight allowances for individual personalities, and a certain amount of discretion about how they perform their job.

One officer may have no tolerance for log book violations of any kind, while another will give a driver a break if the log book's not too far behind.

The same goes for the appearance of the truck. From one officer's point of view, trucks that come in clean and polished, usually are legal and up-to-date in their log book, licenses and permits, etc. However, officers are well-aware that truckers may try to cover up violations by going in with a clean and polished truck, thinking that this will get them through.

Basically, you should keep your truck clean and washed, in order to look professional, and to properly care for the truck. Try to do everything "by the book", and you'll have nothing to cover up.

Information about being put “out of service”:

Either you, the driver or your equipment can be put out of service for a number of different reasons.

For drivers, reasons could include log book violations (over hours, etc.), not being properly licensed, not having certain endorsements, not having a medical card, or any condition which could make the driver unfit for

driving. This will put the driver “out of service” until they’re “legal” again. With log book violations, the officers may make the driver wait 10 hours or longer, or until the driver has sufficient hours available to legally drive. The driver should have the option of going to a nearby truck stop, or home if it’s nearby, as long as they don’t drive a Commercial Motor Vehicle (CMV) during their “out of service” time.

For the equipment, anything defective or missing, or otherwise deemed unsafe, will put the equipment “out of service.” A service truck may have to come down to the weigh station and fix the problem before it’s allowed to get back on the road.

In either case, the driver will have to pay a fine. Fines for driver violations will most likely *not* be reimbursed by a company. Fines for equipment violations *may* be reimbursed.

It is a serious offense if a driver (or their equipment), who has been put “out of service”, then violates the order and resumes driving prematurely. Drivers are disqualified from driving commercial vehicles for a minimum of 90 days to a maximum of five years for multiple offenses. Fines start at \$1000 and go up to \$5000.

Other types of inspections

Border check/inspection stations

These are common in the southwest states, from Southern California to Texas. Border Patrol officers *man* these inspection stations and are looking for illegal immigrants who may have crossed over the U.S. Border from Mexico. At these stations, the truck driver will be asked if they’re carrying any passengers in their vehicle. The driver may be subjected to a search of their vehicle, but I’ve personally never had this happen.

Agricultural check/inspection stations

All drivers entering certain states (especially in California, Arizona, Florida, and a few others) are met with these inspection stations immediately. Truck drivers are asked what product they're hauling. Usually drivers are then waved on through, but if a driver is hauling a certain agricultural product (certain plants, produce, etc.), they may be pulled aside and have their vehicle inspected.

About DOT /commercial vehicle enforcement vehicles

On the CB, you may hear DOT enforcement officers called "diesel bears." In some states these officers drive pickups or other minimally marked or unmarked (*plain wrapper*) vehicles. They can stop and check you at random in certain places, the most popular of which are rest areas and, obviously, weigh stations.

They cannot do this legally, however, if you're parked in a truck stop parking lot, which is considered private property (unless they have probable cause to believe you've committed a crime or if you have obvious violations). This is one reason why parking in truck stops is preferable (especially for longer durations, like sleeping overnight) to parking in rest areas.

Hours of Service Rules

January 4, 2004 marked the first time in 65 years that there has been a change in the hours of service rules for truck drivers. It's actually hard to believe that the rules stayed the same for so long, considering all that has changed, in the country and in the industry, since 1939. Roads, vehicles, and driver training have each dramatically improved since then.

However, The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) has reported that there has also been an increase in commercial motor vehicle crashes. The FMCSA analyzed the information and data, had meetings and discussed solutions to the problem, and eventually came up with new hours of service rules. They believe that the new rules better address the problem of driver fatigue, as they are based on the human body's 24-hour biological clock.

Note: Check the latest information on the revised hours of service regulations [here](#).

The New Hours of Service rules

Commercial motor vehicle drivers (property carrying) may not drive:

- More than 11 hours after taking 10 hours off duty or in the sleeper berth.
- After 14 hours on duty after taking 10 hours off duty or in the sleeper berth.
- After 60 or 70 hours on duty in seven or eight consecutive days (unchanged).

Additional new rules:

- 34 hour "Restart":

I have found this to be one big advantage of the new "Hours of Service" rules. If at any point, you take 34 consecutive hours off duty, you can "restart" the 60 or 70 hours you have available in the seven or eight-day period.

One of the routes I've had was made easier by this new rule. I would usually pick up a load, of the same product, the same day each week, from the Denver, Colorado area. I would then drive to Mississippi and Louisiana, making approximately 10 to 15 deliveries along the way. Then I would head back to Denver to pick up another load. This would cover about 3300 to 3500 miles, which I could usually complete in about 5 to 5 ½ days. So, each time I got home for my days off (if it was for at least 34 hours), I could start again with a fresh 70 hours. In fact, on that route, it was never necessary to total up my hours.

- Extension of the 14-hour on-duty period sleeper berth exception:

The 14-hour on duty period can be extended by the use of the sleeper berth, as long as it's for a minimum of two hours. Obviously, a truck must have a sleeper on the truck to be able to take advantage of this extension. Merely taking a few hours off in the local diner would not accomplish this. To extend your day, the time needs to be taken in the sleeper berth. Off-duty time (the time you spend not driving, outside of the truck) may not extend the 14-hour on duty period.

This means many locally operated trucks, which typically don't have sleeper berths, are unable to take advantage of this option.

Comments about the new rules:

There is been much controversy about this subject in the trucking world. You hear about it when you walk into a truck stop, and when you listen to the CB radio. Everyone seems to have an opinion one way or the other. It depends on what type of trucking operation you're involved in. Like my example, which I mentioned above, the type of operation with some consistency and regularity would seem to benefit the most from the Hours of Service rules changes. However, much of trucking can hardly be considered consistent or regular. All too often, the nature of trucking is to

hurry up and wait. I can hardly imagine shippers and receivers becoming educated about our new rules, much less changing their method of operation (M.O.) to accommodate truckers.

Like I mentioned above, you can split your on-duty time through the use of sleeper berth periods. If you arrive at a shipper, and are told you have to wait four hours before you can get loaded, you have the option of going into the sleeper berth and getting some sleep. I know, this is not the answer for every situation. What if it's the beginning of the day and you've already had a full eight hours of sleep? No question, this can mess up your scheduling, and any rhythm you may have had to your routine or day. By the time you get loaded, half of the day may be over, and the shipper may expect you to drive straight to the receiver, some 700 miles away.

The answer is often unclear. Much depends upon your company, and how they deal with this shipper/driver conflict. If your company only sees it from the shipper's point of view, and expects you to drive straight through to your destination regardless of whether or not you're well rested, then maybe your company isn't very concerned about your safety.

This is the dilemma: safety or profit? What should the company do, considering what you know about business and about reality? What would you do, if it was your fleet of trucks? If the company doesn't make a sufficient profit, then it fails, and its drivers have to find another job.

The Log Book

There are several different kinds of log books that are used by motor carriers. If you work for a company, most likely the company will provide you with your log books. These should have preprinted company information on them.

Note: *Trucking companies (with a few [exemptions](#)) must transition from paper logs to electronic logs (e-logs) by December 18th, 2017. For drivers with these companies, the following information about paper logs is not applicable. However, the information may still be helpful for drivers of companies that fall within the exemption guidelines.*

The following are different types of log books:

- The one-page version, the top half is the driver's daily log, and the bottom half is the driver's vehicle inspection report.
- The half page version, on one side is the driver's daily log, and the other side is the driver's vehicle inspection report.

Note: The first two types of log books are bound by staples, and have carbon paper for you to use.

- The loose-leaf type, which you place in your own three ring binder log book. When you buy refills at a truck stop, they usually come in packs of 31 to cover a whole month. One thing many drivers do is to take either of the above two versions of log books, remove the staples, and punch holes into the pages, and put them in the binder (you can buy an inexpensive hole puncher at any office supply store or at a Walmart).

Speed averaging

According to the DOT, a driver cannot legally log a driving time which would average the legal speed limit. This is because of the limitations of big trucks; having to slow down for other vehicles (to keep safe distance, etc.), and not being able to maintain top speed on inclines and curves, etc.

You can receive a speeding ticket based upon the information on your logs, for example, if you averaged 75 MPH in Colorado (which is the maximum legal speed limit on the Interstate, though obviously not in all places).

Many trucking companies will tell you the maximum speed limit you're allowed to show on your logs. A common practice is to have drivers take the state speed limit, and subtract five miles; others allow a little bit closer to the speed limit. Two or three MPH should be sufficient.

Speed averaging is the practice of taking the maximum speed you can legally log, and inputting that factor into your log book. Technically, you're supposed to show the actual time you drove, showing every change of duty status, so I'm not recommending speed averaging. I'm just telling you what's commonly accepted within the industry and commonly practiced by experienced, professional truck drivers. Speed averaging allows drivers to get as much out of their driving hours as possible. For example, Denver, Co. to Salina, KS. is approximately 430 miles. You left Denver at noon, and changed your duty status to "driving" at that time. 430 miles divided by a maximum logging speed of 69 MPH (a few MPH's less than the combined averages of the states), is 6 1/4 hours.

Therefore, whether you got to Salina earlier or later, you got to Salina on your log book at 6:15 PM (not factoring in any breaks, which you would have done). Any sooner, and you could be cited for speeding, and any later, and you wouldn't be maximizing your driving time.

The ELD Mandate

The Commercial Vehicle Safety Alliance (CVSA) will begin enforcing the electronic logging device (ELD) mandate requirements on Dec. 18, 2017 after the deadline, vehicles without ELDs will be fined and cited.

Either a blessing or a curse, depending on who you ask, is ELDs or Electronic Logging Devices. The [FMCSA explains the requirements here](#), but basically the first paragraph sums it up nicely:

December 10, 2015. Washington – The U.S. Department of Transportation’s Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) today announced the adoption of a Final Rule that will improve roadway safety by employing technology to strengthen commercial truck and bus drivers’ compliance with hours-of-service regulations that prevent fatigue.

As shown [here](#), **Carriers and Drivers** who are subject to the rule must install and use ELDs by the appropriate deadline:

- Carriers and drivers who are using paper logs or logging software must transition to ELDs no later than December 18, 2017.
- Carriers and drivers who use AOBRDS prior to the compliance date must transition to ELDs no later than December 16, 2019.



The [ELD 50 E-log Device](#) is one example of an authorized ELD. If you’re a motor carrier or independent owner-operator that needs to procure one of these, [ELDFacts](#) has more information.)

This is “the first E-Log device that:

- 1) installs in seconds under the dash,
- 2) allows drivers to use Android devices to view logs, and
- 3) provides access to Hours of Service and Driver Vehicle Inspection Report (DVIR) logs via the [Rand McNally DriverConnect web portal](#).

Portable ELD Devices

There are EDL devices you can use with your tablet or smartphone. [Here's a solution](#) that *claims* to offer:

- Free ELD - No Contract - \$19.95 Mo.
- 100% Free ELD Device
- Guaranteed Compliance!
- Simple Driver Interface - Easy to Use!
- Bring Your Own Tablet / Smart Phone & Data Plan
- Voted #1 by Business News Daily - Best GPS Fleet Tracking for Business

I have not investigated this unit, so check it out thoroughly first.

The Bottom Line

By now, it should begin to dawn on you that you don't need to do anything illegal or unsafe to make good money and ultimately, to become a successful truck driver. But stick around, there's much more to come.

Your focus should be on becoming a successful truck driver. The most important thing to keep in mind is that your CDL is your livelihood. Why risk it by doing things illegally or unsafely? You will not be successful long term in trucking if you're not diligent about doing your job safely and legally.

Chapter 5: The Mindset of the Professional Truck Driver



Most drivers on the road, obviously, started by driving cars (or any four-wheeler smaller than a semi-tractor). The longer you've been driving a four-wheeler, the more programmed your instincts, judgment, and thinking have become. You don't really understand this until you start driving a big truck.

For example, when you're approaching an intersection, your mind may already *think* it knows how soon to begin braking, and how much pressure to apply to the brakes. It may not adjust immediately to the fact that you're no longer driving a car, and are now behind the wheel of an 80,000-pound truck. Many ill-trained truckers still drive as if they *were* driving a car.

A big change must be made if the driver's going to become a professional truck driver, and hopefully, *before* something bad happens!

The Trucker's Usual *Mindset*

When I first started driving a truck, I still had the mindset of most other drivers; I was always in a rush, not looking far enough ahead, etc. Not yet being a very skillful truck driver, *and* always being in a rush isn't a very good combination!

I don't remember what it was exactly that caused me to *finally* slow down. It could have been any number of things: seeing horrible accidents, nearly jackknifing in winter conditions, or other similar occurrences. I think, however, that I just reached a certain point in my life where I began to realize that all my rushing around and stressing about things weren't really getting me anywhere.

It's one thing to be in a rush when you're driving a normal vehicle. But when you're driving a big truck, it's extremely frustrating, and almost futile. Not to mention dangerous!

Slowing it Down

Whatever the reason, when I *did* start driving slower, it was quite a revelation. Everything became so much easier... making turns, backing up, and driving in winter, traffic, or any other conditions. I was finally just driving down the road, going a reasonable speed and not competing with other vehicles (especially trucks), and *not* needing to prove anything to anyone.

Another big benefit of going slower is the decreased amount of stress that you experience. There are so many things that you no longer need to worry about: law enforcement, speeding tickets, the big risk of having accidents, and beating another driver down the road or to a final destination, for example.

The Trucker's Thought Process While Going Down the Road

First, you must get your fundamentals down. For example, the less experienced you are at shifting gears, the more you consciously think about the whole process (*before* you actually have to shift and *while* you're shifting). Then, as you get more experience, your subconscious begins to handle more and more of your everyday trucking tasks.

Sometimes a trucker must think about, and do, many different things simultaneously. Imagine that you're driving in a big city, and in traffic (which is most of the time in a big city!). A car cuts directly in front of you, so you hit the brakes and give yourself some space, while shifting to a lower gear (after thinking about which gear you should be in for the speed you're now going), and looking in the rear-view mirrors on both sides to see what the traffic's doing behind you.

Then, after you've made your adjustments, you're proceeding amidst the traffic, while glancing at the directions/map on your clipboard/notepad (or switching between apps on your smartphone). Now you see the street ahead of you and realize that it's the street you must turn right on. You're looking at the traffic light, as well as at the corner you must turn right on. Are there any pedestrians walking across the street? Are there vehicles there that will make this turn more difficult? How much room will you need to safely make the turn?

Soooo, take it slow! I'll be talking more about this in the next section.

So, you've downshifted into the proper gear, while approaching the turn. Now you're making the right turn, you may have to swing wide to make the turn (especially if it's a small one lane street, like on one of the typically smaller East Coast city streets), and you're watching for vehicles trying to pass you on the right, while looking ahead for people and/or vehicles.

Don't worry though, it won't take long before you're doing a lot of this without having to worry about *how*. You won't have to think about how to shift or steer, make a turn or back into a parking space... you'll just do it! Then you'll be free to concentrate on the new situations in front of you like vehicle and pedestrian traffic, and road and weather conditions, all of which are constantly changing and need your attention.

When you get to this level of proficiency, it's as if you and the truck are "one." Everything gets done instinctively, and automatically. Your *sub-conscious* has taken over much of your job. I'm not encouraging inattentiveness, by any means. The opposite is true; you will now be even *more* attentive to important tasks.

An analogy can be derived from the game of basketball. When you first learn the game, you need to practice the basic skills first. You dribble the ball repeatedly, and you get a little better each time. It's the same with learning to shoot a jump shot. After enough repetition, your subconscious takes over and you no longer need to think *how* to shoot a jump shot anymore. You just do it!

This leaves your conscious mind free to concentrate on the ever-changing conditions of the game; like that guy defending you, trying to block your shot. Even this becomes less conscious after a while, if you're good enough (think Michael Jordan, in his prime).

The mind works similarly in other areas of life, and trucking is no exception.

When you get this proficient as a truck driver, you can begin to enjoy your work. You'll be calm and confident, ready to take on any new conditions you encounter. Then, the fact that there ARE new and different conditions become an advantage over other jobs, many of which involve doing the same tasks repeatedly.

Staying Calm Through Changing Conditions and Circumstances

It is so much easier if you can learn to stay calm under a range of differing circumstances. In trucking, things are always changing. You are dealing with people who have their own agenda, are often in a rush, or possibly just consider you to be in their way. You will be given plenty of opportunities to get frustrated and angry out there. Cars will cut you off, road construction or accidents will threaten to make you late, and even the weather will be a source of aggravation.

But remember, nothing can *make* you get upset. How you think about the things that happen is what determines how you'll react... and *you* control how you think about these things.

To make it long term in trucking, it helps to be calm, and to take things in stride, even to laugh at things instead of getting angry. One of the things that will help, like I've mentioned, is to stay calm and to *take it slow*. Being in a rush is a sure factor in causing stress. To prevent against this, you must give yourself plenty of time to do whatever you're doing. And realize, even if you *are* late to something, rushing will probably not help, and could make things much worse (accidents, etc.).

Stress, even fear, is often caused by the unknown, or by the unforeseeable. For example, if you don't know how to properly back into a parking space at a truck stop, you'll probably be stressed out and nervous, before and during your backing. But, when you get more practical experience, you'll become much more confident and calm.

How to Respond to the Actions (and Reactions) of Other Drivers

Think things through before you react (either becoming angry, or acting in response). That driver who suddenly speeds up, so you can't pass may be drunk, or high on drugs. They may have *other* personal issues on their mind, which may not even have anything to do with you.

Don't take things personally because it's probably *not* personal; that person most likely doesn't know you at all, or even necessarily realize you are there! Most people are totally self-absorbed and unaware of what is going on around them. It's just true! Try to give others the benefit of the doubt. That benefit will often be yours, as you remain calm while those around you stress themselves out.

In any situation, if you try to put yourself in the place of the other person, you'll find that gives you a whole new perspective on things.

Try not to get too irritated at other big trucks slowwwly going down the road. I know, I know, you must get where you're going in a hurry, and that truck is in your way.

But there are a few other things to consider:

- That driver may have a load which is fragile, sensitive to road conditions, and which demands extreme care.
- They may be going slowly because they're looking for a customer, and/or a certain address or street.
- They could just be a brand-new driver, on the road as a trucker for the first time.

There are many situations where you just can't worry about how other drivers (including other truck drivers) are reacting to your driving. Most of the time they'll be behind you, sometimes tailgating and weaving back and forth, apparently not understanding why you're driving so slowly. Don't let these people bother you, or make you think you have to go faster. They probably don't even know what *they're* doing, much less what *you* should be doing.

I'm informing you of this, so you'll be prepared, *not* so you'll go faster. Let them pass you if the situation allows. If not, those other vehicles will just have to wait.

Handling Things Beyond Your Control

There are so many things in trucking which are just beyond the driver's control. Driving down the road, you cannot control the actions of other drivers. Accidents happen, as does the weather, which often cause slowdowns and delays. You might have just driven for three days, and got the load to the receiver in time, but then had to wait half a day for the receiver to get around to unloading you. Terrific!

It's important to simply understand that these things just *happen*. *Expect* them to (see next section), and realize that no matter how upset you get, you're probably not going to change a thing (you could yell at the receiver to hurry up, but then you would probably have to wait *another* half a day).

What Should You Expect Out On the Road?

Since *anything* can happen out on the road, a driver should *expect* anything to happen. You should expect the unexpected. For example, if you

expect a traffic jam when you go through Atlanta at rush hour (they should call it the *slow hour*, shouldn't they?), you probably won't get so upset when you're in the middle of it.

Of course, a *better* plan, if you can arrange it, is to *avoid* the situation altogether by going through (if you can't go around) downtown at an earlier or later time.

If you expect the car that's passing you to cut directly in front of you, you'll be prepared to slow down, and remain calm, if and when it does. You should expect the car in front of you to have a tire blowout, slam on the brakes, and stop immediately. If you did, you wouldn't follow so closely, would you?

The Qualities of a Professional Driver

No matter what your profession is, strive to be the BEST at it.

In trucking, the BEST drivers are NOT:

- The fastest driver going down the road in a *large car*.
- The driver who can blind side back into a parking space... without pulling up.
- The driver who runs the most miles in the company.
- Not even the driver who made the most money.

These truck drivers ARE:

- The safest and most consistent driver, week after week.
- Not involved in preventable accidents, or receive speeding tickets.
- Making consistent miles and pay, and managing to save money on the road.

- They're able to keep relatively healthy, which will help them in their driving, and for the rest of their life.
- When this driver finds a good job, they stick with it.
- They get along with, and respects the authority of their company, dispatcher, etc.
- They stay in touch with, and spends time at home with their family and friends.

Traits of the professional truck driver:

- Is relaxed and doesn't stress out over difficulties or problems.
- Is a skilled driver, confident in their abilities; not cocky or overconfident, or having a "know it all" attitude.
- Is secure with themselves, and therefore, will not try to prove themselves by driving fast, rudely, or talking tough on the CB, among other things.
- Enjoys their job, and the trucking life in general.
- Tries to be positive, not focusing on the negative.
- Is not always in competition with other drivers on the road, but instead, goes out of their way to help other drivers.
- Doesn't procrastinate, or put things off, but does things as they need to get done.
- Occasionally makes sacrifices in their personal life, for the sake of their job.
- Starts trips early, and arrives at destination on time.

Chapter 6: Driving Skills Made Easy



After mastering the information in this chapter, you'll be able to:

- know what other drivers are going to do *before* they do it,
- avoid accidents and conditions on the road,
- be more relaxed and confident while driving.

This information is not meant to replace the education a driver must receive in a qualified, truck driver training program. **The information is meant to *supplement* the basic skills and knowledge already received.**

Some of the information here will be obvious and easy to understand immediately to new/future drivers, but some of it can only be appreciated after undergoing some real-world trucking experiences.

There is more than one way to accomplish many tasks in trucking. In some instances, I will offer several of the more common methods; in others, I

will offer what is commonly thought to be the most practical method. This guide doesn't have *all* the answers (just most of them!), but it gives the driver the most practical advice it can on many subjects.

The driver must keep an “always be learning” viewpoint, and never feel like they “know it all.” I don't think any of us will ever get to that point!

Shifting Gears



Factors which affect shifting

Many factors come into consideration when deciding what gear to start driving in, and how to shift under different conditions and circumstances:

- How heavy is the truck?
- Are you driving the bobtail only?
- Is the surface flat, or are you on an incline or a decline?
- How powerful is the engine, and what are the transmission shifting recommendations?

It's extremely important that you know the proper gear to be in for each situation.

Loaded heavy

The most straightforward and obvious, because, when you're heavy, you'll usually start in first gear (low gear if starting on an upgrade), and go through the gears in succession.

Loaded light or empty (deadheading)

For every shifting situation (starting from a stop, making a turn, etc.), you can shift in, at least, one higher gear than you would if it were loaded heavy.

Bobtailing

Just as with being loaded light, you'll have to start out in a higher gear (though even higher, possibly in 4th gear). Remember, without the trailer, the bobtail will not drive as smoothly or sometimes shift as smoothly. If you start in too high of a gear, the truck will probably jump and lurch forward.

Driving uphill

If you're loaded heavy, you'll usually have to start in 1st gear, or possibly low (sometimes called *granny low*). You'll have to shift quickly as you reach the top RPM's, because gravity will force them to drop quickly, after which it won't go into gear. For this reason, you may actually have to bring the RPM's to a higher than normal peak before attempting to shift.

Driving downhill

When you're either starting from a stop when your facing downward, or driving down a steep hill (not a long downgrade, which is covered in the section on mountain driving), you'll need to start in a higher gear, possibly 2nd or 3rd. If you start in too low of a gear, gravity will immediately push your truck down, and will be difficult to shift into the next higher gear

because of the suddenly high RPMs. If you *can* shift into the next gear, and if it's too low of a gear, the truck will lurch forward and bounce you in your seat. So, not only do you need to start in a higher gear, you may also need to skip gears.

Note: For especially steep inclines, see the section on [mountain driving](#).

Practical methods of shifting

Most drivers may not even realize there is more than one way of shifting. I was on the road for over a year before I ran into a driver who showed me how to *float* the gears. This section summarizes some of the most commonly used shifting methods.

Standard double clutching

This is the method which is taught in the trucking schools, and recommended by the transmission manufacturers, who probably know a thing or two about the subject. This may be the only method of shifting you ever use.

Simply put, “double clutching” means that you push the clutch in twice for every gear shift; once to take the transmission out of gear and once to put it back in gear. It takes some practice and getting used to at first, but then it’s almost as easy as shifting any other vehicle.

Floating the gears

This method is not taught at many schools because of disagreements on its effects on the truck’s transmission. But *floating* appears to be the method of choice for most veteran drivers who’ve been driving the longest.

Probably the main objection to its use is that it *can* wear on the gears if it is done improperly. When floating is attempted by novice drivers, you’ll hear a lot of grinding of the gears. For this reason, I would recommend that

newer drivers master basic double clutching before they attempt to try floating the gears.

Float the gears means shifting without using the clutch. Instead, drivers use precise timing to take the transmission out of gear at the recommended RPM range. Many drivers use a combination of standard double clutching and floating the gears, because some transmissions have certain gears in which using the clutch is necessary (or just easier) to take the gearshift out of gear.

- **To upshift:** when the RPM's reach the top of the range, let off the accelerator while simultaneously taking the gearshift out of gear. Then simply put it back into gear at the low end of the range. The use of the clutch is occasionally needed to take the gearshift out of gear, but only timing is necessary to put it back into gear.
- **To downshift:** when the RPM's reach the low point where you'll have to downshift, many drivers use the clutch to take the gearshift out of gear, then rev up the engine and put it back into gear at the proper RPM's.

Downshifting: finding the right gear

First, *memorize* the speed ranges for each forward gear, which will be a bit different depending on the transmission. Then you can use this knowledge to select the proper gear. Standard double shifting, rather than floating the gears, is recommended for downshifting.

Note: *To record speeds that you'll need to memorize, use a recording app on your phone, a digital recorder, or an "old school" tape recorder. You'll want to dictate while driving, not take written notes.*

For example:

- First, slow down until you're approaching your desired speed.
 - Observe your MPH, then figure out what gear that speed range will put you into.
 - Next, push in the clutch, rev up the engine, and put it into gear.
 - Last, how much should you rev the engine (or how hard and quickly to press the accelerator - a lot or a little, to a certain rpm range, etc.).
- If the speed you're currently going is on the low side of the speed range for that gear, then just rev up the engine a little bit (on the lower side of the rpm range, approximately 1300 to 1400 RPMs). If the speed you're going is on the high side of the speed range that gear, you'll need to rev up the engine higher (to approximately 1700 to 1800 RPMs).

Downshifting when exiting the Interstate



Commonly, when taking an exit, you might have several hundred yards, for example, in which to slow down. *Braking down* through each gear, in

succession, is the *textbook* way to go. This is considered the safest method, plus it saves your brakes from excessive wear and tear.

However, provided you know the proper gear for each speed range you are travelling, you can also do what many other drivers do: be selective by *braking down* more quickly and skipping several gears. Actually, the shorter the distance the off-ramp is, the *safer* and more recommended this technique really is.

Slow down just before the exit, but not *too* slow. Don't do what many drivers do, as they will slow down to ramp speed while they're still on the Interstate, apparently unconcerned about the traffic behind them. Go approximately 55 to 65 mph, unless there's an extremely short off-ramp, in which case you'll need to go even slower.

Once you're going down the off-ramp, use your brakes and slow down to the off-ramp speed, *then* shift to the proper gear for that speed. Then, just brake down to the stop sign or yield situation, and again skip to the proper gear. Use your best judgment as you determine if the gear you're in will give you sufficient braking power (the lower the gear, the more braking power you'll receive from the engine).

Of course, these are just examples. You must consider all the conditions that exist when you're deciding how to downshift, and what gear to be in.

Factors when shifting on the off-ramp:

- The length of the off-ramp.
- The curve of the off-ramp.
- The traffic on the Interstate, especially traffic behind your vehicle.
- The condition of the pavement - wet, rough, slippery, oily, dry?

Backing Like a Professional

Perhaps the most difficult trucking skill to master is backing up a semi-trailer. To pass the CDL skills test, you need to be able to do a variety of backing maneuvers, which account for most of the tests.

Being able to skillfully back up a trailer is essential for a professional truck driver.

In discussing the importance of selecting a good trucking school in the previous guides, there was great emphasis placed on getting enough time *behind the wheel*. Along with shifting, sufficient time must be spent practicing how to back the trailer.

Different types of backing maneuvers for common situations

Some backing locations demand that you back up a certain way, and *that* way alone. But others can be done in the manner of the driver's choosing. Still others may take a combination of maneuvers to get the job done. Much will depend upon the driver's backing skills and experience.

Straight line backing



The first backing maneuver to learn is the straight-line back. The concepts learned while doing so will help with the other backing maneuvers. The driver must back up the tractor-trailer a certain distance to a certain point while keeping the vehicle in a straight line.

Start with the tractor and trailer in a straight line. You should see an equal amount of both sides of the trailer as you look in the mirrors. Look in the mirror as you're backing, and turn the steering wheel (when turning from the top of the wheel) in the direction of the drifting trailer. When you see more trailer in your right mirror, turn the wheel to the right (clockwise) to "push" the trailer back in line. This is also considered "chasing" the trailer.

The trailer should be headed for a specific target, or kept in the middle or towards the side of the street. If you're off target, let the trailer head in the target's direction before making the correction and bringing the tractor and trailer in a straight line again.

The key is to constantly adjust as you proceed backwards because the farther the trailer starts to drift out of line, the harder it will be to bring it back into line without having to pull up (a pull-up is moving forward to realign the truck, and get a better angle or give yourself more room after a backing attempt).

Alley dock (45 degree)

See the full video demonstration [here](#), alley dock part starts about 6:20.



The set up (the “jack”): To set this up properly, you first pass across the front of the alley or parking space, which is your “target space”. Do so in low gear in idle speed, no throttle necessary, observed from outside your driver’s side window. The left side of your vehicle should be approximately 4 feet away from the front of any parked vehicles.



Choose a reference point and start pulling out to set up backing:

As soon as your tractor drive tires are in the middle of the target space, stop for a moment and pick a reference point directly in front of the target space (like another tractor, light pole, etc.) which you’re going to aim your tractor at, then turn the steering wheel hard to your right. Continue progressing, forward and away from the target space, at idle speed until your tractor has completed a full 90-degree turn, out away from the

parking space, then, without slowing down, turn the wheel hard to the left until you're 90 degrees to the left. You should now be facing the same direction as when you first passed the parking space.

Note: *This is one simplified way to do this maneuver; trucking schools may have different methods for the same maneuver, as will truck drivers you'll see backing up to a dock or in a truck stop. Do whatever works best for you.*

Backing up (the “chase”)



Look out of your window and you should see the back of the trailer pointed at the parking space, in a *jacked* position. Try turning the wheel a full or half turn to the right (depending on how far you pulled out and the space you had to work with) and proceed back, observing how you're progressing in relation to the target (remembering precisely how much you needed to turn the steering wheel, so you can get it down perfectly in the future).

The goal now is to time it so that you're in a straight line by the time the back of your trailer reaches the dock or the back of the parking space. Once your tractor is getting straight to the trailer, it will be easier to use your mirrors instead of looking out of the window.

Now you can simply use the straight-line back method of “pushing” or “chasing” the trailer on the side it’s seen the most.

The Pull Up



If you don't time your backing up perfectly, perhaps you've kept the steering wheel locked to the right too long, you'll notice the trailer tandems stop rolling and the back of the trailer is veering too much towards the driver's side (pushed trailer just beyond *square*), it's usually best to stop, get out and look if necessary, then pull up to straighten out the trailer.

How fast should you back up?

The most common advice for most backing maneuvers is to back in low gear, at idle speed, with your foot off the throttle, and off the clutch as well. For an average size parking space or dock, with adequate room on both sides, this is about right, once the driver has become adept at backing.

But when backing into a tight spot, it's almost impossible to go *too slow*. **Even backing at idle speed is too fast when there's only a few inches of clearance on each side.** If you're on level ground, start backing in idle speed, then slow yourself with the use of the clutch (though overuse of the clutch can cause wear and tear, so many experts don't recommend this step). This is just something you'll have to practice and get

the feel of. Again, don't use the accelerator. If your backing down a hill or just a slight decline, use both the clutch and the service brake.

Note: *I have heard advice against using the clutch in this manner because it wears the clutch out faster. I agree, this is probably true, but I think it's more important to back up, especially around other vehicles or property, at a safe speed.*

As you're backing, watch the rear of the trailer, and try to imagine where its path is heading, continually adjusting as necessary. You should be backing at a slow walking pace at best... a *crawl* if the parking spot is especially tight, as is the case with many grocery warehouses (especially on the East Coast where there is just not as much space).

In these situations, there may be only a few inches on each side of the vehicle. Be careful not to hit any mirrors, either your own or the other vehicle you may be parking next to!

Jackknifing the tractor and trailer for tight spaces

This is a technique used in situations where you have an extremely limited space in the street. In normal conditions, by using the 45-degree backing method, your tractor would end up straight, aligned with the trailer. However, in some places this would position your tractor in the middle of the street. This is very common on the East Coast, where space is more limited than the rest of the country. It is also common for grocery/produce deliveries, especially to smaller stores or warehouses, often where there are no actual truck delivery accommodations, or dock, etc.

Note: *this maneuver won't work exactly as described here if there's another truck parked next to your space on your driver side*

You want the tractor to end up perpendicular to the trailer. To do so requires a set up similar to the 45, but not quite as far forward (in the

street, etc.), and almost in a straight line. Proceed back towards the dock/parking space, then “jack” the trailer as it’s nearly at the dock. You’re not going to chase the trailer to get straight, but will end up at an angle to the trailer.

The hardest part is getting the timing down so that the back of your trailer is even with the dock. If not, **then pull up and try again**, this time starting to “jack” earlier or later than the previous time, depending upon how you ended up.

Blind side backing



Blind side backing is when you must back into a space or dock with the trailer jacked on the right side so that you can't see the trailer or the dock/parking space except for in the convex mirror. Having a partner or a helper available to guide you will be extremely helpful if you have to back this way.

This method of backing is to be used only when you have no other choice. If you can maneuver the truck so that you don't have to blind side back, do so by entering from a different direction or going around the block, if possible. It will be much easier and safer to do so, especially when you have limited experience.

Go slower than you would with normal backing. You will be looking at the convex mirror on the passenger (right) side. Remember that objects in the convex mirror are closer than they appear. Also, use the power mirror (if you have this option) on that side and push it far out. This will enable you to see the space much better. Be prepared to move the mirror slowly back in as you back up, because the view will change as you progress.

If you have any doubts about whether you're backing up correctly, stop the truck and set the tractor brake. Get up and look out of the passenger window down at your trailer.

You should now know if you need to make any adjustments, or should continue on the present path. Do this several times if you have to. NEVER proceed if you're not 100% sure that you're going to make it without hitting anything.

Check [here](#) for a video demonstration.

Additional backing information and advice

Backing essentials to practice

To back up effectively and consistently, it will help you to do things the same way each time, so that they become a habit.

Mirrors must be properly adjusted, and clean:

The big mirrors are the “West Coast” mirrors, and the small ones are the convex mirrors. When the tractor and trailer are in a straight line, you should be able to see a small, equal portion of both sides of the trailer in the mirrors. Just a light covering of dirt or snow will make it impossible to see where your backing.

Windows (at least the driver side) should be open:

Most drivers look out of the window at the trailer whenever it's at an angle to the tractor (jackknifed or jacked).

Put on four-way flashers:

It should become a habit to put on the flashers every time you back up. This informs others that you're backing up (or are about to).

Trailer tandem settings effect on backing

The position of the trailer tandems can dramatically affect the trailer's reaction speed. Setting the trailer tandems all the way to back lengthens the distance between the drive axles and the trailer tandems, which causes the trailer to react more slowly.

Sliding the tandems forward shortens the distance between the set and the tandems. The shorter the distance between the drive axles and the trailer tandems, the faster the trailer will react when backing.

A 53-foot trailer with the tandems slid all the way up reacts about the same as a 48-foot trailer with the tandems slid all the way back. Drivers who pull doubles regularly have to back up "pup" trailers which vary in length from 26 to 29 feet. These trailers can react extremely fast and require subtle movements of the steering wheel. These are actually good trailers to practice on, because after doing so for a while, the driver becomes adept at how the trailer will react and about how angles and timing work.

When these drivers switch to backing up longer trailers, they find that it's suddenly much easier. However, it's still very easy to oversteer when the trailer tandems are slid forward. Beginning drivers especially tend to oversteer, and overcompensate when trying to make adjustments. Until

you get skilled at backing, it may be easier for you to start with the tandems set back a little bit, when possible.

Making turns is easier when the tandems are slid forward, as long as there's sufficient room on the other side of the trailer because of the wide swing of the trailer. If you're in the right lane making a right turn, make sure that the swing of the trailer doesn't come too close to the vehicles in the left lane.

Get Out and Look (G.O.A.L.)

Never assume that there's nothing behind you when you're about to back up. If you've been aware of what's been behind you as you've been driving, when you pull up to back up, you may not have to get out to know what's behind you. If it's sunny out, you can usually tell if there's any vehicle behind you by the shadows from their vehicles, but if you're not absolutely certain, **Get Out and Look** *before* you back up. At the very least, you can get out and look under the trailer to see if there's anything on the other side.

Many drivers are reluctant to be seen as amateurs by their fellow drivers. Therefore, they may not want to follow some of the advice in this book.

For example, they'll drive too fast in truck stops and back up (also too fast) without being sure of what's behind them. Ironically, they do this to be perceived as professionals, and the opposite is true. They're viewed by professionals as amateurs!

It takes time and energy to get out of the truck and look behind it. In addition, there may be another truck that's waiting for the driver to back up, which causes even more stress. Just relax, be aware of your surroundings, and take your time.

Get help from truckers, but use good judgment!

Depending on where you are, there are often other people (preferably other drivers) who'll be able to help you back up when the backing up is especially difficult. Use the help if it's available, but use your best judgment in doing so.

Sometimes you'll be in a truck stop about to back up, or already doing so, when you hear another trucker on the CB radio giving you advice. Very often, it is a driver who has a view of the blind side of your trailer, and this assistance can be very helpful.

Just be sure this is the case, and you know who you're talking to, because, as hard as it is to believe, there are people out there who get a kick out of seeing you screw up, and will tell you all is clear when the opposite is true.

Use the help if it goes along with your own judgment of the situation and your experience (if you have any, of course!). But if you're unsure AT ALL, get out and look. The last thing you need is to back into another truck, or damage your trailer against a structure of some kind.

Using lines, tire tracks, or imaginary lines as backing aid:

Sometimes it's harder to back up when there are no other trucks backed into the adjacent spaces, because you don't have them a guide or a reference point. If you have dock or parking space lines, try to back in at the top (as if there were trucks alongside) instead of crossing the lines at some point in the middle. The first reason is that you should practice backing maneuvers the same way each time when you're just beginning. The other reason is because if you cross the lines in the middle and then "jack" the trailer, you're creating more of a jackknife position which you'll have to fix with a pull up.

Try to use previous tire tracks or tire indentations in the gravel if they appear straight and aligned correctly. I also try to imagine where lines would extend out to (from a dock or parking space) and use them when I back up. When backing, don't just try to get the back of the trailer to the dock, etc., but try to move the line alongside the bottom of your trailer to line up with the dock or parking space line.

If the parking space or dock is unlit at night, you can place a flashlight at the back of the dock or at whatever point where you need a guide. An alternative is an electric lantern which you can pick up inexpensively in any camping supply store. You can even use your smartphone, with a flashlight app. Just don't run over it!

Braking Essentials

For information on the air brake system, see the appropriate section of your CDL manual. You can access all state CDL manuals [here](#).

The Anti-Lock Braking System (ABS)

All tractors manufactured after 1997, and trailers manufactured after 1999 are required to be equipped with anti-lock brakes. The anti-lock braking system is a device installed on many, especially newer tractors designed to prevent wheel lock-up. When the brakes are applied, and a wheel is about to lock up, the ABS automatically adjusts air pressure to the brake chambers on the appropriate wheel to prevent wheel lock up. If the vehicle is equipped with ABS, it automatically functions whenever the ignition switch is turned on.

If the system is functioning properly, a truck/tractor ABS warning lamp should illuminate when the ignition switch is first turned on, and should remain on until the system self-test has been completed successfully. Trailers equipped with ABS have an ABS warning lamp in the cab, and on

the side of the trailer, which illuminates when the ignition is first turned on. The light should go out after the initial self-test, unless a problem is detected, in which case the lamp will remain illuminated.

How the ABS works: The ABS was designed to prevent wheel lock up. When a wheel locks up, it will skid along the pavement, unless it's on slippery pavement, in which case the wheel will slide. As mentioned in the section on [jackknifes](#), when a wheel locks up and slides, it actually travels faster than wheels that are rolling. then a jackknife is likely to occur. With the ABS operational on both tractor and trailer, in a sudden braking situation, you could literally stand on the brakes, and the wheels would not lockup. The ABS intermittently applies brake pressure at this point, and your vehicle will slow down without the wheel/s skidding or sliding.

Using the engine (or Jake) brake



Note: The Jake brake is a registered trademark of [Jacobs Vehicle Systems](#).

A Jake brake is a compression brake, which utilizes the power of the engine to help slow the vehicle, along with the proper use of the service brakes. This assistance can help to keep the service brakes cool, which is essential for maximum braking power. The Jake brake can also help to extend the useful life of the service brakes, as well as possibly avoid accidents through quicker stopping time.

Do not use the Jake brake when bobtailing, or when pulling an empty trailer on wet or slippery pavement.

First off, not all tractors come equipped with an engine brake, but most carriers are now opting to include them as essential equipment on the tractor. The following section describes basic Jake brake operation, with additional information in the section on mountain driving.

Engine brake driver controls

The controls can vary depending on the design of the cab and on the configuration of the controls, but will all operate similarly. One control will be a simple on and off switch.

The other control will be your speed settings: low, medium, and high (some Jake brakes use only four cylinders, and have just two speeds; low and high). On a typical six- cylinder engine, low speed uses two cylinders for braking power, medium speed uses four cylinders, and high speed uses all six cylinders. The operation of the Jake brake is also affected by the clutch pedal and the accelerator pedal.

The operation of the engine brake

The engine must be at operating temperature before turning on the engine brake. After that, you may leave the Jake brake control in the ON position. Exceptions are when driving on slippery pavement (see the section on using the Jake brake on slippery pavement below), and when local ordinances prohibit it's use.

The following describes basic use, but operation may vary slightly from vehicle to vehicle:

When the Jake brake is ON, it operates automatically. As soon as you depress the service brake, the Jake brake will be activated. Some

engine brakes will come on as soon as your foot is off the clutch as well as the accelerator, but in others, the cruise control must be in the *off* position for this to occur.

The Jake brake was designed to work in conjunction with the cruise control by automatically coming on as soon as the speed exceeds the cruise control set point). Investigate all the possibilities and become familiar with the engine brake.

If you don't have the cruise control engaged, turn its switch off. Then you'll be able to use the Jake brake to its fullest capabilities.

Pressing on the accelerator or engaging the clutch deactivates the engine brake, but the deactivation may be constant or temporary, depending on your tractor's setup.

When driving down the road, keep in mind that maximum braking (engine retarder) performance occurs at engine speeds between 1800 RPM and the maximum recommended speed for your type of tractor. Below that, retarding power will be reduced.

Using the engine brake on different road conditions

- **On flat, dry pavement**
 - With a lighter load:

Note: *using the Jake brake when under a light load is optional.*

Put the Jake brake on “low”. When you let up off the accelerator, the Jake brake will come on. You shouldn't need to apply the service brakes to slow down under normal driving conditions. If you still need to use the service brakes to slow down the vehicle, try setting the Jake brake on a higher position. Putting the brake on “high” may cause the truck to have jerky or

jumpy braking under a lighter load. Plus, there is no real need to do so with a light load.

- With a heavier load:

Put the Jake brake on “medium” or “high”, depending upon the weight of the truck.

- Descending a steep grade (see [mountain driving](#).)
- On slippery pavement (see [mountain driving](#) or [winter driving conditions](#).)

Chapter 7: Driving Through Adverse Conditions



There are many adverse conditions you'll encounter out there on the road. We'll just discuss the most challenging of these and give you tips on how to handle them.

Among these conditions are:

- [Winter Driving Conditions](#)
- [Rain](#)
- [Wind](#)
- [Fog](#)
- [Summer Driving](#)
- [Night Driving](#)

Trip planning, (see [chapter 2](#)), is even *more* important under adverse conditions. You *must* plan ahead so you can better be prepared for adverse conditions when they happen on the road!

Your first preparation for these adverse conditions begins with complete and thorough [Pre-Trip Inspection](#).

Of course, visibility is paramount, so headlights and taillights must be kept clean and in working condition.

Also, your heater and defroster must be operating properly. It's a scary thing to be driving in the rain, when suddenly, your windshield fogs up.

Winter Driving Conditions



Driving a big truck in winter conditions is tough, there's no sugar coating it. Things can be *especially tough* if you're a new driver. Under normal conditions, one of the most important things you can do is SLOW DOWN. In adverse conditions, this is doubly true!

Besides helping to prevent an accident, you'll also reduce stress. Your goal should be to drive down the road relaxed and confident, which is what I'll try to help you accomplish in this chapter.

Practical Advice for Driving in Winter Conditions:

- In slippery driving conditions, it's best to use the brakes as little as possible to lessen the likelihood of sliding. Therefore, a combination

of adjusting your speed to existing conditions, and maintaining an adequate following distance, is critically important.

- Make sure you look ahead, and if you see traffic congestion, slow down and stay back.
- Try to avoid passing other vehicles (unless you have no other choice) when the road conditions start to get bad. *You* may be driving safely, but it's hard to prevent other vehicles from sliding into you.
- Be especially careful on exit ramps, which have slower speeds, often have curves, and are often more susceptible to icy conditions.
- Be careful in truck stops and customer locations which may not remove snow or put down any traction aids.

Be prepared: Essential supplies for winter driving

Carry enough supplies in your truck as if you're going camping... because you never know, you may have to! If you have a breakdown, or get stuck in a remote and/or mountainous area, it could be a long time before anybody gets to you.

The key factor could come down to your ability to communicate to someone (*anyone*, in severe situations) that you're having a problem. Therefore, I list communication methods first in the list of supplies. Obviously, of equal importance, are supplies to help keep you warm, and food and water.

Communication supplies

- Smartphone -- get on with a nationwide plan, and a phone with analog and digital capabilities. Try get a plan with the best overall coverage, taking note of where the coverage is lacking. But no matter

how good your coverage is, there could still be areas with dead spots, or lack of cell coverage. In addition, get a cheap backup cell phone.

- CB radio -- there's many situations in which having a good radio and a good antenna are very useful. Drivers can tell you what the conditions look like ahead, and warn you of any accidents you could encounter.
- The Qualcomm system (if installed)
- Flares/reflectors

Food supplies

- Plenty of water (Keep at least three extra gallons on hand during the winter months)
- Several day's supply of food (including a good deal of non-perishables)
- A combination of quick-energy snacks like candy or energy bars, and high protein items like canned beans or jerky will serve you well in these situations.

Other supplies

- Ice and snow scraper and brush.
- Jumper/booster cables.
- Snow chains/cables.
- Flashlight -- I recommend the large, D-cell, mag lights, extra batteries and bulbs.
- Lanterns and matches (kept dry), and a small butane lighter.
- First-aid kit - don't forget things like Pepto Bismol, or 'Gas-X', and possibly extras of any prescriptions you need to take regularly, particularly in the winter.

- Standard shovel, and small, light-weight snow shovel.
- Supplies for traction -- traction mat, sand/gravel, and/or a big bag of kitty litter/absorbent.
- Warm blankets (the old Army surplus standard wool blankets are great back-ups for extreme cold), sleeping bag.
- Indoor/outdoor thermometer -- this tells you the temperature inside and, more importantly, directly outside the truck.
- Essential tools.

Clothes supplies

- Warm clothes -- dress in layers. Flannel, fleece and wool are essentials. Remember, cotton will not keep you warm when it's wet, but fleece and wool will.
- Ski cap/hat. (Again, wool or polar fleece are best)
- Snow boots. (Make sure they're waterproof and insulated)
- Insulated coveralls -- flatbed drivers, produce/cooler warehouse workers, and anyone else who works in extremely cold weather, I highly recommend these. They come in different levels of cold preventive effectiveness, some will keep you warm in temperatures of 50/ below zero and colder.
- A can of Camp Dry or similar product can even make inexpensive boots or coveralls waterproof. Keeping dry is essential to keep warm.

What to do if you get stuck and/or stranded in the snow



1. Shovel snow out from under the drive tires and the steer tires. Try to shovel as much as possible from in front and from behind the tires, and underneath the vehicle if you can.
2. Use traction mats or throw down some kitty litter or sand in front of and behind the tires.
3. Turn on your axle differential.
4. Start in low gear, and attempt to move the vehicle towards the part of the road which appears to have the best traction. If the wheels start to spin, get off the throttle - you don't want to dig yourself in any deeper. If the situation warrants it, you may be able to rock the vehicle free by shifting back and forth between forward and reverse gears (first check your vehicle's manual for information about this).
5. If you can move the truck at all, put on the snow chains or cables on the drive tires, then try to get the vehicle moving again.
6. If you can't get the vehicle moving, and you haven't been able to contact anyone via the cell phone, CB radio, or via the Qualcomm

- system - look for a nearby shelter. Try to flag down any vehicles, to see if they can help.
7. If there doesn't appear to be any shelter nearby, and you're experiencing severe winter conditions, i.e. blowing snow, frigid temperatures, etc., your best bet will be to stay in the truck until help arrives.
 8. Keep the truck idling up around 900-1000 RPMs, and check your exhaust stacks periodically to make sure they don't get blocked with snow or ice. If you bought your fuel up north, most likely it will be a blended diesel, which should not gel up (or if you've used a fuel additive).
 9. Keep yourself warm using layered clothing and blankets.

If you've carried the recommended supplies, you should be fine until help arrives. If it's a road that's traveled with any regularity, chances are DOT highway/maintenance personnel will be there before too long. Besides clearing the snow from the road, they will be looking for stranded motorists.

Effects of cold weather on the truck

Starting the truck in cold temperatures

The engine simply needs more time to warm up in cold weather. Once you start the vehicle, allow the vehicle to idle at low RPMs for a few minutes. Then, idle the engine a little higher, to around 1000 RPMs. The purpose of warming up the engine is to allow the oil film to sufficiently lubricate pistons and liners, shafts, and bearings. Allow the engine to warm up until the coolant temperature is at least 130° Fahrenheit. The colder the temperature outside, the longer your engine will take to warm up.

The transmission also needs time to sufficiently warm up in cold weather. If you've ever tried to immediately drive a truck in cold weather, without

having sufficiently warmed the vehicle up, you might have noticed how hard it was to get the engine into gear, and to shift. This because the transmission fluid was not warmed up enough.

About diesel gelling



yourfuelsolution.com

The colder the weather gets, the greater the likelihood of fuel gelling. Gelling is when the diesel gets so thick that it no longer flows, and the truck can no longer operate. This usually occurs when temperatures get into the single digits, or below. Truck stops in areas of extreme cold temperatures usually blend their fuel, which limits the amount of gelling.

How to prevent diesel from gelling:

- Fuel tank heaters
- Adding kerosene
- Fuel treatments and additives
- Keep fuel tanks full
- Keep tractor engine idling (keep an extra key so that you can lock up the truck when it's still running)

The danger of the vehicle's brakes freezing

Anytime you stop the vehicle when it's near or below freezing temperatures, beware of the possibility of your brakes freezing. This is especially likely if you've stopped after long periods of braking, like after descending a mountain pass. The brakes heat up, and can stay quite warm for a while. The presence of snow, ice, or just having moisture in the air are now combined with the heated brakes. When you set the trailer brakes in this situation, you have frozen brakes in a short period of time.



How to prevent frozen brakes:

- Before stopping, drive around with your foot slightly on the brake pedal to dry out the brakes.
- Park on level ground, and set tractor brakes only.
- You may have to get underneath the trailer, and hit the brake linings on their sides to break them free.
- See this [video](#) for more advice on unfreezing frozen wheels.

Driving in slippery or icy conditions



One of the keys in icy conditions is to never do anything quickly; always steer, brake, and accelerate in a steady manner.

Be on the alert for icy conditions

As soon as temperatures drop in to freezing ranges, immediately start driving slower.

If the roads are wet during near freezing temperatures, watch the trailer tires in you mirror. If there's no spray coming up from the road, it might be ice-covered. Even if there IS spray coming up, there still could be ice beginning to form... enough to make you slide.

Check to see if your mirror brackets are gathering ice. Also watch for ice buildup on CB antennas, which causes them to get heavy and sway faster back and forth.

It's helpful to keep your windshield warm, if possible. When there's freezing rain or ice forming on your windshield and/or wipers, your wipers won't be able to do much good. Turn your heater on defrost, and put it on as hot and high as it will go, letting the hot air go directly on the windshield. Crack your windows to let the air then go out of the window, and not get too hot in the truck.

Also, keep a good supply of de-icer to spray on the outside of the windshield and on the wipers. When the conditions are bad, you may have to get out several times to apply the de-icer, and/or break the ice off of the wipers. Depending upon what type of tractor you have, you may be able to stand on the driver's step and reach the windshield with the spray. Otherwise, you'll have to open the hood to give yourself access to the windshield.

Be on the alert for “Black Ice”



This is perhaps the most dangerous condition you'll encounter. This is not regular ice, which you can clearly discern as soon as you see it. This is an extremely thin, almost transparent layer of ice. You can be driving along on dry road one moment, then further down the road suddenly you notice the road seems to be shiny.

All you know is that it's below freezing outside, and it looks wet. It may have been lightly raining or there may be foggy or misty conditions. Either way, if the ground was wet (probably only a very thin layer), and if it's darker because of the pavement beneath it, it is probably *Black Ice*.

Black Ice warning signs:

- Shiny surface, wet looking road without spray coming up from the trailer tires.

- Below freezing temperature plus fog or mist.

There have been times when I did not have any idea I was on black ice until I noticed cars spinning off the road on the other side of the highway, and in front of me.

Check out this [video](#) which shows a great example of *Black Ice*.

How to drive when you encounter *Black Ice*:

- As soon as you notice that you may be on black ice, immediately take your foot off the accelerator, and allow your truck to slow down without touching your brakes.
- Take your foot off the accelerator.
- Don't touch the brake.
- If you've started to slide, turn your vehicle in the direction it is sliding, not the direction you want to go, to regain control.
- Turn off the cruise control.
- Turn off the engine brake.
- Turn on your hazard lights/4-way flashers.
- After you've slowed down considerably, very lightly touch the brakes while looking in your mirror at your trailer. See how it reacts, and whether it slowed down, and if you retained traction and control.

Note: See more information on slippery pavement in [mountain driving](#).

Watch for signs that say, "Bridge freezes before rest of road"



It's true that, especially where icy conditions may exist, bridges are the most dangerous section of road because of their propensity to freeze first. The term bridge is to include not only a long bridge that traverses a river or body of water, but any small bridge which doesn't stay flush with the ground (going over another road, canal, small stream or body of water, and big dip in the road, or at the bottom of a hill, etc.). Most ice-related accidents seem to occur at or near these bridges.

Ice buildup

It's important for a driver to pay attention to ice that's accumulated on their truck during the trip, especially when traveling through the mountains in wintertime.

Ice alone can add up to several thousand pounds to the vehicle, possibly resulting in costly fines, as well as endangering other vehicles behind because of ice falling off the vehicle, and severely impacting the way the truck responds to accelerating and braking.

Each time you stop, take notice of ice buildup as you inspect your vehicle. If you have much buildup, take your hammer, and knock off a good amount of ice at each stop.

Jackknives: How Do They Happen and How to Prevent Them?



Delaware Free News

When conditions are slippery, chances improve that a phenomenon called jackknifing can happen (although technically, jackknives can happen in any weather, especially in an accident). This is the term for when the tractor and trailer get out of alignment with each other because lack of tire traction. This creates a “V” or “L” formation, looking like an unfolded pocket knife. Typically, the jackknife occurs when you brake too hard, then the trailer starts coming around towards either side of the tractor, going faster than the tractor.

It’s essential to keep an eye on your mirrors when conditions make this a real possibility. If you’re using your brakes and you see the trailer starting to jackknife, let off the brakes and even accelerate a little, and you might prevent a big problem.

Another key factor is to make sure your loaded heavy whenever slippery conditions are likely. I know this isn’t always possible, as loading the trailer is not always under your control. But whoever IS in control should know

about the conditions before they send you out in them. Empty trailers are *especially* vulnerable to jackknives.

[Here's a video](#) of a trucker driving on a snow-covered road when they lose control and almost jackknives. It's hard to tell if the trailer was coming around or not. Then, they narrowly avoid another truck that DID jackknife.

Sorry for the language in the video. You can turn down the sound if it's a bit too much. The sliding starts just after the :35 second mark.

There's more on jackknives in the next chapter, [Big Challenges for Big Trucks](#).

Extreme snow conditions

Ground blizzards



Anytime you have a combination of snow (especially dry, light, “Styrofoam” snow) and high winds, you have the ingredients for a *ground blizzard*. This results in poor visibility, and extremely dangerous driving conditions. It is the reason why major Interstates and highways close to all vehicles.

Slow down, and leave just your low beams on. As with fog conditions, high beams will not help your visibility in blizzard conditions.

Turn your flashers on when the conditions get bad and you're proceeding slowly, to avoid being hit from behind. You will probably encounter numerous vehicles (sometimes even big trucks) which are stopped on the shoulder. **These people need to consider that other people also can't see very well either, and are in danger of being hit from behind.**

If the blowing snow is especially bad, you may only be able to see a few feet in front of you, in which case you should be driving extremely slowly (5-10 mph?).

If there's a truck stop nearby, or any safe place to stop that's off the road, it's best to stop until the blizzard passes.

If you must stop off the shoulder, do so on an on-ramp or an off-ramp (if the shoulder's big enough) and get as far off the road as you safely can.

***Note:** The area on I-80 between Cheyenne and Laramie, WY is an example of an area that often closes because of blizzard conditions. Pay attention to the CB and to the weather band if traveling through these blizzard prone areas.*

Lake effect snowfall

This is a snowfall which occurs in areas around large bodies of water. A cold and dry weather system passes over this body of water, picking up a lot of moisture, and heads downwind, to unload all this moisture as snow. Upstate New York, especially the Buffalo area, gets a lot of this snowfall because of its proximity to Lake Erie. Cleveland, OH area also gets hit hard.

Snow plows



Watch for snow plows before and during winter storms. Snow plows often get rear-ended because other vehicles don't realize they're only traveling 25 to 35 mph. If the weather is especially bad, and you find yourself behind a snowplow, you may want to consider staying there as opposed to passing them (especially if you're carrying a light load). The road ahead may be even *more* dangerous.

Other Adverse Conditions

An over-the-road driver will have to go through practically every weather condition out on the road at one time or another (unless you only drive through the southern routes, but even places like Jacksonville, FL, and Houston, TX, get the occasional freeze and snow covering). It will be helpful if you know beforehand what to expect in these situations.

In an earlier chapter, I discussed the importance of visibility, and keeping the windows and mirrors clean. This can't be stressed enough. A dirty windshield reduces your sight distance, and therefore, increases the time it'll take you to stop. In addition, it can cause fatigue, especially at night. Working to focus through dirt, moisture or ice wears out your eyes fast.

Rain



Many drivers don't seem to consider rain a condition worth slowing down for, but bottom line: rain makes the roads slippery, and you and other vehicles won't be able to stop as fast. You need to increase your following distance, and slow down.

From the *first rain*, when the road first becomes wet and becomes extremely slippery, to *heavy rain* conditions, when hydroplaning is extremely likely, go slowly and use extreme caution. Keep in mind when it's particularly hot, rain will cause hot pavement to become slick and oily, increasing the chances of losing traction. Your visibility will also be reduced, impacting your reaction times.

Using headlights

It's surprising how many drivers don't use their headlights when it's raining out... even in heavy rain. You should turn on your headlights whenever your windshield wipers are turned on. This is actually a law in some states. Apparently, many people only consider how well they can see ahead of them, and not how well they can be *seen*.

Unfortunately, truckers are also guilty of not turning on headlights.



When it's raining, many drivers put on their parking lights only. Although this is better than having no lights on at all, how much extra energy does it expend to put on the headlights as well? It's safest to turn on ALL of your lights.

Driving in heavy rain

During, or immediately after a heavy rain, be careful when there are large puddles of water on the road. When you are passing a big truck (or when you're being passed by a truck), there is a danger of getting water splashed on your windshield from the other truck's tires, sometimes totally blinding you as you're passing. This is especially dangerous at higher speeds. Don't panic and slam on your brakes reactively. Be calm and prepared, and turn your windshield washers on high speed.

Hydroplaning

Hydroplaning occurs when the tires lose contact with the road, and therefore traction. This can happen in any heavy rain, and is more likely when tires are low on tread, so keep your tire depth within legal limits.

For trucks, this results in a greater chance of jackknifing due to the wheels locking up (see the previous section on [jackknifing](#)).

Driving in rain: advice and tips

- When the roads are slippery, slow down and drive defensively. Don't let other vehicles who are driving too fast for the conditions affect your driving.
- Increase following distance because your stopping time is greatly increased, and because of the greater likelihood of sliding.
- Be cautious and slow during lane changes.
- Clean the mirrors regularly.
- If it's cold out, watch for spray from your trailer tires, it could be starting to freeze.
- Consider the other vehicles when it's raining, because the water spray from your tires can blind them.

Wind



In windy conditions, give extra room to other vehicles, if possible. You may be doing everything right, staying in your lane, etc., when the wind forces a passing car right into the side of your trailer. It may have been a situation beyond your control, but it's possible you could have avoided it. If you are

in the right lane, and you have no vehicles or hazards on the shoulder, you could move over slightly to the right when you notice a vehicle's going to pass you, if it's especially windy out.

High winds



This is one of the situations in which it is better to be driving a heavy, loaded truck than a light or empty one. The lighter your overall weight is, the more possible it is that a high wind could, at the least, make your trailer sway, and at the worst, knock you off the road or onto your side.

Always keep two hands on the wheel, especially in high winds, to maintain control of the vehicle. Be careful when passing or being passed by other vehicles, especially other trucks. As you pass each other, one or both of you may be hit by a particularly strong gust, blowing either of you off course, and either off the road or into each other. Bridges and overpasses are another danger spot for high winds.

Fog



There is no question, most vehicles drive too fast under normal driving conditions. But when they do so when visibility is limited, as is the case with fog, this can be deadly.

You've heard stories in which 75 vehicles were all involved in a major collision or pileup. Anytime a situation like this happens, you can count on the fact that it occurred under heavy fog conditions.

Fog, however, was not the primary cause of the accidents. Driving too fast for conditions was the cause.

At the very minimum, you must be able to stop within range of your visibility.

In areas of the country that regularly have foggy conditions, they have a section on their weather report which tells you the visibility distance in certain areas. For example, "the visibility on I-10 is less than 1/10 of a mile".

I've often driven in these conditions, and a truck will pass me going 75 miles mph. Almost as soon as they pass me, their taillights disappear into the fog. And to make matters worse, the road may be wet from rain. If

there's anything on the road ahead (accident, slow vehicle, deer, etc.), it's doubtful that truck would be able to see the problem in time.

Watch for taillights in front of you, and headlights coming towards you to gauge the visibility distance.

As with any other condition which limits your visibility, slow down accordingly.

Summer driving



Summer driving, especially in the southwest or southern states, can be tough on tires, belts, and hoses. Make sure they're checked at every regular service, and replaced as needed.

Drivers should stop and check tires during the pre-trip inspection, at every safety check on the road, and at the post-trip inspection.

Supplies for the truck in hot weather

- Plenty of extra water, coolant, etc.

- Extra belts and hoses.

Supplies for the driver in hot weather

- Plenty of water, other beverages, food supplies.
- Possibly sun block for your arm or face if the sun will be on you for long periods of time.

There are more construction zones in the spring and summer as crews try to repair roads damaged by winter-weather conditions. Remember to plan ahead for possible delays caused by the construction. Speed limits are lower, and speeding tickets cost more.

If possible, plan the trip so that you park in in higher elevation, where it's cooler. Also, try to park so that the rear of the truck is towards the sun. Use a sunshade to block out as much sun as possible when you're stopped.

Night driving Essentials



As with any other condition affecting visibility, driving speed should be reduced to that which will enable the driver to stop within the distance they can see ahead.

Some states consider this when they post the legal state speed limits. Texas, for example, allows 70 MPH during the daytime, but only 65 MPH when it gets dark.

Whenever visibility is reduced, put on your headlights, and not just the parking lights like many drivers do.

When to use headlights:

- After dusk.
- Under any adverse weather conditions affecting visibility.
- With the sun's glare.

Anytime the glare from the sun is impairing visibility in either direction, turn on your headlights. Certain areas, where this is more common, have signs directing drivers to turn on headlights during daytime.

When you should use high beams:

Especially in mountainous or winding roads, it is key to use your high beams when you're able to. This is mainly due to the abundance of wildlife, where you need to see farther ahead to give yourself time to react.

When you should *NOT* use high beams:

- When an on-coming vehicle is within 500 feet.
- Dim your lights as soon as possible on roads that curve. Sometimes, you don't see the on-coming vehicle until it's very close. However,

you can usually see the other vehicle's lights well before you see the vehicle itself. Don't wait until your lights are blinding the other vehicle to turn your high beams off, then act like you're doing them a favor. Be courteous, and think of the other person. Anticipate and dim the lights ASAP.

- When a vehicle passes you (on any type of road), dim your high beams immediately.
- Fog and blizzard conditions.

Chapter 8: Big Challenges for Big Trucks



There's no shortage of challenges truckers must encounter, and overcome, while getting the load to its destination. We'll be looking at them all, along with how to handle them better to make your life easier... from big city driving with all its issues and potentials for delays, to mountains and the many difficulties they present, plus just about every other type of challenge.

Here we go!

Big Cities



Key precautions and proper attitude to maintain

When driving in the big cities, the most important thing to remember is...expect the unexpected!

This shouldn't be so difficult, because this should *always* be your attitude (recall [The Truckers Mindset](#)), right? In the big cities, things just happen more quickly, more often, and involve more people.

Everyone's in a big hurry, but truckers can't get caught up in that. They must take it EASY.

Ask yourself, what if that person in front of you stopped immediately, for no apparent reason? Could you stop in time? If you followed less closely, and went a little slower, you *would* be able to stop.

Always keep your eyes moving, keeping the "big picture" in mind so you'll see problems ahead of time.

For example, you'll know if another vehicle's in the next lane, so you could move over instantly, if necessary.

Don't try to keep cars from cutting you off, there's no point. Most likely, they'll be gone just as fast as they came, as if they were never there. Let it go, let them win, even if it's only in their mind.

The most important thing is your safety, getting home to your family and friends, and accomplishing your primary objectives (on-time deliveries, getting paid), as well as any other goals you may have.

Making Turns

Turning is just more difficult in the big city. On many streets, there's barely enough room to get it done. On others, there's even less room!

For example, if you're turning right onto a 2-lane street, it's not as easy as just giving yourself extra room to make the turn. You often must swing wide at the last moment to try and prevent someone from trying to pass you on the right.

When stopped at an intersection, stop short before the crosswalk and leave extra room. Do this regularly and make it a habit, as if there were always trucks needing room to turn. As we discussed in the trucker's mindset, when you make something a habit, you eventually delegate that task to your subconscious mind, freeing up your conscious mind to concentrate on your current situation.

The “Right Turn Squeeze”



TheBatavian.com

- Some trucking schools (or some experts) teach you not to swing wide on turns because it could allow another vehicle to do the “right turn squeeze.” In real life, however, there are times when you have no choice. There would be no other way to make the turn successfully.
- Before you make the right turn, get in the proper low gear. As you’re making the turn, go extra slow. If you have a power passenger side mirror, swing it out as you turn, so you can see the rear of the right side of the trailer.
- Stay as far to the right as you can while still giving yourself enough room to make the right turn. If you don’t allow more than four feet of room on the right, you can prevent cars from trying to pass you on the right. Of course, this is not always possible.
- Sometimes there are cars in your path (stopped at the light on the street you’re turning onto) that have not given you enough room to make the turn. They will have to back up (if they don’t have a line of other vehicles behind them, in which case you’ll have to wait while all the vehicles proceed when the light changes).

- Another option if you have doubts about making the turn is going past the street you need to turn on, the turning left at the next practical street, then 2 more left turns until you're on the street you need to be on. To do this maneuver, you either need to know the area, or have a good, detailed map (one which shows low bridges and street directions, etc.) to make sure you can get back to where you need to go.
- Then there's the issue of the small streets. You must get to the point where you know how much room you'll need to make any given turn. The best time to learn this is when you're practicing, far away from the crowded city streets. But, until you've done successfully a few times, you'll probably be a bit uncertain.

The swing of the trailer

You must consider the swing of the trailer when you turn while pulling forward and turning. Measure the distance from the back of the rear trailer tires to the back of the trailer. This is the amount of the maximum potential swing of your trailer when turning. The sharper the turn, the closer to the maximum swing your trailer will be.

When you must slide the tandems forward to distribute the weight of the load, remember that the potential swing of the rear of your trailer will be greater.

It is very important to consider this swing effect, especially when pulling forward and away from a structure or out of a parking space in a truck stop or out of a dock. The closer you are to the structure or other vehicles, the greater the chance the swing of the trailer will become a factor.

Low clearances



[*NY Daily News*](#)

Low clearances are overpasses or obstacles that are not high enough to enable your tractor and trailer to safely clear underneath. Although these can be found anywhere, they're more common in the big cities.

The first step in dealing with low clearances is to know the height of your own vehicle. Don't assume that both tractor and trailer are 13'6" in height. Use a tape measure know for sure. Find out the height when the trailer is empty, and when it's fully loaded. Then you'll know the variance and what height clearance you'll be able to clear under different conditions.

Don't rely on the posted low clearance heights. These heights may or may not factor in such things as snow and ice accumulations, or road resurfacing which may have significantly reduced the actual clearance. Some clearances have already factored in snow accumulation into the clearance height. Consequently, in these areas, when there is no accumulation, you may be able to get a 13'6" vehicle under a 13'1" underpass or bridge.

Here's a video of a truck in Long Island, NY doing just that!

When you come to a low clearance that you're unsure of, it's best to stop and check it out. Have a tape measure on hand, or a pole that's the height of your trailer, to use in such a case. Some drivers position their CB antenna to be the same height as their trailer, and they'll figure that if it clears, the trailer should make it. Be careful, and don't assume anything.

Watch for an incline through a tunnel, for example. A truck that made it through the beginning of the tunnel will not necessarily make it all the way through to the other side. Also, go slowly whenever your vehicle is close to the top. And go even slower if the road is rough. Sometimes, just a little bump can cause your trailer to jump and hit the ceiling of a tunnel.

In some underpasses or tunnels, for example, the clearance is greater in the middle lane, or center of the road, than it is at the edges. These heights may or may not be posted.

This is a situation encountered more often east of the Mississippi, though not exclusively. Many of the towns and roads were built before the advent of the big trucks commonly seen today. In these areas, drivers must always be on the lookout for low clearances.

Before driving in an unfamiliar area or route, check the Rand McNally Motor Carriers Road Atlas, or other similar guide. At the front of the book is a section listing all known low clearances, with their exact route locations in each state. There are also low clearance guides for individual cities. These can be purchased at truck stops near the city. This will help a driver to be prepared for, or to avoid, many low clearances. But this is only an aid to avoid low clearances, not a guarantee. There can be mistakes, either in printing, or in actual clearance height.

Check out the [Smart Truck Route App](#) to help you steer clear of low clearances and stay on the best route for truckers!

Choosing to take a bypass to get around a big city



interstate-guide.com

Most bigger cities have a bypass route which goes around the city, instead of through it. Sometimes, it's optional for trucks to take the bypass, other times it's mandatory, such as when there's a low clearance, or if you're hauling hazardous materials and there's a tunnel to avoid (all commercial trucks hauling hazmat are prohibited in tunnels).

When it's optional, there are some things to consider when deciding whether you should use the bypass, but it usually comes down to: **How much time could be saved by using the bypass?**

The bypass route is usually several miles longer than a route that goes straight through the city. But the bypass speed limit is usually higher, the road is in better condition, and the route avoids the heaviest traffic.

If it's rush hour (in most cities, this could be anywhere from 3:30 to 6:30 PM), it's usually a better idea to take the bypass, which should save you a lot of time.

During off-peak hours, you may prefer to go straight through the city, and skip the bypass. But this varies from city to city.

Listen to the CB radio when approaching a major city. You may hear about an accident, or other traffic condition on the main highway going through the city. If this is the case, you can take the bypass or alternate route and avoid the situation.

Bypass routes that go around small towns are discussed in the section on secondary highways later in the chapter.

As you can see, there are a lot of things to take into consideration.

Driving on the East Coast



If you've never been to any major East Coast cities (Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington D.C. - but especially N.Y.), you need to be prepared. Many of the streets were built before the coming of big trucks. They're narrower, and there are many low clearances, low power lines, and plenty of other obstacles, so plan ahead. There's constant heavy traffic, and everyone's in a rush (even the big trucks, and especially the local ones).

There are *not* enough truck stops in the major metropolitan areas. I don't think you could build enough of them without them always being totally

filled. Therefore, the ones you *do* find have few parking spaces available, and the maneuvering is extremely tight.



Some companies claim in their job ad that they don't travel to the East Coast, or more commonly, they claim "No New York City."

There are other companies that will pay drivers additional money for making the pickup or delivery if it's in NYC.

When you're on the East Coast, it can be much easier if you're a "self-contained" trucker. You can concentrate on making the pickup and/or delivery and then just quickly get out of the city. You can eat in your truck without having to worry about going out of your way to find a truck stop, walk to a local restaurant, wait for a lunch truck, find a rest room, etc.

Note: Being self-contained means you have everything you need in the truck with you and you're not dependent on outside services. See more in *Trucking Lifestyles*.

If you call ahead and learn that a customer won't be able to get to you right away, ask them if they have secured parking at their facility, and if you could safely and securely park there the night before a morning delivery.



why.org

If you don't have E-ZPass, have plenty of cash available for the many tolls you're likely to encounter. Just to give you an idea, the PA Turnpike can be almost \$100 one way for big trucks. A single bridge can be \$30 or more.

Note: [E-ZPass](#) is an electronic toll collection system used on most tolled roads, bridges, and tunnels in the Midwestern and Northeastern United States, as far south as North Carolina and as far west as Illinois.

For information on the bridges and tunnels in the New York City Metropolitan area, [click here](#).

The Mountains

Winter driving in the mountains: What to expect



In the wintertime, you must be mentally prepared. If you're a new trucker driving through winter conditions for the first time, it will probably be stressful.

If there's anything more stressful than driving a big truck in winter conditions, it's doing it in the mountains!

But here's some good news: once you've driven through Colorado, for example, and crossed a mountain pass after putting on snow chains, you'll probably never fear doing it again. Of course, that's not to say you'll *want* to do it again!

No, I'm not recommending you look for a company that only works the southern states! SOMEone's gotta pick up and deliver those northern loads!

Remember, one of the keys to safe driving is taking things *slowly*, and that's just in normal driving conditions. In winter driving conditions, *especially in the mountains*, you'll have to take things *extra* slowly.

In slippery conditions, you'll need to constantly monitor the progress of your trailer in your mirrors, because there is an increased danger of jackknifing.

Curves are another danger under slippery and/or windy conditions. Slow down and get into the correct gear *before* the curve.

Driving in the mountains will test every skill and bit of knowledge you possess as a truck driver. Once again, this is information designed to supplement the education you receive at a high-quality truck driving school, *not* replace it.

Practical Mountain Driving

Using the cruise control

In winter driving conditions, you need to keep the cruise control in the "off" position. YOU control the truck when conditions are less than ideal.

If you lose traction and/or begin to slide, or if you notice the trailer wheels lock up, all you have to do is let your foot off of the accelerator/throttle, and you should be able to regain control of the vehicle. The other thing to remember is to immediately get off and stay off the brakes when you begin to slide.

If you keep your cruise control on, and you start to slide, you can't just quickly "let up" on the throttle. With the cruise control on, you'd need to take a second or two to manually turn off the switch.

You may be thinking, you can simple apply your brakes to turn off the cruise control. But, if you start sliding, even light pressure on your brakes could cause you to lose control and jackknife.

What to do when you see wildlife



whp.dot.state.wy.us

If you're driving at night and you spot a deer, elk or other animal on the road ahead of you, slow down and quickly assess the situation.

If you're on the Interstate and there are other vehicles around or behind you, immediately begin to slow down, but not so suddenly as to cause a vehicle to hit you from behind.

If you're all alone on a two-lane road, you will have more options at your disposal:

- Turn your headlights off and back on again, which may get them moving if they're fixated on your headlights.
- If they don't immediately move out of your way, blow your air horn (some "experts" say to not do this because it may attract certain animals, like elk, toward your vehicle, possibly even animals that weren't on the road). But I have found, in my experience, that it *does* work.
- As a last resort, you can veer off slowly, away from the animal, but remember it may start moving in the same direction.

- It may come down to a choice: hit the animal, or steer away suddenly and possible jackknife and/or rollover.

If it looks like you will hit the animal, stay calm and treat it like a [steer tire blowout](#).

The first 2 things to remember are:

- Hold the Steering Wheel Firmly.
- Stay off the brake

Other vehicles warning you about wildlife

In many mountainous areas, vehicles traveling in the opposite direction will flash their high beams (or turn their headlights off and on) at you to warn you about wildlife in the area, possibly in or beside the road up ahead. Slow down for a while until you're sure you have passed the (potential) hazard before getting back up to normal speed.

Truck and trailer Jackknife



Having the vehicle “jackknife” is a danger which can happen in any terrain, but is more common in slippery conditions, especially in the mountains.

When a vehicle's wheel(s) loses traction on a slippery surface, it stops rolling and begins to slide. This is what drivers refer to when they say their wheels have "locked up".

These "locked up" wheels often travel faster than wheels which are rolling. When this happens on a tractor-trailer, there is a great danger of what is known as a "jackknife".

A tractor-trailer is connected at the fifth-wheel and the kingpin. This is known as the "pivot point," and it is because of this that a jackknife can occur.

The tractor and the trailer are both prone to 'jackknives':

- The "**trailer jackknife**" occurs when the trailer wheels have locked up (lost traction), and the rear of the trailer swings out and starts to overtake the tractor, eventually colliding with it.
- The "**tractor jackknife**" occurs when the tractor's wheels have locked up (again, lost traction), and are progressing forward (and to the side of the road) faster than the trailer tandems.

Either way, the results look about the same.

As you are driving down the road, monitor your mirrors, and continually look for the trailer coming forward or coming around on either side of your tractor, particularly in conditions that would make the trailer or tractor more prone to jackknifing. If you detect that it is happening soon enough, you may be able to prevent a jackknife from happening to you.

Factors which cause wheel lockup and jackknives:

- **Weather related causes:** driving too fast for conditions, slippery conditions, icy curves, windy conditions, changing weather conditions, etc.
- **Braking related causes:**
 - brakes out of adjustment,
 - over braking,
 - using trailer hand brake,
 - improper Jake brake use,
 - using brakes in a turn or in curves, etc.
- **Driver related causes:**
 - unsmooth steering,
 - using the cruise control,
 - following too closely,
 - driving too fast for conditions,
 - driving fatigue,
 - routes not planned properly causing sudden needs to change roads/backtrack/look at map/rush, etc., all which could lead to driving in a way which could cause a jackknife.

Trucks using the shoulder going up a steep grade:



The first time I noticed this practice, I was in the mountains on I-5, climbing [Siskiyou Summit](#) in Oregon. The shoulders on that stretch of highway are somewhat wider than shoulders elsewhere, but it still surprised me to see big trucks get onto the shoulder. These are usually the extremely slow trucks, often climbing at less than 25 mph.

From what I've seen, it seems to work well because trucks that are able to climb a *little* faster (35 mph?), can safely pass in the right lane (not the far-right shoulder), and other vehicles can travel unimpeded in the far-left lane.

These shoulders on these parts of I-5 in Oregon are, in effect, extra lanes. They're very wide, and seem to be in good condition. I'm not suggesting that you use the shoulder in other areas of the country, as doing so is illegal, is dangerous, and can get you a heavy fine. I'm just informing you of what to watch for and what other truckers are doing, so that you're not confused. **Just think safety first, and try to use your best judgment.**

Since then, I have noticed the same tactic used elsewhere, but it's not as common. I would only do the same if the shoulders were wide and smooth enough, and there was no foreseeable end to it, or any upcoming hazards, bridges, etc. And, of course, traffic conditions must exist which would require possibly using the shoulder in the first place.

Another place where this method could be used is on a 2-lane highway, because it is often difficult to pass. But, in places where this isn't common, vehicles could get confused and think you've got a problem if you're on the shoulder, and be afraid to pass. Use good judgment and see what other vehicles are doing, but think safety first.

However, I can only advise you to use these shoulders if signs indicate that it's legal to do so.

To follow the lead of other truckers or NOT to follow

Don't just imitate what other truckers are doing, especially when going down a steep grade. Your life depends on your use of caution. You never know, another driver may have a light or empty load. With a lighter trailer, they would be able to go down the grade faster than a loaded truck, though not necessarily legally. The heavier your vehicle is, the more gravity works against you.



St George News

Consider a driver that's descending a downgrade at a fast speed. They're unnecessarily taking a big risk to save just a little time.

They may "smoke" their brakes. The smoking is literally the brake pad rubber wearing away. **Sometimes the brakes get so hot, they can catch on fire (see image above).**

There is no excuse for risking your own life plus endangering the lives of others. Use good judgment in the observation of other drivers. Some of them are safe, professional drivers... but others can be quite the opposite!

Curves

In some areas, especially mountainous ones, there may be posted truck speed limits on curves. If not, and there's only one posted speed limit for all vehicles, reduce your speed to 5-10 MPH (or more, depending on your load, the weather/road conditions, etc.) *below* that posted speed limit.

Note: *on many exit ramps, curves get sharper as they progress. Always look far enough ahead to see how sharp the curve is.*

Since curves can reduce your visibility, you should significantly reduce your following distance on these stretches.

The risk of rollovers

Anytime you take a curve or a turn too fast, and turn the steering wheel too sharply, you run the risk of rolling the truck over. If you're turning to the right, the truck will lean to the left.

The risk of rollovers is even greater in the following situations:

- Windy conditions.
- The trailer which is loaded top-heavy, or which has a high center of gravity.
- Hauling tankers, which can be pushed by liquid surge inside.
- Combination vehicles.
 - Doubles and triples tend to rollover more frequently than other vehicles.
 - Heavier trailer improperly connecting behind a lighter one, which increases the risk of rollover.
 - Also, wind affects these trailers more than others -- if the rear trailer rolls over, it can possibly bring the rest of the vehicle down with it.

Therefore, to prevent against rollovers, be extra careful going around curves. Rollovers commonly occur on exit ramps because the posted speed limits are meant for smaller vehicles. If you're unfamiliar with an exit, go at least 5 MPH slower than the posted speed limit.

Tire Chain Essentials



“Throwing on iron” is an activity many truck drivers dread. The most common refrain I’ve heard from these drivers is:

“If I have to chain up, I’ll just pull over and go to sleep instead. It’s not worth the risk or trouble”.

Some truckers can get away with this, but there are many drivers who spend most of their time driving in the mountains. They have to drive over the mountain passes to get where they’re going.

If these drivers had to wait for dry roads, they would often be late to their destination, and probably not make much money, at the very least. They might also lose their jobs!

But any drivers who regularly chain up in winter conditions, will tell you it’s no big deal. They can throw on a set of chains in less than 30 minutes, and get up and over the pass without any problems. It’s mostly a matter of what you get used to, and get good at.

Using tire chains: important facts and information:

1. Do not drive over 30 mph for an extended period of time.
2. Do not drive on dry pavement for extended period time.
3. Make sure there are no twists in the tire chains before you install and drive on them.

Note: *The above three prohibitions have the purpose of preventing chain breakage.*

4. Do not deflate tires before you install tire chains.
5. Do not use tire chains for towing purposes.
6. Install tire chains when instructed to and/or when conditions warrant it.
7. Single chains cover one tire each... dual chains cover two tires each (tandems).
8. Tire chains can add significant weight to your gross weight. A pair of singles weighs approximately 50 pounds, and a pair of duals close to 100 pounds. Cables, on the other hand, are only 1/3 of the amount of weight.
9. Chain control area: state law enforcement and/or Department of Transportation (the DOT) decide if and when tire chains may be necessary or required in certain areas which are prone to adverse winter weather conditions.

Installing tire chains

Note: *procedures for cables are similar, differences are explained.*

The following video is a good demonstration of tire chain usage.

- [How to install tire chains demonstration by Flatbed 101.](#)

Practice installing tire chains on your vehicle when you are at your company terminal, or in some other controlled environment. Don't do it for the first time in sub-freezing temperatures, with blowing snow, and vehicles passing by dangerously close.

It's also a good idea to have your tire chains pre-fitted to your tires, due to a possible variance in size. In some states, there are signs indicating that parking is for trucks chaining up their tires, with a 30-minute time limit.



Tire Chaining Tips: Understand, and be prepared for, individual tire chain laws in any state you're going to travel through.

1. Tire chain up areas are usually extra-wide shoulders, or parking areas on the side of the road. These chain-up areas are usually located just *before*, and *after* mountain passes.

2. Park in the chain up area. If there are no chain up areas, you'll need to find a safe place to park before you climb the pass. Make sure there is enough room between your vehicle and the vehicles on the traveled part of the highway to give you plenty of room to maneuver safely around both sides of your vehicle while you're installing the chains.
3. Get your tire chains out of the storage compartment, and lay them out on the ground next to the appropriate tires. Make sure there are no tangles or twists in the chains before you install them.
4. Lay the chains on top of the tires (on both sides of truck -- usually chaining up a set of duals on each side is sufficient), whether you're using single or dual chains, and wrap them/push them down underneath the tires.
5. Slowly move the truck forward one to two feet, so the front of the chain (towards the front of the truck) goes underneath the tire, and can connect to the back of the chain at the back of the tire.
6. Secure the chains together, and tighten using the chain-tightener.
7. Use bungee straps or rubber adjusters to keep the chains from coming loose.
8. After you've driven a short distance down the road, stop and check the chains if there is another parking/chain up area.

United States tire chain laws

Note: *states which are not mentioned have no tire chain laws in effect.*

All states which require the use of tire chains are located west of the Continental Divide. Only Michigan prohibits the use of tire chains. Where there is no mention of tire chains, it is up to discretion of the driver, and on the conditions of the road. Many states which are not mentioned have areas which are prone to having winter driving conditions.

Basically, if you're an over-the-road driver, and travel anywhere near mountain areas, you should have chains (and cables for less severe conditions) on your truck.

Note: However, because tire chain laws are subject to change, [*check with this ATA site*](#) for up-to-date information.

Michigan:

It is illegal for trucks to use chains in Michigan.

California:

Technically, there are no tire chain laws in California. However, the DOT may prohibit any vehicle from entering chain control areas if said vehicle does not possess chains. For semi-trailers, only one set of chains is required, but multiple trailers could be restricted in certain areas. Chains may be staggered on the front and back, but are not required on the tag axle (unpowered axle behind the drive axles).

Colorado:

The laws apply to all highways throughout the state. When the tire chain law is in effect on a certain pass, the DOT will post this information on signs preceding the pass.

There are two levels to the tire chain law for commercial vehicles:

1. **Level 1** requires the use of either snow tires or chains/cables on all single axle combination commercial vehicles.
2. **Level 2** requires the use of chains on ALL commercial vehicles. The more snow-covered a pass is, the greater the likelihood of level two being in effect.

Trucks in Colorado must chain up four wheels. Trucks using cables can get ticketed for not using chains, but only if the truck gets stuck.

Nevada:

Requires chain coverage of two wheels of the drive axle, and two wheels of the trailer.

Oregon:

The laws apply to all highways throughout the state. You must have chains on four drive axle tires and two chains on any two of the trailer axles.

Utah:

Truckers are advised to carry chains from November 1 to March 31. However, the law doesn't require it.

Washington:

The laws are complicated in Washington State. See [WSDOT](https://www.wsdot.wa.gov/roadwork/roadwork_safety/tire_chains) for more detailed information.

Wyoming:

All vehicles may be required to be equipped with chains or snow tires. Signs are posted before these chain control areas.

Using the Jake brake in the mountains, and on slippery pavement

The use of engine brakes under adverse conditions is debatable. Some experts will tell you *never* to use the Jake brake when there's any snow or ice on the road. They claim that it can cause the truck to slide.

At a minimum, don't use the Jake brake when you are driving an empty trailer on wet or slippery pavement, or while driving on ice. If possible, you should *stop* driving and pull safely off to the side if there are icy conditions on a downgrade.

There is a dilemma in using the engine brake under slippery conditions:

- The Jake brake was created with one main purpose in mind: to use while descending steep mountain grades.
- However, using the Jake brake is often *discouraged* when driving under slippery conditions.

Of course, while driving in the mountains in the winter, these conditions usually occur together!

So, what should you do?

In normal driving conditions (when not in mountainous or slippery conditions), you can leave your Jake brake in the "on" position. When you

need it, you just get your service brakes, and the engine brake comes on as well.

If you decide to use the Jake on a downgrade (in winter conditions), you must do so in a *controlled* fashion. Leave the control switch "off" until it looks like you'll need it. This way, it won't come on unexpectedly, or when conditions are too slippery to use the engine brake.

Test the Jake brake

- First, make sure you have adequate distance between your vehicle and other vehicles.
- Turn the Jake brake "on," but start with the speed on "low." If the drive wheels lock up or the rear of the trailer begins to move out of alignment, immediately turn the Jake brake off.
- If traction is still good, and you need greater stopping power, try the Jake brake in a higher position. Again, if the drive wheels lock up, or the rear of the trailer moves, turn the Jakes back to "low speed".
- Road conditions can change at any moment, so be prepared to turn the Jake brake off, if needed.

Steep grades

By definition, a *grade* is a significant change of elevation; either an upgrade, or downgrade, the steepness of which is determined as a percentage. For example, a road with a 5% downgrade decreases 5 feet for every 100 feet of travel forward.

Ascending a steep grade



Turn the engine brake to the “off” position. In some trucks, the Jake brake can come on when you let up off of the accelerator to start to downshift. In others, the Jake brake is disabled whenever you use the clutch. Try to become very familiar with your truck so you’ll know how everything functions.

Make sure you use your four-way flashers when you're going significantly less than the speed limit. If the grade is especially steep, watch your engine temperature, and turn on the manual engine fan (if so equipped) if it's getting too hot. You may experience a loss of power, but this is preferable to overheating.

Descending a steep grade



On the Interstate, there will be signs placed before a significant downgrade, telling you the downgrade percentage. There may be other signs directing you to slow down, often to a specific speed limit. Some signs will tell you how many miles long the downgrade is and there will typically be a place to stop and check your brakes before you start going down.

You must use the proper combination of gear, speed, brake pressure, and correct braking method to properly and safely descend a mountain pass.

Turn off the cruise control. In some trucks, this can affect the operation of the engine brake (see below).

Descending in the proper gear:

The *old* advice was to go down the grade in the same gear you climbed it. However, not all passes have the same grade percentage on both sides. In addition, today's trucks are equipped with more powerful and efficient engines enabling them to climb the grade in a higher gear. To descend in the same gear could result in smoking the brakes or possibly losing power altogether.

Pick a low enough gear to descend in a safe and controlled manner. You can often *upshift* on the descent (though only if you obviously erred on the side of safety and picked too low of a gear), but it's not advisable to try to *downshift* if you've selected too high of a gear, though it still may be necessary to get into a lower gear *somehow* (possibly by using the service brake and quickly downshifting if you can safely do so, or moving to the shoulder and stopping temporarily to get yourself together).

If you're already going too fast, it may be impossible to get into lower gear without significantly slowing down first or stopping altogether.

Safe speed:

If you've selected the proper gear, you should be going down the grade in a safe, reasonable speed. Go down slowly, even if you're familiar with the mountain, because conditions are always changing. Your brakes might not be in the exact same condition as your previous descent down the same grade, traffic and road conditions are always unpredictable, and the weather may be an additional factor.

Amount of brake pressure and methods of braking:**1. "Snub braking"**

Select a gear at which the high end of the RPM range will be at the top speed limit you want to descend the grade. A certain 6% grade may have a truck speed limit of 35 MPH. The RPMs should be at maximum (2000 RPMs to whatever the manufacturers recommended maximum RPMs are) when the target speed is attained. Use medium to hard braking to slow down 5-10 MPH or when the RPMs are in the 1700-1800 range, which is still high enough to help slow the vehicle. Repeat "snubbing" each time the target speed is reached. This has become the preferred method in recent years.

2. Light and steady pressure

Again, select a gear which allows the vehicle to descend the grade in higher RPMs while close to target speed limit. Except, with this type of braking, you *maintain* light and steady pressure (approximately 5 pounds of pressure) all the way down the grade, just enough to keep your speed and RPMs in control. Watch the trailer brakes for smoke as you descend. It's key that your brakes are in adjustment for this method of braking to be effective.

Note: The *Application Pressure Gauge* shows how many pounds of pressure you're applying to the service brakes. Some trucks have these pressure gauges, but not all of them.

3. “Control speed, with or without the use of the engine brake”

“Control speed” is the speed that occurs when the forces that are pushing the vehicle down the grade are equal to the forces that are holding the vehicle back (without using the service brakes).

This method is slower, safer, and highly recommended.

a. The Jake brake and Control Speed:

The Jake brake can literally be a lifesaver. If it's used properly, you can descend a steep 6% grade down a mountain pass without even touching the service brakes, even with a full load (descending much faster than if you had no Jake brake installed). That's IF you're in the correct gear!

You must keep the RPM's within the recommended range (check the engine manufacturer's manual in the truck).

Before beginning to descend a steep downgrade, you must test the Jake brake to see if it's operating properly. Simply take your foot off of the accelerator, and the truck should begin to slow down.

With some trucks, you'll have to step on the service brake to activate the engine brake, or turn the cruise control off. Become familiar with exactly how the Jake brake works on *your* truck, and do it *before* you're needing to slow down on a decline!

Check [here](#) for a good discussion on the use of proper braking techniques while descending a grade.

Descending a steep grade (6 percent) with a heavy load (80,000 lbs. or more)

1. Control speed without using the Jake brake

You can accomplish control speed without the use of the Jake brake or service brakes, but you'd have to be in a very low gear, and traveling extremely slowly (for example only, perhaps second or third gear, traveling 10 mph). To be safe, go down the mountain at least one gear lower than what you came up in (unless you're in a situation in which you're starting at the top).

2. Control speed using the Jake brake

Before you descend a downgrade, make sure the control switch is in the "on" position, and take your foot off of the accelerator to ensure that it's working properly. Set the Jake brake to the "high" position. Then select the proper gear for the descent (for example, fourth or fifth gear, traveling 20-25 mph).

Note: *The following 2 methods are not recommended by the author.*

3. Faster than control speed using the Jake brake.

This is the method used by many truck drivers, when going down a shorter grade, and preferably without "smoking the brakes" or losing braking power. But they must be very familiar with the downgrade, or at least be able to clearly see the end of it.

To descend, select either a higher gear or lower speed on the Jake brake controls. With this method, be prepared as you may have to occasionally use the service brake.

4. Faster than *control speed* without using the engine brake.

In this situation, the downgrade must be an even shorter one or this driver is going to lose braking power and be in trouble. There is a danger of losing air pressure or “smoking” the brakes, causing brake fade - the loss of braking power. In either situation, stop the vehicle immediately on the shoulder, if possible.

Remember to turn off the engine brakes when you’re not needing them. On some transmissions, the engine brakes can come on when you’re downshifting (although this shouldn’t happen on the newer trucks), which will cause difficulty going into gear. When you’re climbing a grade, this can cause you to miss a gear, at the minimum.

Be sure to have the engine brake control *off* when you don’t need to use the engine brakes.

Note: see [Using the Jake brake in the mountains, and on slippery pavement.](#)

Caution... More Dangerous Conditions Ahead!

The following are a few of the more common hazardous and sometimes dangerous conditions truck drivers encounter on the road.

Holidays and weekends



wthr.com

Be especially careful during holidays and weekends, especially Saturday night. During these times, many people are off of work, and may have been out drinking... you should *assume* that they have been drinking. Then, you *won't* be surprised when they veer in your direction.

It's important to be able to recognize drunk drivers. There are some warning signs to help you to do so.

Recognizing drunk drivers:

- Driving erratically: stopping, speeding up or slowing down for no apparent reason.
- Driving too slowly or speeding.
- Swerving all over the road, or into other lanes.
- Drifting off into shoulder.
- Driving without headlights on at night.
- Driving aggressively, tailgating other vehicles, etc.

On holidays, many people drive distractedly; making plans, thinking about what they need to buy, etc. The last thing on their mind is driving.

Construction zones



In some states, it seems that the construction will never end. Work or construction zones usually have a lower speed limit, commonly 45 mph. This can really affect your overall driving time and ETA.

There are many reasons why construction zones have lower speed limits, but safety is the main one. Construction workers are often dangerously close to the moving traffic in these zones.

Think about *their* safety and slow down while driving through. It's also key for *yours* safety. The lanes are usually not as wide, so there's less margin for error. There are often also concrete barriers set up alongside the lanes, separating traffic from the work area. Hitting a barrier will cause damage to your vehicle, and possibly other vehicles, and possibly an accident.

Sometimes you have very little room on either side while driving through. During re-paving operations, the edges of lanes can be abrupt, and shoulders can be *soft*. In extreme cases, these conditions could cause a roll-over, particularly if the end of a single trailer, or the last trailer of multiple trailers, swings out over the edge of these lanes or shoulders.

Be careful driving through these work zones. Some of the roads are obviously still in bad condition, while others just are poorly designed, resulting in past accidents and/or fatalities.

I've seen truckers going 10-20 MPH *over* the speed limit in these zones. They may have heard on the CB that there are no "bears" in the work zone, and are following the lead of other truckers, but these drivers have no regard for the law OR for the safety of others.

Again, don't worry about the drivers behind you, who may want you to go faster (especially when there is only one lane, so they can't pass you). It may be another truck behind you who wants to go faster because of the "no bears" report. So, they expect you to *blaze* on through. Remember, *you* are responsible for your safety, as well as the safety of potentially many others.

Be extra careful when driving behind construction vehicles, especially trucks hauling rock or dirt. Stay back several truck lengths to avoid damage to your truck, especially the windshield.

Driving on roads in poor condition



HAZELTON, Id. (KMVT/KSVT)

Roads and highways get in bad condition from many different factors:

- Winter weather.

- High volume of vehicle travel: the more the pavement gets driven on, and the more weight that gets applied to the road, the more damage will occur to it.
- Road construction is behind schedule.
- State's road construction budget is poorly financed.

Offsetting the effects of roads in poor repair:

- **Go SLOW:**

It's bad for the truck, the cargo, and it's bad for the driver. If you're driving over poorly maintained or bumpy roads, it helps just to go slower. It's rarely good for the cargo you're carrying (depending on what you're hauling: produce, plants, other sensitive or fragile materials) to be shaken or moved too much. It's also not very comfortable for you as the driver, and any other passengers in your truck. Finally, you'll cause less damage to your vehicle.

- **Take your foot off of the accelerator:**

In some situations, such as on bumpy overpasses, it's best to just let up off of the accelerator briefly, until the road smooths out again. When you take your foot out of the equation, the truck will not be as affected by the bumpy road. If you're able to maintain a steady speed (not much traffic, or changes in the speed), use the cruise control to take your foot out of the equation.

Maneuvering through customer locations



Customer locations and some truck stop pavements are sometimes not kept in great condition, and can be difficult to maneuver across.

Muddy, soft ground, or other unstable surfaces:

Situation: you're about to enter a customer location (shipper or receiver), and you notice that the ground area where you'll have to deliver is muddy for example, where if you proceed, you run the risk of getting stuck.

You should survey the area, and decide whether you'll be able to successfully maneuver through it. *You're* in control of the vehicle and where you guide it. If you doubt that you can make it, because of mud or whatever condition, but the customer seems insistent, *you* still have options, and are the one in control.

You might say to the customer, "If I get stuck, will you sign a statement saying you'll pay the wrecker to come and get me out?" Of course, you need to be polite, and tactful if you DO say anything like this to the customer. But keep in mind, even if this does occur, and you have to get a wrecker to get you out, you've lost valuable time in the process. Remember, you're not getting paid while the wheels are not turning.

You should think twice about pulling into a location which is mud covered or just plain muddy. It is extremely easy to get stuck in the mud, and it could be hard to get out. Much depends on how thick the mud is, and how soft the ground is.

But if you felt that you had no choice but to try to maneuver in a muddy area, and **you DO get stuck...**

Here's a list of things you can try (not necessarily in this order):



1. Turn on your “axle differential” to lock up the rear drive axles on the tractor. Check for a demonstration [here](#).
2. Determine which direction you'll try to move the truck... try to maneuver your drive tires towards an area where there is more traction.
3. Avoid going *full throttle*, or trying to rock the truck to get free or start moving if it appears the ground is soft, or the mud is

too thick. By doing this, you'll most likely dig yourself in deeper, and make it harder to get out of the mud.

4. WAIT FOR THE GROUND TO DRY, AND CONSIDER A NEW OCCUPATION. JUST KIDDING... YOU'LL NEED TO KEEP YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR IN TIMES LIKE THESE!

5. Use a shovel to remove some of the mud behind and in front of the drive tires.
6. Use the shovel to put in some dirt/gravel/absorbency pellets or cat litter, etc.
7. Try to move the truck, and observe if you've made any progress.
8. Are there any large vehicles around which could help pull you out?
9. Call for a wrecker to come and get you out. I mention this last, because you need to try everything else first. It may take some time for the wrecker to get to you, and a wrecker can be expensive. A company may, or may not reimburse you for the expense. Most likely, it will depend on whether they feel you

could have avoided the situation or not. Look at it this way -- you've learned from the experience, right?

Railroad crossings



Courtesy: FMCSA

- Approach all railroad crossing with the expectation that a train is coming. At far too many such crossings, there is no view to the sides of the road, and you can't tell if it's safe to cross until you're practically on top of the tracks. In this case, it is always advisable to stop and look *before* crossing.
- Expect the road at the crossing to be rougher than the rest of the road. Reduce speed while going across.
- Because the truck you're driving is louder than other vehicles, you can't rely on your ability to hear a train approaching. Again, go slow, and stop if you need to.
- Beware of railroad crossings at the top of an incline. This increases the likelihood of the trailer (possibly the landing gear) getting stuck or hung up on the tracks. If you see this about to happen, stop and back out of the situation, traffic allowing.
- When you come to a railroad crossing when a train is crossing, it may take some time for the train to pass. In this situation, you can

set the tractor brakes, so you don't have to continuously hold down the clutch and brake. But don't set the trailer brakes unless you have to (too steep of an incline, etc.), because some trailer brakes take a long time to release. You don't want to hold up traffic.

As a reminder, remember not to shift when crossing railroad tracks. Get in the proper gear before crossing the tracks. Also, if the tracks are just before a traffic signal, make sure you can totally clear the tracks by the time you have to stop at the light, or else stop for the light at a position before the tracks. Never get yourself in the position of having to stop your vehicle on the tracks.

Handling emergency situations

Many emergency situations can occur while driving that you need to know how to handle immediately.

Tire blowouts:

Steer tire blowouts



Handling a steer tire blowout is more dangerous than with other tractor or trailer tire blowouts.

Here's a [video](#) demonstrating how to handle this occurrence.

First you must recognize that a tire has blown out. You may hear a loud “bang”, almost like a gun shot. The vehicle may thump or vibrate heavily. The steering may suddenly feel heavy or stiff.

What to do when the tire blows:

1. Hold the steering wheel firmly.
2. Stay off the brake (if conditions permit). Using the brakes tends to force the truck in the direction of the blowout, and increases the chance of a jackknife or rollover.
3. Once you've regained control, turn on your emergency flashers, slowly pull off the road, and onto the shoulder, if there is one. If not, just get over to the right as far as you can.

Trailer tire blowouts

Sometimes the only way to know that one of your trailer tires has blown out is that you'll see bits and pieces of tire spraying out behind you. Sometimes this happens *before* the tire has blown out, and is getting ready to. Consider this a warning, and stop immediately. However, there are other times when you'll have no warning at all.

Make sure you thump all your tires every time you stop. If you notice a tire that looks like it's borderline and will soon need to be changed, try to get to the nearest truck stop with a service center (use a good truck stop guide), rather than wait on the side of the road or at a rest area for a service truck. Unlike steer tire blowouts, you can often travel a short distance when a trailer tire blows out, at least to get the truck off the road and to a safer spot, away from traffic.

When you start sliding

Before you feel the truck starting to slide, you might first experience a lack of traction, then you will hear the engine revving up *without* feeling the truck accelerating.

The instant you feel this (or if you just start sliding):

- Get off the accelerator and don't hit the brakes. You should have already turned off the cruise control, but if you haven't, do it now!
- You may or may not have steering control. Fight your instinct to turn the steering wheel in the direction you want to go, and instead, **turn into the slide**, in the direction the truck's sliding, even if it's not where you want to go. This will hopefully help you to regain control.
- Very lightly apply pressure to the brakes, just long enough to see how the truck and trailer react.
- If you seem to have some control, begin to gently pump the brakes until you're able to stop your slide. Check the section on "[black ice](#)" for more information.

Avoiding head-on collisions

It's imperative to know how to deal potential head-on collisions before they come up. Although more common on secondary highways, this *can* even happen on the Interstate.

In the event a vehicle is coming towards you, always move to the right. This often happens on two-lane highways when a vehicle going the opposite direction is passing another vehicle.

If the vehicle isn't passing but is still on your side coming towards you, slow down and move to the right (as far as possible), and stop. **It's rarely a good idea to steer to the left in these situations!**

Chapter 9: Truck Driving on the Interstate



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This section focuses on driving skills and knowledge required to handle situations a driver regularly encounters while on the Interstate. To us drivers, it's simply known as the *Big Road*. However, keep in mind that much of the information in this chapter could also apply to other four-lane highways and secondary roads situations.

The trucker's public image on the Interstate



The trucker (and their truck) are most visible when they're on the Interstate (especially in a yellow truck!). The better you get at trucking, the more aware you may become of how the public perceives truck drivers.

Imagine watching trucks around you as if you were the driver of a 4-wheeler. You may very well cringe as a truck *tailgates* a car, or cuts off another truck.

When you begin to think this way, it'll force you to think more about your *own* method of driving.

The trucker's mindset on the Interstate

After you've driven on the Interstate long enough, it seems like you could drive in your sleep. Your cruise control is on, and you might not have to stop for a hundred miles. Your subconscious literally does most of your driving at this point (see "[The Mindset of the Professional Trucker](#)").

However, even if you're a veteran trucker, you must still challenge yourself to constantly improve your driving technique and attitude. None of us has gotten to the point where we can't improve. We can learn something new every day.

Common Interstate Experiences



Rubberneckers

A *rubbernecker* is a term used to describe drivers who must slowwwwww down and gawk at the scene of an accident (or another event) before finally moving on down the road.

This often causes lengthy delays, sometimes several miles long, because they *had* to see what was happening. Rubbernecking delays are often longer than the original cause of the delay in the first place.

This curiosity seems to affect most people, to varying degrees. However, tempting it may be to rubberneck, try NOT to. You won't see anything pleasant, and *you'll* probably be contributing to the slow-down!

Watching for abrupt lane changing

Most accidents occur during lane changes. It is commonplace for four-wheelers to change lanes abruptly in front of trucks. It's also quite possible that they'll suddenly slow down (for traffic, or other conditions ahead, to take the exit, etc.) Just expect these types of maneuvers and be prepared to slow down or change lanes.

Try to stay in the far-right lane as often as possible. This is pretty obvious; unless you're passing another vehicle, you should stay to the right. When you're to the extreme right and there's more than two lanes, your only worry is the traffic in front of you, and to your left.

It's important to change lanes *slowly*. By doing so, you give the other vehicles a chance to see what you're doing. They may be about to make one of those split-second lane changes, especially dangerous when there's multiple lanes in a congested area. This will also help you to notice a possible vehicle in your blind spot and correct your mistake before you run them over. Then, *slowly* go back where you were, watching for any vehicles who may be moving into your previous spot.

Vehicles driving in the truck's blind spots (i.e. the “No-Zones”)

It's hard for many four-wheelers to understand that you, the truck driver, can't see them when they are in certain areas around the perimeter of your truck. As I've discussed earlier, the average driver still knows little about the limitations of big trucks.

Therefore, for your own safety and peace of mind, you need to:

- Be aware of your own vehicle's limitations, specifically your blind spots.
- Recognize that many people are unaware of these limitations, and expect them to be in the most dangerous places.
- Take preventative measures to guard against blind spot related accidents.

One of the most dangerous and annoying four-wheeler habits is tailgating directly behind your trailer, in the “no-zone” directly behind you. They get

as close as they can, to the point that you cannot see them, and they can't see *anything* that's coming up on the road ahead.



This is a lot like “drafting”, right Talladega fans?

Some four-wheelers (and even big trucks) do this to improve their MPGs. However, regardless of their motivation, it can create problems for you, the truck driver. Plus, it's illegal and rightly so! See [this article](#) for more about vehicles drafting behind big rigs.

Imagine you're driving down the road and you see a blown tire (in CB terminology, an *alligator*) in your lane directly ahead. Reacting to the imminent danger, you start moving over into the left lane as you get closer to the blown tire.



Courtesy: Dan Hartzell, TMC

A few possibilities exist here:

1. Just as you begin to veer left, the car that was *hiding* behind you, that you didn't even know was there, jumps out from behind you and starts trying to pass you. You're already halfway into the left lane, but they behave as if you're trying to cut them off. They have no idea that you were trying to avoid a road hazard. You may be forced to run over the tire instead of hitting the other vehicle.
2. You *do* move over into the left lane, but the vehicle that was behind you has no clue of the alligator just ahead and has *maybe* a second of reaction time. Either they run over the rubber, possibly causing it to fly in another car's direction, or have it bounce up and damage its own vehicle, or swerve at the last second, possible causing another accident or rollover.

Unfortunately, four-wheelers rarely realize that truckers make evasive maneuvers for a reason. They might even think it was just to irritate or enrage them!

The best way to avoid scenarios like the one above is to, (if safely possible to do so), get over into the other lane immediately after you see a road hazard, rather than waiting until the last second.

Even if you've been watching for other vehicles and seem to be the only one on the road, you never know when a four-wheeler will be lurking in one of your "no-zones."

Note: For complete information on side, rear, and front no-zones, as well as the dangers of wide right turns, check this [video from the Utah DOT](#).

Vehicles driving inattentively

Watch for drivers who are reading while they're driving, putting on make-up or doing their hair while on the way to work, talking on their smartphone, dealing with children in the vehicle, etc. These drivers could do *anything* at any given moment. Keep a safe distance away from them to allow for unexpected movements.

Four-wheelers that speed up when a truck attempts to pass

This one still leaves me shaking my head, even after all these years! It's important for you to stay under control, and consider several things:

- **It's not personal.** Most of the time the vehicles in question aren't even aware that they're doing it. In other cases, when they see you move over into the passing lane, it forces them to realize they've drifted off, and they resume their previous, faster speed. They're not *necessarily* trying to drive you crazy!
- **They may be under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs.** If this is the case, it probably will be obvious. Stay back and just observe for a little while. Let other drivers know on CB Channel 9 and call 911 if you have a smartphone. Take note of the license plate number, and vehicle description if you can do so safely.

There are times when you'll encounter someone who *does* want to mess with your serenity. Well, you can't shoot them, and you can't run them off the road either, so how *do* you react?

How to respond:

- Is there much traffic on the road? How much slower does the driver go when they're ahead of you? Sometimes if you don't react in an obvious fashion (whipping your truck back behind them, blowing your horn, or swerving towards the offending vehicle. I've seen it all!), the driver will stop the nonsense and carry on.
- Can you tolerate going slower for a little while? (A *little* slower won't throw your whole day off, will it?) It seems that most of the time, these types of drivers are local commuters (especially when you're within a city's limits) who are most likely soon to exit the Interstate. Most people who are driving long distance aren't looking for trouble or messing around.

Don't let anyone's driving or overall behavior affect your own experience out there! You must expect these types of situations and be prepared to handle them calmly, and professionally. YOU are the professional, right?

Drivers changing lanes with or without using turn signals



Watch for drivers who don't use turn signals, even when they need to change lanes in crowded situations. You'll encounter this most often going through or around bigger cities.

It would be stating the obvious to say that many drivers don't use their turn signals. But many drivers do so *intentionally*, not merely out of neglect. Perhaps in the past, they may have been denied a lane change or the ability to merge by another driver when they *were* signaling.

So, now, these drivers just make their move *without* using their turn signals. They'll simply wait for an opening, then quickly change lanes.

Of course, all this does is lead to more of the same types of behavior.

Big trucks now do the same thing, because it is very common for other vehicles, as soon as they see a big truck trying to make a move, to not allow *them* to do so.

Often, they don't want to get slowed down by being behind the truck. So, these big trucks, realizing that other vehicles may not let them over, don't bother using their turn signals. This behavior is more common in the bigger city areas, where drivers are often in a big rush.

We, as professionals, cannot let the bad tactics of other drivers affect the way *we* drive. For safety's sake, we must *always* use our turn signals. Sometimes, it will delay us slightly, but other times, drivers will go out of their way just to help us out.

Hazards on the shoulder



Any time there is a vehicle on the right shoulder of the Interstate (or any 4-lane highway), the truck driver should, upon observing the vehicle, turn on their turn signal, and get over into the left lane, if they're able to safely do so.

[This video](#) shows the benefits of using an App like [Waze](#), which can alert drivers to upcoming hazards and help prevent accidents, as well as other uses.

I'd even recommend moving over if the vehicle is *just* off the shoulder in the grass or dirt.

The shoulder is for emergency stopping only, with only official and/or emergency vehicles (like highway patrol, DOT, etc.), vehicles involved in accidents, or those having mechanical issues, being permitted to stop. Any vehicle on the shoulder is a potential hazard to oncoming traffic.

The driver must assume that the vehicle on the shoulder could come out into traffic at any time (once again, see "[The Mindset of the Professional Trucker](#)"). Also consider that there will probably be people on the shoulder

as well, attempting to right whatever wrong brought them to the side of the road to begin with.

If a driver doesn't move over, their vehicle will pass dangerously close to these people. Even a gust of wind caused by your trailer going by can kick dirt and rocks at them.

Don't panic if you can't get over, because of heavy traffic, limited time, etc. Just move over in your lane slightly, if possible, to give the hazard a bit more room. Obviously, don't move over if there's a truck with a wide load in the next lane, or any other similar situation. Remember to use your turn signal first!

It's even more important to move over if there are people in or around the vehicle on the shoulder. I'll even slow down to be able to move over, if I need to. It's not worth endangering the lives of others just to get down the road a couple minutes faster.

If you can see a vehicle on the shoulder ahead, and it has a red or orange sticker on it, then it has been tagged for towing. It was probably abandoned for some reason. These vehicles may not be an immediate hazard, but I still recommend getting over if safely able to do so.

Many truckers (and other vehicles as well) don't move over into the left lane when they see what appears to be an abandoned car on the shoulder. They apparently feel that there is no reason to get over, because there are no threats of it jumping out into the highway.

But these drivers are not thinking about *all* the possibilities. Just because there is a tag on the car doesn't mean someone hasn't possibly stopped by to pick it up... or who knows? Someone may be stealing it! They would be even *more* likely to jump out into traffic without warning.

What about the vehicle *behind* yours? You already know that most vehicles follow too closely anyway. Because of this, they probably cannot see around or in front of you. So, assume that they do *not* see the hazards ahead either. All it would take is a little swerve out into the shoulder at the wrong time and you'd have a major accident. If you cannot move over because of heavy traffic in the left lane, at least move over to the left of your lane somewhat.

Also, get on the CB radio and mention that there is a hazard on the shoulder, especially if there are trucks behind you that possibly can't see.

Slow vehicles

Watch out for slow moving vehicles on the big road. If you're looking far enough ahead while you're driving, nothing should catch you by surprise.



Some slow-moving vehicles include:

- Recreational vehicles, often towing boats or trailers.
- Farm vehicles and equipment.
- Trucks with doubles/triples trailers.
- Oversize/wide loads.

- Company trucks governed at low speeds.
- Military convoys.

Merging Scenarios

Vehicles merging from on-ramp



wapt.com

Move to the left lane

It is both courteous and safe to move over to the left, if possible, to allow vehicles, especially big trucks, entering from the on-ramp, to merge. This allows you to get around them, instead of having to possibly slow down when they don't merge aggressively or fast enough. Moving to the left helps the drivers who are merging, as well as yourself.

You can't always get over into the passing lane. There may be too much traffic, and not enough time or warning to make the move. But turn on your left turn signal and make the attempt. If you're unable to move over, watch for merging vehicles and try to judge their speed and distance. This will tell you whether you'll have to slow down and let the vehicles merge ahead of you, or maintain speed and let them fall in behind you.

When you're driving down the road and you know that an on-ramp is coming up, anticipate a possible move to the left. Or, if you're already in the left lane for some reason, consider staying there until you see the merging vehicle. When you notice that upcoming exits have vehicles that are or will be merging from an on-ramp, use your judgment and consider letting certain vehicles over ahead of you, if you are in the left lane. Obviously, this depends on the traffic situation, the speed of other vehicles, and other factors.

Getting back over to the right lane

Soon after you get over into the left lane, get ready to put on your right turn signal, so that the vehicles you let merge, plus any vehicles behind you, know you intend to return to the right lane. This may seem obvious until you see how many drivers, even ones that you let merge, are oblivious to your attempts to return to the right lane.

When you do move over to the left, people don't always think, "Oh, that truck's getting over because of the merging cars, then they'll want to get back in the right lane again." Instead, they may think, "That truck's going slow in the left lane, I must pass it on the right!" Therefore, turn on your right turn signal as soon as possible.

If *you're* the one merging onto the road, and other drivers have gotten over for you, help them out if you happen to gain speed quickly and they can't pass you. Don't leave them hanging out there in the passing lane. Slow down a little and let them pass you, unless they're going so slow that it would cause a major problem.

Have you ever moved over for a merging vehicle and they sped up and wouldn't let you pass? It's aggravating to say the least. Well, don't do the same to the other drivers.

Watch for vehicles merging without looking



Drivers are taught “turn your head to look quickly over your shoulder before changing lanes or merging in traffic.” Despite this, many simply look in the mirror (if they look at all!) as they’re approaching the Interstate.

Sometimes, you'll be right next to them as they’re coming down the on-ramp, and they won't see you as they’re frantically looking in their rearview mirror. Move over into the left lane for merging vehicles if you’re able. If not, then you may have to slow down to allow them to merge (even though they should be yielding to traffic).

Merging onto the Interstate on different types of on-ramps

When you're merging, you must yield to current Interstate traffic, which has the right-of-way. On many on-ramps, the road first heads straight for the Interstate, then it'll curve and run almost parallel to the Interstate, which gives you enough road to get up to Interstate speed.

At the point where the ramp is heading straight towards the Interstate, quickly look left and get a big picture of the oncoming traffic. Notice if there are any big trucks coming, and if they may not be able to get over into the left lane in anticipation of you merging. Especially look for any wide

loads that may be coming. By looking first and getting the big picture, you'll know ahead of time exactly *how* you should merge, either by speeding up and getting ahead of the vehicles on the Interstate, or by backing off and waiting for certain vehicle to pass.

Some off-ramps don't head towards the Interstate enough so that you can get a good look at the oncoming traffic. Instead, it gradually heads towards the Interstate, in which case you'll have to use the convex mirror to get an idea of what's coming. In the case of a wide load (in either merging situation), stay to the right of the on-ramp as you're gaining speed, possibly even driving over part of the shoulder, if it's in good condition, and if necessary.

Passing Scenarios

The “peel off” from behind

This is a situation which often occurs when there is a slow vehicle in the right lane, and a bunch of traffic in the left lane, passing at varying speeds. You're soon going to have to pass a vehicle ahead of you, but there is that heavy traffic in the left lane to consider. You turn on your left turn signal, and someone in the left lane *may* slow down and let you over in front of them. However, people are not always so accommodating.

Instead, what often occurs is that the vehicles in the left lane see your turn signal on, and make sure you can't get over by speeding up, and the vehicles behind you see your turn signal, realize you're going to have to get over, and because they are smaller and more easily able to move over into the left lane, they "peel off" from behind you, and pass you.

This situation gets even worse when there is a line of cars behind you in the right lane as you're approaching a slow-moving vehicle. What usually happens is that the vehicle at the rear is able to get over into the left lane

first, as soon as the last of the vehicles in the left lane passes. Then they follow in succession, "peeling off" one by one, until it's *finally* your turn. This is a situation where, "the last will be first, and the first will be last", especially if you're a big truck.

Another "peel off" situation can occur when you don't know that a vehicle has been tailgating you, and you don't observe that you're going to have to pass a vehicle in time. As soon as you hesitate for a second and look for approaching traffic in your rearview mirror and slow down, the vehicle behind you whips out into the left lane and starts to pass you, causing you to slow down even more, until they pass.

Preventing the "peel off"

- Use your turn signal hoping somebody will let you over. It's the correct way to drive anyway, right?
- Know the big picture of what's all around you.
- Make your lane changes as soon as possible so that you...
- Don't follow the vehicles ahead of you too closely.

If you *can't* prevent the peel off, *relax*. Going slower for a short period of time will not impact you that much.

When you realize you're in a "peel off" situation (vehicles have already been peeling off behind you), and you start to move over into the left lane, consider giving the vehicle ahead of you a chance to come over as well. Do this by slowly moving over into the left lane, or flashing your headlights on and off, or if it's a big truck say, "come on over" on the CB.

Sometimes it's best to stay out in the left lane

You've passed one vehicle and you see another one you can pass in approximately 20 to 30 seconds. If there's no one behind you wanting to pass, you can stay out there in the left lane, until you pass the next vehicle. Just keep the big picture in your mind of all the vehicles all around you, and try not to hog the left lane and prevent everyone else from passing (or worse, passing you on the right).

If another vehicle is fast approaching after you've passed the first vehicle, then just get back into the right lane, and wait until it's clear again.

Drivers that LOVE the left lane



There are some areas in the country where this condition happens more often than in others. Some drivers have found that they *really love* the left lane and they're going to stay there, no matter what. And because of the actions of these drivers, even more drivers have decided that they must do the same, *lest they perish* in the right lane.

Seriously, this seems to happen more in some areas than in others. Interstate 25, north of Denver, CO, seen above, is one of those areas. A whole line of vehicles, maybe miles long, in the left lane, maybe because

they see a truck in the right lane a mile ahead down the road, but maybe *not*. These individuals may have tried previously to get over into the left lane, perhaps to pass a slower vehicle, but were not allowed to by the *other* “left lane lovers.” So, from then on, they became a lover of the left lane as well.

Maybe I’m exaggerating, but I’ve found the only way to stay sane in these areas is to stay in the right lane and just drive slower, until I’ve passed the area altogether. This is a great way to create a little extra space around you.

Don’t allow yourself to be manipulated and refuse to hang out with the rest of them in the left lane.

Vehicles slowly approaching in the passing lane

Another common situation occurs because drivers stay out in the left lane too long. As opposed to the previous “left lane lovers” who do so for no good reason, these drivers intend to pass, although it may take quite some time. The problem is that this often happens just as you’ll have to pass a vehicle in front of you. You judge that about the same time that you will have to make the passing move, the slowly approaching vehicle will be on your left, forcing you to have to slow down. This seems to happen quite often, especially for big trucks.

When you first realize that this is going to happen, make sure you get out in the left lane ahead of time. You don’t want to stay out there any longer than necessary and impede traffic, but you also can’t make the bad habits of other drivers constantly make *you* have to slow down.

Getting out in the left lane soon enough (before you miss your chance)

To avoid getting too close to the vehicle you're intending to pass, move out of the left lane sooner. If you can't do this because of traffic conditions, keep your distance, and wait for a better opportunity.

But there is often a dilemma with this practice, as well. As I mentioned before, you must use good judgment when deciding when to get over. You must consider the traffic in front of you, in the left lane, etc. The problem is that many other vehicles will not understand why you've gotten over into the left lane. They will probably try to pass you on the right, and maybe even cut in front of you, often much too closely between you and the vehicle you're about to pass. This is probably even more unsafe than tailgating, which was the first thing you were trying to avoid.

If you see that this may be the case, because there's approaching traffic in the left lane, it would probably be better just to slow down so that you're not tailgating the vehicle ahead of you, and allow the other vehicles to pass. Then, go ahead and pass when the traffic has passed you. As always, take the “highroad.”

When you need to move over to pass, but there's heavy traffic

When the passing lane is crowded, and you need to pass a slower vehicle, it's best to turn your turn signal on right away, and hope that someone will let you over. If it's not very crowded, however, just wait until there's a clear opening, turn your turn signal on, and move over into the passing lane.

Tough decisions when considering passing

You always need to consider the big picture on the road before making a move. I've talked about getting over into the left lane in anticipation of

vehicles merging from the on-ramp. However, if there is a vehicle quickly approaching in the left lane (and you're still in the right lane), you might want to consider either forcing the merging vehicle to back off and wait for you to pass or back off if it appears the merging vehicle won't back off (for whatever reason).

When it comes to peoples' lives, there's no point trying to win some silly contest.

In a normal passing situation, consider staying behind the vehicle ahead of you, and going a little slower. Driving safely should even take priority over driving courteously, because you won't always be able to accommodate everyone.

Truckers “hanging out” in the left lane: appearances are often deceiving

Sometimes there are situations where it appears that a truck is out in the left lane, but is not passing the other vehicles. I think, because of all the peculiar things that people do, you should first give the trucker the benefit of the doubt. Personally, there have been countless times when I attempted to pass someone, and then they sped up. Or possibly the road just started to incline, and the truck lost power. Many drivers, even some truckers, don't realize how important spacing is. A truck can't simply pass directly in front of another vehicle, or place itself in a position directly behind another vehicle without leaving sufficient space.

Four-wheelers afraid to pass trucks

This could be in a category called "strange things people do." A vehicle coming up from behind gets over into the passing lane to pass you. Just as they're right beside you on your left, they slow down and stay there, maybe because they felt that your trailer veered a little bit towards them.

Now, if it was me in their situation, and I thought a big truck was coming towards me, I would probably hurry up and pass the truck, rather than stay there and take the chance of getting hit by it.

Regardless of *why* they do it, what YOU should do is: expect this reaction, get over slightly to your right, and if they're still there beside you, slow down a little bit until they've passed you. This is much better than having them remain there, afraid to do anything.

Truckers not using their mirrors effectively

I often notice that a lot of truckers have the habit of leaning forward in their seat to be able to see the vehicles they're intending to pass as they cross back into the right lane of traffic. I think this exposes flaws in their training that needs to be discussed.

If you must lean forward to see the vehicle you're about to pass (especially trucks, which need to keep more space between them and the vehicle in front of them), then one of two things are happening: either your mirror is not pushed out far enough (you can tell this is the case if you can see too much of the sides of your trailer), or, you're passing too soon.

In order to pass correctly, look to see the whole car or the tractor (not just the trailer) in your mirror before you pass back into their lane in front of them.

Trucker Problem Areas to Watch For

Trucker tailgating



cleanmpg.com

Tailgating is when vehicles follow other vehicles too closely. When big trucks tailgate, it is especially dangerous. The increased amount of time it takes trucks to stop combined with the truck's gross weight makes accidents involving big trucks particularly devastating, even at lower speeds. Four-wheelers who often put themselves in harm's way, as well as truckers who bear down on vehicles in the "hammer lane" often seem unconcerned about the potential for disaster that exists when they tailgate.

As a general rule, keep a minimum distance between vehicles, of one vehicle (in our case, one whole truck length) for every 10 mph. So, if you're in the Interstate traveling 70 mph, you should keep seven whole truck lengths of space, between the front of your vehicle, and the vehicle ahead of you, on dry pavement.

It seems that the majority of trucks often get closer than a single truck length, traveling at the same rate of speed. It's amazing that there's not even more accidents. And when there is wet, or slippery pavement, the following distance must be increased accordingly.

Tailgating is one of the leading causes of accidents. Lead others by your good example, and don't copy other driver's bad tailgating habits.

I understand the motive behind tailgating. It frustrates me, as well as you, when some drivers hog the left lane (the passing lane) without passing quickly enough. Or worse, when they're not passing at all.

So, what you do is attempt to "push" the offending driver over by coming up behind them, usually like you're going to run them over. This does intimidate some vehicles to hurry up and get out of the way, and it may wake up some who may have not realized what they were doing.

Of course, there's always the joker who responds by slowing down, bent on showing you the error of your ways.

We need to think of tailgating from a different perspective. What would happen if the vehicle in our way (and this applies to any time we follow too closely, even when we're in the right lane and not passing) had a tire blow out, or the kids in the vehicle spilled or threw something, and the driver panicked and hit the brakes and/or swerved wildly? Well, since there would be no way to stop in time, it's very possible you would run them over. Plain and simple.

As professional truck drivers we must expect the unexpected at all times! We must **always** think this way.

Almost the reverse situation (with the same result, more tailgating!), is when a vehicle passes your truck and gets *directly* in front of you, leaving maybe a car length or two of space. As soon as you see this coming, gradually back off a little bit (not too fast though, because of other vehicles that may be behind you, sometimes without your knowledge).

Note: Under the FMCSR, two convictions within three years of "following too close" in a commercial vehicle results in a 60 day' disqualification.

Turtle racing: trucks *slowly* passing other trucks



Like the image above suggests, “turtle racing” is when a truck is passing another truck, but only barely. It may take them a minute or more to pass. This isn’t so bad when there’s no traffic behind them, but it’s all too common to see this happen when there’s *plenty* of traffic wanting to pass, but unable to.

This trucker is saying “the heck with everyone else, I’M going to pass.” This is unprofessional and reflects on all truckers.

Another similar situation is when you’re coming to the top of an incline and you’re thinking about slowly overtaking another, slightly slower truck. A good idea is to wait until you get to the top of the hill and see if the other truck’s going to quickly regain a speed equal to or greater than yours. By doing this, you only lose a few seconds of time, and you won’t force them to have to re-pass you.

When another vehicle (not necessarily a truck) is slowly trying to pass, and there’s no one behind, I will often slow down and let them pass so that they will not hold up traffic. Of course, this all depends on the traffic conditions at the time. If done right, this will not cost you much time.

Slow down to avoid turtle racing, and to help other big trucks pass you. There are many situations in which it would be best to just go a little slower than to either very slowly pass another vehicle, or get really frustrated and follow close behind the other vehicle.

The problem is caused by either your truck being governed at a certain speed, or a low speed limit where the other driver is going a few miles per hour less than the speed limit. It's best to just go a little slower (perhaps 3-5 mph slower). If you did this for an hour, you'd lose three to five minutes of time (if you're going 60 mph), which isn't much. But you'd probably only need to do that for 5-10 minutes at most, which will only cost you a minute or two of total lost time.

However, closely watch the speed of the vehicle passing you, if you're climbing a hill. You may be about to slow down a little bit and let them pass, but they already realize that they're losing power quickly, and will not be able to pass you, so they expect *you* to keep up your speed so that they can fall back in behind you. If you don't realize this is happening, and you still try to help them by slowing down, instead of helping, you'll end up slowing *both* of you plus any traffic behind you.

Sometimes it doesn't help *anyone* if you're *too* helpful, without having an accurate assessment of the whole situation. Again, try to keep the big picture in mind.

Driving exclusively in the middle lanes (where there are 3 or more lanes)



timesfreepress.com

When you're in a 3 or more forward lanes situation (more common in the bigger city areas), trucks are often restricted to the two right lanes. Truckers like to stay in the middle lane because they can avoid cars merging into the far-right lane.

However, there are several problems with this technique. First, this will cause *more* vehicles to pass you on the right. Then, you'll have vehicles passing you on *both* sides, then simultaneously trying to get in front of you.

Another problem is when there's a truck coming up from behind, and it looks like they want to pass you. The forward truck should move into the far-right lane, if possible, rather than forcing the other truck to pass on the right.

Trucks that block the lane which is about to end

Truckers often do this to prevent cars from cutting in front of the line when there's a bottleneck situation, often slowed to a crawl. It's frustrating when you merge when you should, and wait for what seems like forever, and then a vehicle, typically a four-wheeler, cuts in front of everyone to get to the front of the line.

So, eventually, a truck somewhere in the line will move over into the lane that's about the end, and stay out there, blocking any attempts of other vehicles to cut in front of the line. Usually the blocking trucker is told on the CB that they will be let in to merge at the last minute by another trucker.

One problem with this, is that you don't know any given vehicle's or driver's situation. A vehicle trying to get ahead of others in line **COULD** be a person driving to the hospital (a woman in labor, for example), or any other number of possibilities. Give them the benefit of the doubt. Maybe they are just self-centered, but don't make that *your* problem.

Many truckers believe, and their case may be valid, that allowing vehicles to do this, only encourages more of the same. However true this may sometimes be, I believe it's best to simply relax, and not be so concerned about what everyone *else* is doing. A few vehicles getting ahead of everyone else is not going to affect my disposition, my being on time, or my day.

Spacing Issues

Using the engine brake to create space

The subject of using the Jake brake under conditions other than descending a steep downgrade is controversial. Many "experts" claim that you should only use the Jake on a downgrade. But I have also found many

experienced truckers use the brake under different situations, and for various reasons.

Whenever under a loaded trailer (and when the local ordinances don't prohibit engine brake use), it is perfectly acceptable to use the engine brake. Simply put, the engine brake helps to stop the vehicle more quickly, in combination with the service brake. Stopping more quickly can enable you to avoid running into a car that just cut in front of you, for example. Also, the regular use of the engine brake can lessen the wear and tear on your brakes.

Many truckers use the Jake when they are in multiple (three or more) lane situations common on the Interstate in bigger cities. Their objective is to let other vehicles *know* they're around, as if to say, "keep your distance."

The main drawback with the use of engine brakes is the noise they create. This is the most common complaint. For this reason, watch carefully for signs prohibiting the use of engine brakes. Some areas are more specific in that they prohibit the use of un-muffled engine brakes. Most newer trucks have much quieter engine brakes.

Trucks traveling together



stltoday.com

A *convoy* can refer to a greater number of trucks, often from the same carrier, taking many loads from a common shipper to a common destination.

It is not recommended that trucks travel together (even trucks from the same company), but it is done regularly. I won't discuss that here, except to discourage traveling *too* closely together. You always want to allow another vehicle the option of passing in front of any other given vehicle.

For example, a car or another truck may have started up an incline and not had the power to pass all the vehicles it had intended to pass. There should be sufficient room between trucks to allow the vehicle to pass and get over, out of the way of the other traffic. This is also important for safety reasons as an emergency vehicle may be coming up from behind, and the passing vehicle would need to get over into the right lane.

Separate yourself from other groups of vehicles

It's very common on the Interstate to find vehicles traveling together, often in groups. In theory, vehicles can get away with driving faster when in groups because they're not so easily singled out by law enforcement. Also, people want acceptance (in whatever they do), and do not want to be left behind.

However, traveling in groups can lead to negative driving habits. The most obvious of these are following too closely and speeding. As a professional truck driver, you should try to separate yourself from these groups of vehicles. This includes other groups of trucks, especially if they're speeding and tailgating.

One built-in advantage of driving slower is that it automatically separates you from everyone else.

If the speed limit is 65 mph, and you *go* 65 mph, everyone else will want to drive between 70 and 75, on the average. You'll see a whole herd of faster moving vehicles approaching from behind, then passing you, and then they'll be gone. While this was happening, you were relaxed, not in competition with anyone, not following vehicles too closely, and were not having other vehicles follow too closely behind you.

When you're in the middle of a whole group of vehicles, you have to think about so much more than you would if you were driving in your separate space. There is much more to worry about: vehicles which are following too closely, changing lanes, driving erratically, hitting their brakes in front of you, etc.

Keeping space on the sides of your vehicle is important for several reasons:

- to give yourself a way out in reaction to the actions of other vehicles,
- to prevent a slight movement from causing your vehicle to run into others,
- to prevent vehicles running into your vehicle (especially during high winds), and,
- to guard against a blowout of one of your tires hitting a vehicle on your side.

Other Important Issues on the Big Road

Commentary on *Governed* truck speeds

You may be hauling a lighter load, and are driving up toward the top of an incline when you realize you're going to have to pass a slower, often heavier

truck. However, many times the truck speeds up and starts to match your speed because the road is flattening out the top of the incline.

You've already been driving at your top speed (your truck being governed at 65 mph, for example). If the other truck passes you on the right in this situation, that's fine; wait for them to get ahead of you, then get back over in the right lane.

The problem occurs when they match your speed, and don't consider the fact that you're hanging out there in the left lane, often with other vehicles behind wanting to pass. If you weren't governed, you could more easily pass them. But in some situations, you'll have no other choice than to slow down, let the other truck move ahead, and move back over into the right lane.

A similar situation occurs when other vehicles are merging onto the highway. You get over into the left lane to pass the slower, merging vehicles. At the same time, you're letting them over, as well as avoiding them. But the merging vehicles will often be oblivious to your moving over for them as well as your need to get back into the right lane.

See if they're going to merely match your speed, or if they're going to pass you on the right. If they let you just hang out there in the left lane, and you haven't got the power to pass them (because your speed is governed), then you'll have to slow down and let them pass (unless you see other vehicles not too far ahead that you *can* pass— then just stay out there).

I can understand why trucking companies govern their trucks at a lower speed. The first motive, as is usually the case in business, is profit. With the skyrocketing cost of fuel, the companies are simply trying to save on fuel consumption. The closer to 55 mph they can keep the trucks, the better MPG each truck will get. The other factor mentioned often is safety, as studies have shown that traveling at higher speeds increases the likelihood of crashes and fatalities.

However, I believe it all boils down to training. Even the issue of training, at its root, is closely related to profit. Some of the major carriers often hire drivers right out of truck driver training schools. Some of these schools are company-sponsored, some are independent, and some are run by the companies themselves.

Either way, many of these programs are nothing but CDL mills, which only give the minimum amount of training necessary to get drivers to pass their CDL test, and on the road pulling their freight... once again, the motive is profit. And, not coincidentally, these are the same companies which govern their trucks at the lowest speeds.

I believe that an experienced, well-trained driver should not ever be governed below the legal speed limit. This is just my opinion, and not a dogmatic assertion. Perhaps, those drivers in their first year, for example, should be governed at a lower speed until they've proven themselves.

Most truck drivers, if given the choice between earning \$.34 per mile and driving a truck governed at 62 mph OR earning \$.32 per mile and driving a truck governed at 70 mph would choose the truck with the higher speed limit. Or, at least they *should*.

Wouldn't it help if 4-wheelers understood truckers?!

I believe many people are just ignorant of what truck drivers go through, and of how dangerous it is being too close to a big truck. One of my goals is to help educate people about trucks. I believe it should be a mandatory part of the driver licensing test and/or renewals to learn proper safety concerning trucks.

However, there are people who just don't care about, or for some reason, plain dislike truckers. They may have gotten cut off or run off the road by some renegade trucker. Now they're going to pay us back!

As true as this may be, there are still no excuses to drive unprofessionally and unsafely. We are never going to “teach them a lesson.” We must expect these behaviors, and rise above them.

This may seem crazy to some truckers, **but four-wheelers are not the enemy! Think about it, when you’re at home, what do *you* drive? What does your family drive? Yep, probably a four-wheeler!**

When you see another truck tailgating dangerously close behind someone, sometimes less than a car length behind, imagine that the person in that vehicle is someone close to you, like a member of your family, then handle your own truck with that in mind.

Chapter 10: Getting Off the Interstate



There are many things that distinguish secondary highways and smaller roads from the Interstate. The first thing you notice about these roads is the abundance of towns you must go through, which force you to slow down and stop often. Also, on most of these roads, there are only two lanes, and they're usually narrower than on the Interstate.

There are trucking companies who stay on the Interstate 95% of the time. But then there are the "off-route" trucking companies that specialize in running lanes that cut across and in-between the Interstates.

I always welcome driving on these types of roads. There's often much more to see and your mind has more to think about, which can make the time go by much differently, if not quicker! Just be aware that there *are* differences, and that's what I'll be examining.

Driving Through Smaller Cities and Towns



rappnews.com

Avoid racing to traffic signals

Don't drive like other drivers out there, and race down the road just to get to a red light and stop. There are a lot gears to grind through when driving a big truck. If you can, try to time it so that you don't have to come to a complete stop. To do so, you may have to drive a little slower, but try not to affect the vehicles behind you by going *too* slowly.

Watch your speed because big trucks are being watched more closely than other vehicles on the road, especially by law enforcement.

Driving courteously

Think about the place you're driving through. Often, there are houses and businesses right along the highway. This is their home, so try to be courteous. Your vehicle is louder and bigger than others on the road, and is the one that the people notice.

Using your engine brake

Try to not use the Jake brake when going through smaller towns if you don't absolutely need them. The sound can reverberate through people's houses. Remember, they're primarily designed for use on mountain or steep hill downgrades!

Sounding the air horn

Driving down the road, especially driving on secondary highways and through smaller towns, you'll get a lot of kids (and some adults) that give you the "blow the air horn" sign. Kids (or the kids in all of us) just love to hear the air horn and to say hi to the truckers in many parts of the country. Go ahead and sound the horn, but do consider your surroundings -- are there elderly people nearby who may get frightened by the loud noise? Is it later at night, and you are in a residential neighborhood where people may be sleeping?

If you're driving in a team operation, and your partner is trying to get some sleep in the sleeper, just do the pumping motion right back at the kid (or adult!) and don't wake up your partner.

These are just a few situations where you *don't* want to sound the air horn unless there's an emergency. Otherwise, go ahead and blow!

Stopping in towns

Try to avoid stopping in the left lane at a red light, unless there's a slower truck in the right lane that you can pass quickly. Try not to hold up vehicles that want to pass.

Look far enough ahead and stop gradually. This will also reduce the risk of getting hit from behind.

Parking your truck

Don't park in front of a business (even if you're going to be "just a minute"), with your rig blocking the business' signs, or customer parking spaces. Put yourself in their situation and think about how your truck would affect things.

Places to Stop Along Secondary Highways

Truck stops

You won't usually find large truck stops like TA/Petro and Pilot/Flying J on the smaller highways, except when they intersect or merge with the Interstate. Get a good truck stop guide (see "[Trip Planning](#)") to help you find truck stops along your route. Since there are fewer truck stops than on the Interstate, plan to stop when there's one available.

Generally, the truck stops along these roads are smaller, but since there is much less truck traffic, they're usually big enough. There may be less amenities available and they may not be open 24 hours like the big Interstate truck stops.

I like going to these truck stops because it is often easier to find a parking space. Additionally, you can find restaurants that are cheaper, have better food, *and* have friendlier, more personalized service (in my humble opinion, of course).

Rest areas

Generally, rest areas on secondary roads are smaller, and have less amenities. Often these are merely picnic areas, with some picnic tables and trash cans, but have no other facilities. Be careful when stopping at these

areas at night. Many have no lights at all. You can be a sitting duck if the wrong person comes along.

At nighttime, it's safer to stay at the bigger rest areas and truck stops.

Common Situations Encountered on Secondary Highways

If most of your driving experience has been on the Interstate, driving on these roads can be tiresome, and will take some getting used to. Most roads have only two lanes, they're smaller than the Interstate, and vehicles traveling in opposite directions are usually in the next lane.

Driving all day on smaller highways (especially when you're not used to it), like driving in the mountains or in bad weather, will most certainly make you feel like you've earned your pay.

Handling narrower and fewer lanes

It's harder to drive down a two-lane highway and do your own *thing* (traveling separate from groups, spacing, etc.), like you do on the Interstate. On these smaller highways, your speed and overall progress is often limited by the vehicles around you, especially in front of you. If the road is congested at all, especially during the busy times of the day, it can be difficult (sometimes futile or pointless) to try to pass other vehicles.

The width of the lanes often differs from one road to another. U.S. Highways are the biggest and pose no great difficulty. But county roads and other smaller roads can get extremely narrow. Sometimes you'll only have a few inches of room on either side of your truck. Very often, there are no shoulders at all on secondary roads. On the edge of the road, there is a solid white line, and then it can dramatically fall off, down a hill, into a wooded area, etc.

On the Interstate, if you drift off, you might hit the rumble strips and just get back in your lane (not that I recommend drifting off). In contrast, on secondary roads with limited shoulders, you have no such luxury. If you drift off to the right for just a second, even if you react in time to get your tractor back in your lane, if your trailer wheels go off the edge into the grass or gravel, it could pull the whole vehicle over.

On roads such as these, you must constantly be monitoring your mirrors on both sides, to keep within the lanes.

First, check to see that you're in the middle of the lane. If you have the room, move to the right of your lane to give yourself some breathing room against oncoming traffic, especially for other big trucks. When you're situated where you want to be, notice where in the lane *you* are (not the truck, but *you*.)

Then, when you look at your lane, are you in the middle, off to the left? Keep yourself in the same position, and your truck should stay where you want it. This way, you'll be able to keep your truck in the right position without having to use your mirrors, although you'll still have to regularly monitor your mirrors.

This alone can be tiresome after a few hours of driving. Of course, you must also keep aware of other vehicles around you, your spacing, as well as all the other usual conditions on the road.

Passing slower vehicles on a two-lane highway



rollingcoal.net

Be very careful when trying to pass on a two-lane highway. You must use good judgment, which comes from possessing a good sense of timing, and experiencing similar situations. Possibly the most valuable skill to have is being able to know how far away an oncoming vehicle is, how fast it's traveling, and whether or not you'll have the time to pass the vehicle in front of you safely, before the oncoming vehicle gets there.

There are many factors which affect your decision making: your vehicle's speed and acceleration limitations, whether there are hills to climb or descend, curves in the road, and the overall condition of the road (to include weather conditions).

Pay close attention to the lines. Never try to pass if the solid line is toward your lane.

Occasionally there are passing lanes, some of which can last for many miles. However, some only last for a few hundred yards. If you're thinking about passing, and you know that there are passing lanes coming up, it's usually best to wait for the passing lane to be clear.

Often these passing lanes will be available on lengthy and/or steep inclines. Unfortunately, there are times when you've been waiting for your opportunity, then you're finally able to pass another vehicle, but, because of the incline, lose the power to do so.

If you're unsure you can pass slower vehicles on a two-lane road easily and safely, then **don't** attempt it. It's not worth the risk, just to save a few seconds of time.

On roads with curves, especially common in mountain terrain, it can be extremely tough for a big truck to pass another vehicle. It's usually best to wait for the road to straighten out, or for a passing lane to come available.

Watch for vehicles trying to pass you. Drivers can get impatient when they've been stuck behind a big truck for a while. When they see any kind of opening, they may try to pass, and take unnecessary risks, for all the good it will do them.

Passing on two-lane roads is dangerous for *any* type of vehicle. But when you have a semi-truck that wants to pass *another* semi-truck, or even multiple trucks, *that's* when things get interesting.

Trucks having to pass other trucks becomes that much more difficult for several reasons:

- Tractor-trailers are much *longer* than four-wheelers, which makes it take longer to pass, which exposes the passing vehicle to oncoming traffic for much longer.
- Tractor-trailers are much *slower* than four-wheelers, which has the same effect.

Because of the previous reasons, there needs to be an even bigger and longer break from oncoming traffic. In addition, drivers need to exhibit better judgment when choosing when to pass.

The big takeaway? Passing on a two-lane highway still comes down to experience and judgment.

Hazards on two-lane highways

When there are vehicles, going slowly or stopped, on the shoulder or other hazards on the opposite side of the road, quickly assess the condition of the shoulder on your side of the road, and whether there are other vehicles traveling in the opposite direction who would move over if they had the opportunity.

If there are vehicles approaching, especially big trucks, and the shoulder is in good condition, you may be able to move over slightly to the right as a courtesy to the other vehicles, allowing them to safely move around the hazard.

Making U-turns

Sometimes, you may have to consider making a U-turn when you're driving down a secondary highway. You may have driven past where you're supposed to go, or access to where you need to go is blocked by a median, or any number of other reasons. If it's a four-lane highway, it's usually easier to make a U-turn, because there's often more room (another exiting lane) to do so. Only make the U-turn when you're in a situation where there are no vehicles near you in either direction. This is a situation where it is extremely important to know the space requirements for making such a move. If you're not sure you can make it, don't even attempt to make the move. Perhaps you can find another location to turn around in.



If you haven't planned your trip thoroughly enough, you could run into a low clearance that gives you 2 choices:

- Back up long enough to find a wide space to get turned around in.
- Attempt to make the U-turn. Here's a [video](#) showing a driver who's chosen this option.

Ever hear the saying "Give me 40 acres, and I'll turn this rig around"? Well, it comes from an [old trucking song](#), and it's not far from the truth!

If you're on a two-lane highway, you may have to go down the road quite a bit before you find a place big or wide enough to turn around. If you are in an area that's not very congested, sometimes you can turn around in a big parking lot. Just make sure there's enough room, take it very slow, and be very considerate of other people and vehicles.

Finding a place to turn around can be extremely difficult. The better you know how much space you need to turn around, the easier it will be. Also, you need to determine, just from looking at a surface, if you'll be able to use it to drive on.

Weather conditions can be a big factor, as rain will make some dirt parking lots (or any lot, surface, etc.) impossible to maneuver. If you're unsure about the reliability of a surface, you shouldn't chance it. It is a big hassle, as well as a big expense, to get pulled out of the mud.

Creating space in preparation of entering customer locations (or turning onto narrow roads)



Many trucking operations regularly pickup at or deliver to customer locations which are not designed to accommodate big trucks. Other times, the entrances to these locations are right off a main road, and the entrance itself is only wide enough for smaller vehicles. Sometimes, even bigger customers that regularly receive trucks have entrances directly off of two-lane highways. In these cases, you must swing wide enough to be able to make the turn.

When you're [planning the trip](#), first look at the location on Google maps. Check the satellite view as well as the street view. Call the customer, and with the one of the map views out and visible, get directions, asking the about accessibility, and if there's enough room. Mention that you are in a tractor-trailer if it seems like they get all types of delivery trucks in there, and ask how other truckers have been able to get in and out of their location. Now you'll know if you'll have to create space ahead of time to make the turn.

When approaching the location, separate yourself as much as possible from other vehicles, on all sides if possible. Consider the big picture, and try to *time* your turn.

If you're on a four-lane road with a median in the middle, your situation may allow you to turn on your four-way flashers and slow down, causing a group of vehicles behind you to pass. Then, if you timed it right, you'll be able to swing out into the left lane to make a right-hand turn into a narrow entrance.

If you're going the opposite direction, take the same steps, then pull forward to be able to back into the driveway if required. Keep your flashers on throughout the entire maneuver, and try to wait until there are no cars coming. If that's not possible, wait until you have as much time as possible, do what you have to do, (be quick, but don't let them rush you, and cause you to back into something!) and then smile and wave like it was everyone else's idea to let you go in front of them!

Entering city limits



In rural areas of the country, you'll often know you're coming into a small town (or bigger towns) when you see a big Co-op or Purina grain and feed storage silos and/or railroad sidings, or other large industrial types of

buildings (at least with entering the town from one direction). When you enter the city/town limits, start slowing down right away, because there will probably be a 30 to 45 mph speed zone ahead, with local police on the alert for speeders.

Staying on route and making route changes



When you're traveling on a smaller highway, you must always be alert and stay on the right highway. Sometimes it's easy to miss the highway signs. Generally, the smaller the highway or road, the smaller the sign's going to be. Driving at nighttime only makes these signs harder to see. You may be in the middle of a town and have to turn at the next stop sign, with less than a block's warning. Take it slow going through these types of areas, especially when you see a possible change of direction coming up.

In contrast to the Interstate, where there's always at least a mile notice before an exit, secondary roads can throw a change at you without any advance notice. The smaller the roads get, the more alert you'll have to be for these types of changes.

When you've been on a road that's taken curves several times, possibly changing directions at certain points, occasionally look at street signs to make sure you're still on the right road.

Be careful, one wrong turn, and suddenly you could be driving in a residential area, with a whole other list of hazards, including small children darting out in the street and not knowing for sure how to control their bicycles, low power lines and tree branches, narrow streets with cars parked on both sides, dead ends and NOWHERE to turn around!

It's much better that you upset a few people around you by going slower and know for sure where you are turning than get yourself trapped in a residential area, with visions of having your truck airlifted out!

Business routes



When you're on the outskirts of a town, there is often another road that veers off and goes directly into the busiest part of that town (if the route you're on doesn't already do that). This road is often the business route, with the same route number as the one you're on. But, at first glance, this may seem like the route you need to take. However, watch the sign closely. At the top of the number it will say "business" if it's a business route (or sometimes a "B" after the number).

If you *do* take the business route by mistake, it might be best stay with it (unless there's a sign prohibiting trucks, as many towns don't want trucks traveling through busy business or residential areas). It will usually loop back and merge with your original route. But your GPS should show you if that's the case!

Truck routes



tnonline.com

As mentioned above, many people don't want big trucks going through certain areas of their town. In this case, they'll have a "truck route" which will probably go all the way around the town, and connect with the main route at the other end of the town. It is advisable, and usually mandatory, that trucks take these truck routes. It often is for the trucker's benefit that these routes exist. They may save time in avoiding congested areas, low clearances, or ill-advised, difficult turns.

It can be more difficult to find a place to stop on secondary highways than on the Interstate. There are less truck stops, and they often don't have exits that take you off the highway, where you could find a place to stop. However, the smaller towns often have more places to pull off and park, if only for a brief time (not for parking overnight).

Traveling with other trucks

On a two-lane road, don't travel together with another truck so closely as to not allow a vehicle to pass in between the two trucks. This could force a vehicle to unwisely try to pass several vehicles when it only had the time and space to have passed one vehicle.

Things to watch for while driving on smaller roads

There may be occasions when you must drive to locations which are off the main highway. This was often my case when I drove for a company which made deliveries to nurseries, greenhouses, and plant farms. I often drove down very small roads, some of which prohibited trucks altogether, as many of these locations were in more rural areas, or in semi-residential areas. You must be on the alert in these areas for any type of obstruction or low clearance:

- **Low clearances:** Tunnels, underpasses, and on bridges.
- **Low hanging objects:** Utility wires, tree limbs and branches, etc.



I'm not referring to small tree branches that hang down, which you'll inevitably hit, but to bigger tree limbs, some of which are big enough to stop you in your tracks, OR break a mirror or dent a roof! Sometimes you

may have to wait for a vehicle coming from the opposite direction to pass you, then move to the other side of the road to avoid such obstructions.

Chapter 11: Sometimes, You Need to Stop the Truck!



Truck drivers need to regularly stop the truck on the way to their destination.

Some stops are necessities for the truck itself like:

- fuel, maintenance, vehicle inspection, etc.

Others are necessities for the driver:

- restroom breaks, eating a meal, getting coffee or needed supplies, or just taking a needed rest break.

Truck Stops

Ah... truck stops! You know them. You love them. Well, you might as well get used to them soon if you're gonna be a truck driver. They're impossible to avoid!

Even if all you do it get fuel and oil at truck stops, it's an experience that might cause *some* kind of emotional response in you... anger, frustration, laughter, confusion, and embarrassment are a few that come immediately to mind!

Of course, some truck stops are worse than others. It usually depends on the area where it's located. We'll discuss some of these things, as well as give some helpful advice about the normal tasks that you'll need to accomplish while there.

Finding truck stops

As an over-the-road driver, you'll need to be able to find a truck stop wherever you have to go. Fortunately, there are several ways to find one.

Using a Truck Stop App

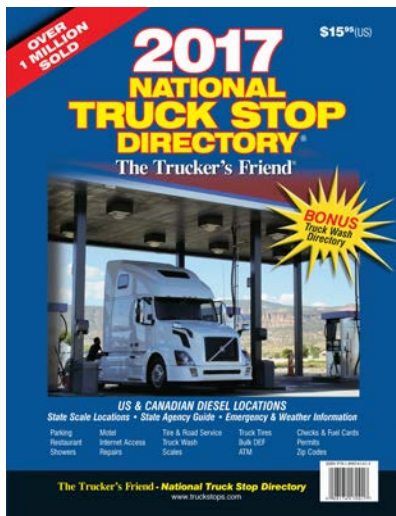


Trucker Path: From Trucker Path, “America's #1 app for truckers. Right now, truckers all over the country are telling each other the best places to park, stop, eat, and more with Trucker Path Pro. Join the conversation! It's 100% free.”

Truck Posting Show where you are ready to haul a load	Parking Find out if there's space before you pull over	Truck Stops Grab some sleep, a shower, and a bite to eat	Fuel Stations Find the brand you need and the price you want
Hotels Go on, relax in a real bed. You deserve it.	Truck Washes Keep it clean with full service or express	Rest Areas Stretch your legs and stay under HOS limits	Low Clearance Plan ahead and avoid an unexpected detour

Using a truck stop guide (printed version):

A good truck stop guide is essential for an over-the-road driver. You should have one within easy reach, right next to your Atlas.



This is the guide I've used for most of my years on the road. They keep it updated with a new version every year. You can purchase it [on its website](#) or you can find it in most truck stops (IF you can find a truckstop without a guide!).

As we've discussed previously (see "[Trip planning](#)"), your goal is to drive to a certain point by the end of the day. Many times, you'll get to the area in the evening, but you won't be able to deliver until the morning. So, it helps to plan ahead and know which truck stop you're going to stop at when you get there.

Keep in mind that the closer you are to a bigger city, and the later at night it gets, the harder it will be to find a parking space.

First, look at the "big picture" in the state where you're going to need a truck stop. Focus on the area just before your destination. Depending on where you are, there might be several truck stops, there could be none. It helps to have several stopping options, and just choose the best one.

If there are no truck stops in the area near where you'll end the day, then you may want to stop at an available truck stop earlier; fuel, eat, etc., *then* stop and sleep at a rest area (if you know it's a safe, guarded, well-lit area) nearer to where you're going to deliver.

It can be a lot easier when you're on the Interstate, because there are typically more truck stops. Once you know a TA/Petro truck stop in *one* state, then you basically know them *all*, like it is when you go to a Walmart or McDonalds in another state. Same thing. It can be a lot more comfortable out on the road when you know what to expect.

There are many factors to consider when choosing a truck stop from the guide, at least the truck stops other than the TA/Petro's and Pilot/Flying J's, etc., which you're already familiar with...or *will* be shortly after you start trucking.

First, observe how big the parking area is, especially in a metropolitan area. See if they have a restaurant, and if it's open 24 hours. After that, see if the truck stop has whatever else you're looking for; truck scales, truck service

shop, maintenance, a convenience store, etc. The guide should even tell you if the parking area is paved or lighted.

Getting truck stop information on the CB Radio:

Sometimes you can get good information on the CB about truck stops from other truck drivers who know the truck stops in the area. They may know how the food is, if there's sufficient parking available, as well as how to get there.

This is usually a last resort for me because I like to know in advance where I'm going to stop. But, there are good truck stops which are either too small or too new to be listed in the truck stop guide, or are technically not a truck stop at all.

Determining which locations are truck stops:

Sometimes it's hard to tell if certain locations are truck stops or not when you see their billboard advertisement on the side of the road. If it says Truck Plaza, or Truck Center, it obviously is a truck stop with facilities for truckers. But many truck stops do not have the name truck in their title. If it says, Travel Plaza or Travel Center, it most likely is a truck stop. Another common one is TA/Petro Shopping Centers; this is an example of one that IS a truck stop.

Different types of truck stops

The BIG truck stops

If you've spent any amount of time on the Interstate, you should be familiar with most major truck stops. TA/Petro and Pilot/Flying J are the biggest. These 2 companies are the result of the merger of 4. Some trucking companies only do business with one truck stop exclusively; others may do business with any truck stop that accepts Comcheck; still others will go to *any* available truck stop.

The **facilities** at these locations are often newer, and bigger, which is key when it comes to amenities like showers or driver's lounges. You may be away from home, but you can still have many of the comforts of home.



The **food** at these restaurants doesn't vary that much from one truck stop to another. Basically, the food is good and is typically "home-style cooking," and some of the buffets are excellent. The larger truck stops like Flying J will often have a food court, with a small pizzeria, teriyaki place, deli; sometimes all of the above.

There is almost always a collection of cold sandwiches, fried chicken, and various salads available to 'grab and go' up by the checkout counter and the fuel counter, if these are separate. But regardless of which option you choose, the prices are, hardly without exception, more expensive than in the smaller, off-Interstate truck stops.

Major truck stops are **open 24 hours**. Truckers operate 24/7, so this is obviously an advantage!



Parking is usually abundant during the daytime, but gets pretty scarce later in the evening, at least in the bigger city areas. At these times, you may end up going “round and round,” looking for that one space. That’s another reason why I try to plan ahead, and avoid these situations.

If you’re going in to eat, get supplies, and/or maybe rest for a while or spend the night, the bigger truck stops are preferable. But if all you need is a rest room break, stopping at truck stops can kill your time. It can take 20 minutes just to drive all the way in, park your truck, and walk inside. Then you’re inside, looking around, and considering doing other than what you came in for. It’s much quicker to use a rest area, or the equivalent, instead. Save the big truck stops for when you need to stop for a longer period.

Smaller truck stops

The truckers who remember talk longingly about the truck stops of old. How the food was better; even cheaper. And, at many smaller truck stops, this is still true.

One good thing about having the same, or dedicated route is that you know where to find the good truck stops or restaurants with parking. When you find a good truck stop, write a note about it somewhere, like right in your truck stop guide. Note how the food and the service was, and which amenities they had.

Another benefit of smaller truck stops is that you can **get in and out quicker**, without so many trucks to fight with. The parking is usually closer to the main building than at the big truck stops.



These truck stops may or **may not be open 24 hours**. You probably can park on the premises overnight, but you'll have to wait until the morning for the restaurant or store to open up. **The amenities often won't be quite as fancy**. The showers will probably be smaller, if they have any at all.

One time, I was in this small truck stop in Montana. I asked where their showers were, and I was told that there was a water hose out back. Wow, thanks a lot!

Refer to your truck stop guide for a list of each truck stop's amenities. You're welcome. Thank me later!

Truck stops in big city areas



Around big cities, the first thing you notice is how many big trucks there are. Even in the middle of the day, it can be tough to find a parking space. Planning ahead, and getting there early enough is essential.

In the more crowded areas, some truck stops charge a fee for parking over a few hours (anywhere between \$5 and \$10). If you fuel (usually over 50 gallons), or purchase a certain amount of food or supplies, then the parking is (usually) free for 24 hours.

Try to get your fuel and essentials at other, less crowded truck stops. This will save you a lot of time and aggravation.

Illegal activities, common practices, and driver safety

Hitchhikers



pennlive.com

In many truck stops, especially around big cities, you'll get a lot of hitchhikers asking for a ride. First, they'll probably ask you which way you're going. Just tell them up front that your company doesn't allow you to take any riders on the truck. By law, no unauthorized riders are allowed in a commercial motor vehicle.

NEVER pick up hitchhikers, under any circumstances. Picking up hitchhikers is dangerous, and it's prohibited (in most states, and by all trucking companies). Picking up hitchhikers is an unsafe thing to do. Remember, truckers DO get hijacked, robbed, beaten up, or even worse. No matter which way you look at it, picking up hitchhikers is too risky, and just not a smart thing to do.

Forget the notion that it's friendly and helpful to pick them up and give them a ride. Despite how harmless a person appears, you don't know who this person is, or their story. Most trucking companies don't even allow family members to travel in the truck, unless they've acquired written permission and authorization from the company. This is due to regulations imposed on trucking companies by insurance companies.

There are several ways in which you can get caught with unauthorized passengers. Weigh stations (also agricultural and border patrol inspection stations) occasionally check out your truck, and will want to see documentation allowing you to carry riders in your truck. If they find unauthorized passengers, they will give you a costly ticket, inform your company, and not allow the riders to continue on your truck. Another way to get caught is from the reports of other drivers, possibly even from your own company.

The CB Radio



Unfortunately, there should be a parental advisory sticker on the CB. No kids allowed, especially in many urban areas around the country. There's a lot of swearing and tough talk going on. This is when the "CB Rambo's" come out of the woodwork. You know, they're the ones who are much tougher on the radio than in person. You'll also hear from (and SEE) the "lot lizards" (prostitutes) as well as random people selling various items.

When you're driving in a truck stop parking lot, turn your CB on low volume. You may hear about an available parking space if it's crowded, especially at night. You may get some needed help when backing into (or out of) parking spaces. However, if it bothers you to hear other trucker's comments, don't forget to turn that CB knob to off!

People selling various items (illegal and legitimate)

Beware when hearing or being offered items via the CB. Some things can sound real tempting, but you've heard, "if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is," and you've probably experienced it personally. Well, you can get some good deals out there (drivers upgrading to a better CB radio, or getting out of trucking can be the source of some good deals), but it's essential that you know the value of things, as well as their quality and condition. If you're not sure, pass on the deal.

Another important thing to realize is that many items being sold, via the CB or by people you don't know in the parking lot, may have been stolen. These are not people you want to do business, or associate, with. Many of the people who hang out in these truck stops regularly do so, and are just waiting for an easy *mark*.

The "back row"

In many truck stops, especially in metropolitan areas, the back row of truck parking spaces can be a haven for illegal activities. This includes "lot lizards" going truck to truck banging on doors, people selling illegal drugs, begging for money to get back home to their momma, you name it! Make sure you lock up the doors and windows (even the vent windows).

Getting a "no lot lizards" bumper sticker and putting it on your window can often discourage them from disturbing you. But to be more proactive and possible enable them to get some help, place the following decal on your truck window.



I say this because truckers need their sleep. But I don't say this without realizing the reality and seriousness of the situation.

There are *real* human beings out there, many in the truck stops we frequent daily, that are being used and abused under our very noses. In other words, these “lot lizards” are being *forced* to work the truck stops. They should *not* be mocked or laughed at. That just shows a person's ignorance.

Check out [Truckers Against Trafficking](#) for more information. [Here's a video](#) you should watch so you can be part of the solution, and not a part of the problem.

Safety

Be careful when walking through truck stop parking lots. The most dangerous thing about walking through truck stop parking lots may be the danger of getting run over by other truck drivers! So, be careful when you step out in a lane, or parking space, and when walking behind a truck... you don't want to get run over.

Some truck stops in metropolitan areas can be dangerous to walk around, especially in the back and where there's no light. Try to stay or walk where

there are other drivers around. The adage, “safety in numbers,” is certainly good advice when it applies to truck stops.

Carry Pepper Spray (Just in Case!)

Pepper spray is a good choice because you can't build up a resistance to it as you can with mace, and is more effective against animals. Just be forewarned, when you choose to use self-defense equipment, it is your responsibility to be apprised of the [regulations and legalities](#) pertaining to said equipment in whatever location (state or county) you choose to use it in.

Truck stop procedures and protocol

Drive slowly

There is no need to go racing around the truck stop. Nobody is going to be impressed, and quite a few will be aggravated. There are many drivers walking to or from their trucks out there, and can come out from behind any truck. Trucks are backing up, coming around corners, and driving in every direction. Think about everyone's safety, including your own.

Backing up into parking spaces

- Put on your 4-way flashers when you're going to back up.
- Back up slowly, in low gear; use the clutch, not the accelerator.
- Listen on the CB if you wish; you may get some help if you need it.

Diagonal parking spaces

Many truck stops, most notably TA/Petro, have diagonal parking spaces. These can be easier to back up into, if they're going the right direction. However, many drivers may be unfamiliar with backing up this way. Here's a quick

Simply pull alongside the space you're planning on parking in, then slowly angle out (semi-right turn) to about the halfway point in the aisle. While still moving forward, turn the steering wheel back to the left and go straight (as if you were just driving down the middle). Stop when the back of your trailer is just in front of the parking space. Turn the steering wheel to the right, about half as much as when you do a normal alley dock style of backing. Adjust as needed!

Pulling forward into a parking space



overdriveonline.com

Instead of backing up, many drivers simply drive forward into a space. There is usually nothing wrong with the practice, but make sure you'll be able to back out without a problem.

There are advantages to parking forward. There is more privacy this way, without everyone else being able to see inside your truck. Also, some drivers park this way if they have a reefer unit on their trailer, and they don't want to disturb other drivers. Or, conversely, some drivers without reefers park forward to avoid the noise of other drivers pulling reefers.

Bobtail parking



Some drivers will complain if you park a bobtail in a space designed for a tractor and trailer. Many truck stops have parking places specifically for bobtails. When these are available, use them instead of taking up a whole tractor-trailer parking space. But if there are none available, and there doesn't appear to be any other obvious places where you can park, you have no other choice than to park wherever you can, despite the objections of some other drivers.

There are often occasions when you'll have to bobtail. Your trailer may need repairs, or it may be getting loaded. You may be waiting to pick up a loaded trailer from a customer.

Contrary to the belief of some drivers, it's still difficult for bobtails to find a parking space, and parking in a regular truck space may be their **only** option.

Note: Some companies allow you to take your bobtail home with you during your off time. However, many neighborhoods don't allow any commercial vehicles to be parked on their streets. In this situation, it's probably best to leave the truck at the company yard or terminal on your days off, and have someone drive you to the terminal or drive yourself when it's time to go to work.

Turn off headlights if parking lot is sufficiently lighted

Many trucks that are parked may still have the driver up in the driver's seat, and can get easily blinded. It shows consideration for your fellow drivers when you dim your headlights as you drive through the lot, looking for a space of your own. Obviously, if the truck stop isn't well lit, then you should keep your lights turned on.

Truck APUs and idling the engine

Truck APUs: The best solution for today's truckers



Having an APU installed on your tractor is the only way to go. You'll no longer have to worry about costly wasting of diesel fuel and polluting exhaust fumes messing with the air!

The initial investment is a bit expensive, but the fuel savings will quickly add up and make it worthwhile.

Check [here](#) and [here](#) for good discussions on choosing and using truck APUs.

Old school idling of the engine:

In certain conditions, like extreme cold or hot weather, you may need to let the engine idle. You may also have accessories on board, such as a refrigerator (the food needs to stay cool or it will spoil), and will need to keep the truck idling when you sleep. If not, you may run down your battery, which is the last thing you need.

However, many places now prohibit idling the engine. Hunts Point in the Bronx, N.Y. is one location which has begun cracking down on the practice. They limit idling time to three minutes, after which they can fine the trucker \$300.00. This is tough, because New York gets extremely cold in the winter, and just as hot in the summer.



Note: obviously, idling your truck will significantly raise your idling time. Many companies go by information on the tractor's computer when they are compiling information for handing out bonuses. Some of these bonuses may be attainable, but others may not be (unless you're willing to freeze in your truck – not recommended!). Find out your company's policy about these things beforehand, when you're gathering information about a company.

Combining tasks and saving time

The most efficient truck drivers do several tasks simultaneously to save time, and quickly get back on the road. There are many tasks that must be done *while* at the truck stop. With a little forethought, you'll be able to do several of these things during one stop at the truck stop.

Here are some suggestions on efficiency:

- Fueling, servicing, repairing, and washing the truck can all be done during the same stop, if you have the time.
- Eating meals, buying supplies, taking showers, sleeping, etc. are other tasks you'll need to do while stopped. Try to get everything done while you're there.
- If you only need to stop and use the rest room and/or get something to drink, and not take more than say 10 minutes, you can pull through the fuel island and pull ahead to the after fueling position, and run in to the quick truck stop area, and get what you need, then be right back on the road. This is a good move especially late at night when there's a lack of parking places. Besides saving you the time it takes to park, etc. you're allowing another truck driver to be able to park and take their time in the truck stop or just go to sleep.
- When you're in the fuel island, besides going through the normal fueling procedures, make a visual inspection under the hood. The hood is up already, so this won't take any extra time. There are couple of other things you can do as well: first, you can check your tire pressure. There are air hoses installed in most fuel islands for your convenience. Another thing you can do is to drain the air tanks, which should be done every day, but especially when there's been a lot of moisture in the air.

Fueling the truck



These are some basics you should get in the habit of doing every time you fuel. The following are some recommended procedures which may vary from location to location. The order of the procedures can be modified to fit *your* situation. These are recommendations, not set in stone procedures. Your company will most likely have their own rules about fueling.

Quick basic procedures checklist the fuel island

- Stop the truck so that the fuel pump is close to your fuel tank
- Set the parking brakes
- Write down the mileage in your state/mileage list
- Turn off the truck
- Grab your bag of trash and throw it out once you exit the truck
- Bring your wallet and/or fuel cards and/or method of payment
- Exit the truck
- Use the automatic fuel card reader, or phone in your information to the fuel desk
- Fuel the truck (see next section, "things to do while you're fueling the truck")
- Pull your truck forward (slowly, watching the pumps as you pull forward)
- Set the parking brakes
- Turn off the truck

- Take your keys and exit the truck
- Lock the doors
- Go inside to the fuel desk and sign your fuel receipt for pay for the fuel/supplies (if you didn't use the automatic fuel card reader)
- Get back in your truck and leave before the next trucker in line is finished fueling.

Enter Fuel Lane and Stop

Slowly enter the fueling area and stop so that your fuel tank cap is closest to the fuel pumps. Stop the truck and set the brakes.

Let the truck idle

Idle the truck for a minute or two before shutting the engine off.

Record Important Details

Write down your mileage, time, update log book, etc.

Turn off the Truck

Turn off truck even when it's cold outside. Too many drivers ignore this rule.

Get authorization through fuel desk or use automatic card reader

Talk to the fuel desk on the fuel island intercom. They'll need to gather information about the truck (usually the truck and trailer number, and license plate number), company information, and method of payment (Comcheck, cash, etc.). Also inform them if you also need reefer fuel.

At some locations, you'll need to go inside before you fuel to provide a method of payment. They need to protect themselves by preventing drivers from driving off without paying.

If your company provides you with a fuel card, you can use the automatic fuel card reader (if available) located by the fuel pumps at most truck stops. This reader may ask for truck and trailer number; tractor mileage; whether you're fueling the tractor, reefer, or both; oil or other supplies needed; whether you need a cash advance, and possibly other information.

Start fueling the tractor

Make sure both fuel pumps are secure in the tanks, using bungee straps if necessary. Don't walk too far away from pumps when fuel is flowing (you can wash windows, check oil etc., but don't go inside *while* you're fueling). If you *do* have a spill, immediately inform the fuel desk personnel or outside attendant if there's one available.

Watch for any spilled diesel on the fuel island. Some truck stops, unfortunately, are not very diligent about cleaning up these spills right away. Watch your step, because diesel fuel is very slippery, and you can easily fall down and get injured.

Keep a mat or piece of carpet on the floor near the driver's seat. You don't want to track diesel all over the truck. Also, keep some old rags nearby to wipe off your shoes before you get back in the cab, if there was any diesel that you may have picked up on your shoes.

If there's a good amount of diesel on the ground near the pumps, beware... there may be either a leak on the nozzle handle or hose, or possibly a faulty automatic shut-off valve on the handle. Watch the fueling process even more closely than usual, to prevent against an overflow. Also, notify the fuel desk about the problem, which they may be unaware of.

Things to do while you're fueling the truck

- Make sure the fuel nozzles are securely in place in the fuel tanks
- Start fueling
- Open/raise the hood
- Wash the door windows, the windshield, and the mirrors with the squeegee
- Visually check the windshield washer fluid and the engine coolant level
- Next, check the oil. It should now have had a few minutes to cool down to give a more accurate reading. If the levels are low, go into truck stop and purchase the needed supplies (after you've finished fueling). You will probably be able to charge it along with the fuel. Leave the hood up and go inside to get what you need (oil, other supplies, etc.), when you've finished fueling.
- Finish fueling and hang up the nozzles

Finish fueling

The fuel should automatically shut off when the fuel reaches a level near the top of the tank. But remember, watch both hoses carefully, because these fuel nozzle automatic shut offs are not foolproof. You can add more fuel to the tank manually, but don't completely top off the tank. You should leave some breathing room for the diesel vapors.

Pull slightly forward for reefer fuel (for drivers hauling a refrigerated trailer)

The fuel tank for the reefer is located just behind the trailer landing gear. When you pull forward for reefer fuel, stop when the landing gear is just forward of the fuel pump.

If the fuel desk knows you're getting reefer fuel (or if you entered it on the automatic reader), the fuel pump will be ready and reset at zero when you remove the nozzle and slide the lever to the "on" position.

Pull all the way forward after fueling

You want to enable the next driver to be able to fuel right away. It may take more than a few minutes to complete the transaction and use the facilities, and purchase other supplies or food, etc.

Watch the pumps and hoses in your mirror, and then slowly pull forward. This way, you'll be able to catch any mistakes you might have made right away. Truckers have forgotten to hang the fuel hoses back up, driven forward, and ripped the hoses from the fuel pumps, causing a diesel spill. These hoses also get run over a lot. Make sure there are out of the way before you get back in your truck, then watch for them as you pull forward.

Note: some smaller truck stops may not have left you enough forward room for you to pull forward. Use your judgment to decide whether to pull forward, or to leave the truck in the fuel island and just go inside to pay.

Truck stop services and amenities

Services for the truck



The fuel desk



The fuel desk of a truck stop handles a lot of different types of transactions:

- Arrange payment for fuel, oil, other supplies, etc.
- Get cash advances, cash comchecks, etc.
- Arrange for a shower (get on the shower list, make payment {typically around \$10 if you haven't fueled, or use shower coupons or credits from fuel purchases}, get shower key, towels, soap, etc., and is usually where you return keys, towels, etc.).
- Fax services (send or pickup).
- Pay for scale tickets.

Truck Repair and Maintenance



- **Preventative maintenance (PM) service**
- **Tire purchase and repair**
- **Parts and services**

Most truck stops have service centers for the driver's convenience. Try to get your truck serviced during off-peak hours, if you can. If you need it done late in the afternoon, or during weekends, you might have to wait longer. For regular services, some shops require the driver to stay close by while the truck's being serviced. Often, the driver can go inside the truck stop and eat a meal, take a shower, etc., while the shop is performing repairs. Just let them know your whereabouts.

CAT scales

For more information, go to [Keeping It Legal: Weighing the Truck](#).

Truck wash



Many bigger truck stops have truck washes on the premises. They're often situated across from the fuel islands and truck service area. Blue Beacon is the most common truck wash, and truckers usually highly recommend the work they do.

Know your company's procedures on truck washes; how often they want the truck washed at a minimum, how often they'll allow you to wash the truck at a maximum (per month?), whether the company has an account at

a certain truck wash (in which case you wouldn't have to pay cash), or if you're expected to pay cash, then be reimbursed (or not!).

Some companies leave it at the discretion of the driver, as they believe it's more of a driver issue, than a company one. Some drivers keep the truck clean and polished regularly, others may wash the truck only once every six months. It's impossible considering the conditions of the road (especially in the winter) to keep it clean all the time (and not cost effective), but make sure you do it often enough (approximately every 3-4 weeks) to maintain a professional appearance.

Additional services offered by many truck washes:

- Engine wash
- Aluminum brightening
- Protectant
- Trailer washout
- Undercarriage wash

Here's a [video](#) showing the whole truck wash approach and process.

Vacuuming the truck

Your portable vacuum cleaner which you (should) keep in the truck is good for regular, superficial cleaning of the carpet and upholstery. But whenever you stop at a truck wash, there should be the large, industrial type vacuum cleaners stationed right before the entrance to the truck wash. Stop at the vacuum cleaners, and thoroughly vacuum the truck.

When you wash the tractor, make sure you also occasionally wash under the hood, to keep the engine clean. Doing this will help you be able to spot leaks, and to tell where they came from. Keep on top of these things, and you will save yourself costly time in the long run.

Services for the driver

Restaurant



As mentioned before, the food quality as well as the service can really vary from stop to stop (just like anywhere else). When you find one that has good food and service, and a reasonable price, write it down so that you'll remember it.

In addition, many bigger truck stops now offer the convenience of fast food like Burger King, Taco Bells, Pizza Hut, etc.

Shower facilities



Most truck stops have private showers for drivers, and will provide them for free if the driver fuels a minimum amount, such as 50 to 75 gallons. The conditions of the showers will vary from truck stop to truck stop. With smaller truck stops, look around. If they keep everything else in good

condition (the neatness and cleanliness of fuel islands, trash cans, inside the store, restaurant, etc.), then they'll probably have showers in good condition too. Most truck stops have showers which are in good condition, and are cleaned in between every shower taken.

These "shower rooms" usually include a shower, a sink with a mirror and a shelf, a bench or chair, and a toilet.

[Here's an informative video](#) about using the truck stop showers. You'll hear some commentary on what you'll commonly find in the bigger and/or more popular truck stops.

Shower essentials

At the shower desk (this item list will vary); you'll be given a shower room key, towels and a washcloth, and a paper shower mat (or an extra towel). You should also bring your own shampoo and/or conditioner, shaving cream and razors, toothbrush and toothpaste, soap (if you don't like to use the generic liquid soap dispenser, or very small bars of soap the truck stop usually gives you), and a hair brush, comb, hair dryer, etc.

Depending on what type of trucking you do, planning on taking a shower every day can be difficult. It may be more realistic to take showers at the most convenient times: when you have a few hours to kill, are waiting for a load, at the completion of a trip, etc.

Of course, if your daily routine involves more physical work like loading, unloading, or securing or tarping a load, then you'll need to find a way to shower every day. But, if you go for days and all you do is drive, then you might find it more practical to skip a day now and then.

Just remember, only truck drivers can choose to be less funky!

If your body chemistry demands that you shower every day regardless, then select a time at a truck stop, preferably after fueling, so you can save time. Keep in mind that you only make money when the truck's wheels are turning.

Everyday hygiene

Bring your travel bag with toothbrush, toothpaste, etc. to the truck stop or rest area restroom at the beginning and end of your day. Don't start thinking of the road as separate or different from being at home, and start neglecting essential hygiene. Your body and teeth don't know the difference, and you'll begin to feel the effects of such neglect, which will impact your ability to operate the truck efficiently, as well as your ability to make money.

Laundry facilities



The bigger truck stops, and some smaller ones, have laundry facilities. Most have coin- operated washers and dryers, folding tables, and chairs to use while waiting. Many have detergent, dryer sheets, etc., in vending machines; in others you'll have to purchase them in the convenience store.

Convenience store



Truck stop convenience stores have your basic necessities, with the bigger ones having a better variety and selection. But, as with all convenience stores, getting stuff there is usually more expensive.

Try to stock up on supplies when you're at home and have access to stores with better selection and cheaper prices. If you're running low on supplies while you're out on the road, try to go to a Walmart, or a similar store, that may have room for truck parking.

Theater / TV room / Driver's Lounge



Other services (not all services offered at all locations)

- Game room
- Chapel/church services (usually in the driver's lounge)
- CB shop
- Barber
- Dentist
- Chrome shop
- Knife shop
- DOT physicals
- Fitness area
- Game room
- Cell phone sales, service, accessories
- Chapel, ministry services
- Pet areas
- ATM

Rest Areas



Good times to stop at a rest area instead of a truck stop:

- When you need to make a quick restroom break.
- When you're getting tired and the next truck stop is too far down the road.
- When it's late at night and you doubt there will be parking spaces available at the next truck stop.

If it's late at night, I often try to find a rest area (or on-ramp or shoulder if there is no rest area nearby, and it's legal and safe to do so) that's just *before* a truck stop, and take my sleep break there. Then, when I wake up in the morning, drive to the truck stop when there's usually plenty of parking available, and go in and get coffee, have breakfast, etc. This eliminates the worry, stress, and aggravation of finding a parking space late at night when you're getting tired.

Is truck parking allowed?

There are some rest areas which have signs prohibiting overnight parking. They may limit parking to just two or three hours. This is to allow more trucks to make quick rest stops, and then resume driving. Usually there'll be a 24-hour rest area just a short distance down the road (check the Atlas for location).

Safety



Most rest areas on the Interstate are usually kept well-lit and many are patrolled by private security and sometimes by highway patrol. But you should avoid walking in rest areas at night. Watch for people just “hanging out,” either in their cars or around the facilities. Do not stay in the rest room too long, especially late at night. Always keep the doors locked and the windows up.

“Lot lizards” (prostitutes) are often seen hanging out in rest areas as well, sometimes going truck to truck. They can be men or women, so don’t be surprised in either case. Truckers have gotten robbed, or worse, by letting them into their trucks. Keep some sort of (legal) self-defense options in the truck and on your person. See more about this in the truck stop section [“the back row.”](#)

Facilities

Rest areas don’t have the services that truck stops have. Usually they have rest rooms, soda and snack machines, water fountains, public pay telephones, and perhaps a few others.

Some rest areas may have an information or welcome center on site. These are usually the first rest area you come to when you've just entered a new state. Some states offer free coffee at their rest areas to combat driver fatigue (of course, remember that the only real remedy to fatigue is adequate sleep).

Other Places to Stop

Picnic, scenic, parking areas



These are similar to rest areas, but usually don't have any facilities. The parking areas are often unlit, and may not be as safe, depending on the area. Make sure if you stop there at night that there are plenty of other trucks parked there (there's more safety in numbers), although that doesn't guarantee your safety. These can also be hangouts for prostitution and other illegal activities in some parts of the country.

Weigh station parking



In some states, weigh stations provide parking for big trucks. These are safe places to park, and there is usually rest room facilities provided for drivers. Closed weigh stations are also used by drivers for parking. The possibility of being inspected in the event the weigh station opens exists, but is not common.

Just park and sleep in weight stations when the parking spaces are AFTER the scales and where you don't have to go around the scale house and go back across the scales. Not that you're trying to get away with anything, but you don't want to volunteer your truck for inspection any more than necessary!

OR, just make sure you're up to date and legal if you stop at one like shown above!

Customer locations

When you're getting directions, find out if the customer (shippers and receivers) allows trucks to park on their property (or sometimes nearby, or on the street outside; ask if the area's safe). For example, it's often much easier to show up at the customer the night *before* your delivery appointment (when loading/unloading is scheduled), and sleep there for

the night. Then, when you wake up, all you have to do is get yourself together, walk into the facility, and check in.

Walmarts, malls, and other large private businesses



The parking lots at many Walmarts can resemble truck stop parking lots. Walmart has quite large parking lots and its personnel are *often* OK with trucks parking there.

Parking at places like this is a convenience to drivers. Thank them by going in and making a purchase and not just using their business to park your rig for free. And watch out for cars and pedestrians!

There are exceptions, so take notice before you park there. Many of the stores in larger metropolitan areas are too crowded for trucks. Some Walmarts have “no trucks” signs and even low clearance barriers preventing trucks from entering in the more crowded areas.

Remember, not all Walmarts allow trucks, as seen [here!](#)



Don't enter the parking lot if it's crowded. Also, if you do park there try to be as far back away from the store is possible. You don't want to take up several parking spaces if there's not a multitude of available spaces for other vehicles.

This is another reason why trucks are not allowed to enter some Walmart parking lots. People complained because they had no place to park because of the big trucks taking up too many spaces. Just as you don't make money when your wheels aren't rolling, discount stores don't make money when their customers can't park.

Don't allow yourself to get blocked in by other vehicles who park there after you've gone into the store. Don't make the mistake of thinking that other vehicles wouldn't park right in front of you, not giving you a way out. Many people are only thinking about what items they need to get inside while inside the store.

The newer Walmart Supercenters have just about everything you could need, now even including groceries, for good prices. These can be a good place to stop for the truck driver, especially one who stays out on the road for long durations, and needs to resupply themselves and the truck.

When you notice a store that has ample parking, note down the location information on a notepad (or [Evernote](#)), and use it like you would the truck stop guide. Then you'll have this information for the next time.

Parking on ramps and shoulders



Sometimes, you just must stop. Never, unless it's an emergency, stop on the shoulder of the traveled part of the highway or Interstate. But you can *often* find a shoulder on the ramp access to the highway that's far enough away to be safe. It's best to use the shoulders for quick stops only.

If its late at night, there's likely to be limited parking at the truck stops. You may be too tired to drive any further, and can't make it safely to where you planned to stop. Try to find a spot on the shoulder of a ramp that's level, so you're not sleeping on an incline or a decline, or off to the left or the right. This will allow you to get much more restful sleep.

Some drivers say NEVER park and sleep on the shoulder. But these drivers have probably never had to deliver in NYC or many places on the east coast. Just stop at a truck stop in NJ on the way? Late at night? GOOD LUCK with THAT!

Check out the following view of one of these truck stops in Bloomsbury, NJ, taken during the day, when you MIGHT find a spot. At night? Nightmare!



There are times when you just have no choice but to stop on an on or off-ramp. It's a lot safer to just park rather than continuing to drive when you're tired. You just should use some common sense out there! Try to find a spot that has other trucks there, is well lit, in a relatively safe area, etc., and you should be fine.

If you're going to get off at an exit to use the on or off-ramp's shoulder, make sure that it has return access back to the highway. Most states seem to have signs that tell you if there's no return access, but I've seen some of these no-return exits without any such warning signs.

Here's an [article](#) that gives more information about this ongoing debate.

Staying Safe While You're Stopped

Personal Safety or Self-Defense Equipment



Can truck drivers carry a gun in their truck?

Well that depends, mostly, on your company rules (most companies will say NO) *and* on the state laws where you're driving in or through. These two factors make it difficult, but not impossible, to carry a gun in the truck.

If you're an owner-operator, you only have to worry about the state to state law problem.

According to the NRA/IRA Guide to Interstate Transportation:

"Federal law does not restrict individuals (except convicted felons; persons under indictment for felonies; adjudicated "mental defectives" or those who have been involuntarily committed to mental institutions; illegal drug users; illegal aliens and most nonimmigrant aliens; dishonorably discharged veterans; those who have renounced their U.S. citizenship; fugitives from justice; persons convicted of misdemeanor crimes of domestic violence; and persons subject to domestic violence restraining orders) from transporting legally acquired firearms across state lines for lawful purposes. Therefore, no federal permit is required (or available) for the interstate transportation of firearms."

Additional information:

- [Navigating gun laws for truckers](#)
- This article on [guns.com](#) has more information on the subject, if you're wondering if you can carry a firearm as a truck driver.
- Gunlawguide.com - "[Traveler's Guide to the Firearm Laws of the Fifty States](#)".
- [Self-defense for truck drivers](#).

What About Pepper Spray, Stun Guns, Tasers, mace, etc.?

These are items that truck drivers can more easily carry, though not necessarily legal.

Pepper spray is effective enough to solve 99% of the problems you're likely to face on the road and truck stops. It's powerful, but non-lethal. There *are*, however, some limitations on its use.

Plus, there's still the company policy problem. If the company says no, then find another company to work for if your safety is important to you and your family.

[Selfdefenseninja.com](#) lists these restrictions and all US state restrictions.

Safety advice for women drivers



Note: *This section was co-written with my wife Sarah, veteran of truck stops and the road.*

Some women may get offended at the section title here, complaining that they're equal to men and shouldn't be treated any differently. I totally understand! Just look at this instead as "safety advice for ANY person who may be susceptible to attack from an uninvited mean person." A bit long for a title though!

- Keep a shirt or jacket on the passenger seat to suggest the existence of a male partner.
- Never tell anyone that you're alone.
- Do not allow anyone you do not know into your truck with you under any pretense. (Obviously, certified mechanics in appropriate locations and circumstances are excepted).
- Don't park (or get out of the truck) in dark or secluded areas.
- Just as when you are driving a car, if you have any reason to believe that the flashing lights pulling you over are not law enforcement, or if you feel unsafe or uncomfortable pulling over alone in a secluded area, use both your common sense and either your cell phone or CB

radio to get in touch with local law enforcement and inform them that you understand you are being pulled over, and would like confirmation that the vehicle following you is in fact carrying official law enforcement personnel. If they can confirm this, respectfully request your right to drive to a well-lit, public area before you stop. If you're in the middle of a long stretch of dark highway, they may balk at this request, but perhaps they'll have some suggestion of another action that could be taken for you to feel safe. Communication and respect are always the keys when dealing with law enforcement agents.

- When going to and from the truck, for any reason, always walk with your head up, be aware of your surroundings, and walk with a purpose. If you're not sure where the restroom or service department is in the truck stop or dealership, don't wander around looking unsure of yourself. Walk right up to the counter, or first uniformed employee you see, and ASK for what you need. Radiating confidence and awareness will discourage would-be attackers.
- Be polite, but don't encourage any unneeded interaction with strangers. Of course, this isn't about customers, but keep in mind this basic rule: If you don't know them, then you don't owe them. Not a look, not a smile, not even an acknowledgment. They're not your friends, and likely, you'll never see these people again. It's understandable to feel obligated to respond to someone who seems to be 'just a nice guy' (or gal), but you can never be too careful when you're on the road alone.

A lot of men (dock workers, lumpers, other drivers, maybe even your supervisor or dispatcher) will only see you as a target. So, don't be surprised if you find yourself the butt of jokes, usually crude, or the subject

of shameless stares. That doesn't mean you must tolerate it, particularly if it's to your face. Be firm, be professional, and ignore everything you can.

Sometimes you may have to toss out a solid “BACK OFF” to get your point across. Remember, you'll probably never see these people again, and their opinions don't matter.

If you hear crap on the CB, turn it off. Instead of getting upset (which will only amuse the people that are trying to harass you), try to keep yourself busy while going down the road. Check out the upcoming section on “[Things to do while driving down the road](#),” and make the most of your time. It's best to take the “high road” if you can.

Ignore the stares! They will come from almost everyone, practically everywhere you go. Half of them are admiring looks, anyway. Nearly everyone you meet will be surprised and fascinated to hear what you do for a living. Don't take their surprise as an insult. Realistically, as a female trucker, you are in the minority of drivers out there!

Don't invite trouble by allowing other drivers to buy your meals or drinks. Paying your own way is one way to set up boundaries. Guard your “personal space.” Many people will take a mile if you give them an inch, so be careful of what you allow. When someone gets too close, ask them to move away. If they don't, *you* move. If they follow you, leave. But don't go directly to your truck if they are still following you. Stay in a well-lit, public place until they're gone. Some of the larger, more established truck stops may have a security patrol that could escort you to your truck.

There is more detail about safety in the section on “**Staying Safe While You're Stopped**” in [When You Need to Stop the Truck](#).

You may find you have to try a little harder for a little longer, and be a little more careful, to earn the respect you deserve, but once you've worked through all of the initial challenges of becoming a truck driver, you will have a rewarding career ahead of you, regardless of your gender.

Safety and privacy inside the truck



Cleanandcool.com

Privacy is very important, because when you are stopped, your truck is essentially your home. You don't want everyone to be able to see inside your living area, to see what you're doing, and to be able to see all your possessions, electronics, appliances, and personal items.

Having adequate privacy is also important for security/safety. People cannot covet or desire what they cannot see. This security factor is even more important when you're in a rest area, or secluded location, which doesn't offer the security that a good truck stop does. To accomplish this privacy, the following will help!

Sleeper/cab curtains, sunshades



You can also use the RoadPro Cab Curtain. You can find this one on Amazon. It works nicely!

Different trucks have many kinds of interiors, and sleeper berth styles. Some are designed with a curtain that can wrap all the way around the windshield and windows, thereby giving you complete privacy within your whole cab. Others just have a large curtain separating the front of the cab/driving area from the sleeper berth area. In this situation, the curtain usually closes at the middle, and is fastened by either Velcro, a zipper, or metal snaps. It's best to have both options, but the sleeper berth type of curtain is more common.

If you particularly want to have more room or privacy in the driving area, you can do so cheaply, quickly, and portably.

Measure your windows and windshield, then while you're at a Walmart or similar store, buy a small tarp or a few yards of canvas and strips of self-adhesive Velcro. Attach the Velcro to both the material and above the windshield and passenger windows. This will fashion a removable curtain that blocks both the sun and the eyes of other drivers.

Emergencies and Breakdowns



Overdrive Magazine

Even with the best companies, and the newest trucks, breakdowns do occur. Fortunately, most trucking companies now have improved communications with their drivers, and are *usually* quick about getting things taken care of.

When a breakdown occurs, get the truck off the traveled part of the highway or road, if possible. Get out and set up your reflective triangles, if needed to alert oncoming vehicles.

Depending on your company, breakdown procedures will vary. With some companies, drivers are to call or text their dispatcher with any problems (or use the Qualcomm system, if so equipped). The dispatcher will then get help for the driver. In others, the driver will have a list of phone numbers to call in the case of a problem, and take care of it themselves.

Running out of fuel... It even happens to truckers!

Proper planning should prevent totally running out of fuel, but since we are human, we are also prone to mistakes, or just occasional bad judgment. It's happened to the "best" of us.

OK, here's a quick, though a bit embarrassing tale, from my early days as a driver. I didn't include this in my first edition of the book because I thought readers would then doubt my ability to teach anybody anything! But, now I realize this was silly. I was new, poorly trained, and sometimes, stuff just happens! But now, I can help you avoid stuff!

In my first month as a trucker, just after completing my “quality” 2 weeks' worth of education, I'm driving in the Bridger-Teton National Forest, up near Yellowstone.

The following image (thanks Google!) shows a good view of the area, which shows a drop off on the right as I was going UP the mountain. **Not sure if this is the exact location, but it's close!**



I *should* have fueled in Riverton, WY. I *figured* I'd easily make it to Jackson Hole, WY on the fuel I had left in the tank. Well, as it turns out, you burn fuel much more quickly when going up steep hills!

Of course, I had no back up plan. When it started looking more and more likely I was *not* going to make it to another truck stop, I just prayed I'd find *some* gas station I could fit my truck into and get diesel!

NO such luck! Engine dies going UP the hill. Then ALL power shut off. This is a “safety feature.” Well, thanks a lot, Freightliner and Cummins!

Well, as it turns out, *brakes need power*. Oh, and *so does steering*!

So, there I am, stepping, or literally *standing* on the brake, and slowing down the truck. But the truck is still going backwards! And I’m heading towards a drop off! I’m now holding my door open with my left hand, while *trying* to steer with my right hand, *and* standing on the brake with all I had!

I had the door open and was standing for *another* reason. Since I’m *not* the captain of a ship, I was ready to jump out of that truck *before* it went over the edge!

I stopped the truck just as my right rear trailer tandems were straddling the edge of the steep drop off. I sometimes call it a *cliff* when I tell this story, just to be dramatic! I set the brakes, then *slowly* got out of the truck.

So, there I am, just sitting on a rock and enjoying the scenery. I wish I had a picture. A semi-truck teetering back and forth in the wind, set against the beautiful backdrop of the Wyoming mountains.

So, to sum it up, I got lucky. If that truck went over the edge I would have been fired, unlikely ever to get a trucking job again. You wouldn’t be reading this right now!



phenixtruckbodies.com

But I got lucky. The driver of a pickup truck with a transfer flow fuel tank of diesel was nice enough to stop and take pity on a poor rookie trucker. We fueled up the truck, and I *carefully* got back in that truck and was able to get it going again up that hill. Thank you Lord and the stars above!

Conditions that make running out of fuel more likely:

A new or unfamiliar truck

When you're assigned a new truck, find out the capacity of the fuel tanks, which will vary from truck to truck. They usually have two tanks ranging from 75 to 150 gallons or more apiece. Generally, the newer the truck, the better the fuel mileage per gallon. Keep track of your fuel mileage, and use this as a guide when planning your trips.

Not knowing the locations of fuel stops along the way

Proper planning is key. Effective trip planning is covered in another section.

Wind resistance or mountains and hills

Not factoring these conditions into your miles per gallon calculations can be costly. This can cause a difference of several miles per gallon alone.

Faulty fuel gauges

Don't put too much faith in the fuel gauge. On one truck, empty is empty; on another, you can drive another 100 miles before you run out.

Inclines and declines

Whether the truck is on flat surface, or on a decline or an incline will cause many gauges to read differently. Also, with some tanks, they may draw fuel from the front of the tank. So, if you're running low on fuel, and going uphill, your chances of running out of fuel increase, because most of the fuel is towards the back of the tank.

Note: *if you're running low on fuel, and are not sure you'll make it to your scheduled truck stop, stop at the closest fueling location, and get just enough fuel to get you to your next stop. With some companies, if you don't stop at one of their regular truck stops, you'll have to pay cash on your own, which you will be reimbursed for. Talk to your company first about this possibility.*

Inspecting the Truck and the Load

Periodic safety and cargo checks

- Equipment must be checked at least every three hours or 150 miles, whichever comes first. In addition, drivers must stop to check all the trucks lights before it gets dark. Then, they must recheck them whenever they stop at night.
- Tires, wheels, lugs, and studs should be checked every time you stop.
- While stopped, you can also clean any windows and mirrors, if they are dirty.
- Cargo checks:

- If the cargo can be checked without breaking the seal, it must be checked within the first 25 miles of driving, every three hours or 150 miles, and at each change of duty status.
- Checking the reefer and the cargo temperatures:
 - If you're carrying a load that needs to be kept at a certain temperature, check the temperature every time you stop.
 - Reefer units need to be regularly serviced, or you'll run the risk of having the unit breakdown, or just stop cooling or heating sufficiently.
 - The unit needs to be checked for things such as oil, belts, and coolant. Don't just wait for the unit to show signs of not working properly.
 - If it does fail, it could take a long time to find a repair shop and make the repairs. Possibly too long, as the perishables you're hauling could spoil! Of course, how long these things take depends on where you are at the time of breakdown

Hazardous materials safety checks

Drivers hauling hazardous materials must check the vehicle's tires every two hours or 100 miles, and at every change of duty status.

Tires found to be under inflated must be driven, if possible, to the nearest fueling location and sufficiently inflated.

Overly heated tires must be replaced immediately.

Note: For hazardous materials regulations for truck drivers, check the [FMCSA](#).

Exercise and Stretching Breaks

I'll just emphasize the need to stop driving occasionally, to move around, stretch, etc. It's easy to get in the pattern of just sitting and driving, stopping only when absolutely necessary. But this will catch up with you if you're not careful. Take my word for it!

Depending upon the type of trucking you do, you usually need to stop every few hours or so, to check your load and/or tires. Take this opportunity to do some stretching, pushups, sit-ups, squats, and/or a quick few strolls around the truck. Besides getting you into a better routine for your health, it will also enable you to drive more alertly and more effectively.

It may sound silly to some, but posture is key, especially when you're driving. You're behind the wheel up to 11 hours at a stretch. You can actually do a lot of damage to your back and/or your neck by sitting slouched over, as I see a lot of drivers do. I know, it doesn't look as cool to sit upright, but it'll help considerably.

Also, consider a good back cushion (try the wood beads cushion, which many drivers use). Often, it's not until we've already done some damage and our back starts hurting that we consider doing something about it.

With wisdom, comes age. Or is it the other way around?

One thing you can do is to park farther away from the truck stop and walk. This is the opposite, of course, of what most truckers do. They're always trying to find the closest space available, having a minimal amount of walking. I can understand it if you're running a little behind schedule, or if the weather's bad, but don't get in the habit of doing it *all* the time.

Chapter 12: Successful Trucking Practices



Solo Drivers. How to Drive Effectively

Don't count the miles

When you first get started out on the road, you can get into some bad habits. Like focusing on the mile markers and/or your clock, at least for several hours at a time, hoping to get where you're going faster, so you can relax, or eat a meal, etc.

Most of the time, just notice the markers in your peripheral vision, but try not to *focus* on the mile number. It might even help to set an alarm if you need to, perhaps every hundred miles or so. Just be sure you don't miss any important stops or route changes.

The reasoning behind this (besides the fact that this will help the time and miles to go by easier) is because you need to *enjoy* this job, or you'll never succeed long term.

This means enjoying *this moment, right now!* Don't just live only for the moment when you get home. Don't get me wrong, those can still be the *best* moments, because there's nothing like being with your family or alone fishing, or whatever. But these shouldn't be the *only* good moments in your life!

Over-the-road truck drivers are totally different than most nine-to-fivers, many of whom are counting the minutes until 5 o'clock, or until Friday. Thank God, it's Friday! Yeah, I remember those days.

Professional drivers spend a great majority of their lives on the road! Don't you think maybe we should enjoy it a little? It can make all the difference.

Here's a way to keep your mind occupied and entertained while driving. It's an app called [Georeader](#) that automatically reads historical markers to you out loud as you drive by them. Very cool idea!

Listen As You Drive

Hear what markers say as you drive, without stopping to read, making your trip more enjoyable. *All hands-free, driver-friendly.*



Do some exercise and stretching



The better overall condition that you're in, the more effectively you'll drive, and the fewer back and neck related injuries you'll have.

Stopping at certain intervals along the way breaks up your day, and energizes you if you're feeling sluggish.

Also, good posture is key, and will have a positive effect on your long-term condition. It's probably more important than you think. Preventive measures are important when it comes to health and exercise. You don't want to wait until you're in chronic pain (neck, back, shoulders, knees) to try and change bad habits. Simply begin by creating good ones, and you'll thank yourself later.

Along the same lines, ensuring your seat and mirrors (and in some cases, the gas, brake, and clutch pedals) are adjusted properly to minimize any repetitive motions you must make will go a long way towards eliminating injuries to your neck, wrists, elbows, knees, and back, and add to your driving endurance. Ergonomics aren't just for office workers!

Note: Check out the chapter "Truckers Can Also be Fit" in *Trucking Lifestyles* for much more on this.

Eating healthier



Certain foods can affect your body, and your energy level, in different ways. If you eat a very big meal (like your typical truck stop buffet), a short time later your body reacts by going into sleep mode to compensate. Similarly, eating sweets (although providing a short-term energy burst) will also make you sleepy after the initial energy burst. These are not the affects you want when you're trying to get down the road safely and effectively.

Drink plenty of water throughout the day; at least eight glasses a day. But one thing - you might have to stop the truck more often! Not only will this help your body clear toxins (such as excess caffeine, sugar, and fat) from your system, it will help maintain your kidney and bladder health, both of which are common problem areas than can have particularly severe results when not cared for properly, for truckers.

There are actually many healthy alternatives at truck stops: at many Pilot/Flying J's, there are Subway restaurants. They have low-fat and low-carb options, depending on how you're eating. Other truck stops have Arby's, Wendy's, and other fast food restaurants. Even some of these restaurants also have low-fat and/or low-carb options.

Note: Check out the chapter “Truckers Can be Healthy” in *Trucking Lifestyles* for more details.

How to Be Effective Team Drivers



Recognizing partner differences, similarities.

Not every team that gets together is going to want to *stay* together. In a way, it's similar to a marriage, because the partners spend a similar amount of time together, and probably have about the same breakup percentage.

A good partner can be tough to find. You may find what you think is an ideal partner until you realize you can't sleep because of their driving style (quick movements, sudden stops because of bad habits, tailgating, etc.).

Remember, even trucks with the biggest cab and sleeper can be confining for two drivers, especially when the drivers are not used to driving team.

We all have different likes and dislikes, methods of driving, driving abilities, personalities, etc. One driver may like to talk all the time, and the other doesn't (though this might be the ideal partnership).

There are also other issues like smoking preference (most non-smokers dislike the smell of cigarette smoke), music likes and dislikes, and CB usage preferences, etc.

Don't forget your partner!

Believe it or not, this is a common occurrence with team drivers. One partner may be sleeping in the sleeper berth. The driver stops at a truck

stop just to get something to drink. They're gone for a couple of minutes, then they get back in the truck, and resume driving. In about 10 minutes, they get a call from their company which directs them to go back to the truck stop and pick up their partner, who was left behind when they last stopped.

To prevent this from happening, the partners should discuss with each other a few routine things to do each time the driver stops and goes inside the truck stop, and the partner who was still in the sleeper berth decides to get out of the truck as well.

For example, the non-driver should leave the sleeper berth curtain wide open, and/or leave their hat or other item on the passenger seat to indicate that they've left the truck.

Make sure you know your partner's phone number for emergencies such as these!

The qualities of a successful team operation



californiacareerschool.edu

In a successful team operation, both drivers work together as one unit. They must agree on the length of the driving shift and sleep/rest times,

route planning, and be skilled at combining tasks while on the road (taking meals, fueling and/or servicing the truck, etc.).

Shifts: How long to drive?

This depends upon the preferences of the individual. Some drivers prefer to drive the whole 11-hour shift, which will only work if the other partner prefers to run like this. Both partners also need to be able to sleep and/or rest for the same period of time.

Other teams prefer to swap positions every 4-6 hours, depending upon the situation. It's often easier for new drivers to drive with this limited number of hours. Perhaps the toughest thing about this style of driving is having to take two, smaller periods of rest instead of one long one.

Driving for longer shifts is easier for veteran drivers, but it takes some getting used to.

Flexibility is key because the conditions are always changing. If the operation always drives coast-to-coast, then it would be easy adjusting to whatever shifts they decided on. But, in trucking, it's often 2300 miles one trip, then 500 miles the next trip, etc., which would interrupt any consistency in routine they may have developed.

Inevitably, compromise and sacrifice are key if the team operation is going to be a successful one.

Things to Do While Driving Down the Road

Listening to the radio

This can help you to enjoy your driving time, and can keep your mind busy. Some drivers prefer music, others listen to talk radio shows or news. If you have a smartphone, you can even be involved with certain shows, calling in either your request or opinion.

I tend to go alternate between the two, depending upon my mood. Also, if it's getting later in your driving shift, you may want to consider more upbeat music. If the music is too slow and melodic, it can have too relaxing of an effect. You don't want to be lulled to sleep!

Listening options:

- Music
- Talk shows
- Sports
- Audiobooks

Audiobooks

Many truck drivers enjoy listening to audiobooks while driving. Most major truck stops allow you to rent the tapes at one truck stop location, and to return them to another truck stop down the road participating in the same program when you're done with them. This is a very innovative idea, and convenient for drivers who may not get back to the initial truck stop for quite a while.

Another option is to listen instantly through online services like [Audible.com](https://www.audible.com) and [Audiobooks.com](https://www.audiobooks.com), both of which offer free trial subscriptions, then approximately \$14.95 thereafter.

Or...just turn the radio off!

When you first start trucking, most of your time will be thinking about the process of trucking itself. How to shift properly, staying in your lane, etc., but after you've been trucking for a little while, you don't have to give conscious thought to every little driving detail. At this point, you'll be better able to enjoy the scenery, etc.

You can also just think through different processes of the job, and test your knowledge in certain areas.

You can invent hypothetical scenarios. For example:

- What would you do right now if you found yourself on “black ice”?
Did you say, “let up off of the accelerator?” Good answer!
- Do you have enough space in front of you to stop in case the vehicle ahead of you had a tire blowout and suddenly slammed on their brakes?

You get the idea. The possible scenarios are endless if you just give it some thought.

For example, I was driving down the road, just thinking about different things, when I started thinking about my first year as a driver... how I could have done things differently, learned things easier, etc.

It was *then* that I started writing these guides about succeeding at truck driving.

Ever since then, thinking about trucking and talking into a tape recorder have taken over most of my time while driving (and while not driving, as well). Don't underestimate yourself when it comes to your ideas. Who knows, you could write a book, invent something new (trucking related or not), or do practically anything you can imagine.

Practically every great accomplishment in history started out as just an idea. The key, however, is to eventually act on those ideas, and turn those ideas into reality.

Keep a voice activated tape recorder handy and keep track of whatever comes to mind... who knows where it could lead?

Talking (and listening to) the CB radio:

Though this may be becoming a dying art, many drivers still spend much of their driving time talking on the CB. This can pass the time, be entertaining, and help new drivers learn more about trucking.

Just try not to get into bad CB habits like criticizing other drivers in truck stops, or threatening other drivers when they irritate you on the road!

Keeping the Shiny Side Up

Driving safely: Practical tools and advice



Wear your seat belt, observe the speed limits, etc. You know, obey the law!

Keep two hands on the wheel:

- Use a hands-free bluetooth device. Check [here](#) for a review on the BlueParrott by Driver Solutions.
- Have a clipboard or clip device mounted on your dashboard in a convenient/easy to see place. Then place a copy of your directions and/or a map on the clipboard. This allows you to steer and shift unhindered by holding the map, etc. And, of course, take it slow!
- Strap a voice activated recorder to an armrest or sun visor so you can make “notes” to yourself or repeat directions you’re receiving over the phone out loud for use later without having to write anything down or take your eyes off the road or hands off the wheel. Be sure your sight and freedom of movement are not hindered in any way by the its positioning.

Adjust speed to the conditions: Such as accidents, weather, cities, construction/work zones, mountains and curves, etc.

Go even slower than posted speeds on curves and on and off-ramps.

Give yourself plenty of space: Keep a safe distance, and don't tailgate. Increase this space for the existing conditions.

When bobtailing, drive even slower when driving the tractor *without* the trailer attached: You’ll notice how much bumpier the ride is when you’re bobtailing. This is because the suspension system was designed primarily to pull a trailer. Another key factor is the reduced braking efficiency of the tractor without the assistance of the trailer brakes.

It takes longer to stop a bobtail than it does to stop a tractor-trailer combination.

Go even slower yet if you're driving a cabover. All the forward weight of the cabover can, especially when going downhill, carry the whole tractor forward, flipping you onto the nose of the tractor!

Key information about driver fatigue

What is driver fatigue?

When you first start driving a truck, it may be surprising to you how easily just "driving" can wear you out. There are many things you have to think about as you're going down the road-- the mental, mostly conscious aspects of your driving. You have to keep your trailer within the lines, shift; you have to constantly be on the alert for the actions of other drivers on the road, not only thinking about what they're doing, but what they might do; you may be thinking about a whole host of other issues, like where you're going and how to get there, what exit you'll have to take, where you'll have to fuel, etc.

Stress also plays a big part in driver fatigue.

It won't be long before your subconscious starts to handle more of those conscious things. Then, normal shifts of driving will not be so tiring, *if* you get enough sleep, and take sufficient breaks throughout the day. However, in trucking, there are often demands which require that you change your routine, and drive at a time when you normally wouldn't.

For example, perhaps you had to wait all day at the shipper to get loaded. You got some sleep during the day so that you could drive at night. But if you're not used to it, these changes in routines and shifts can be difficult, and can easily lead to you getting fatigued.

Nighttime driving requires a higher level of awareness and concentration than daytime driving does. You need to be aware of when you're getting too tired to drive, at which point you need to find a place to park and get some sleep. No amount of coffee is going to keep you wake and alert enough to drive safely. And no load or customer is more important than your safety, and the safety of others on the road.

These are some sure signs that you're getting fatigued:

- You start hallucinating. There are *no* pink elephants on the road in front of you.
- You swerve to miss tree branches or similar objects in front of you. However, it's probably only your eyelashes as your eyes are beginning to close.
- You keep catching yourself drifting off onto the shoulder, or into the middle of the highway.
- You are either grinding gears, or are not choosing the right ones, or make any other driving mistakes.
- You keep realizing you're going too slow, and having to get back up to speed. When this happens, turn off your cruise control.
- You're getting "white line fever," which is when you get hypnotized by the never-ending white lines on the highway at night.
- Other vehicles are honking at you, and you don't know why.

Preventing driver fatigue:

- Take at least one exercise and/or stretching break during your shift.
- Be especially alert during nighttime driving. Drink coffee if you wish, but don't depend on it to keep you awake.

- Try to eat healthier (see *Trucking Lifestyles*). Avoid eating large meals, and snacking on sugar-filled products.
- Get enough sleep, and take a short nap during the day, if necessary.
- Listen to more upbeat music, or a talk radio show you're interested in. I highly recommend getting [SiriusXM Satellite Radio](#) for your truck, which has over a hundred different stations of both music and talk (it also includes a trucker's station, audiobook stations, and comedy stations).
- Talk on your smartphone (don't forget the hands-free device!), or on the CB to other truckers.
- Set and give realistic ETA's to your dispatcher or customer. Make sure the scheduled delivery time allows you to drive legally, and get enough rest. If you believe the delivery time to be unrealistic, tell your dispatcher. Don't drive long, unsafe hours just to impress your dispatcher or customers. Consistent, realistic performance is the key to employer and customer satisfaction.

Bobtailing



I highly recommending dropping your trailer at a truck stop whenever you have the time (see “Layovers” in *Trucking Lifestyles*) to do something interesting... *away from the truck stop!*

Make sure you get the trailer drop approved at the truck stop fuel desk *before* you just drop it. You may return to the sound of crickets, and NO trailer! Your company will *not* be pleased!

Also, understand your company’s rules and regulations about your use of the truck when not under a load. For example, some companies only allow you to bobtail 10 or 20 miles per day. Other companies may impose a time limit, like 1-hour total bobtailing per day. And other companies will only allow you to bobtail if you are *not* under a load. Again, ask your company, or read the company rules and regulations for drivers.

Also, remember to drive safely when bobtailing. Some drivers think just because they have no trailer, they can drive the bobtail like a car. In fact, the opposite is true. The stopping distance actually increases because you don’t have the braking capability provided by the trailer.

Check out this informative [video on bobtailing](#).

Personal conveyance

According to the FMCSA, personal conveyance authorized personal use of the bobtail as your personal vehicle when not assigned to a load (aka “under dispatch”), or logged as “on-duty not driving” status. If you are bobtailing to pick up a load, you must log that as “on-duty driving.” Both “To” and “From” locations must be personal in nature.

With the big transition to ELDs (electronic logging device), all miles driven, regardless of status, are recorded. But still, any personal driving is logged as “off-duty not driving.” See [Big Road](#) and the [FMCSA](#) for more info on this.

Chapter 13: Completion of the Trip. Phew!



Many of the procedures at the receiver, from first arrival, to checking in, to being given a dock door to unload, are similar to the procedures at the shipper.

You'll find that deliveries can fit into a few different categories:

- Some deliveries are scheduled at a certain date and time, with very little flexibility.
- Other deliveries are considered A.S.A.P. or “hot” deliveries.
- There are loads where you will be responsible for scheduling the delivery date and time, especially when there are several drops.
- And there are loads where you just deliver the load *whenever* you arrive, within reason.

If possible, try to find out which type of delivery it is *before* you leave the shipper.

Dry or Reefer Van Haulers Procedures



The procedures for van drivers vary from that of tanker, flatbed, and other types of haulers. Procedures on some other types of hauling are found later in this chapter.

Procedures on arrival at the receiver

- Park the truck and go inside the facility to tell the receiver you've arrived. They may or may not be ready to unload you. Inform dispatch, etc. in the event of any significant delays in waiting for a dock or in unloading the trailer.
- Have the receiver break the seal, and open the trailer doors in their presence (if applicable; they may just tell you to go ahead and do it yourself), before backing up to a dock.

Unloading or dropping the trailer

Regardless of which method is used to unload the trailer, the receiver may or may not require you to be at the back of the trailer as it's being unloaded. But your company may require you to be there *every* time you

get unloaded. Even if you're not required to be there, it is still good idea to be there, to safeguard against any false claims being made, unless drivers are not allowed on the dock.

Driver Unload



Usually, when required to unload the trailer, you'll have the option of hiring a lumper to do it for you (see below for more information on lumpers). If you're required to unload the trailer yourself, you will usually be paid an additional amount for it.

Payment is often determined by the type of product you have, and how it's loaded on the trailer (or more accurately, how easily it'll come off). Often, a driver (or lumper, if not an employee of the receiver) will be paid according to the weight of the load (commonly, 'X' number of dollars per 1000 lbs.). For example, if there's 40,000 lbs. of product, then it might be $\$1.75 \times 40$ (thousand lbs.) = \$70.00 to unload the trailer.

There are several ways drivers can unload the trailer:

1. Using a pallet jack:

There are manual as well as powered pallet jacks. The manual kind are simple to use, but you often must be certified to operate the powered type.

The drivers may be told where on the dock to place the product. If the whole trailer is loaded with the same product, it may be a simple process of lining up the pallets in a row. If it is a mixed load, the driver may have to separate the pallets and re-stack the items in a manner of the receiver's choosing.

2. Using a forklift:

You must be certified to be able to operate a forklift. Even with certification, each dock/customer may have specific regulations you need to be advised of before you begin unloading the product. Check with a dock supervisor to confirm that you're following all applicable rules. Otherwise, the placing of the product on the dock is the same as above.

3. Wheeling or rolling the product off:

Some products come loaded on racks with wheels underneath. The driver simply rolls the product off the trailer. This is often done in a "route" type of operation with regular customers, with the driver picking up empty racks from a previous delivery.

Other products are rolled off of trailers onto the dock. Often the trailer is parked on a decline, so the product rolls off easily. This is done with many different types of products; large paper rolls, each weighing up to 5,000 lbs. or more, are commonly rolled off.

4. Unload by hand:

Some trailers need to be totally unloaded by hand. The product may be anything from boxes to bags, and may have been loaded directly on the floor of the trailer. The receiver may have the driver load the product onto a pallet while in the trailer, and use a pallet jack to take the product off the trailer, and place it on the dock.

5. Any combination of the above methods.

Receiver unloads the trailer

When the receiver physically does the unloading, they may want you present on the dock at the time. Many times, you'll be instructed to wait in the driver's lounge (if the receiver has one), or to wait in your truck in which case they may call you on the CB or come get you when you're empty.

Hire a lumper to unload the trailer:

Lumpers, or casual labor, are paid either in cash, or by a Comcheck or similar method. Have sufficient cash on hand in case they must have cash.

Contracting a lumper is usually arranged through the receiver. They can be paid as employees of the receiver or as independent contractors. Either way, get a receipt for the transaction so that you can get reimbursed by your company.

Get a price ahead of time for the unloading. After a while, you'll get to know what is a fair price for unloading. If you're unsure if a quoted price is fair, call your dispatcher and ask their advice; after all, the company is who will be reimbursing you for the expense. Very often, the first price given is negotiable. Tell the lumper you're prepared to pay a certain (lower) price. If they balk at the price, you can always pay the original amount.

Pallet exchange

Pallets often must be accounted for (and paid for). Depending upon the product and if the pallet was included (paid for) with the product are key factors in determining whether you'll get empty pallets back when yours are unloaded. In an even pallet exchange, you'll have 22 loaded pallets taken off your trailer, and 22 empty pallets placed back in your trailer before you leave.

Drop and hook

This is the simplest and quickest way for all van drivers to complete their load assignment and, without delay, go immediately on to the next one. There may or may not be a receiver present to contact, sign and give copies of paperwork, etc.

Some locations are just trailer “drop yards,” where you drop your trailer in a specified or available parking space. The next trailer you hook onto may be your new load assignment, a pre-loaded trailer. You may have to hook to an empty trailer, and wait for the next load assignment or go immediately to the next shipper to load.

Drivers hauling doubles and triples regularly drop and hook, at one of their terminals, at one of their customer’s facilities, or possibly at an empty lot doubling as a “drop yard.”

What if you’re delayed in getting unloaded?

As soon as you know you’re going to have to wait, notify your dispatcher. If your company pays you for waiting time (some companies pay by the hour after 2 hours, for example), they’ll log the time that you started waiting. Also, in some situations, the dispatcher may be able to talk to the receiver and get you unloaded sooner.

Get an estimate of possible waiting time. If you at least have an idea of how long it’s going to be before the receiver can unload you, you can act accordingly.

There may be a driver’s lounge to wait in, or you may be told to wait in your truck until you’re called on the CB. If it’s going to be several hours (and you can wait in the truck until the receiver contacts you on the CB), perhaps you could take a quick nap, and be better prepared to drive when you’re empty, depending on the legal hours you have available to drive.

Handling problems with receivers and loading dock personnel

As an example, on one occasion, I had a 7 AM appointment time at a receiver in Denver, CO. I had called earlier and was told that if I got there the previous night before 10 PM, they could possibly unload me early.

I took the chance and showed up early because I lived close to Denver and could go home when I was empty. I say, “took the chance,” because if the receiver couldn’t unload me early, I would have to wait out on the street all night since there was no truck stop nearby or any facilities.

This is one situation where you’ll be glad you were prepared with food and supplies because when you wake up, you might have to wait until after you’ve unloaded to get any breakfast or coffee, etc. It just depends on the location, sometimes lunch trucks frequent some customer locations.

Unfortunately, the receiver couldn’t unload me when I got there at 10 PM. The area was an industrial one, but relatively safe, so I locked up the truck and went to sleep.

The next morning, I had to deal with the dock supervisor. The normal procedure is for the seal to be broken in the presence of the person in charge, in this case, the dock supervisor. Then the driver opens the trailer doors and backs to the dock. But this person got upset because I had not already broken the seal beforehand.

That dock was the *one thing* the supervisor could control, and they let a driver (me!) know it. Take a deep breath, exhale, and repeat if necessary. Calm down, and think, “You’re right, this is YOUR world, soon I’ll be back in MY world; back in the truck, back on the road, and back in control.”

There is no benefit to proving anything to people who behave like this, no matter the situation. In fact, you may even hurt yourself, or your

company's reputation. In this instance, allowing him to feel superior resulted in getting unloaded, and therefore *home*, sooner. Additionally, anytime you realize that true control is in controlling how *you* respond, and, as I said, "allowing" someone to feel like they're the boss, *you* are really in control of the situation.

OSD (over, short, and damaged) freight

At the shipper, you counted the freight (noting number of pallets and/or number of pieces), secured it properly, ensured that the paperwork was in order, signed the paperwork, and made sure the trailer doors were locked. Then you drove the shipment safely down the road, arrived at the receiver, and the receiver has broken the seal of the trailer and opened the doors.

Unfortunately, there can still be problems:

- Even if driven safely, damage can still occur due to the abundance of poorly maintained roads, if for no other reason.
- And, even if you've counted the load, a mistake still could have been made, on either end of the transaction.
- There may be pieces missing (shortage), or too many pieces (overage).

No matter what the problem or the cause, the first thing you need to do is notify your dispatcher when you first realize there's a problem. This way, perhaps the problem can be resolved without an expensive claim taking place, while still maintaining a positive relationship with the customer. Promptly contacting your dispatcher can also alleviate some of your stress, as it will probably take most of the discussion and resolution of the problem out of your hands.

This is also another situation in which you will benefit from simply acknowledging a mistake was made, while not necessarily taking

responsibility for that mistake, and assuring the appropriate people are informed and involved to bring about a quick resolution. Arguing with the dock supervisor or customer will only create stress and aggravation, so choose not to put yourself through that.

Handling the paperwork

The Bill of Lading is proof that the receiver received the shipment, and must be sent in to the company with the rest of the paperwork. It also indicates whether there were any shortages, overages, or any damage to the shipment (see previous section). As previously mentioned, if there are any problems, make the proper notifications.

When the trailer is unloaded

The person who unloaded you (or who *oversaw* the unloading process), possibly the driver of the forklift, will sign the Bill of Lading and give you (at least) a copy, or...

You need to go to the shipping/receiving office to get your signed copy of the Bill of Lading. Someone there will probably tell you what to do, or you can just ask whoever *seems* to be in charge.

Delivery Information for Other Types of Trucking

Other types of trucking don't typically back up to a dock to get unloaded, like van trailers do. Each type of hauling has their own type of trailer which has its own method of unloading. This is just an overview of some of their basic operating differences.

Flatbed, Oversize, Specialty Haulers Unloading Information



Flatbed drivers can pick up and deliver practically anywhere, and are not limited to loading docks at large customer warehouses. **They may deliver to, for example:**

- a construction or building site
- a lumber yard
- a retail building supply store (Lowe's, Home Depot, etc.)
- a cemetery
- an airport (check this [video](#) of crane unloading trailer at airport)

Drivers may have to get the product delivered at, or by, a certain time, or will inform the receiver when they'll be arriving, so the receiver can meet the driver, schedule unloading (cranes, other unloading equipment), etc.

Drivers usually take the securement off the load themselves, then the receiver takes the load off the trailer. Waiting very long to get loaded or unloaded is not common like with van hauling.

Tanker Haulers Unloading Information



Similarly, products hauled in tankers practically unload themselves. Granted, there are procedures to follow, and operations to understand and implement, but it is a whole different process than having a van trailer unloaded at a dock.

More of the loading and unloading process is done by the driver than with any other type of hauling. Usually, the driver hooks up hoses to the tanker and to the source to transfer the product. The product is pumped on or off the tanker by a hydraulic pump, or simply flows on or off with gravity.

Other Types of Unloading

There are many other types of hauling which are beyond the scope of this guide. Every type has its own type of unloading process, some requiring more driver involvement and know-how than others.

Usually the carrier will train the new driver on its own unique method of operations, including loading and unloading procedures.

Some types of products are taken off the trailer, some are driven off, and some even walk off. With trucking, you just never know!

After the Trailer Is Unloaded and the Paperwork Is Signed...

Inform your dispatcher, and/or the broker and possibly the shipper, that you're empty. There may be several different persons who all need to know when the load assignment is complete. You'll either call or text the dispatcher or use the Qualcomm to send an "empty" message. The quicker it's understood that you're empty, the quicker you'll be able to be assigned to a new load. However, don't give an empty message before every bit of product is unloaded, and the paperwork is signed to indicate that there were no problems of any kind.

Your company will have instructed you what paperwork to send in and how to send it.

Some of the most common methods of getting your paperwork to your company:



- send the paperwork by mail (regular mail or [TripPak](#) envelopes which get sent in TripPak Mail Boxes located in most major truck stops)
- Fax the paperwork (in-cab or truck stop)
- Scan the paperwork with TripPak or [Transflo Express](#) (in-cab, mobile, or truck stop)
- Hold onto it until you're able to drop it off at a company terminal.



It is essential to handle the paperwork correctly, for company purposes, and to get paid for the load. You may get paid as soon as the company receives the paperwork, or based upon information you send via the Qualcomm. Either way, you'll have to make sure your company receives all the proper paperwork.

The paperwork drivers must submit to their company usually includes the following:

- Signed Bill of Lading
- Trip sheet
- Log book pages for the trip
- Vehicle inspection sheets
- Receipts (both reimbursable and not)

If there were no problems, congratulations!

As you've seen, it's not as easy as just taking a product from point A to point B. There was a lot involved, and it takes a professional truck driver to get it done right.

Now it's time to get another load assignment, and to do it all again!

Chapter 14: Your Trucking Future is in Your Hands



As you've gone through this manual, I hope you've been getting all the key information you need to help you decide if trucking is the career for you and/or to increase your professional and personal success and enjoyment in your life as a truck driver.

If you feel that there is an important factor I've failed to share, please get in touch with me and let me know. I'm always striving to improve the quality and accuracy of the information in this manual.

If *Trucking Mastery* has made a difference in your life, whether it's helped you become a new truck driver or helped you improve the life you already lead as a veteran trucker, please tell me. I'd love to include your testimonial, and have you share your successes and experiences on the road with other truckers... plus all those *potential* truckers out there!

Proud to Be a Trucker!

When you begin to realize that the entire nation relies on our performance to keep going, you really feel like you're a part of something that matters.

And you are! Even the most basic items were in the back of a tractor-trailer at some point between manufacture and purchase. Every diaper on a baby, every bite of food at every restaurant, every dish you eat off of, shirt you wear, every tube of toothpaste and roll of toilet paper, every car you drive, the fuel to power that car, every roll of sod you lay, gallon of paint you decorate your kitchen with, wading pool you splash around in, bike you assemble for your child... even the military equipment that protects our freedom to have these comforts, all of these things and thousands more were made available to you and your neighbors, in a very large part **due to someone's willingness to take on the challenge and adventure of trucking.**

I've made my best effort to show you just exactly what is involved in the day-to-day life of a truck driver. I haven't tried to glamorize or sugar-coat any of it. I don't think that's necessary and it wouldn't have been helpful.

I'm hoping that together we can change the image of truck drivers from rebels and misfits to important members of society; men and women who choose to be personally responsible for the safety of both the average citizen and products they need to live their lives, with an ongoing, behind-the-scenes view of how this country operates.

Trucking may not always be easy, but as I hope I've explained, it is an important part of this country's economy, and a great way to earn an honest living, though in an unconventional way.

Do you question how you're spending your life, stuck in the daily grind, and:

- commuting to a desk every day, only traveling one or two weeks a year?
- having a supervisor looking over your shoulder?
- living for the weekend?
- getting paid for the work you actually do?
- wondering if you're making a difference?

If these sounded like *your* thoughts, then trucking may be just what you've been looking for!

This manual was created to equip you to make the right choice for you and your circumstances, and, if you so choose, to help you become a safe and successful truck driver.

From the first day I drove a big truck, and even up until the time when I had over 10 years of experience, I still viewed truck driving as just another in a long line of jobs.

It wasn't until I saw the need for, and then created this guide, that I realized how much was involved in this trucking life. I believe that if the average person had any idea of how much was involved in a truck drivers job, they would see, and treat truck drivers very differently.

I've had drivers who, after reading *Trucking Mastery*, tell me that they suddenly felt very proud to be a truck driver. And so am I!

Thank you, and good luck out there on the road!

Jim Purcell

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