

CDL Exam — Cheat Sheet

General knowledge, air brakes and hours of service, on one page. Free from Exam Practice Hub.

How the exam works

The General Knowledge test is 50 questions and every CDL applicant takes it. You need 80% to pass — 40 correct. Endorsements are separate tests: air brakes, combination vehicles, tanker (N), hazmat (H), passenger (P), doubles/triples (T). Hazmat also requires a TSA security threat assessment with fingerprinting, so allow extra weeks.

Air brake numbers — memorise these

Low pressure warning	Must activate before 60 psi
Spring brakes apply	Automatically between 20 and 45 psi
Leak rate, released	Single vehicle 2 psi/min Combination 3 psi/min
Leak rate, applied	Single vehicle 3 psi/min Combination 4 psi/min
Governor cut-out	Compressor stops around 125 psi
Slack adjusters	No more than about 1 inch of movement pulled by hand
Brake lag	About 0.5 second before air brakes even begin to work

Hours of service (property-carrying)

- **11-hour rule** — maximum driving after 10 consecutive hours off duty.
- **14-hour window** — a continuous clock from coming on duty. Breaks, fuel and loading do NOT pause it.
- **30-minute break** — required after 8 cumulative hours of driving. Off duty, sleeper, or on-duty-not-driving all count.
- **60/7 or 70/8** — rolling on-duty limit. A 34-consecutive-hour restart resets it.
- **Sleeper split** — 8/2 or 7/3. One period must be at least 7 hours in the berth; neither counts against the 14.
- Most interstate drivers must use an **ELD**. Personal conveyance is off-duty use that does not advance the load.

Space, speed and stopping

- Following distance: **1 second per 10 feet** of vehicle length under 40 mph, plus 1 more second above 40.
- A loaded rig at 55 mph needs roughly **300 feet** to stop — about twice a car's distance.
- Total stopping distance = **perception + reaction + braking**. Perception alone is about 60 feet at 55 mph.
- **Empty trucks take LONGER to stop** — less weight on the drive tyres means less traction.
- **Bobtail** tractors brake poorly: brakes sized for 80,000 lbs, carrying about 20,000.
- Drive at a speed that lets you stop within the range of your headlights — low beams reach only about 250 feet.

Skids, curves and emergencies

- **Front-wheel skid** — ease off the accelerator and stop steering harder. Let the tyres regain grip.
- **Drive-wheel skid** — stop braking, push in the clutch, steer where you want the tractor to go.
- **Brake failure on a grade** — take the escape ramp. Never shift to neutral.
- **Controlled braking** — as hard as possible without locking the wheels. **Stab braking** is for non-ABS only.
- **Retarders** off when roads are wet, icy or snowy — they can break drive-wheel traction.
- **Tanker surge** — liquid keeps moving after you stop. Baffles reduce fore/aft surge, never side-to-side.
- Right turns: keep right and start the turn **BEFORE** swinging out. Swinging left first causes the squeeze crash.

Cargo, hazmat and placards

Tie-downs	At least 1 for cargo under 10 ft and 1,100 lbs; 2 if over 5 ft AND over 1,100 lbs
Working Load Limit	Total WLL must be at least half the cargo weight
Cargo inspection	Within 50 miles, then every 150 miles or 3 hours
Weight limits	80,000 lbs gross 20,000 single axle 34,000 tandem
Placard colours	Red = flammable Orange = explosive Yellow = oxidiser Green = non-flammable gas White = poison
Hazmat rail crossing	Stop 15 to 50 feet from the nearest rail, then cross without shifting
Shipping papers	Within the driver's reach while driving, clearly identifiable

Disqualifications and limits

- **BAC limit is 0.04%** — half the limit for a car. 0.02% puts you out of service for 24 hours.
- **Refusing a test** is treated as a positive: removed from duty, reported to the Clearinghouse, return-to-duty process required.
- **First DUI** — at least 1 year disqualification, 3 years with hazmat. Second is lifetime.
- **Leaving the scene** and using a CMV in a felony are also major offences with the same penalties.
- **Texting is banned outright.** Hands-free calls must take no more than one button press.
- **Out-of-service order** means the vehicle does not move — not to a shop, not on local roads.
- **DOT medical card** valid up to 24 months; an examiner may issue a shorter one.