10 Things You Should Do Before Your CDL Knowledge Exam

You’ll pass. Guaranteed!

CDL

DRIVING-TESTS.ORG
Since Driving-Tests began in 2010, we’ve received feedback from more than 15,000 test-takers about their experiences with the official knowledge exams.

Many people arrive at the DMV overconfident and underprepared, missing simple steps that could help them pass their CDL knowledge exam. Those who succeeded often followed similar preparation strategies. Here are 10 steps we recommend to better prepare for your knowledge exam.

Andrei Zakhareuski,
Driving-Tests.org, Founder and CEO
az@driving-tests.org
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Get things in order

Essential Documents for DMV
Before taking the knowledge exam for your Commercial Learner Permit (CLP) or Commercial Driver License (CDL), ensure you have all the necessary documents:

☐ Proof of Identity: Typically a government-issued ID.
☐ Social Security Number: Or proof of ineligibility if you’re not a U.S. citizen.
☐ Proof of Citizenship: Or proof of permanent legal presence in the U.S.
☐ Proof of State Residency.
☐ Non-Commercial Driver’s License: Required if applying for a CLP.
☐ Commercial Learner Permit (CLP): Required if applying for a CDL.
☐ Self-Certification of Commerce:
  • Interstate or intrastate.
  • Excepted or non-excepted status.
☐ Medical Documentation:
  • Medical Examiner Certificate (DOT medical card).
  • Any medical variance documents.
☐ Completed Application: For CLP or CDL.

Submission of Documents
• Some states allow pre-submission of documents like the DOT medical card via mail or fax.
• Online self-certification may be available in some states through the state DMV’s website.
Additional Requirements
If you’ve had a driver’s license from another state in the past ten years, a ten-year driving record background check may be required.

Hazardous Materials Endorsement
If you plan to take the Hazardous Materials (H) knowledge test, note the following:

- **Fingerprinting and TSA Security Threat Assessment**: Required for H and X (Tank Vehicle and Hazardous Materials) endorsements.
- **Timing**: Start the assessment process at least 30 days before applying for your CDL.
- **Fingerprinting Location**: Usually done at TSA-approved application centers, not DMV offices.

Vision Screening
Don’t forget to bring your eyeglasses or contact lenses for the vision test. See an eye doctor if you are unsure whether you can pass the vision screening.

State-Specific Requirements
Check your state’s official CDL manual or DMV website for state-specific requirements and instructions on the application process.
Prepare your mind and your body

Health Considerations

- **Self-Assessment:** If you're not feeling well, evaluate if you can perform at your best. It's better to postpone the exam rather than risk failing and having to wait to retake it.
- **Common Sense:** Many people underestimate how a minor illness can impact their performance on significant tasks like exams.

Night Before the Exam

- **Get Enough Sleep:** Ensure you have a restful night. Avoid late-night activities that can disrupt your sleep pattern.
- **Avoid Parties:** Say no to social events or partying the night before your test.
- **Impact of Sleep Deprivation:** Studies show that 24 hours without sleep can impair your abilities as much as being legally intoxicated.

Reducing Stress and Stimulation

- **Avoid Stressful Activities:** Refrain from watching suspenseful TV shows, playing video games, or engaging in heated social media debates the night before.
- **Avoid Studying Late:** Cramming or reading the CDL manual late at night can be counterproductive. Resting your mind is more beneficial.

Before Going to Bed

**Proper Sleep:** When you go to bed, make sure to sleep. Avoid watching TV or listening to the news in bed.

Exam Day Morning

**Set Your Alarm:** Wake up a couple of hours before the exam. This allows you time to prepare and ensures you're fully awake.
Start your day off right

- **Well-Balanced Breakfast:** Opt for a breakfast that combines proteins, healthy fats, and carbohydrates to fuel your brain and body. Good choices include eggs, whole-grain toast, yogurt, fruits, and nuts. This mix helps sustain energy levels and concentration without causing sluggishness.

- **Limit Caffeine:** While a small cup of coffee might help wake you up, avoid consuming too much caffeine as it can heighten anxiety and make you jittery. If you’re sensitive to caffeine, consider alternatives like herbal tea or a decaffeinated beverage.

- **Morning Exercise:** Engage in light exercise such as a brisk walk, stretching, or yoga. This can boost blood circulation to your brain and help ease nerves. Exercise is also effective in reducing stress hormones and can enhance your mood and alertness.

- **Relaxation Techniques:** If you experience test anxiety, incorporate relaxation techniques into your morning routine. Practices like deep breathing, meditation, or progressive muscle relaxation can calm your mind and reduce stress.

- **Mental Preparation:** Spend some quiet time visualizing success at the test or reviewing key points in a relaxed manner. Avoid last-minute cramming, as this can increase anxiety.

- **Plan Your Journey:** Make sure to know the route to the testing center and allow extra time to get there so you won’t have to rush. Arriving a bit early can give you time to settle and compose yourself before the test begins.

- **Avoid Additional Stressors:** Keep your morning as calm as possible. Avoid engaging in stressful activities or conversations. Focus on positive thoughts and stay confident in your preparation.
Effective Strategies for CDL Exam Preparation

Final Review

- **Quick Review:** Take one last look at your state’s official CDL manual to refresh your memory, especially focusing on the topics you found most challenging.

- **Guidance Sections:** Near the front of the manual, check for guidance on which sections you need to study for your specific CDL class and endorsements.

Focused Study

- **Selective Study:** Only study the sections relevant to your CDL class and endorsements. For example, if you’re not driving passenger vehicles, skip those sections.

- **Memorize Specific Facts:** Certain facts, like hazardous material class definitions, following distance rules, and placement of warning devices, need to be memorized. Jot these down for quick reference.

Compiling Key Facts

**Create a Cheat Sheet:** As you scan through the necessary sections, note specific numerical facts and rules. Use this list for quick refreshers instead of rereading the entire manual.

Understanding Procedures

- **Pre-Trip Inspection and Coupling/Uncoupling:** Learn the steps and understand the reasons behind the sequence. For example, lock the trailer brakes before backing the tractor to prevent accidents.

- **Practical Application:** Act out the steps of pre-trip inspection and coupling/uncoupling at home. Pretend there’s a truck in front of you and walk through each step.
Visualization

**Visual Aids:** Use pictures and videos to understand vehicle components better. If your manual lacks illustrations, search online for images or instructional videos.

Practice Tests

- **Evaluate Understanding:** Take permit practice tests to assess your knowledge of general commercial driving, air brakes, and specialized subjects.
- **Identify Weak Areas:** Review questions you missed and focus on studying those topics further.
Step 5

Wear appropriate clothing for the knowledge exam

☐ **Dress Appropriately**: Choose clothing that suits the weather and is comfortable for sitting for extended periods. Avoid overly tight or loose clothing that might distract you during the test.

☐ **Look Presentable**: Passing the test might lead to having your photo taken for your permit or license. Therefore, opt for a neat appearance.

☐ **Carry Necessary Items**: Make sure to bring all required documents and items specified by your state’s DMV, such as your identification, proof of residence, and any necessary forms.

☐ **Use the Restroom**: Visit the bathroom before the test starts to avoid any discomfort or distractions during the exam.
Read each exam question intelligently

- **Read Carefully:** Always read each question at least twice. This helps you fully understand what is being asked, especially when you’re nervous or rushed.

- **Identify Negatives:** Pay close attention to words like “not,” “except,” or “avoid.” These can completely change what the question is asking. Missing these words can lead to a misunderstanding of the question and an incorrect answer.

- **Evaluate Similar Answers:** If you find multiple answers that seem correct, compare them carefully. Look for the most comprehensive option that covers all aspects of the question. There might be a good answer, but there’s often a best answer that is more complete or directly addresses the question’s specifics.

- **Critique Each Option:** Assess the appropriateness of each answer in relation to the question. Consider different driving scenarios where one answer might apply better than another. This can help you eliminate less suitable answers.

- **Consider “All of the above”:** Be mindful of the “All of the above” option. If this choice is present, verify the accuracy of all other statements in the options. If they are all correct, then “All of the above” is likely the best choice.
Use the process of elimination

- **Identify Wrong Choices:** If you don’t know the correct answer, eliminate choices you know are incorrect.

- **Ridiculous or Outlier Choices:** Look for and eliminate any obviously absurd options.

**EXAMPLE**

**What can you do at an accident scene to help avoid another accident?**

1. Stay in your vehicle and do nothing until help arrives.
2. Set out warning devices to keep other vehicles from running into the accident scene.
3. Have a drink to calm your nerves.
4. Leave your vehicle, do nothing, and get to higher ground.

**Eliminate Absurd Choices:**

- Choice (3) is clearly absurd. Eliminate it.
- Choice (4) is also unreasonable as leaving the scene of an accident is illegal. Eliminate it.

**Remaining Choices:**

- The correct answer is between choice (1) and choice (2). Based on your knowledge, setting out warning devices is the best action, so choice (2) is correct.
Handling "All of the above" or "None of the above"

**Strategy:** If you can eliminate at least one choice as incorrect, you can eliminate "All of the above" or "None of the above" if they are options.

**EXAMPLE**

**Why is it important to use a helper when backing?**

1. Because you have blind spots.
2. Because people feel more comfortable when you do.
3. Because you are providing a job for someone else.
4. For all of the above reasons.

**Eliminate Absurd Choices:**

- Choice (3) is absurd unless you’re hiring someone specifically for this task. Eliminate it.
- With choice (3) eliminated, choice (4) ("All of the above") is also incorrect.

**Remaining Choices:**

- The correct answer is either choice (1) or choice (2). Given the context, the primary reason is that you have blind spots, so choice (1) is correct.
Take your best guess if necessary

☐ **Stay Calm**: Remember, it's perfectly normal not to know every answer. Getting rattled can affect your performance on subsequent questions.

☐ **Make an Educated Guess**: After you’ve ruled out the clearly incorrect options, choose the best remaining answer. Often, your instincts or residual knowledge may guide you correctly.

☐ **Move Forward**: Don't dwell on one question. It’s important to maintain a steady pace and focus on answering the rest of the questions as best as you can. Lingering too long on one question can eat into the time you might need for others.

☐ **Keep Perspective**: Keep in mind that you don't need a perfect score to pass. Focus on accumulating enough correct answers to meet the passing threshold.

“Taking the test in this manner helps manage anxiety and improves your overall test-taking strategy, increasing your chances of success.”
Double-check your answers

☐ **Select Confidently:** When you know the correct answer, confidently select it. Trust your preparation and knowledge.

☐ **Pause for Verification:** After selecting an answer, pause for a brief moment. Take a deep breath to center yourself and reduce any anxiety or rush.

☐ **Double-Check:** Verify that you have selected the answer you intended. Look at your selection carefully to ensure it corresponds with what you believe is correct. This helps catch any slips made due to nerves or haste.

☐ **Move On Carefully:** Once you’ve confirmed your choice, proceed to the next question. Avoid dwelling excessively on any single answer to keep a good pace throughout the exam.
Believe in yourself

Be confident in your ability to handle the challenge of passing the knowledge test. In fact, believing in yourself is necessary to succeed in handling any challenge!

All the best!

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