

Checklist for Quality Courses in Tractor-Trailer Driver Training

This Checklist is a yardstick for motor carriers, truck driver employers, truck safety advocates, prospective students and others in measuring the quality of a tractor-trailer driver training program.

Formal training is the most reliable way to learn the many special skills required for safe truck driving. The more skills that are learned in supervised training, the fewer that need to be learned on the job. Such training is available from private truck driver training schools, public education institutions and in-house motor carrier training programs. Because of the important role in truck safety, the trucking industry has implemented minimum standards by which to measure training programs. The standards are administered through the Professional Truck Driver Institute (PTDI). Training institutions voluntarily certify their courses to verify that they are meeting PTDI industry standards. Not all schools have chosen to certify their courses.

You can use the following Checklist to evaluate a course against PTDI standards. **PTDI-certified courses meet all of these standards plus a number of others.** The Checklist is only brief treatment of the standards by which truck driver training quality is measured. It is not intended to provide an exhaustive treatment of evaluation standards. For the full standards and guidelines, see www.ptdi.org/standards.

COURSE ADMINISTRATION

- Is the course accurately and clearly defined and explained in informational materials on topics such as costs, tuition reimbursement (if any), training provided, equipment used, outcomes, classroom hours and actual individual driving time? i.e., is advertising truthful?
- Are there clearly stated goals that match the needs of students and the trucking industry?
- Are there clear, written eligibility requirements for students that are followed?
- Must an applicant meet minimum DOT, state/provincial, federal and/or local law and regulations related to drug screens, age, physical condition, licensing, driving ability, and driving record as stated in the school's admissions policy?
- Are there written policies regarding safety, liability and rules?
- Do admissions follow written procedures?
- Are enrollment agreements required?

INSTRUCTIONAL PERSONNEL

- Do instructors possess a combination of education and experience that clearly qualify them for their assignments?
- Do driving instructors have at least three years of experience as licensed, successful tractor-trailer drivers with a good driving record?
- Do instructors meet state/provincial requirements, school policy and Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations?
- Do instructors have teacher/instructional skills?
- Do instructors have a state/provincial license or permit, if required?
- Are instructors thoroughly trained in the curriculum?
- Are instructors carefully supervised and evaluated?
- Do instructors participate in regular staff development programs?

TRAINING VEHICLES

- Are vehicles in good mechanical condition and appropriate for the activities for which they are used?
- Do they meet safety requirements, contain occupant restraint systems of all occupants and contain working emergency equipment?
- Are training vehicles comparable in size and power to those used by motor carriers in the area?

INSTRUCTION & CURRICULUM

Curriculum Content:

- Does the course outline clearly identify units of instruction including their sequence, broad purpose and general content?
- Does instruction cover the subject areas identified by PTDI curriculum and skill standards? (See Primary Functions/Duties of a Tractor-Trailer Driver" in the *PTDI Skill Standards for Entry-Level Tractor-Trailer Drivers* and the "Minimum Hours of Training & Five Curriculum Units" in the *PTDI Curriculum Standard Guidelines for Entry-Level Tractor-Trailer Driver Courses*.)
- Does classroom instruction include the use of aids such as films, displays, textbooks, models, charts, etc?
- Are instructional materials appropriate for the ability of the trainee and are they up-to-date?
- Are materials provided to each trainee?

Instructional Time:

- Does each student receive at least 104 (60-minute) hours in combined classroom and lab time? (Lab is instruction that occurs outside the classroom that does not involve actual operation of the vehicle and its components; this includes time on the range under the supervision of an instructor. Observation time does not count as instructional time.) Independent study may be substituted for up to 1/3 of classroom hours. Independent study is not the same as homework.
- Does each student receive at least 44 (60-minute) hours of actual behind-the-wheel time? (This is time with hands actually on the wheel, with at least 12 hours on the range and 12 on the road and the other 20 hours on either.)
- Is the trailer loaded with a minimum of 15,000 pounds during at least 25% of street instruction time?
- Are night-driving principles taught and practiced, with a minimum of one hour of behind-the-wheel time?
- Is the total length of the instructional day, including independent study, not longer than 10 hours on average?

Classroom Conditions:

- Is the learning environment safe, sanitary and comfortable?

Student/Instructor/Truck Ratio:

- Does classroom and lab instruction average one instructor for not more than each group of 30 students?
- Is there never more than one instructor to three trucks on the range?
- During driving, is there one instructor per truck and never more than four trainees in the truck?

Lesson Plans

- Do instructors use lesson plans to guide each session?
- Are students provided with behind-the-wheel lesson driving procedures along with a list of safety rules for street driving?

Range Conditions

- Is the range safe and protected from the hazards from other road users?
- Is the range free of obstructions and the surface enable the driver to maneuver without loss of control?
- Are there adequate sight lines available to the instructor and trainees?

Street Instruction Conditions

- Is driving practiced under various roadway and traffic conditions?

Tests

- Do written classroom/lab tests test mastery of a sample of knowledge objectives for each unit of instruction?
- Do range tests assess student proficiency in (a) fundamental vehicle control skills and (b) routine driving procedures?
- Do road tests use routes that permit a broad range of observations and are they planned in advance?
- Are road tests administered in a standard van or box-type tandem-axle trailer (with minimum length of 45 feet) and a tractor with a tandem axle?

Distance Learning

- If a portion of the classroom/lab instruction is delivered electronically, is there active two-way communication between instructor and student? Is the student provided with information about technological competence needed, completion requirements, and any additional costs? Must each student take a proctored exam? Does the course begin and end within a specified time frame? May the students review completed lessons at least once at no additional cost prior to the proctored exam?

Graduation

- Does a student have to successfully complete the course equivalent to PTDI content and hours, including tests and road tests before graduation?
- Does a student secure a CDL before graduation is conferred?

OUTCOMES & RECORDS

- Are student critiques of the school used in follow-up?
- Are transcripts provided upon request?
- Does each student keep a "driver duty status record" to document time behind the wheel?
- Do both the student and instructor "sign-off" on the record?
- Are permanent records kept for at least 10 years?

To find the answer to these questions, you may question school personnel, current students or graduates, and motor carriers who hire graduates from the school.