

Truck Drivers and Driver/Sales Workers

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Significant Points

- Job opportunities should be favorable.
- Competition is expected for jobs offering the highest earnings or most favorable work schedules.
- A commercial driver's license is required to operate most larger trucks.

Nature of the Work

Truck drivers are a constant presence on the Nation's highways and interstates, delivering everything from automobiles to canned foods. Firms of all kinds rely on trucks for pickup and delivery of goods because no other form of transportation can deliver goods door to door. Even if goods travel in part by ship, train, or airplane, trucks carry nearly all goods at some point in their journey from producer to consumer.

Before leaving the terminal or warehouse, truck drivers check the fuel level and oil in their trucks. They also inspect the trucks to make sure the brakes, windshield wipers, and lights are working and that a fire extinguisher, flares, and other safety equipment are aboard and in working order. Drivers make sure their cargo is secure and adjust their mirrors so that both sides of the truck are visible from the driver's seat. Drivers report equipment that is inoperable, missing, or loaded improperly to the dispatcher.

Once under way, drivers must be alert to prevent accidents. Drivers can see farther down the road, because large trucks sit higher than most other vehicles. This allows drivers to seek traffic lanes that allow for a steady speed, while keeping sight of varying road conditions.

Delivery time varies according to the type of merchandise and its final destination. Local drivers may provide daily service for a specific route, while other drivers make intercity and interstate deliveries that take longer and may vary from job to job. The driver's responsibilities and assignments change according to the time spent on the road, the type of payloads transported, and vehicle size.

New technologies are changing the way truck drivers work, especially long-distance truck drivers. Satellites and Global Positioning Systems (GPS) link many trucks with company headquarters. Troubleshooting information, directions, weather reports, and other important communications can be delivered to the truck, anywhere, within seconds. Drivers can easily communicate with the dispatcher to discuss delivery schedules and courses of action in the event of mechanical problems. The satellite linkup also allows the dispatcher to track the truck's location, fuel consumption, and engine performance. Many drivers also work with computerized inventory tracking equipment. It is important for the producer, warehouse, and customer to know the product's location at all times, in order to keep costs low and the quality of service high.

Heavy truck and tractor-trailer drivers drive trucks or vans with a capacity of at least 26,000 pounds Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW). They transport goods including cars, livestock, and other materials in liquid, loose, or packaged form. Many routes are from city to city and cover long distances. Some companies use two drivers on very long runs—one drives while the other sleeps in a berth behind the cab. "Sleeper" runs may last for days, or even weeks, usually with the truck stopping only for fuel, food, loading, and unloading.

Some heavy truck and tractor-trailer drivers who have regular runs transport freight to the same city on a regular basis. Other drivers perform unscheduled runs because shippers request varying service to different cities every day.

After these truck drivers reach their destination or complete their operating shift, the U.S. Department of Transportation requires that they complete reports detailing the trip, the condition of the truck, and the circumstances of any accidents. In addition, Federal regulations require employers to subject drivers to random alcohol and drug tests while they are on duty.

Long-distance heavy truck and tractor-trailer drivers spend most of their working time behind the wheel, but may load or unload their cargo after arriving at the final destination. This is especially common when drivers haul specialty cargo, because they may be the only one at the destination familiar with procedures or certified to handle the materials. Auto-transport drivers, for example, position cars on the trailers at the manufacturing plant and remove them at the dealerships. When picking up or delivering furniture, drivers of long-distance moving vans hire local workers to help them load or unload.

Light or delivery services truck drivers drive trucks or vans with a capacity under 26,000 pounds GVW. They deliver or pick up merchandise and packages within a specific area. This may include short "turnarounds" to deliver a shipment to a nearby city, pick up another loaded truck or van, and drive it back to their home base the same day. These services may require use of electronic delivery tracking systems to track the whereabouts of the merchandise or packages. Light or delivery services truck drivers usually load or unload the merchandise at the customer's place of business. They may have helpers if there are many deliveries to make during the day, or if the load requires heavy moving. Typically, before the driver arrives for work, material handlers load the trucks and arrange items to improve delivery efficiency. Customers must sign receipts for goods and pay drivers the balance due on the merchandise if there is a cash-on-delivery arrangement. At the end of the day, drivers turn in receipts, money, records of deliveries made, and any reports on mechanical problems with their trucks.

Some local truck drivers have sales and customer service responsibilities. The primary responsibility of *driver/sales workers*, or *route drivers*, is to deliver and sell their firm's products over established routes or within an established territory. They sell goods such as food products, including restaurant takeout items, or pick



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up and deliver items such as laundry. Their response to customer complaints and requests can make the difference between a large order and a lost customer. Route drivers may also take orders and collect payments.

The duties of driver/sales workers vary according to their industry, the policies of their particular company, and the emphasis placed on their sales responsibility. Most have wholesale routes that deliver to businesses and stores, rather than to homes. For example, wholesale bakery driver/sales workers deliver and arrange bread, cakes, rolls, and other baked goods on display racks in grocery stores. They estimate how many of each item to stock by paying close attention to what is selling. They may recommend changes in a store's order or encourage the manager to stock new bakery products. Laundries that rent linens, towels, work clothes, and other items employ driver/sales workers to visit businesses regularly to replace soiled laundry. From time to time, they solicit new orders from businesses along their route.

After completing their route, driver/sales workers order items for the next delivery based on product sales trends, weather, and customer requests.

Working Conditions

Truck driving has become less physically demanding because most trucks now have more comfortable seats, better ventilation, and improved, ergonomically-designed cabs. Although these changes make the work environment more attractive, driving for many hours at a stretch, unloading cargo, and making many deliveries can be tiring. Local truck drivers, unlike long-distance drivers, usually return home in the evening. Some self-employed long-distance truck drivers who own and operate their trucks spend most of the year away from home.

Design improvements in newer trucks reduce stress and increase the efficiency of long-distance drivers. Many of the newer trucks are virtual mini-apartments on wheels, equipped with refrigerators, televisions, and bunks.

The U.S. Department of Transportation governs work hours and other working conditions of truck drivers engaged in interstate commerce. A long-distance driver cannot work more than 60 hours in any 7-day period. Federal regulations also require that truckers rest 10 hours for every 11 hours of driving. Many drivers, particularly on long runs, work close to the maximum time permitted because they typically are compensated according to the number of miles or hours they drive. Drivers on long runs may face boredom, loneliness, and fatigue. Drivers frequently travel at night, and on holidays and weekends, to avoid traffic delays and deliver cargo on time.

Local truck drivers frequently work 50 or more hours a week. Drivers who handle food for chain grocery stores, produce markets, or bakeries typically work long hours, starting late at night or early in the morning. Although most drivers have regular routes, some have different routes each day. Many local truck drivers, particularly driver/sales workers, load and unload their own trucks. This requires considerable lifting, carrying, and walking each day.

Employment

Truck drivers and driver/sales workers held about 3.2 million jobs in 2002. Of these workers, 431,000 were driver/sales workers and 2.8 million were truck drivers. Most truck drivers find employment in large metropolitan areas along major interstate roadways where major trucking, retail, and wholesale companies have distribution outlets. Some drivers work in rural areas, providing specialized services such as delivering newspapers to customers or coal to a railroad.

The truck transportation industry employed almost one-quarter of all truck drivers and driver/sales workers in the United States. Another quarter worked for companies engaged in wholesale or retail trade. The remaining truck drivers and driver/sales workers were distributed across many industries, including construction and manufacturing.

Over 10 percent of all truck drivers and driver/sales workers were self-employed. Of these, a significant number were owner-operators who either served a variety of businesses independently or leased their services and trucks to a trucking company.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

State and Federal regulations govern the qualifications and standards for truck drivers. All drivers must comply with Federal regulations and any State regulations that are stricter than Federal requirements. Truck drivers must have a driver's license issued by the State in which they live, and most employers require a clean driving record. Drivers of trucks designed to carry 26,000 pounds or more—including most tractor-trailers, as well as bigger straight trucks—must obtain a commercial driver's license (CDL) from the State in which they live. All truck drivers who operate trucks transporting hazardous materials must obtain a CDL, regardless of truck size. Federal regulations governing the CDL exempt certain groups, including farmers, emergency medical technicians, firefighters, some military drivers, and snow and ice removers. In many States, a regular driver's license is sufficient for driving light trucks and vans.

To qualify for a commercial driver's license, applicants must pass a written test on rules and regulations, and then demonstrate that they can operate a commercial truck safely. A national database permanently records all driving violations incurred by persons who hold commercial licenses. A State will check these records and deny a commercial driver's license to a driver who already has a license suspended or revoked in another State. Licensed drivers must accompany trainees until the trainees get their own CDL. Information on how to apply for a commercial driver's license may be obtained from State motor vehicle administrations.

While many States allow those who are at least 18 years old to drive trucks within their borders, the U.S. Department of Transportation establishes minimum qualifications for truck drivers engaged in interstate commerce. Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations require drivers to be at least 21 years old and to pass a physical examination once every 2 years. The main physical requirements include good hearing, at least 20/40 vision with glasses or corrective lenses, and a 70-degree field of vision in each eye. Drivers cannot be colorblind. Drivers must be able to hear a forced whisper in one ear at not less than 5 feet, with a hearing aide if needed. Drivers must have normal use of arms and legs and normal blood pressure. Drivers cannot use any controlled substances, unless prescribed by a licensed physician. Persons with epilepsy or diabetes controlled by insulin are not permitted to be interstate truck drivers. Federal regulations also require employers to test their drivers for alcohol and drug use as a condition of employment, and require periodic random tests of the drivers while they are on duty. In addition, drivers must have no criminal records such as felonies involving the use of a motor vehicle; any crime involving drugs, including driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol; and any hit-and-run accident that resulted in injury or death. All drivers must be able to read and speak English well enough to read road signs, prepare reports, and communicate with law enforcement officers and the public. Also, drivers must take a written examination on the Motor Carrier Safety Regulations of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Many trucking operations have higher standards than those described. Many firms require that drivers be at least 22 years old, be able to lift heavy objects, and have driven trucks for 3 to 5 years. Many prefer to hire high school graduates and require annual physical examinations. Companies have an economic incentive to hire less risky drivers. Good drivers drive more efficiently, using less fuel and costing less to insure.

Taking driver-training courses is a desirable method of preparing for truck driving jobs and for obtaining a commercial driver's license. High school courses in driver training and automotive mechanics also may be helpful. Many private and public vocational-technical schools offer tractor-trailer driver training programs. Students learn to maneuver large vehicles on crowded streets and in highway traffic. They also learn to inspect trucks and freight for compliance with regulations. Some programs provide only a limited amount of actual driving experience, and completion of a program does not guarantee a job. Persons interested in attending a driving school should check with local trucking companies to make sure the school's training is acceptable. Some States require prospective drivers to complete a training course in basic truck driving before being issued their CDL. The Professional Truck Driver Institute (PTDI), a nonprofit organization established by the trucking industry, manufacturers, and others, certifies driver training programs at truck driver training schools that meet industry standards and Federal Highway Administration guidelines for training tractor-trailer drivers.

Drivers must get along well with people because they often deal directly with customers. Employers seek driver/sales workers who speak well and have self-confidence, initiative, tact, and a neat appearance. Employers also look for responsible, self-motivated individuals able to work with little supervision.

Training given to new drivers by employers is usually informal, and may consist of only a few hours of instruction from an experienced driver, sometimes on the new employee's own time. New drivers may also ride with and observe experienced drivers before assignment of their own runs. Drivers receive additional training to drive special types of trucks or handle hazardous materials. Some companies give 1 to 2 days of classroom instruction covering general duties, the operation and loading of a truck, company policies, and the preparation of delivery forms and company records. Driver/sales workers also receive training on the various types of products the company carries, so that they will be effective sales workers.

Although most new truck drivers are assigned immediately to regular driving jobs, some start as extra drivers, substituting for regular drivers who are ill or on vacation. They receive a regular assignment when an opening occurs.

New drivers sometimes start on panel trucks or other small straight trucks. As they gain experience and show competent driving skills, they may advance to larger and heavier trucks, and finally to tractor-trailers.

Advancement of truck drivers generally is limited to driving runs that provide increased earnings or preferred schedules and working conditions. For the most part, a local truck driver may advance to driving heavy or special types of trucks, or transfer to long-distance truck driving. Working for companies that also employ long-distance drivers is the best way to advance to these positions. A few truck drivers may advance to dispatcher, manager, or traffic work—for example, planning delivery schedules.

Some long-distance truck drivers purchase a truck and go into business for themselves. Although many of these owner-operators are successful, some fail to cover expenses and eventually go out of business. Owner-operators should have good business sense as well

as truck driving experience. Courses in accounting, business, and business mathematics are helpful, and knowledge of truck mechanics can enable owner-operators to perform their own routine maintenance and minor repairs.

Job Outlook

Job opportunities should be favorable for truck drivers. In addition to growth in demand for truck drivers, numerous job openings will occur as experienced drivers leave this large occupation to transfer to other fields of work, retire, or leave the labor force for other reasons. Jobs vary greatly in terms of earnings, weekly work hours, number of nights spent on the road, and quality of equipment operated. Because this occupation does not require education beyond high school, competition is expected for jobs with the most attractive earnings and working conditions.

Overall employment of truck drivers and driver/sales workers is expected to increase as fast as the average for all occupations through the year 2012, due to growth in the economy and in the amount of freight carried by truck. The increased use of rail, air, and ship transportation requires truck drivers to pick up and deliver shipments. Demand for long-distance drivers will remain strong because these drivers transport perishable and time-sensitive goods more efficiently than do alternative modes of transportation, such as railroads. Job opportunities for truck drivers with less-than-truckload carriers will be more competitive than those with truckload carriers because of the more desirable working conditions for less-than-truckload carriers.

Faster than average growth of light and heavy truck driver employment will outweigh relatively slow growth in driver/sales worker jobs. The number of truck drivers with sales responsibilities is expected to increase more slowly than the average for all other occupations as companies increasingly shift sales, ordering, and customer service tasks to sales and office staffs, and use regular truck drivers to make deliveries to customers.

Job opportunities may vary from year to year, because the strength of the economy dictates the amount of freight moved by trucks. Companies tend to hire more drivers when the economy is strong and deliveries are in high demand. Consequently, when the economy slows, employers hire fewer drivers, or even lay off drivers. Independent owner-operators are particularly vulnerable to slowdowns. Industries least likely to be affected by economic fluctuation, such as grocery stores, tend to be the most stable places for employment.

Earnings

Median hourly earnings of heavy truck and tractor-trailer drivers were \$15.97 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$12.51 and \$20.01 an hour. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$10.01, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$23.75 an hour. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of heavy truck and tractor-trailer drivers in 2002 were as follows:

General freight trucking	\$17.56
Grocery and related product wholesalers	16.90
Specialized freight trucking	15.79
Other specialty trade contractors	14.25
Cement and concrete product manufacturing	14.14

Median hourly earnings of light or delivery services truck drivers were \$11.48 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$8.75 and \$15.57 an hour. The lowest 10 percent earned less than

\$7.03, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$20.68 an hour. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of light or delivery services truck drivers in 2002 were as follows:

Couriers	\$17.48
General freight trucking	14.92
Grocery and related product wholesalers	12.26
Building material and supplies dealers	10.83
Automotive parts, accessories, and tire stores	7.82

Median hourly earnings of driver/sales workers, including commission, were \$9.92 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$6.98 and \$14.70 an hour. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$6.07, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$19.60 an hour. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of driver/sales workers in 2002 were as follows:

Specialty food stores	\$14.98
Drycleaning and laundry services	14.74
Grocery and related product wholesalers	12.66
Limited-service eating places	6.78
Full-service restaurants	6.47

As a general rule, local truck drivers receive an hourly wage and extra pay for working overtime, usually after 40 hours. Employers pay long-distance drivers primarily by the mile. Their rate per mile can vary greatly from employer to employer and may even depend on the type of cargo. Typically, earnings increase with mileage driven, seniority, and the size and type of truck driven. Most driver/sales workers receive a commission based on their sales in addition to an hourly wage.

Most self-employed truck drivers are primarily engaged in long-distance hauling. Many truck drivers are members of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. Some truck drivers employed by companies outside the trucking industry are members of unions representing the plant workers of the companies for which they work.

Related Occupations

Other driving occupations include ambulance drivers and attendants, except emergency medical technicians; bus drivers; and taxi drivers and chauffeurs.

Sources of Additional Information

Information on truck driver employment opportunities is available from local trucking companies and local offices of the State employment service.

Information on career opportunities in truck driving may be obtained from:

► American Trucking Associations, Inc., 2200 Mill Rd., Alexandria, VA 22314. Internet: <http://www.trucking.org>

A list of certified tractor-trailer driver training courses may be obtained from:

► Professional Truck Driver Institute, 2200 Mill Rd., Alexandria, VA 22314. Internet: <http://www.ptdi.org>