

CDL General Knowledge

Last-Minute Cram Sheet

Nationwide core review | General Knowledge only | Use with your state's current CDL manual

IF YOUR TEST IS TOMORROW, START HERE

Prioritize space management, speed control, seeing hazards, vehicle safety, railroad crossings, and emergency handling. Learn the few high-value numbers below, then use your state manual for local details.

Numbers Worth Knowing

- 12-15 seconds** Look this far ahead while driving to spot hazards early.
- 1 sec / 10 ft** Below 40 mph, leave at least 1 second for every 10 feet of vehicle length.
- +1 second** Above 40 mph, add another second of following distance.
- 1/3 slower** Reduce speed by about one-third on a wet road.
- 1/2 or more** Reduce speed by half or more on packed snow.

Vehicle Inspection: Think 'Unsafe Condition'

Tires & wheels

damage, low tread, improper inflation, loose/missing hardware

Steering & suspension

looseness, leaks, broken or missing components

Brakes

damage, contamination, adjustment problems, warning signs

Core Safety Rules

- Increase following distance when roads, visibility, traffic, or weather worsen.
- Enter curves slowly enough that you do not need hard braking while turning.
- Scan mirrors regularly and communicate early with signals, brake lights, horn, or flashers when appropriate.
- Never enter a railroad crossing unless you have enough room to clear it completely.
- Do not shift gears while crossing railroad tracks.

Lights & reflectors

clean, correct color, working, visible

Emergency equipment

warning devices and required safety equipment present and ready

Cargo

balanced and secured so it cannot shift, leak, fall, or affect control

QUICK MEMORY CHECK

Can you explain the following-distance rule, wet/snow speed reductions, why empty trucks may need more stopping distance, and what you should do before entering railroad tracks? If not, review those before moving on.

Fast Final Review

Use this page for the final pass immediately before your General Knowledge test.

SPACE & SPEED

- Keep enough space ahead, behind, and to the sides to create an escape route.
- Slow before curves. Higher speed sharply increases stopping distance and crash severity.
- On slippery roads, reduce speed early and make smooth steering/braking inputs.

SEEING & COMMUNICATING

- Look far enough ahead to identify changing traffic and hazards before they become emergencies.
- Use mirrors often; know where vehicles can disappear into blind spots.
- Signal intentions early. Use warning devices when other road users may not see the danger.

RAILROAD & HAZARDS

- Approach crossings cautiously; look and listen for trains.
- Do not enter unless your entire vehicle can clear the crossing without stopping.
- Do not shift gears while crossing. Watch for work zones, low clearance, soft shoulders, and distracted drivers.

SKIDS & EMERGENCIES

- During a tire failure, keep a firm grip and avoid sudden braking; maintain control and slow gradually.
- If drive wheels skid from acceleration, ease off the accelerator.
- If braking causes a skid, release the brakes as needed to regain wheel rotation/control, then correct safely.

What This Sheet Does NOT Cover

Air Brakes, Combination Vehicles, Hazardous Materials, Tank Vehicles, Passenger, School Bus, and Doubles/Triples involve additional knowledge areas and/or endorsements or restrictions. Prepare separately for every test required for the vehicle and work you plan to do.

5-MINUTE TEST-TOMORROW PLAN

1. Recite the following-distance rule without looking.
2. Review wet-road and packed-snow speed reductions.
3. Rehearse railroad-crossing and hazard decisions.
4. Scan vehicle inspection categories and emergency responses.
5. Open your state's current CDL manual for state-specific requirements.

You do not need to know everything tonight.

Know the highest-value rules cold.

Then verify local requirements in your state's official CDL manual.