

ROAD TEST

The road test is near the end of the hiring process. It is required by Federal regulation. But, as we have stated throughout this manual, the fact that it is required is far less important to you than what you may learn about the applicant while administering the road test. It should be treated as a serious part of your screening process; regardless of whether or not you are required to administer one.

The well-administered road test should address two factors:

1. An applicant's technical, mechanical and physical skills associated with driving a commercial vehicle.
2. An applicant's attitude while driving a commercial vehicle.

All too often, recruiters treat the road test as a formality - "something required by the D.O.T." Even in the best situations, only the hard skills (technical competence) are measured. This is shortsighted. A driver's responses to vehicle defects, weather, other drivers and traffic conditions can tell you a lot. And, while one could argue any driver can "act the part" for the duration of a road test, a properly administered road test will produce some indications of potential problems if they exist.

A road test should begin with a full pre-trip inspection. Special attention should be given to the manner in which the driver completes the pre-trip inspection. Early results of the Commercial Driver's License testing indicate the highest failures in this area. Have the applicant explain every step of the process as he/she observes and checks the vehicle. It is not enough for them to look and/or touch the various safety sensitive parts - they should explain what they are looking for and what they have found.

If the pre-trip inspection is completed to your satisfaction, the driver should demonstrate their maneuvering skills. This should include steering, stopping, shifting and backing exercises. The driver's proficiency at the maneuvering skills should be sound enough to give you confidence that you will be safe during the on-the-road test. Establishment of a road test range on the premises could pay dividends in the long run.

The actual road test should be similar to the required road test for your state's CDL exam. It should be over a predetermined route of approximately 45 minutes of in-traffic driving. It should include the following if at all possible:

1. Four (4) left-hand and four (4) right-hand turns.
2. A straight section of road in a business district.
3. Three (3) or more intersections with various controls and rights-of-way.
4. A railroad crossing.
5. At least one (1) fairly tight curve.
6. A five (5) mile section of limited access highway or expressway and if this is not available, a similar length of rural two-lane highway. The driver should demonstrate lane changing at least once during this part of the test.
7. A downgrade, preferably long enough to allow the driver to demonstrate downshifting.
8. An upgrade to demonstrate shifting to maintain speed.
9. A downgrade to show stopping without rolling.
10. An upgrade to show stopping without rolling backward.
11. An underpass.
12. A bridge with a posted weight limit or some other hazard which the driver should see and identify to you.

Another source of road test layout is the one used by your state for CDL skills testing. Throughout the road test, the applicant's specific driving skills should be assessed. However, take care to observe how the applicant interacts with the vehicle, the environment and other motorists. Is the applicant patient, considerate and accepting of less-than-professional abilities of automobile drivers? Remember, this road test is probably the best performance the applicant can muster. When they are on their own, their performance will either be equal to or less than what you are observing. Ask yourself, "Am I comfortable entrusting this applicant with the lives of others, the assets of the company and my reputation as a good judge of professionalism"?

Accompanying with this manual are several examples of road test forms and scoring methods. Remember, the individual who is giving the road test must be instructed in the proper method evaluation for each phase of the road test. As the applicant performs the driving function, specific skill sets should be evaluated so that weaknesses can be identified. If an applicant is deemed to be sufficiently competent to pass the road test but weak in some specific areas, this should be noted. There should be a plan discussed with the applicant that they will follow to improve their skills in a weak area if they are hired. Remember, one of the most damaging things to you is not to do the road test. Just as damaging in the event of an accident, if not more so, is to identify a weakness in a driver and do nothing to improve the skill the driver is weak in.

A signed copy of the road test and certificate of completion must be kept in the qualification file. A certificate of road test completion should also be given to the applicant.