We will now cover some areas in taking the skills test with a semi tractor/trailer combination vehicle.

The Road Test evaluates your ability to drive safely in most on-the-road situations. The objective is to identify those who lack the skill to safely operate a commercial vehicle under normal traffic conditions. You will drive over a test route that has a variety of traffic situations. At all times during the test, you must drive in a safe and responsible manner; and

- Wear your safety belt.
- Obey all traffic signs, signals, and laws.
- Complete the test without an accident or moving violation.

To drive a vehicle safely, you must be able to control its speed and direction. Safe operation of a commercial vehicle requires skill in:

- Accelerating.
- Steering.
- Stopping.
- Backing safely.

There are 6 different types of vehicle controls skills tests and some place during your road test, the examiner will ask you to perform some of or all of these tests. The different types of vehicle control skills tests are;

- Straight line backing.
- Offset back/right
- Offset back/left
- Parallel Park (driver side).
- Parallel Park (conventional).
- Alley dock.

**Straight line Backing**
Offset back right or left

Parallel park:

Start in the Proper Position. Put the vehicle in the best position to allow you to back safely. This position will depend on the type of backing to be done and the amount of room you have to maneuver. When you are doing any backing exercise, make sure that you use your emergency 4 ways, and make sure you practice your backing techniques before you take the test, it is not the easiest thing to back up a combination vehicle and you must pass at least one of these exercises. It is permissible to get out and check behind you to make sure there are no obstacles that may be blocking that your line of vision. Another way to remember when getting ready to back is the G.O.A.L which means Get Out And Look.
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The alley dock can be one of the most difficult skills test on the driving test, because it can be complex on the particular way you turn the steering wheel to make the trailer turn. (see backing trailer image below) The key to the alley dock exercise is achieve the proper angle in your set up and then to put the rear of the trailer in the opening of the alley dock, use as much room as available to you for a pull up to make it more of a curved backing or an actual straight line backing. Practice this before your CDL skills test, use your 4 ways, never hesitate to get out and look (G.O.A.L).

Now we will discuss the road test its self

First we are going to talk about stopping at an intersection, there are two things to be careful on when stopping at an intersection, the first one is how you decelerate, make sure you don’t apply the clutch to early or put the transmission into neutral until stop, this is called coasting. Its actually better to downshift maybe down to 6th gear if it’s a 10 speed, then apply the brake and when the engine comes down to an idle then push in the clutch, the engine should idle out when you are within one truck length of the intersection. If there is a car stopped ahead of you, make sure you stop in time so that you can see the rear wheels of the vehicle in front of you, this will allow you enough room to get around that vehicle if necessary without having to back up.

Traffic checks and intersections

there are traffic checks that you need to do as you are going through or turning in an intersection. The traffic check before the intersection, make sure that you look left or right, traffic check once you have entered into the intersection, then the traffic check going down the new street. It is important that you know what is going on behind you and the sides of your vehicle at all times. Check you mirrors regularly and check your mirrors more often when in heavy traffic etc.

If you go through an intersection with these objects present, you need to cover your brake: A pedestrian near the curb, a stopped car or a person on a bike.

All drivers should look ahead and be familiar with what is happening in front of them; but many don’t look far enough ahead.

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**Importance of Looking Far Enough Ahead.** Because stopping or changing lanes can take a lot of distance, knowing what the traffic is doing on all sides of you is very important. You need to look well ahead to make sure you have room to make these moves safely.

Here are some hints that can help you look far enough ahead:

- Look for vehicles coming onto the highway into your lane or turning. Watch for brake lights from slowing vehicles. By seeing these things far enough ahead, you can adjust your speed or change lanes if necessary to avoid a problem. If a traffic light has been green for a long time, it will probably change before you get there so start slowing down and be ready to stop. You can also watch the pedestrian cross walk sign for a clue to a pending signal change. If the sign is flashing or has turned to a solid red color, the light is about to change so you can slow your speed with out having to abruptly apply the brake.

**Right Turn**

When you are making a right turn, you need to set yourself up so you are within 3 feet of the right curb, and maintain that 3 ft distance with your trailer as you make your turn, this prevents any vehicles from getting between you and the curb.

![Right Turn Diagram](image)

**Left Turns**

When you are making a left turn you are going to set your self up in the left turn lane (fig 2-11 below) if it’s a single left turn, you are going to turn from the left lane come out into the intersection and then you are going to turn in the left lane, the lane closest to the center of the street or boulevard., when you straighten the whole vehicle out then you can start working on getting over into the right lane. **There is no shifting allowed in turns, the reason behind this is because if you happen to miss a gear in the middle of turning and you could lose your concentration on traffic checking, so you have to demonstrate to the examiner that you can make those turns without shifting in the curve.**

On the subject of shifting, both hands must stay on the wheel unless needed for signaling or shifting. Many of us get in the habit of resting our right hand on the shifter for extended periods of time. This may a way of remembering to keep both hands on the wheel: The only time your hand needs to be on the shifter lever is when your foot is on the clutch. Foot to clutch.....hand to shifter.

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If there is a multiple turn lane (fig 2-11 below) you are going to set yourself up in the right lane and you going to follow that lane around into the right lane which is the slower lane of traffic.

![Diagram showing multiple turn lanes and lane changes.]

During the driving period the examiner will more than likely have you do a lane change, and it is very important that you build enough gap before you come into that other lane-of least 4 seconds for the vehicle in front of you. If you can not achieve the 4 second gap, you need to tell the examiner it is not safe for you to do a lane change and let the examiner determine if you need to continue straight ahead or he believes you have enough time to do a lane change.

During your test your examiner will ask you if there were any weight restrictions for a bridge you going over or a height restriction for a bridge you going under, make sure you keep you eyes open for that, the answer is usually no, do not look in your rear mirrors right after the examiner has asked you these questions because then the examiner will question if you really knew if it was marked or not, don't second guess yourself.

**Railroad crossing**

Just cover your brake as you go across the tracks.

**Expressway**

The examiner will have you do a lane change on the expressway with the 4 second gap from the car in front of you.

On Ramps make sure you do a traffic check as your getting onto the on ramps. When you exit the expressway...
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make sure to cancel your signal when the whole vehicle is on the exit ramp, if you leave it on longer you may give the wrong impression of what your intentions are.

During the test the examiner will probably tell you to pull over to the side and stop as if you are going to get out and check your right front tire. This is called an emergency road stop, the examiner is looking to see that you use your directional to get over to the side, and once there that you put on your 4 ways put the vehicle in neutral, and that you are parallel with the curb.

Another thing the examiner will ask you to do is pull over to the side, and the examiner will set you up for doing the mountain driving exercise. This is a verbal exercise so you need to tell the examiner everything you are doing, do not assume he knows what you are doing, treat the examiner as if he has never gone up & down a mountain.

Start off with a traffic check, signal to the right so you can merge into the right lane which is the slower lane of traffic, make sure you are in the proper gear and put on your 4 ways emergency flashers since the examiner has told you that you are going to be traveling slower than other traffic. At the top of the grade you are going to check your brakes and make sure you are in the proper gear for going down. Going down you are going to do frequent traffic checks, using the proper braking technique intermediate moderate applications which is called snubbing if needed to control the speed, in other words you are going to apply your brake for 3 seconds to reduce your speed by 5 mph to a safe speed, this will prevent your brakes from overheating. When you safely get down to the bottom of the mountain and you are starting to pick up speed, you are going to cancel your 4 way flashers, do a traffic check and safely merge into the left lane.

So these are the main areas to focus on when doing your combination vehicle skills test, since you have that longer vehicle you need to practice going around turns, and if you do happen to hit a curb during your skills test tell the examiner, if you don’t tell the examiner he may assume that you have taken out a light pole or another type of object such as a fire hydrant. So again practice this discussion and get some additional practice with a licensed CDL holder in a vehicle similar to the one you are going to test in before you take your CDL skills test.

Know what are the grounds for automatic failure of your CDL skills test, here are some items of what not to do during your skills and basic vehicle control skills test.

**Automatic failure for the entire test for any of the following reasons:**

- fails to perform the air brake system check entirely or fails to perform All Three of the checks correctly;
- fails to wear a seat belt during the Road Test;
- refuses to perform any maneuver which is part of the prescribed test;
- receives a traffic citation for a moving violation during the test;
- disobeys traffic signs and signals;
- does not yield the right-of-way to pedestrians or other vehicles;
- is involved in an avoidable crash or accident, or has physical contact with other vehicles, objects, pedestrians;

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• commits a dangerous act causing vehicles or pedestrians to take evasive actions;
• puts vehicle over curbs or sidewalks unnecessarily, or
• commits a serious violation of a traffic law

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