

Pre-Trip Inspection Checklist & Study Guide

FMCSA-aligned 116-point CDL walkaround · Class A & B · Updated June 27, 2026

This study guide mirrors the official CDL pre-trip inspection sheet used by Georgia DDS examiners. Use it alongside the AI Pre-Trip Simulator at cdldrive-ai-hub.lovable.app.

1. Engine Compartment

- Oil level — full, no leaks at pan/filter
- Coolant level — at fill line, hoses firm with no bulges/cracks
- Power steering fluid — full, hoses secure, no leaks
- Windshield washer fluid — full
- Belts (alternator, water pump, A/C) — under 3/4" play, no frays
- Water pump — mounted secure, no leaks
- Alternator — bolted tight, wires intact
- Steering box — bolted, no missing nuts, hoses sealed
- Pitman arm, drag link, tie rod — no bends, cotter pins in place
- Leaf springs, shock, U-bolts — no cracks, no missing/shifted leaves

2. Front Exterior

- Lights/reflectors — clean, not cracked, correct color
- Tires — 4/32" min tread (steer), even wear, no cuts/bulges
- Wheel/rim — no cracks, no welds, lug nuts tight, no rust trails
- Hub oil seal — full sight glass, no leaks
- Steer axle — no cracks/leaks
- Mud flaps — secure, not torn (where required)

3. Driver Side / Fuel Area

- Door, mirrors, glass — secure, clean, no damage
- Fuel tank — mounted secure, cap tight, no leaks
- Battery box — secure cover, batteries tied down, no corrosion
- Drive shaft — not bent/cracked, U-joints secure
- Exhaust — no leaks, mounts secure, no soot trails
- Frame — no cracks, bends, or rust-through
- Air bag/suspension — no leaks/cracks

4. Coupling System (Class A)

- 5th wheel — greased, no missing parts, mounted secure
- Locking jaws — fully closed around kingpin
- Release arm — in locked position, safety latch engaged
- Kingpin — not bent, fully seated, no space between trailer and 5th wheel plate
- Air & electric lines — secure, no cuts, not dragging or rubbing
- Glad hands — sealed, correct color coding (red = emergency, blue = service)
- Landing gear — fully raised, handle secured, no damage

5. Trailer / Rear

- Trailer frame, body, doors — no damage, doors latch securely
- Tandem axles — locking pins fully engaged
- Trailer tires — 2/32" min tread, no damage, matched sizes
- Trailer wheels — no cracks, lug nuts tight, hub seals OK
- Trailer brakes — drums not cracked, shoes > 1/4", slack adjuster < 1" pull
- Lights/reflectors — all working, correct color, ICC bumper secure
- Splash guards / mud flaps — intact

6. Passenger Side

- Repeat all driver-side checks
- DOT placards (if hazmat) — correct, legible, secured on all 4 sides

7. In-Cab Inspection

- Seat belt — latches, no cuts/frays
- Mirrors — adjusted, clean, secure
- Steering play — under 10° (about 2" on a 20" wheel)
- Horn (city & air) — both work
- Windshield & wipers — clean, blades intact, washer sprays
- Heater/defroster — blows on glass
- Gauges — oil pressure, coolant temp, voltmeter, air pressure all in normal range
- Warning lights — ABS, low-air, parking brake all extinguish after start
- Emergency equipment — 3 reflective triangles, fire extinguisher (charged), spare fuses

8. Lights & Reflectors Walkaround

- Headlights — high & low beam

- Turn signals — front, side, rear
- 4-way flashers — all corners
- Brake lights — both sides plus center
- Tail/marker/clearance lights — all amber/red as required
- License plate light — working

9. Air Brake Test (must perform in order)

- Governor cut-out: 120-140 psi
- Governor cut-in: within 20-25 psi of cut-out
- Air loss: engine off, foot off brake — max 2 psi/min single, 3 psi/min combo
- Air loss applied: max 3 psi/min single, 4 psi/min combo
- Low-air warning: must activate by 60 psi
- Spring brakes pop out: between 20-45 psi
- Service brake check: roll at 5 mph, apply firmly — truck must stop straight, no pulling

CDL Pre-Trip Study Guide — Key Concepts

Concept	Rule / Limit
Tread Depth Minimums (FMCSA 393.75)	Steer tires: 4/32". All other tires: 2/32". Measure in any major groove.
Air Brake Leakage Limits	Single vehicle: 2 psi/min static, 3 psi/min applied. Combination: 3 psi/min static, 4 psi/min applied.
Low Air Warning	Must activate before pressure drops below 60 psi (light, buzzer, or wig-wag).
Spring Brake Application	Spring (parking) brakes must apply automatically between 20-45 psi.
Governor Pressures	Cut-out at 120-140 psi. Cut-in within 20-25 psi below cut-out.
Steering Wheel Play	Max 10° (about 2 inches on a 20-inch wheel) before front wheels move.
Slack Adjuster	Pull by hand — must not move more than 1 inch.
Brake Drum & Lining	No cracks in drum. Lining at least 1/4" thick at shoe.
Coupling Devices	No more than 1/2" play between upper and lower 5th wheel plates. Safety latch must close over release arm.
Hazmat Placards	Required on all 4 sides when transporting hazardous materials in placardable quantities.

Test-Day Reminders

- Talk out loud — the examiner scores what you say, not what you think.
- Point at or touch each part as you call it out.
- Always check both sides — mirror your driver-side walk on the passenger side.
- If something looks wrong, call it out as a defect and say it must be repaired before driving.
- Run the 7-step air brake test in order. Out-of-order = automatic fail.