

# Fast Facts 5

## Requirements for a California Driver License



### What Is a California Driver License (DL)?

A California DL is a card which grants permission to an individual to operate a motor vehicle. A DL includes your true full name, birth date, mailing address, signature, photograph, and physical description. This card must be in your possession anytime you operate a motor vehicle. You may apply for a DL at a Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) field office. There is an application fee for an original, renewal, and duplicate DL.

### What Are the DL Types?

If you are a visitor in California over 18 years old and have a valid DL from your home state or country, you may drive in this state without getting a California DL as long as your home state DL remains valid.

If you become a California resident, you must get a California DL within 10 days. Residency is established by voting in a California election, paying resident tuition, filing for a homeowner's property tax exemption, or any other privilege or benefit not ordinarily extended to nonresidents.

When applying for a DL, there are 2 types; commercial and noncommercial. Within each type of DL, you may select the appropriate class for your driving needs, including the type of motor vehicle you want to operate.

There are 4 noncommercial DL classes:

- Basic Driver License (Class C)
  - A standard vehicle or truck for personal use on California roadways.
- Motorcycle (Class M1 or M2)
  - 2-wheel motorized vehicle.
- Travel Trailer/Fifth Wheel (Noncommercial Class A)
  - Over 15,000 pounds gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) or a trailer coach over 10,000 pounds GVWR, when the towing is not for compensation.
- Housecar/Motorhome (Noncommercial Class B)
  - Over 40 feet, but not over 45 feet, with endorsement.

**NOTE:** All noncommercial DL classes are available as a REAL ID Compliant or Federal Non-Compliant DL card.

A commercial DL is a license issued in accordance with Federal Regulations that allows an individual to operate a commercial vehicle. There are 3 commercial DL classes:

- Commercial A
  - Any legal combination of vehicles with a gross combination weight rating (GCWR) of 26,001 or more pounds provided the gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of the vehicle(s) being towed is in excess of 10,000 pounds.
- Commercial B
  - Any single vehicle with a GVWR of more than 26,000 pounds, or any such vehicle towing a vehicle not in excess of 10,000 pounds GVWR.
  - A 3-axle vehicle weighing over 6,000 pounds.
- Commercial C
  - Any Class C vehicle with one or more of the following endorsements:
    - Hazardous Materials (HazMat).
    - Passenger Vehicle (PV).
    - Tank Vehicle (TV).

**NOTE:** All commercial DL classes are available as a REAL ID Compliant or Federal Non-Compliant DL card.

For more information on which class of DL you may apply for and requirements, see the *California Driver Handbook* or *California Commercial Driver Handbook*.

### Additional Card Markings

- REAL ID Compliant DL:
  - Complies with federal requirements to allow the applicant to use their DL card as identification to board an airplane, enter military bases, and most federal facilities.
  - All REAL ID Compliant DL cards issued by California DMV will contain a California grizzly bear and a star on the front upper-right corner of the card.

**NOTE:** Applicants applying for a DL pursuant to Assembly Bill (AB) 60 are unable to apply for a REAL ID Compliant DL card.

- Veteran Designation:
  - Eligible veterans have the opportunity to add the word "VETERAN" to the front of their DL card to indicate that they have served in the U.S. Military.
  - It may also play a critical role in enabling access to certain privileges, benefits, or compensation associated with being a veteran without having to carry and produce a *Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty* (DD Form 214).

**NOTE:** You must provide a completed *Veteran Status Verification Form* (VSD-001) issued by a County Veterans Service Office and pay an additional \$5 fee at a local DMV office to receive the veteran designation on your DL.

- Organ and Tissue Donor:
  - When you add your name to the Donate Life California Organ and Tissue Donor Registry, you are legally authorizing the recovery of organs and tissues in the event of your death. A pink "DONOR" dot will be printed on your DL card.

### What Do I Need to Apply?

#### Proof of Identity

When you apply for an original California DL, recertify your California Commercial DL, or convert to a REAL ID Compliant DL, you must present an acceptable identity document(s) to establish who you are. An acceptable document is one produced by an authority, such as a county, state, federal, or foreign agency. These are original or certified documents establishing birth date, true full name, and identity. DMV will only accept an original document or a certified copy of the original to establish identity. DMV will not accept photocopies, "informational copies," or documents with the statement, "Informational, not a valid document to establish identity," or any similar statement. Your document(s) must contain your true full name. Document(s) presented at a DMV office will be returned to you.

For a complete list of acceptable identity documents based on the type of DL you are applying for, visit [dmv.ca.gov](https://dmv.ca.gov).

**NOTE:** For more information on provisional (minor) DLs, visit [dmv.ca.gov](https://dmv.ca.gov).

#### True Full Name

Your true full name is your current, complete legal name (first, middle, and last name) as it appears on your identity or name change document(s). If the name on your identity document is different than the name you provided on your application, you must submit an additional name change document. Name change documents that establish your true full name include:

- Adoption documents that contain the legal name as a result of the adoption.
- A name change document that contain the legal name both before and after the name change.
- Marriage certificate.

- Dissolution of marriage/domestic partnership document that contains the legal name as a result of the court action.
- A certificate, declaration, or registration document verifying the formation of a domestic partnership.

**NOTE:** If you are correcting or changing your name on a DL, you must also correct or change your name on your ID card (if applicable).

**Social Security Number (SSN)**

If you are eligible for or have been issued an SSN, you must include it on your application. When applying for a California commercial DL or REAL ID Compliant DL, you must provide proof of your SSN. For a list of acceptable REAL ID SSN options, visit **dmv.ca.gov**. Your SSN will be verified with the Social Security Administration (SSA) while you are in a DMV office. If you are eligible for a SSN and have not been issued one, contact SSA. You must provide DMV with your SSN if you become eligible in the future. For more information, refer to the *Social Security Number (FFDL 8) Fast Facts* brochure.

**Residency Documents**

You must provide **1** California residency document if applying for a DL or renewing a California commercial DL, and **2** California residency documents if applying for a REAL ID Compliant DL.

DMV will not accept an application without the accompanying residency documents. DMV will accept photocopies, “informational copies,” or computer-generated documents for residency purposes. All residency documents must list the applicant’s first and last name and the California residence address must match the residence address listed on the DL application. For a complete list of acceptable residency documents, visit **dmv.ca.gov**.

*Application Process*

To apply for a DL, you must complete a Driver License and Identification Card Application and pay any licensing fees. For current licensing fees, visit **dmv.ca.gov**. You will be required to take a knowledge test, vision exam, photograph, and, if necessary, a driving test.

1. Before Visiting a DMV Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Study for the knowledge test. Study material available on the DMV website includes:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>— <i>California Driver Handbook</i> (available in multiple languages and at DMV offices)</li><li>— <i>California Commercial Handbook</i>.</li><li>— Sample tests.</li><li>— Road sign flashcards.</li></ul></li></ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gather the identity, residency, and SSN documents you need to apply for a DL.</li><li>• Effective April 2018, DMV will begin offering an electronic DL and ID application process. Applicants will have the opportunity to complete their electronic application before visiting DMV. Be sure to bring your application confirmation with you to your office visit.</li><li>• Make an appointment before visiting a DMV office. Appointments can be made at <b>dmv.ca.gov</b> or by calling 1-800-777-0133. You may also verify payment options available at the DMV office.</li></ul>

2. When You Arrive at a DMV Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Residency Document.</li><li>• Any DL or permit issued previously by any state (if applicable).</li></ul>
You will need:	If you are under 18 years old, you may apply for a provisional permit/DL. In addition to the items above, you will need:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Correct fee(s) for your application.</li><li>• Original or certified documents(s) establishing identity, birth date, true full name.</li><li>• Original document establishing proof of SSN if applying for a REAL ID Compliant DL.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A driver education completion certificate or enrollment in an integrated driver education/driver training program.</li><li>• Signatures by all parent(s)/guardian(s) with custody.</li></ul>

**NOTE:** See the *Provisional Licensing (FFDL 19) Fast Facts* brochure for additional information.  
The DMV representative may give you a number and/or direct you to wait. When it is your turn, you will be called to a window to process your application.

3. When You Are Called to a Representative’s Window	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• After your information has been entered into the computer, an application fee (or any other applicable fee) will be collected.</li><li>• The DMV representative will test your vision (ensure you bring your corrective lenses, if needed), and direct you to the camera.</li><li>• At the camera, your fingerprint will be rescanned and the representative will capture your signature and take your photograph.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide <b>all</b> of the documents listed previously. These documents are used to verify your information and establish a DMV record.</li><li>• The DMV representative will scan your fingerprint. This fingerprint will also be used for taking your photograph and administering tests.</li></ul>	

**NOTE:** The signature and photograph will appear on your DL.

4. Taking Your Knowledge Test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• TouchScreen tests will be automatically graded. A DMV representative will grade paper and audio tests.</li><li>• Didn’t pass? Don’t worry. You can repeat this step. Before retesting, study the <i>California Driver Handbook</i> or <i>California Commercial Driver Handbook</i>. Provisional applicants must wait 1 week before retesting.</li><li>• If you do not pass the knowledge test after 3 attempts, you must begin the application process again.</li></ul>
DMV administers knowledge tests to determine if an applicant understands the laws and rules of the road. Depending on the type of DL you apply for, more than one knowledge test may be required (for example, motorcycle or commercial DL).	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The knowledge test may be done on the computer (TouchScreen Testing) in a variety of languages or, in certain cases, on paper or audio.</li><li>• Once you complete the test, follow the directions provided by the DMV representative.</li></ul>	

**NOTE:** You may **not** drive unless you have a valid document in your possession that authorizes you to drive.

5. What Happens Once You Pass Your Knowledge Test?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If you are issued an interim or temporary DL, you do not need a driving test.</li><li>• If you are issued a driver permit, read it carefully to make sure you understand the driving restrictions that apply.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• After you pass the knowledge test, you must return back to the window to receive your licensing document. Verify that all information printed on your licensing document is correct (for example, name and address) and sign the front of the document in the space provided before leaving the DMV representative’s window.</li></ul>	

**NOTE:** The provisional permit is not valid **until you start** the behind-the-wheel driver training class **and** your permit is signed by the instructor or you are 17 ½ years old.

6. Preparing for Your Driving Test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Behind-the-wheel driving tests are available by appointment only. Once you are ready, schedule an appointment at <b>dmv.ca.gov</b> or by calling 1-800-777-0133.</li><li>• Didn’t pass? Don’t worry. You can make an appointment to repeat this step. Provisional applicants must wait 2 weeks before retesting.</li><li>• Check the DMV website for the retest fee(s). If you do not pass the driving test after 3 attempts, you must begin the application process again.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Even if you have driven before, it is a good idea to practice driving before making a driving test appointment. For more information, see the <i>Preparing for Your Driving Test (FFDL 22) Fast Facts</i> brochure. Commercial drivers, review the requirements in the <i>California Commercial Driver Handbook</i>.</li></ul>	

7. Receiving Your DL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An interim DL is a paper DL issued to you until the permanent DL is mailed.</li><li>• A temporary DL is a paper DL issued to you because the application is incomplete and pending additional information or requirements.</li><li>• If you do not receive your DL card within 60 days, call 1-800-777-0133 to check the status.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• After successfully completing the testing process, you may be issued an interim or temporary DL valid for up to 60 days. You may drive without an accompanying driver until your interim or temporary DL expires.</li></ul>	

**NOTE:** Review your DL and the *California Driver Handbook* or *California Commercial Driver Handbook* for driving restrictions.