



How easy is it to get your truck license?

Driving trucks is a big job and someone has to do it. Everything you can see around you has probably seen the inside of a truck before: the products you use each day, the food you eat, the materials that our houses are made of, and the roads we drive on, everything. Trucks play an important role in carrying both completed products and raw materials everywhere around the country, and without them, it would be difficult for the economy to function. Even products carried by ships and trains usually need to be transported by a truck to and from the port or rail station before they reach their final destination.

In New Zealand, there is a huge shortage of truck drivers. There are dozens of job listings for qualified drivers on job search websites. Class 5 drivers are especially sought-after, and if you can get this licence, expect to be well compensated. Just to meet the current market demand, we need another 2000 drivers right now, and this shortage is expected to continue to grow, as many long-term drivers are expected to retire over the next decade. In other words, now is a great time to get into the industry. Some reasons you might want to consider becoming a truck driver include:

- Good, steady pay cheque with the ability to pay off debt or save for a home
- Opportunities for career growth—many truck drivers go on to become owner drivers, business or fleet owners
- Develop easily transferable skills

- Don't need to get tens of thousands of dollars into debt with a student loan
- Opportunity to travel the country

That's not to say that being a truck driver is easy or is for everyone. But if you are a hard worker, can manage your time well, and take care of yourself, then the job can be rewarding. To be a truck driver, you must be sharp, focused, and aware of the road at all times.

So what license do you need to be a truck driver? There are six different license classes in New Zealand. The different classes of driver license are as follows:

- Class 1: Car licence
- Class 2: Medium rigid vehicle licence
- Class 3: Medium combination vehicle licence
- Class 4: Heavy rigid vehicle licence
- Class 5: Heavy combination vehicle licence
- Class 6: Motorcycle licence

To become a heavy truck driver, you need to hold a licence for the size of truck you intend to drive. New Zealand has four licence classes for heavy vehicles. Special vehicle endorsements may also be required for special type vehicles, including forklift, dangerous goods, bulldozers, and trams and those that run on rollers or self-laying tracks.

The first license you must get to become a truck driver is a Class 2 learner licence. To apply, you must have held a full car licence for at least six months and must pass the road code test at a driver licencing agency (e.g. VTNZ). There are 35 questions, both general questions and questions related

specifically to Class 2 vehicles. Similar to the Class 1 learner licence test, the questions are not difficult if you have studied in advance.

To help you prepare, you can purchase a study book or practice tests at VTNZ or a local bookstore or take free practice tests online at drivingtests.co.nz.

After obtaining the learner licence, to progress to a Class 2 full licence, you have two options. The first is to practice driving under supervision (with a licensed driver, similar to a Class 1 learner licence) for at least six months before and sitting a practical test. The second is to complete a training course at an approved training provider. The courses usually go for two to three days and cover both driver theory and practice. There will also be an assessment at the end of the course. By taking a training course, you can skip the six-month waiting period between receiving your learner licence

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and applying for a full Class 2 license. Once you have completed the approved course, you will be given a certificate, which can be taken to an NZTA licensing agent (VTNZ or AA) and exchanged for your new licence.

Once you have the Class 2 full licence, you can work toward licences for other vehicle classes. Every heavy vehicle licence class has both a learners and full licence. There are waiting times between when you get a full class licence, and when you can apply for the learner licence for the next class. The waiting times are as follows, depending on your age:

	Under 25 years old	25 and over
Class 2L	You must hold a current Class 1 full license for at least six months first	
Class 3L	Must hold Class 2 full for six months first	Must hold Class 2 full for three months first
Class 4L	Must hold Class 2 full for six months first	Must hold Class 2 full for three months first
Class 5L	Must hold Class 4 full for six months first	Must hold Class 4 full for three months first

For people who are over 25 years old, it is possible to bypass the waiting times between licences and fast-track your Class 5 licence by taking an accelerated heavy vehicle licence class course at an approved training provider. By taking one of these courses, you can fast-track the process of getting your Class 2, 4, and 5 licenses. Through an accelerated course, you can skip the waiting period between each of the licences by showing that you have the required driving experience and knowledge.

There are a number of driver training providers that can assist you to obtain your heavy truck licences and endorsements, such as masterdrive.co.nz, candrive.co.nz, drivetech.co.nz, and driveschool.co.nz. ■

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