



# How to Prepare and Apply for a California Driver License (FFDL 7)

## Immediate Attention:

You will need a federal compliant card such as a passport, military ID, or REAL ID to board a domestic flight or access some federal facilities beginning October 1, 2020. The DMV started offering [REAL ID driver licenses and ID cards](#) on January 22, 2018. A field office visit is required to apply for a REAL ID.

## How Do I Get a California Driver License for the First Time?

The steps to apply for a basic California driver license (Class C) with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) are outlined in this brochure. Each step is meant to be read in order. You may be referred to additional publications which can be found on our website at [www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/dmv/detail/pubs/pubs](http://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/dmv/detail/pubs/pubs).

## Step 1: Before Visiting a DMV Field Office

Study for the knowledge test. The study material is available on the DMV website and includes:

- The [California Driver Handbook](#) (also available at field offices and in multiple languages).
- Sample tests.
- Road sign flashcards.

Gather the documents you may need to apply for a driver license. These are original or certified document(s) establishing identity, birth date, true full name, residency, and/or legal presence (example: birth certificate and passport). For information about certified and original documents, and the full list of documents accepted refer to: [Requirements for a California Driver License \(FFDL 5\) Fast Facts](#) and [Documents Required for a Driver License \(FFDL 5A\) Fast Facts](#) brochures.

If you have or are eligible for a social security number, then you must provide the number on your application. For more information, refer to [Social Security Number \(FFDL 8\) Fast Facts](#) brochure.

Make an appointment before visiting a DMV office (walk-ins are only accepted at our Driver License Processing Centers). Appointments can be made online at [www.dmv.ca.gov](http://www.dmv.ca.gov) or by calling 1-800-777-0133.

## Step 2: When You Arrive at a DMV Field Office

Go to the START HERE window, which will be identified by a sign. You will need to complete a Driver License or Identification Card Application (DL 44) form. You can obtain the DL 44 in field offices or call 1-800-777-0133 to have the form mailed to you.

**NOTE:** Do not sign the DL 44 until asked to do so by a DMV representative.

The other items you will need include:

- Correct fee(s) for your transaction (cash, check, money order, or ATM/Debit; credit cards are not accepted at DMV field offices).
- Original or certified documents(s) establishing identity, birth date, true full name, residency, and/or legal presence.
- Any driver license or permit issued previously by any state (if applicable).

If you are under the age of 18 years old, you may apply for a provisional permit/license. In addition to the items above, you will need:

- A driver education completion certificate or enrollment in an integrated driver education/driver training program.
- Signatures by all parent(s)/guardian(s) with custody in the correct section of the DL 44.

**NOTE:** See the [Provisional Licensing \(FFDL 19\) Fast Facts](#) brochure for additional information.

The 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.

## Step 3: When You Are Called to a Representative's Window

Provide **all** of the documents listed previously (in STEP 2). These documents are used to verify your information and establish a DMV record. The representative will scan your fingerprint. This fingerprint will also be used for taking your photograph and administering tests. After your information has been entered into the computer, an application fee (or any other applicable fee) will be collected.

The representative will test your vision (ensure you bring your corrective lenses if needed), and you will be directed to the camera. At the camera, your fingerprint will be re-scanned and the representative will capture your signature and take your photograph.

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

## Step 4: Taking Your Knowledge Test

DMV administers knowledge tests to determine if an applicant understands the laws and rules of the road.

The test may be done on the computer (TouchScreen Testing) or in certain cases, on paper or audio. Depending on the type of driver license you apply for, more than one knowledge test may be required (for example, a motorcycle or commercial license). Knowledge tests are available in multiple languages.

You may not start your knowledge test within a half an hour (30 minutes) of the field office closing.

Once you complete the test, follow the directions provided by the representative. The TouchScreen test will be automatically graded. The paper or audio tests are graded by the DMV representative.

Didn't pass? Don't worry. You can repeat this step. Before retesting, study the [California Driver Handbook](#). Provisional applicants must wait a week before retesting.

If you still do not pass the knowledge test after three (3) attempts, you will need to begin the application process again (go to STEP 1).

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

Passed your knowledge test? **Congratulations!**

## Step 5: What Happens Once You Pass Your Knowledge Test?

After you have passed 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 (example: name and address), and sign the front of the document in the space provided before leaving the DMV representative's window.

If you have been issued an interim or temporary **driver license** and you do not have to complete a driving test, go to STEP 7.

If you have been issued a **driver permit**, read your permit carefully to make sure you understand the restrictions that apply.

**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 reach age 17 ½.

## Step 6: Preparing For and Taking Your Driving Test

Even if you have driven before, it is a good idea to practice driving before making a driving test appointment. For more detailed information see [DMV's Driving Test \(FFDL 22\) Fast Facts](#) brochure.

The behind-the-wheel driving tests are available by appointment only. Once you are ready, you can schedule an appointment online at [www.dmv.ca.gov](http://www.dmv.ca.gov) or by calling 1-800-777-0133.

On the day of your driving test appointment, arrive 10-15 minutes early with an accompanying licensed driver as described in your permit's restrictions. Go to the START HERE window or a designated check-in counter.

The items you will need include:

- Current proof of registration of the vehicle.
- Current proof of insurance for the vehicle.
- The permit that was issued to you.
- A driver license or permit issued previously by any state or country (if applicable).

If you are a provisional driver, you will also need to bring:

- A driver training completion certificate or completion certificate of an integrated driver education/drive training program.
- Your permit signed by a parent/guardian and the driving instructor who administered the driver training course.

The representative will review your paperwork, and direct you to move your vehicle.

A DMV examiner will conduct your behind-the-wheel driving test. No one except the examiner is allowed to accompany you during the driving test. Exceptions are made for training, and certain law enforcement situations.

Your driving test begins with a vehicle safety check. This pre-drive inspection demonstrates that you are familiar with your vehicle and that your vehicle meets the DMV's minimum safety requirements.

**NOTE:** Interpreters may be used during the pre-drive inspection for the identification and use of certain controls in the vehicle, but may not accompany you during the driving test.

Didn't pass? Don't worry. You can make an appointment to repeat this step. Provisional applicants must wait two (2) weeks before retesting.

Check the DMV website for the retest fee(s). If you still do not pass the driving test after three (3) attempts, you will need to begin the application process again (go to STEP 1). Passed your driving test? **Congratulations!**

## Step 7: Receiving Your Driver License

After successfully completing the testing process, you may be issued an interim or temporary license. An interim license is a paper driver license issued to you while the hard copy license is in process.

A temporary license is a paper driver license issued because the application is incomplete and is pending additional information or requirements.

An interim or temporary driver license may be valid for up to 60 days. You may drive without an accompanying driver until your license expires.

If you do not receive your driver license card within 60 days, please call 1-800-777-0133.

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