

# A Complete Guide to Trucking Terms

Want to learn how to talk like a trucker? We've provided a comprehensive guide to learning common trucking, transportation and logistics terms

Whether you're new to the trucking and transportation industry, or just need a refresh, we've compiled a list of the most commonly used terms in trucking.

## A

**ABS** – Anti-lock braking systems help drivers achieve safer braking operations in inclement weather through short applications of pressure.

**Air Ride Suspension** – A style of suspension that uses air bags or compression to provide a smoother ride. These are especially helpful when hauling sensitive or fragile freight.

**Audit** – A safety review of a motor carrier's records done by the Department of Transportation (DOT). The audit verifies the carrier is compliant with Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSRs).

**Authority** – Operating authority, or motor carrier authority, is a motor carrier's right to operate as a for-hire entity with a commercial motor vehicle to transport goods via interstate commerce.

**Authorized Carrier** – A carrier that has been pre-approved by a shipper or broker to haul freight.

**Axle** – A rod that connects wheels on opposite sides of the vehicles and supports the weight of the vehicle.

**Axle Rating** – The amount of weight permitted on an axle or group of axles.

## B

**Backhaul** – A load that will return a driver back to their home city or near the company's home terminal.

**Base Plate** – A license plate issued from the state where the vehicle is registered.

**Bear** – A police officer, state trooper or highway patrolman.

**Bear in the Air** – When highway speed is being checked via an aircraft (airplane or helicopter).

**Bill of Lading** – A document explaining the agreement between a shipper and carrier. This document is usually signed by all parties as proof of completion, and includes information like commodity, weight, pick-up and delivery dates, etc.

**Binder** – An insurance binder, provided by the insurance company, provides short-term proof of pending coverage until policy paperwork is finalized.

**Black Eye** – When a truck has a headlight out.

**Blind Siding** – Backing into a loading dock or parking spot when the trailer is angled out of view from the driver (usually on the passenger side).

**Bobtail** – A tractor running without a trailer.

**Bogie/Bogey** – A frame or chassis that attaches a set of wheels to another trailer.

**Bridge Formula** – An equation used by state agencies and DOT to determine the maximum allowable weight of commercial vehicles and how far apart the axles must be to carry that weight.

**Broker** – Also known as a freight broker or brokerage, brokers act as the middle party between shippers and carriers to facilitate the freight hauling, rates, etc.

**Bulk Freight** – Freight that is shipped in large volumes without being packaged, like sand, gasoline, steel, etc.

**Bunny Hopper** – A vehicle that changes lane constantly, creating a possible hazardous scenario for other drivers.

## C

**Cab Card** – A card that must be kept in the cab of the truck at all times providing evidence of registration in every state a truck is authorized to operate.

**Cabover Truck** – A truck or tractor designed for the cab to sit over the engine instead of under the hood.

**Cargo** – A common term for freight or a transported commodity.

**Cargo Insurance** – Insurance covering the freight being transported in case of claim, loss, damage, etc. occurring during transit.

**Cargo Manifest** – A document listing the cargo on a truck, aircraft or ship.

**Carrier** – A trucking company or owner-operator available for hire to transport freight for shippers either on a spot or regular basis.

**Carrier Liability** – Dictates the maximum amount a carrier may be liable for in the event of damage, loss, or shipping delays. End liability amounts are usually determined by the value of the freight being hauled and can vary between carriers and shippers.

**Cartage Company** – A company that provides local pickup and delivery services.

**CAT Scales** – Private scales typically available at truck stops that drivers can use to weight their vehicle combinations, ensuring their weights are legal.

**CB Radio (Citizens Band Radio)** – A two-way radio system that doesn't require a license, used by truckers and other drivers for reporting emergency calls, road conditions and other chatter.

**Certificate of Insurance (COI)** – A formal document issued by insurance companies confirming a policy exists for a specific entity, such as a trucking company.

**Chassis** – the frame of a commercial vehicle that attaches to the engine, transmission, axles, cargo compartments, cab and fuel tank.

**Chocks** – Wedges placed in front of and behind wheels to keep the vehicle from rolling forward or backward while parked, loading or unloading.

**Claim** – A legal demand by a shipper seeking financial compensation for loss or damages on a shipment. A claim can also be made by a trucking company to an insurance company due to a vehicle accident.

**Class One Motor Carrier** – Carriers with combined annual interstate and intrastate revenues of \$10 million+.

**Class Two Motor Carrier** – Carriers with combined annual interstate and intrastate revenues between \$3 million and \$10 million.

**Class Three Motor Carrier** – Carriers with combined annual interstate and intrastate revenues less than \$3 million.

**Combination** – At least one tractor and one trailer.

**Combined Gross Vehicle Weight** – the total weight of a vehicle including its power unit, equipment, freight, trailers, fuel, etc.

**Commercial Carrier** – An entity for hire, using commercial vehicles to transport freight between destinations.

**Commercial Driver's License (CDL)** – A license authorizing individuals to drive and operate commercial vehicles over 26,000 pounds.

**Compliance Review** – The method in which the FMCSA ensure commercial carriers are following local, state and federal safety inspection metrics.

**Consignee** – The person or company responsible for receiving the shipment and providing proof of delivery. Also commonly referred to as the receiver.

**Consignor** – The company or person shipping the product.

**Consolidation** – The act of combining multiple less-than-truckload (LTL) shipments into a larger shipment to create a full truckload.

**Container Shipping** – The method of rail and sea transportation where freight is packed into shipping containers. The transportation between ports and railheads is done by truck and trailer combinations.

**Contract Carrier** – A carrier that regularly provides transportation for a shipper via terms provided in a contract.

**Coop** – A weigh station or scale house.

**Coupling** – The act of hooking a tractor to a trailer, or multiple trailers together.

**Cubic Capacity** – The measurement of interior cargo space inside a truck, trailer or shipping container.

**Customs** – The authority in charge of monitoring the flow of goods between countries.

## D

**DAC Report** – Provides companies with driver information like equipment, drug and alcohol test results, truck driving school records, etc.

**Dead Heading** – Traveling without a payload; often involves driving a tractor and empty trailer to pick up a load in order to return to a specified location.

**Declared Value** – The amount of value a shipment is declared to have by the shipper or owner of the freight.

**Dedicated Run or Lane** – A lane of freight that typically runs on a specified schedule at regular intervals, with the same products and parties involved. Dedicated lanes are highly sought after by drivers, as they are essentially guaranteed, scheduled income.

**Detention/Demurrage** – A charge created by the carrier to seek compensation for excess use of their time and equipment, usually caused by delays in loading or unloading.

**Disc Wheel** – Wheels that have less parts and require less maintenance and are frequently used on commercial vehicles due to their increased aerodynamics.

**Dispatcher** – Someone employed by a carrier or trucking company that acts as the intermediary party between drivers and shippers to coordinate loads, and sometimes manage other back-office tasks.

**Dock** – The truck parking area for loading/unloading freight, also known as loading docks. They are found most often at manufacturing facilities, warehouses and distribution centers.

**Dock Plate** – The large steel plate covering the gap between the truck or trailer and the loading dock, which makes it easier to load and unload.

**Dolly** – A coupling device (includes an axle, fifth wheel and pintle hook) that allows two trailers to be hooked together.

**DOT Number** – The license granted to carriers by the Department of Transportation. This is not the same as an MC number.

**Double Bottom** – A set of double trailers.

**Doubles (Twin Trailers)** – A tractor paired with two trailers.

**Daily Log** – The detailed record of a driver's day of work, divided into four sections: driving, on-duty not driving, off-duty and sleeper berth. Most logs are now kept electronically

**Drive Line** – The mechanics that deliver the power created from the engine to the drive wheels on a vehicle.

**Drop & Hook** – The term for when a driver drops an empty trailer at a shipper's loading yard and picks up a pre-loaded trailer. This keeps drivers from having to wait while the trailer is loaded.

**Dry Box (Dry Van)** – The common type of trailer used for hauling general freight that has no climate control needs.

**Dunnage** – The filler material used to pack empty space in a loaded trailer to keep freight from moving or falling in transit. It can consist of lumber, foam padding, inflatable bags or other packable materials.

## E

**Electronic Data Interchange (EDI)** – The business-to-business computer system used for exchanging documents rapidly, most commonly used for bills of lading, build tickets, and other logistics files.

**Electronic Logging Device (ELD)** – The digital device truckers use for tracking data such as drive time, speed, mileage, etc. The US required ELDs in a mandate beginning in 2019.

**Endorsements** – An add-on to a commercial driver's license allowing drivers to operate special vehicles or haul regulated commodities, such as driving a tanker or hauling hazardous materials.

**Escort** – A vehicle assisting in the hauling of oversized shipments. The escort vehicle ensure the truck hauling the oversized item(s) has plenty of space to navigate roads and notifies other drivers of the incoming truck. Escorts can help stop traffic if needed.

**ETA** – Estimated time of arrival.

**Excess Value** – The amount of declared value a shipment may hold that is above what a carrier's able to haul with their insurance liability limit.

**Excise Tax** – A tax levied on specific goods, such as tobacco, beer, gasoline, diesel, etc.

**Expediting** – A specialized segment of transportation for time-sensitive shipments. These loads are typically hauled by dedicated carriers and team drivers.

## F

**Factoring** – When a factoring company advances the payment of open invoices to truck companies, usually within 24 hours. Factoring increases cash flow more quickly than standard payment terms.

**Federal Highway Administration (FHWA)** – The entity responsible for managing and conducting construction and maintenance on national highways, tunnels, bridges and other infrastructure.

**Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA)** – The organization within the DOT that prevents commercial vehicle-related injuries and fatalities through safety regulations and information systems.

**Fingerprint a Load** – This phrase indicates a driver must be the one to unload the freight at the receiving location.

**Fender Bender** – A popularized term for a vehicle accident.

**Flatbed** – An open-air trailer used for hauling freight that does not require enclosure during travel, such as lumber, equipment, cars, steel, etc.

**Freight** – The universal term describing any items transported by airplane, ship, rail or commercial vehicle.

**Freight Bill** – Also known as freight invoices. The final bills sent by the carrier to the shipper for the transportation services provided. These may include different or

additional services that weren't on the original load tender.

**Freight Class** – The category of freight in LTL shipping (defined by the National Motor Freight Traffic Association) identifying freight by size, value, and difficulty to transport. The freight class determines shipping charges.

**Freight Forwarder** – Similar to a freight broker, a forwarder facilitates the shipping of goods but typically for international freight, and can be held responsible for claims.

**Fuel Surcharge** – An added payment to the carrier to accommodate for current fuel prices. The Energy Information Administration (within the U.S. Department of Energy) publishes the Average Fuel Index each week, which helps companies establish how much they will add in fuel surcharge on top of shipping rates.

**Full Truckload (FTL or FT)** – The use of a dry van, flatbed or reefer truck to move a full load of freight. Multiple smaller loads can be consolidated to create a full truckload.

## G

**Gear Ratio** – The number of turns an output shaft makes when the input shaft makes one rotation. This number determines performance characteristics of trucks and tractors.

**Glad Hand** – A coupler that allows service or emergency airlines in tractors to be connected to those in the trailer.

**Gooseneck** – A light to medium-duty flatbed trailer that has a protruding neck connecting to a fifth wheel, typically mounted on a hot shot truck.

**Grade** – The ratio between the elevation change and distance of a hill, used to determine the steepness. Also referred to as slope or incline.

**Grandfather Clause** – An exception in a current rule that allows old rules or regulations to be applicable in certain instances, even though the new one has taken place. These are common in laws, contracts and other legally binding agreements.

**Gross Axle Weight Rating (GAWR)** – The maximum allowable weight a single axle on a commercial vehicle can support.

**Gross Combination Weight (GCW)** – The maximum allowable weight for a combination vehicle (tractor and trailer).

**Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW)** – The maximum allowable weight of a vehicle set by the manufacturer. This includes chassis, cab, engine, fuel, driver, cargo, etc.

## H

**Hanging Iron** – The act of securing loads on a flatbed or lowboy trailer with the use of binders and chains.

**Hazardous Materials (Hazmat)** – Materials that are federally controlled and may only be transported by a commercial driver with a hazmat endorsement on their CDL.

**Headache Rack** – A steel rack attached to the back of a truck cab to keep any items on the trailer from coming loose and crashing into the cab or sleeper.

**Header Board** – A steel rack attached to the front of a flatbed trailer frame to keep any items on the trailer from coming loose and crashing into the cab or sleeper.

**Heavy Hauler** – A truck specially designed to haul heavy loads, usually requiring permits and escorts.

**High Cube** – A type of dry van trailer with additional vertical space, usually measuring 14 feet high instead of the standard 13.5 feet.

**Highway Use Tax** – The annual tax paid to the IRS by owners of commercial vehicles with weights equal to, or greater than, 55,000 pounds.

**Hopper Body** – An open-top or tanker-style truck body used primarily for hauling heavy bulk freight such as grain, food products, dry concrete mix, etc.

**Horses/Horsepower** – A measure of power; one horsepower is equal to 33,000 foot-pounds of work in one minute.

**Hot Load** – A shipment that needs to be delivered as soon as possible.

**Hot Shot Trucking** – Refers to large pickup trucks with fifth-wheels, or medium-sized flatbed trailers, hauling light loads short distances.

**Hours of Service** – Regulations that dictate the number of hours commercial drivers are allowed to drive and work, issued by the FMCSA.

## I

**Icing Charge** – The charge for adding ice to any time-sensitive, perishable freight either before or during transit.

**In Bond** – A shipment that has not yet cleared customs from being imported or exported.

**Interchange Agreement** – A contract between two companies negotiating the switch of a trailer to pick up and delivery shipments. This is most common along border towns between countries.

**Intermodal Transportation** – The term for shipments that require more than one type of transportation mode, such as ship and truck, truck and rail, etc.

**International Fuel Tax Agreement (IFTA)** – An agreement among U.S. and Canadian jurisdictions created to simplify tax calculations for interstate and international carriers.



**Interstate** – Shipments that travel between multiple states.

**Intrastate** – Shipments that pick up and deliver in the same state.

## J

**Jackknife** – The folding of a tractor and trailer to an acute point, usually occurs on slippery road surfaces.

**Jake Brake** – A type of brake in diesel engines that use compression to slow a vehicle down without having to use services brakes. Both can be used in downhill slides.

**Just-in-Time** – A method of manufacturing and transportation relying on small, frequent deliveries of raw materials and supplies. The goal is to receive items “just in time” for them to go into production to minimize the cost of storage.

## K

**King Pin** – The large steel pin at the front of the underside of a trailer used to lock into a tractor’s fifth wheel to create a combination vehicle.

## L

**Landing Gear** – The two retractable legs supporting a trailer when the trailer is not hooked to a truck.

**Lane** – The movement or route from a pickup to a delivery location. When the same lane is run on a regular basis, it is referred to as a dedicated lane.

**Layover** – The term for a driver being detained overnight or for a 24-hour period during pick up, loading, delivery, etc. of a shipment. Layovers typically involve fees.

**Lease** – The contractual agreement between a lessee and lessor for use of a physical asset, such as a tractor or trailer.

**Lease Purchase Agreement** – An agreement like a lease in which the lessee has an option of buying the equipment when the contract is finished.

**Less-than-Truckload (LTL)** – A quantity of freight in a requested load that is less than what is required for a full truckload rate. Often, multiple LTL shipments are combined to create an FTL shipment, benefitting both the shipper and the carrier.

**Lessee** – The person or entity leasing equipment for use.

**Lessor** – The person or entity who owns the asset and is leasing the equipment to the lessee.

**Liability Insurance** – An insurance policy that protects people and entities from being held

**Lift Axle** – The axle on a tractor or trailer that can be raised and lowered to distribute weight evenly and/or keep tires from contacting the road.

**Line Haul** – The rate per mile received for transporting items.

**Lowboy** – An open flatbed trailer with a very low deck height, usually used for hauling construction equipment.

## M

**Managed Transportation** – A service in which a company handles all shipping and logistics needs for a shipper or manufacturer.

**Mandatory Entry Level Training (MELT)** – A set of basic requirements for class time and mentored road driving any prospective CDL driver.

**Mile Marker** – The name for posts marking miles on interstate highways.

**Motor Carrier** – A for-hire commercial vehicle and transportation business hauling freight.

**Motor Carrier Number (MC Number)** – An identifying license granted to carriers by the FMCSA.

**Motor Vehicle Record (MVR)** – A report insurance and trucking companies can access while screening employees, including unpaid tickets, traffic violations, convictions, etc.

## N

**National Motor Freight Classification (NMFC)** – A set of comparison characteristics establishing a commodity's transportability, including density, handling, liability and more. There are 18 commodity classes total based on the characteristics.

## O

**Odometer** – An instrument used to measure the distance a vehicle has traveled.

**Onboard Computer** – A computer installed in vehicles used to gather and store information like location, speeds, fuel consumption, movements and more.

**Overage** – When there is more product delivered than was ordered.

**Overdrive** – The top gear in a truck, allowing the engine to operate at fewer RPMs to conserve fuel and reduce wear.

**Oversized Load** – A load exceeding the standard or legal size of freight being hauled by truck and trailer. These loads require additional permits and escorts.

**Owner-Operator** – A truck driver who owns their own truck, operating under their own authority or the authority of the carrier they are leased under.

## P

**P&D** – The short-hand term for pickup and delivery.

**Parcel** – Also known as a small package, typically weighs less than 150 pounds and is the most popular form of order fulfillment.

**Partial** – A truck used to combine multiple shipments from different customers to use the entire truck. These shipments can sometimes take longer due to multiple stops.

**Parking Lot** – A slang term for heavy traffic.

**Payload** – The freight or cargo a vehicle is transporting.

**Perishable Freight** – Any cargo that requires specific transporting conditions (like reefer trucks), and have short shelf lives. These goods can consist of meat, produce, flowers, etc.

**Permits** – A document allowing permission for carriers to transport freight that exceeds standard or legal weight and size limits.

**Piggyback** – A type of flatbed trailer that is able to carry its own forklift on the back to load and unload cargo.

**Placard** – Diamond-shaped signs that must be displayed in multiple places on vehicles hauling any sort of hazmat like explosives, gasoline, etc.

**Point of Origin** – The location where a load is picked up.

**Port of Entry** – A facility located at an international or state border requiring some drivers to stop and show paperwork.

**Private Carrier** – A carrier that only hauls its own company's freight.

**Proof of Delivery (POD)** – The paperwork confirming delivery of a load, usually required to have a legible signature of the accepting party and a date/time stamp.

**Pull the Pin** – The act of pulling the handle that releases the grip on the trailer's king pin, which must be done before a tractor and trailer can be decoupled.

**Pup Trailer** – A small flatbed or dry van that can be used together to hauling doubles.

## R

**Rail** – Any transportation by train.

**Rate Confirmation** – A legally binding document confirming the agreed-upon rate and total cost of service between a shipper and carrier, usually issued by the shipper or broker.

**Reefer** – A trailer with a self-powered refrigeration unit and insulated walls most commonly used to transport perishable goods.

**Removable Gooseneck** – A specialized heavy-haul flatbed trailer providing drive-off accessibility, with a neck that can be raised, lowered or removed from the trailer.

**Rider Policy** – A policy put in place by a trucking company that regulates any passengers the driver may have, and typically includes limitations.

**Rig** – A term for big trucks and tractor trailers.

**Rubbernecker** – A slang term for drivers who are preoccupied with looking at their surroundings rather than driving.

**Runaway Truck Ramp** – An emergency area located next to a steep downgrade that a truck can pull into if they have too much forward momentum to brake appropriately. The ramp is heavily graded and several hundred feet long to absorb the truck's energy.

## S

**Scale** – See Weigh Station.

**Semi** – Another term for a large commercial truck or tractor trailer.

**Software as a Service (SaaS)** – A type of software used to manage organizations, offered in a flexible and customizable format.

**Shipper** – The exporter or seller listed in the bill of lading, which may or may not be the manufacturer of the goods.

**Shipping Order** – The document issued to a carrier from the shipper that confirms load scheduling and booking.

**Skid** – Another term for a pallet that holds freight for being loaded onto a trailer.

**Sleeper Berth** – The portion of a truck cab behind the seats containing a bed and storage for the driver.

**Sliding Tandem** – Trailer axles that can be moved to allow for proper distribution of weight.

**Speedometer** – The device on a dashboard that indicates the speed a vehicle is traveling.

**Spread Axle** – A trailer containing multiple axles that are spread out from each other, unlike standard trailers. This is most common on reefer and flatbed trailers.

**Stacks** – The exhaust pipe that protrudes from the top or behind a truck cab.

**Standard Carrier Alpha Code (SCAC)** – A unique 2-4 letter code used for identifying transportation and trucking companies.

**Strap** – A strong vinyl cord used to tie down and secure freight to a trailer.

**Surety Bond** – A written agreement to guarantee compliance or payment of debt if a borrower defaults.

## T

**Tanker** – An enclosed trailer used to haul bulk commodities like concrete mix, gasoline, and oil.

**Tandem Axle** – Two individual axles grouped in pairs.

**Team (of Drivers)** – A common term for two drivers operating one commercial vehicle, so that one driver can sleep or be off-duty while the other is driving. This is common on expedited loads.

**Third Party Logistics** – A company that serves as an intermediary between companies needing shipping services and motor carriers, often used interchangeably with freight brokerages.

**Toll** – The fee a vehicle must pay to use a particular section of highway.

**Tractor** – A truck designed to pull a semitrailer via a fifth wheel mounted over the rear axles. Also called a truck tractor.

**Tractor Trailer** – A combination of a truck and semitrailer.

**Trans-Load** – Moving freight from one trailer to another to continue a shipment, most common at international borders when a carrier is only authorized to operate in one of the participating countries.

**Trolley Brake** – A brake lever in the truck cab that applies pressure to the trailer brakes when additional force is needed for slowing or stopping.

**Truck Order Not Used (TORD or TONU)** – The phrase signifying when a shipper or broker orders a truck to pick up freight but cancels the load after the truck has already been dispatched to the pick-up location. This usually results in fees.

**Transportation Management System** – A system used to track shipments, tender loads, communicate with shippers and drivers, etc.

**Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC)** – The credential needed to get access to secure areas of Maritime Transportation Security Act (MTSA) regulated facilities.

## U

**Unified Carrier Registration (UCR)** – A system established in 2005 for streamlining the process of commercial carrier registration for interstate transportation.

**Unladen Weight** – The empty weight of a vehicle, also known as tare weight.

**US DOT** – The US Department of Transportation, a federal agency responsible for regulating federal transportation.

## V

**Vehicle Identification Number (VIN)** – A number assigned by the manufacturer of the vehicle, which is unique to each vehicle and appears on any registration and title paperwork.

## W

**Warehousing** – The process of storing goods in a warehouse.

**Waybill** – A document issued by a carrier to list important details regarding a shipment.

**Weigh Station** – An official scale station for randomly weighing commercial vehicles, and occasionally performing inspections.

## Y

**Yard Jockey** – A driver responsible for shuttling trailers between loading docks at a distribution center.

**Yard Tractor** – The truck used for shuttling trailers between stations and docks at a distribution center.

