
Taxi Drivers and Chauffeurs

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Significant Points

- Taxi drivers and chauffeurs may work any schedule, including full-time, part-time, night, evening, week-end, and on a seasonal basis.
- Many taxi drivers like the independent, unsupervised work of driving their automobile.
- Local governments set license standards for driving experience and training; many taxi and limousine companies set higher standards.
- Job opportunities should be plentiful; applicants with good driving records, good customer service instincts, and the ability to work flexible schedules should have the best prospects.

Nature of the Work

Anyone who has been in a large city knows the importance of taxi and limousine services. *Taxi drivers* and *chauffeurs* take passengers to and from their homes, workplaces, and recreational pursuits, such as dining, entertainment, and shopping, and to and from business-related events. These professional drivers also help out-of-town business people and tourists get around in unfamiliar surroundings. Some drivers offer sight-seeing services around their city.

Drivers must be alert to conditions on the road, especially in heavy and congested traffic or in bad weather. They must take precautions to prevent accidents and avoid sudden stops, turns, and other driving maneuvers that would jar passengers.

Taxi drivers. At the beginning of their driving shift, taxi drivers usually report to a taxicab service or garage where they are assigned a vehicle, most frequently a large, conventional automobile modified for commercial passenger transport. They record their name, the date, and the cab's identification number on a trip sheet. Drivers check the cab's fuel and oil levels and make sure that the lights, brakes, and windshield wipers are in good working order. Drivers adjust rear and side mirrors and their seat for comfort. Any equipment or part not in good working order is reported to the dispatcher or company mechanic.

Taxi drivers pick up passengers by "cruising" for fares, prearranging pickups, and picking up passengers from taxistands in high-traffic areas. In urban areas, many passengers flag down drivers cruising the streets. Customers also may prearrange a pickup by calling a cab company and giving a location, approximate pickup time, and destination. The cab company dispatcher then relays the information to a driver by two-way radio, cellular telephone, or onboard computer. Outside of urban areas, the majority of trips are dispatched in this manner. Drivers also pick up passengers waiting at cabstands or in taxi lines at airports, train stations, hotels, restaurants, and other places where people frequently seek taxis.

Some taxi commissions force cabs to specialize in either cruising or prearranged pickups. In other cases, not all drivers are allowed to pick up riders in certain parts of a city (a business district) or at certain landmarks (a convention center or airport).

These restrictions aim to make taxis available to people in areas that drivers find less profitable.

Good drivers are familiar with streets in the areas they serve so they can choose the most efficient route to destinations. They know the locations of frequently requested destinations, such as airports, bus and railroad terminals, convention centers, hotels, and other points of interest. In case of emergency, drivers should know the location of fire and police stations as well as hospitals.

Upon reaching the destination, drivers determine the fare and announce it to their riders. Each jurisdiction determines the rate and structure of the fare system covering licensed taxis. In many cabs, a taximeter measures the fare based on the distance covered and the amount of time the trip took. Drivers turn on the meter when passengers enter the cab and turn it off when they reach the final destination. The fare also may include surcharges to help cover fuel costs as well as fees for additional passengers, tolls, handling luggage, and a drop charge—an additional flat fee added for use of the cab. In some cases, fares are determined by a system of zones through which the taxi passes during a trip.

Passengers usually add a tip or gratuity to the fare. The amount of the gratuity depends, in part, on the passengers' satisfaction with the quality and efficiency of the ride and the courtesy of the driver.

Drivers issue receipts upon request by the passenger. They enter onto the trip sheet all information regarding the trip, including the place and time of pickup and drop off and the total fee; these logs help taxi company management check drivers' activity and efficiency. Drivers also must fill out accident reports when necessary.

Some drivers transport individuals with special needs, such as those with disabilities and the elderly. These drivers, known as *paratransit drivers*, operate specially equipped vehicles designed to accommodate a variety of needs in non-emergency situations. Although special certification is not necessary, some additional training on the equipment and passenger needs may be required.

Chauffeurs. Chauffeurs operate limousines, vans, and private cars for limousine companies, private businesses, government agencies, and wealthy individuals. Chauffeur service differs from taxi service in that all trips are prearranged. Many chauffeurs transport customers in large vans between hotels and airports, bus terminals, or train stations. Others drive luxury automobiles, such as limousines, to business events, entertainment venues, and social events. Still others provide full-time personal transportation for wealthy families and private companies.

At the beginning of the workday, chauffeurs prepare their automobiles or vans for use. They inspect the vehicle for cleanliness and, when needed, clean the interior and wash the exterior body, windows, and mirrors. They check fuel and oil levels and make sure the lights, tires, brakes, and windshield wipers work. Chauffeurs may perform routine maintenance and make minor repairs, such as changing tires or adding oil and other fluids. If a vehicle requires a more complicated repair, they take it to a professional mechanic.

Chauffeurs cater to passengers by providing attentive customer service and paying attention to detail. They help riders into the car by holding open doors, holding umbrellas when it is raining, and loading packages and luggage into the trunk of

the car. Chauffeurs may perform errands for their employers such as delivering packages or picking up clients arriving at airports. To ensure a pleasurable ride in their limousines, many chauffeurs offer conveniences and luxuries such as newspapers, magazines, music, drinks, televisions, and telephones. Increasingly, chauffeurs work as full-service executive assistants, simultaneously acting as driver, secretary, and itinerary planner.

Work environment. Taxi drivers and chauffeurs occasionally have to load and unload heavy luggage and packages. Driving for long periods can be tiring and uncomfortable, especially in densely populated urban areas. Taxi drivers risk robbery because they work alone and often carry large amounts of cash.

Design improvements in newer cars have reduced the stress and increased the comfort and efficiency of drivers. Many regulatory bodies overseeing taxi and chauffeur services require standard amenities such as air-conditioning and general upkeep of the vehicles. Some modern taxicabs also are equipped with sophisticated tracking devices, fare meters, and dispatching equipment. Satellites and tracking systems link many of these state-of-the-art vehicles with company headquarters. In a matter of seconds, dispatchers can deliver directions, traffic advisories, weather reports, and other important communications to drivers anywhere in the area. The satellite link also allows dispatchers to track vehicle location, fuel consumption, and engine performance. Automated dispatch systems help dispatchers locate the closest driver to a customer in order to minimize individual wait time and increase the quality of service. Drivers easily can communicate with dispatchers to discuss delivery schedules and courses of action if there are mechanical problems. When threatened with crime or violence, drivers may have special “trouble lights” to alert authorities of emergencies.

Work hours of taxi drivers and chauffeurs vary greatly. Some jobs offer full-time or part-time employment with work hours that can change from day to day or remain the same. It is often necessary for drivers to report to work on short notice. Chauffeurs who work for a single employer may be on call much of the time. Evening and weekend work is common for drivers and chauffeurs employed by limousine and taxicab services.

Whereas the needs of the client or employer dictate the work schedule for chauffeurs, the work of taxi drivers is much less structured. Working free of supervision, they may break for a



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meal or a rest whenever their vehicle is unoccupied. Many taxi drivers like the independent, unsupervised work of driving.

This occupation is attractive to individuals, such as college and postgraduate students, seeking flexible work schedules and to anyone seeking a second source of income. Other service workers, such as ambulance drivers and police officers, sometimes moonlight as taxi drivers or chauffeurs.

Full-time taxi drivers usually work one shift a day, which may last 8 to 12 hours. Part-time drivers may work half a shift each day, or work a full shift once or twice a week. Drivers may work shifts at all times of the day and night because most taxi companies offer services 24 hours a day. Early morning and late night shifts are not uncommon. Drivers work long hours during holidays, weekends, and other special times when demand for their services is heavier. Independent drivers set their own hours and schedules.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Local governments set licensing standards and requirements for taxi drivers and chauffeurs, which may include minimum amounts of driving experience and training. Many taxi and limousine companies set higher standards than those required by law. It is common for companies to review an applicant's medical, credit, criminal, and driving record. In addition, many companies require an applicant to be at least 21 years old, which is higher than the age typically required by law. Most companies also prefer that an applicant be a high school graduate.

Education and training. Little formal education is needed for taxi drivers or chauffeurs, but most have at least a high school diploma, GED, or its equivalent. Drivers need to be able to communicate effectively, use basic math, and often need knowledge of basic mechanics. Beyond having these skills, most drivers take a course offered by the government or their employer.

Some taxi and limousine companies give new drivers on-the-job training. This training typically is informal and often lasts only about a week. Companies show drivers how to operate the taximeter and communications equipment and how to complete paperwork. Other topics covered may include driver safety and the best routes to popular sightseeing and entertainment destinations. Many companies have contracts with social service agencies and transportation services to transport elderly and disabled citizens in non-emergency situations. To support these services, new drivers may get special training in how to handle wheelchair lifts and other mechanical devices.

Licensure. People interested in driving a taxicab or a limousine first must have a regular automobile driver's license. Usually, applicants then must get a taxi driver or chauffeur's license, commonly called a “hack” license. Some States require only a passenger endorsement, which allows the driver to carry passengers in the vehicle, on a regular driver's license; some require only that drivers be certified by their employer; but the Federal Government requires a commercial driver's license with a passenger endorsement for drivers transporting 16 or more passengers.

While States set licensing requirements, local regulatory bodies usually set other terms and conditions. These often include requirements for training, which can vary greatly. Some locali-

ties require new drivers to enroll in up to 80 hours of classroom instruction, to take an exam, or both before they are allowed to work. Applicants must know local geography, motor vehicle laws, safe driving practices, and relevant regulations. Often, they must also display some aptitude for customer service. Some localities require an English proficiency test, usually in the form of listening comprehension; applicants who do not pass the English exam must take an English course in addition to any formal driving programs.

Some classroom instruction includes route management, map reading, and service for passengers with disabilities. Many taxicab or limousine companies sponsor applicants, giving them a temporary permit that allows them to drive before they have finished the training program and passed the test. Some jurisdictions, such as New York City, have discontinued this practice and now require driver applicants to complete the licensing process before operating a taxi or limousine.

Other qualifications. Taxi drivers and chauffeurs work almost exclusively with the public, and should be able to get along with many different types of people. They must be patient when waiting for passengers and when dealing with rude customers. It also is helpful for drivers to be tolerant and level-headed when driving in heavy and congested traffic. Drivers should be dependable since passengers expect to be picked up at a prearranged time and taken to the correct destination. To be successful, drivers must be responsible and self-motivated because they work with little supervision. Increasingly, companies encourage drivers to develop their own loyal customer base, so as to improve their business.

Many municipalities and taxicab and chauffeur companies require drivers to have a neat appearance. Many chauffeurs wear formal attire, such as a tuxedo, a coat and tie, a dress, or a uniform and cap.

Advancement. Taxi drivers and chauffeurs have limited advancement opportunities. Experienced drivers may obtain preferred routes or shifts. Some advance to become lead drivers, who help to train new drivers. Others take dispatching and managerial positions. Many managers start their careers as drivers. Some people start their own limousine companies.

In small and medium-size communities, drivers sometimes are able to buy their own taxi, limousine, or other type of automobile and go into business for themselves. These independent owner-drivers require an additional permit allowing them to operate their vehicle as a company. Some big cities limit the number of operating permits. In these cities, drivers become owner-drivers by buying permits from owner-drivers who leave the business, or by purchasing or leasing them from the city. Although many owner-drivers are successful, some fail to cover expenses and eventually lose their permits and automobiles. Individuals starting their own taxi company face many obstacles because of the difficulty in running a small fleet. The lack of

dispatch and maintenance facilities often is hard for an owner to overcome. Chauffeurs often have a good deal of success and many companies begin as an individually owned and operated business.

For both taxi and limousine service owners, good business sense and courses in accounting, business, and business arithmetic can help an owner-driver to be successful. Knowledge of mechanics enables owner-drivers to perform their own routine maintenance and minor repairs to cut expenses.

Employment

Taxi drivers and chauffeurs held about 229,000 jobs in 2006. About 30 percent of taxi drivers and chauffeurs were self-employed.

Job Outlook

Employment is expected to grow about as fast as average. Job opportunities should be plentiful because of the need to replace the many people who work in this occupation for short periods and then leave. Applicants with good driving records, good customer service instincts, and the ability to work flexible schedules should have the best prospects.

Employment change. Employment of taxi drivers and chauffeurs is expected to grow 13 percent during the 2006-16 projection period—about as fast as the average for all occupations—as local and suburban travel increases. Job growth also will stem from Federal legislation requiring increased services for people with disabilities. Demand for paratransit drivers will grow in response to the increase in the number of elderly people, who often have difficulty driving and using public transportation.

Job prospects. People seeking jobs as taxi drivers and chauffeurs are expected to have plentiful opportunities because of the need to replace the many people who work in this occupation for short periods and then transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force. Earnings, work hours, and working conditions vary greatly, depending on economic and regulatory conditions. Applicants with good driving records, good customer service instincts, and the ability to work flexible schedules should have the best prospects.

The number of job opportunities can fluctuate with the overall movements of the economy because the demand for taxi and limousine transportation depends on travel and tourism. During economic slowdowns, drivers seldom are laid off, but they may have to increase their work hours, and earnings may decline. When the economy is strong, job prospects are numerous as many drivers transfer to other occupations. Extra drivers may be hired during holiday seasons as well as during peak travel and tourist times.

Rapidly growing metropolitan areas and cities experiencing economic growth should offer the best job opportunities.

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016		Change, 2006-16	
			Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Taxi drivers and chauffeurs	53-3041	229,000	258,000	30,000	13	

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

Earnings

Earnings of taxi drivers and chauffeurs vary greatly, depending on factors such as the number of hours worked, regulatory conditions, customers' tips, and geographic location. Hybrid vehicles, which have improved gas mileage, offer taxi drivers better earnings because drivers pay for their gas out of pocket. Median hourly earnings of salaried taxi drivers and chauffeurs, including tips, were \$9.78 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$8.00 and \$12.19 an hour. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$6.85, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$15.80 an hour. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of taxi drivers and chauffeurs were:

Taxi and limousine service.....	\$10.62
Other transit and ground passenger transportation	9.32
Traveler accommodation.....	9.09
Individual and family services	8.94
Automobile dealers	8.86

Many taxi drivers and chauffeurs are *lease drivers*. These drivers pay a daily, weekly, or monthly fee to the company allowing them to lease their vehicles. In the case of limousines, leasing also permits the driver access to the company's dispatch system. The fee also may include charges for vehicle maintenance, insurance, and a deposit on the vehicle. Lease drivers may take their cars home with them when they are not on duty.

Most taxi drivers and chauffeurs do not receive benefits. This is unlikely to change because companies have little incentive to offer them. However, a few cities have made an attempt to provide health insurance for drivers.

Related Occupations

Other workers who have similar jobs include bus drivers and truck drivers and driver/sales workers.

Sources of Additional Information

Information on necessary permits and the registration of taxi drivers and chauffeurs is available from local government agencies that regulate taxicabs. Questions regarding licensing should be directed to your State motor vehicle administration. For information about work opportunities as a taxi driver or chauffeur, contact local taxi or limousine companies or State employment service offices in your area.

For general information about the work of taxi drivers, chauffeurs, and paratransit drivers, contact:

➤ Taxicab, Limousine and Paratransit Association, 3200 Tower Oaks Blvd., Suite 220, Rockville, MD 20852.

For general information about the work of limousine drivers, contact:

➤ National Limousine Association, 49 South Maple Ave., Marlton, NJ 08053. Internet: <http://www.limo.org>