CAREER KIT

Diesel Mechanic Career Kit: 90-Day Action Plan

How to Become a Diesel Mechanic

2026-10 edition

Inside: at-a-glance summary · step-by-step path · costs & requirements · 90-day action plan · documents checklist · exams · interview questions · resume bullets · common mistakes · 13-week tracker · resources

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SECTION 1

At a glance

To become a diesel mechanic, you need a high school diploma or GED and hands-on training, either through a diesel technology program or on the job in a shop. Most employers want ASE Medium-Heavy Truck certifications, which require passing a test plus two years of work experience. The median diesel service technician earns $61,770 a year (BLS, May 2025).

Timeline	6 months to 2 years of training, then 2 years to ASE certification
Typical cost	$1,000–$40,000 (on-the-job route at the low end, private tech school at the high end)
Education	High school diploma or GED; postsecondary diesel training preferred
License	No state license; ASE certification preferred, EPA 609 for vehicle A/C work
Median pay	$61,770 per year
Job outlook	+4% (2025–35), about as fast as average

SECTION 2

Step-by-step path

1. Finish high school or get your GED

Time: 0–12 months · Cost: $0–$150

BLS lists a high school diploma or equivalent as the typical entry requirement. Classes in auto repair, electronics, physics and math help. If your school offers a vocational automotive or diesel program, take it, because shops notice applicants who already know basic tools and safety.

2. Choose your training route

Time: 6 months–2 years · Cost: $0–$40,000

BLS notes that employers may prefer candidates with postsecondary training in diesel engine repair. Options include community college certificates and associate degrees, private technical schools and manufacturer-sponsored programs run with truck and equipment dealers. Some people start as a lube tech or shop helper and learn on the job instead, which costs less but usually takes longer.

3. Build core skills: engines, electrical and diagnostics

Time: During training · Cost: Included in program

Modern diesel work is as much electronics as wrenching. Learn engine systems, brakes, drive trains, hydraulics and especially electrical diagnostics with a multimeter and a laptop scan tool. Emissions systems such as diesel particulate filters and SCR/DEF are a large share of repair work today.

4. Get your first job as an entry-level tech

Time: 1–3 months of job search · Cost: Paid work

Look for openings at truck dealerships, fleet maintenance shops, trucking companies, transit agencies, farm and construction equipment dealers and municipal garages. Entry titles include lube tech, PM tech, apprentice and service technician. Some employers offer tool programs or tuition help, so ask about them in the interview.

5. Buy tools and get a CDL if your job needs one

Time: Ongoing · Cost: $1,000–$10,000 for tools over the first years

Most shops expect technicians to bring their own hand tools and add to them over time, while the shop supplies large equipment and diagnostic software. BLS notes that some technicians need a commercial driver's license (CDL) to test-drive buses and large trucks. Ask your employer before paying for CDL training, since many will sponsor it.

6. Get EPA Section 609 certification for A/C work

Time: 1 day · Cost: Typically under $50

Under the Clean Air Act, anyone who repairs or services motor vehicle air conditioning systems for pay must be certified through an EPA-approved Section 609 program. ASE is one of the approved providers. It is a short training and test, and many shops require it before you touch truck A/C systems.

7. Earn ASE Medium-Heavy Truck certifications

Time: 2+ years · Cost: $34 registration plus $62 per test

ASE's T-series covers T1 Gasoline Engines, T2 Diesel Engines, T3 Drive Train, T4 Brakes, T5 Suspension and Steering, T6 Electrical/Electronic Systems, T7 HVAC and T8 Preventive Maintenance Inspection. To be certified, you pass a test and have two years of hands-on experience, and relevant training can substitute for up to one year. Passing T2 through T8 earns Master Medium-Heavy Truck Technician status. Certifications must be renewed every five years.

SECTION 3

Costs & requirements

Estimated costs (USD)

Item	Low	High	Note
Community college diesel certificate or associate degree	$3,000	$20,000	Typical range, varies by school and in-state residency.
Private technical school diesel program	$15,000	$40,000	Typical range, varies by school and program length.
Starter hand tool set	$1,000	$5,000	Typical range, varies by brand; many techs spend more over the first few years.
ASE registration and test fees	$96	$530	$34 registration per order plus $62 per test; the high end covers all eight T-series tests.
EPA Section 609 certification	$20	$50	Typical range, varies by approved provider.
CDL training (if required)	$0	$10,000	Often paid by employers. Typical range, varies by school.
Work boots and safety gear	$100	$300	
Total	**$19,216**	**$75,880**	

Requirements

Education	High school diploma or GED. Postsecondary diesel training is preferred by many employers but not required.
Age	Most employers require you to be at least 18. Jobs that require a CDL for interstate driving require you to be at least 21.
Driver's license	A valid driver's license with a clean record is usually required; some jobs require a CDL to test-drive trucks and buses.
Tools	Most shops expect you to supply your own hand tools and build your set over time.
Certification	No state license is required. ASE certification is often preferred or required for promotion, and EPA Section 609 is required for paid vehicle A/C work.
Physical ability	You lift heavy parts, work under vehicles and in awkward positions, and may work in hot or cold shops.
Drug screening	Many employers require a drug test, and DOT drug and alcohol testing applies if you hold a CDL and drive commercial vehicles.

SECTION 4

90-Day Action Plan

Tick each box as you finish the task. Do the phases in order; it is fine if a phase takes a little longer.

Phase 1: Prepare

Days 1–30

Goal: Pick your training route and get job-ready basics in place.

- ☐ List every diesel program within commuting distance, with cost, length and employer partners.
- ☐ Visit or call two schools and ask about job placement and tool discounts.
- ☐ Call five local truck dealers, fleet shops or equipment dealers and ask whether they hire lube techs or helpers.
- ☐ Check your driving record and fix any unpaid tickets or license issues.
- ☐ Get copies of your diploma or GED, ID and Social Security card.
- ☐ Watch or read basic material on diesel engine operation and electrical fundamentals.
- ☐ Buy steel- or composite-toe boots and safety glasses.

Phase 2: Start

Days 31–60

Goal: Enroll in training or land an entry-level shop job.

- ☐ Enroll in a diesel program or accept an entry-level shop role, ideally one that offers training.
- ☐ Write a one-page resume focused on mechanical work, reliability and safety.
- ☐ Practice the interview questions in this kit out loud.
- ☐ Complete EPA Section 609 certification through an approved provider.
- ☐ Start a basic tool set and track every purchase.
- ☐ Learn to use a digital multimeter and practice reading wiring diagrams.
- ☐ Ask your employer whether they pay for a CDL or ASE tests.

Phase 3: Build momentum

Days 61–90

Goal: Gain hands-on experience and plan your ASE tests.

- [ ] Keep a log of the jobs you do: date, vehicle type, system and repair.
- [ ] Ask a senior tech to show you one diagnostic job a week from start to finish.
- [ ] Create a myASE account and review the T-series study guide.
- [ ] Pick your first ASE test, such as T8 or T4, and set a test date.
- [ ] Learn your shop's scan tool and diagnostic software.
- [ ] Ask your supervisor what you need to reach the next pay level.
- [ ] Plan your next two ASE tests for the following six months.

SECTION 5

Documents checklist

Gather these early. Keep originals in one folder and scans in the cloud.

- [ ] High school diploma or GED certificate
- [ ] Government photo ID
- [ ] Social Security card or proof of work authorization
- [ ] Valid driver's license and a copy of your driving record
- [ ] Diesel program transcripts or certificates
- [ ] EPA Section 609 certificate
- [ ] ASE certificates and myASE login
- [ ] DOT medical card if you hold or are getting a CDL
- [ ] Tool inventory list with serial numbers
- [ ] Resume and two or three references

SECTION 6

Exams & how to prepare

ASE Medium-Heavy Truck tests (T1–T8)

What it is: Computer-based multiple-choice tests covering Class 4–8 trucks: gasoline engines, diesel engines, drive train, brakes, suspension and steering, electrical/electronic systems, HVAC and preventive maintenance inspection. T2 through T8 earn Master Medium-Heavy Truck Technician status; T1 is not required for master.

How to prepare: Use ASE's official Medium-Heavy Truck study guide and practice tests. Start with T8 or T4, which line up with entry-level shop work.

EPA Section 609 MVAC certification

What it is: A training and test on motor vehicle A/C servicing equipment, refrigerant recovery, regulations and environmental effects, offered by EPA-approved programs such as ASE.

How to prepare: Read the program's training manual once and take the test; it is short and focused on rules and safe refrigerant handling.

CDL knowledge and skills tests (if required)

What it is: State tests for a commercial driver's license, including knowledge tests and a skills test. Required only if your job has you drive commercial vehicles on public roads.

How to prepare: Study your state's CDL manual and complete any required entry-level driver training before the skills test.

SECTION 7

Interview questions

1. Why do you want to be a diesel technician?

Tip: Give a real reason, like a truck or equipment you worked on, not just the pay.

2. What mechanical work have you done?

Tip: Mention any farm, auto, small engine or school shop work and what you fixed.

3. How would you diagnose a no-start on a diesel engine?

Tip: Walk through a logical order: fuel, air, compression, electrical, then check codes.

4. How comfortable are you with electrical diagnostics?

Tip: Be honest and mention using a multimeter and reading wiring diagrams.

5. What tools do you own?

Tip: List them honestly and say how you plan to build your set.

6. How do you stay safe in the shop?

Tip: Mention jack stands, lockout/tagout, PPE and keeping your bay clean.

7. Tell us about a mistake you made on a repair.

Tip: Pick a real example, explain how you caught it and what you do differently now.

8. Are you willing to work nights, weekends or on the road?

Tip: Be honest about your availability; fleets and road service often need flexible schedules.

9. Do you have, or are you willing to get, a CDL?

Tip: Say yes if you can, and ask if they sponsor training.

10. What ASE tests are you planning to take?

Tip: Name one or two and a target date to show you have a plan.

11. How do you handle a repair that is taking longer than the flat-rate time?

Tip: Say you tell your supervisor early and focus on fixing it right.

12. Where do you see yourself in five years?

Tip: Mention master ASE status, a specialty or lead tech role.

SECTION 8

Resume bullet examples

Adapt these to what you actually did. Use numbers wherever you can.

- Completed a 12-month diesel technology certificate covering engines, brakes, electrical and hydraulics.
- Performed preventive maintenance inspections on Class 8 tractors following DOT checklists.
- Diagnosed and repaired air brake system leaks using shop procedures and a soapy water test.
- Earned EPA Section 609 certification for motor vehicle A/C service.
- Used a laptop scan tool and multimeter to trace electrical faults on medium-duty trucks.
- Maintained a clean and organized work bay with zero safety incidents over 12 months.
- Passed ASE T8 Preventive Maintenance Inspection.
- Repaired and maintained farm equipment, including tractors and combines, on a family operation.

SECTION 9

Common mistakes to avoid

1. Buying a huge tool set on credit before you know what your shop supplies.
2. Paying for an expensive private school without comparing community college programs.
3. Ignoring electrical and diagnostics training, which is where many modern repairs happen.
4. Not logging your work experience, then struggling to prove it for ASE.
5. Letting ASE certifications lapse by missing the five-year recertification.
6. Paying for CDL training yourself when your employer would have sponsored it.
7. Skipping safety basics like jack stands and lockout/tagout.

SECTION 10

13-week progress tracker

Fill this in by hand each week.

Week	Focus	Done?	Notes
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			

SECTION 11

Resources, salary & disclaimer

Resources

- **ASE: Medium-Heavy Truck Tests (T1–T8)**

https://ase.com/tests/t1-t8/

- **ASE: Test Prep and Training**

https://ase.com/test-prep-and-training/

- **EPA: Section 609 Approved Programs**

https://www.epa.gov/mvac/section-609-technician-training-and-certification-programs

- **BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook: Diesel Service Technicians and Mechanics**

https://www.bls.gov/ooh/installation-maintenance-and-repair/diesel-service-technicians-and-mechanics.htm

- **FMCSA: Commercial Driver's License Program**

https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/registration/commercial-drivers-license

- **Apprenticeship.gov Job Finder**

https://www.apprenticeship.gov/apprenticeship-job-finder

Salary

Bottom 10%	Median	Top 10%
Less than $44,530	**$61,770 per year ($29.70 per hour)**	More than $88,740

Outlook: Employment of diesel service technicians and mechanics is projected to grow 4% from 2025 to 2035, about as fast as the average for all occupations, with about 24,400 openings each year.

Source: BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook, Diesel Service Technicians and Mechanics, May 2025 data — https://www.bls.gov/ooh/installation-maintenance-and-repair/diesel-service-technicians-and-mechanics.htm

Disclaimer. Requirements vary by state and change over time. Verify with the official sources listed. This guide is not legal or career advice.