Coupling and Uncoupling Checklist

Tractor-semitrailer · for unfamiliar trailers, drop yards and preloads

LAMINATE ME

Coupling

- [ ] **1. Inspect the fifth wheel.** No damaged or missing parts, mounting secure, no frame cracks, plate greased, tilted down toward the rear, jaws open, release handle in automatic lock. Sliding fifth wheel locked. Kingpin not bent or broken.
- [ ] **2. Inspect the area, chock the wheels.** Area clear. Trailer wheels chocked or spring brakes on. Cargo secured against movement.
- [ ] **3. Line up.** Tractor directly in front of the trailer, never at an angle. Check alignment in both mirrors.
- [ ] **4. Back slowly.** Until the fifth wheel just touches the trailer. Do not hit it.
- [ ] **5. Secure the tractor.** Parking brake on, transmission in neutral.

HIGH-HOOK CHECK

- [ ] **6. Check trailer height. Trailer slightly lower than the fifth wheel so the tractor lifts it as it backs under. Too high and the kingpin can ride over the jaws (a high hook). Kingpin and fifth wheel aligned.**

- [ ] **7. Connect the air lines.** Gladhand seals checked. Emergency line to emergency, service line to service. Lines supported so they are not crushed while backing.
- [ ] **8. Supply air.** Push in the trailer air supply. Wait for normal pressure. Engine off, apply and release the trailer brakes and listen. No major air loss on the gauge. Restart.
- [ ] **9. Lock the trailer brakes.** Pull out the trailer air supply.
- [ ] **10. Back under the trailer.** Lowest reverse gear, slowly, so the kingpin does not hit hard. Stop when it locks.

TUG TEST

- [ ] **11. Tug test. Landing gear raised slightly off the ground. Trailer brakes still locked, pull forward gently to confirm the trailer is locked to the tractor.**

- [ ] **12. Secure the vehicle.** Neutral, parking brake, engine off, key in your pocket before you go under.

HIGH-HOOK CHECK

- [ ] **13. Inspect the coupling. Flashlight. No space between upper and lower fifth wheel. Jaws closed around the kingpin shank, not the head. Locking lever in lock, safety latch over it. Anything wrong: do not drive.**

- [ ] **14. Connect the electrical cord.** Plug in the 7-way, fasten the safety catch. Air and electric lines clear of moving parts.
- [ ] **15. Raise the landing gear.** Low range until free of weight, then high range. All the way up, crank secured. Check tractor frame and tires clear the landing gear and trailer nose in sharp turns.
- [ ] **16. Remove and stow the chocks.**

Uncoupling

- [ ] **1. Position the rig.** Ground firm enough for the trailer's weight. Tractor lined up with the trailer.
- [ ] **2. Ease pressure on the jaws.** Trailer air supply off to lock the trailer brakes. Back gently to take pressure off the jaws. Parking brake on.
- [ ] **3. Chock the trailer wheels.** If the trailer has no spring brakes or you are not sure.
- [ ] **4. Lower the landing gear.** Empty: until firm contact. Loaded: after contact, a few extra turns in low gear to take some weight off the tractor without lifting the trailer off the fifth wheel.
- [ ] **5. Disconnect air and electric.** Gladhands to dummy couplers or to each other. Electrical plug hung down. Lines supported.
- [ ] **6. Unlock the fifth wheel.** Raise the release handle lock and pull the handle. Legs and feet clear of the rear tractor wheels.
- [ ] **7. Pull partly clear.** Until the fifth wheel clears the trailer, frame still under it in case the landing gear sinks.
- [ ] **8. Secure the tractor.** Parking brake on, transmission in neutral.
- [ ] **9. Inspect the trailer supports.** Ground holding, landing gear undamaged.
- [ ] **10. Pull clear.** Release the parking brake, check the area, drive forward.

Before you roll

- [ ] Trailer number on the paperwork matches the trailer you hooked.
- [ ] Seal number recorded and photographed (if sealed).
- [ ] Landing gear fully up, crank stowed.
- [ ] Lights and brakes checked from outside the cab.

Sources

Oregon DMV Commercial Driver Manual, Section 6.4 Coupling and Uncoupling (checked 2026-11-02): https://www.oregon.gov/odot/DMV/Pages/Online_CDL_Manual_2/Section_6.aspx

Steps follow the Oregon DMV Commercial Driver Manual, Section 6.4. Your own state CDL manual, the trailer owner's yard rules and your carrier's procedures come first. General information, not safety-compliance advice.