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» **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FAQ**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

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What does it mean to be a Teamster member?

Being a Teamster member means that you belong to the strongest and most democratic labor union in the world. For more than 100 years the Teamsters Union has been a leader in setting the standard for higher wages, better benefits and improved working conditions for workers throughout the United States and Canada. The Teamsters Union is strong because of the participation of many of its 1.4 million members. Teamster members can find a variety of ways to participate to help

build a stronger union in the workplace — from supporting coworkers in their struggle for justice or helping with the bargaining process to joining a local union committee or becoming a volunteer organizer.

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What is collective bargaining?

Collective bargaining (also called contract negotiations) is the heart and soul of the labor movement. It is when workers band together to negotiate workplace matters with their employer. The end result is a **collective bargaining agreement** or **contract** that spells out in black and white all of the terms both parties agree to, from pay rates and benefits, to a grievance procedure, time off and more. The employees, or **bargaining unit**, generally nominate a few of their coworkers to represent them, along with expert negotiators from the union. Once the negotiating team reaches a **tentative agreement** with management, the bargaining unit meets to vote the contract terms up or down. This is called the ratification process. The contract only goes into effect if a majority of the employees approve the tentative agreement.

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What does my contract cover?

Contract specifics will vary from one worksite, or employer, to the next, but generally include provisions on:

- Wages, hours and fringe benefits;
- Health and safety;
- Non-discrimination;
- Contract length;
- Discipline;
- Seniority;
- Dues collection;
- Union security;
- Grievance procedures; and
- Arbitration.

Most contracts in the Teamsters Union are **white paper** contracts. These are contracts that cover workers at one employer, generally in one location. However, the Teamsters also negotiate **master agreements** that cover employees from one company at all of the company's locations, or cover many employers under one agreement. For instance the Teamsters have one master contract with a number of freight employers and one master contract for UPS.

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How can I support my union?

There are a number of things members can do to make the Teamsters Union even stronger than it is today. Participating in your local union, sticking together, and educating potential members and the public about our union are simple, everyday ways we can support our union. Here are a few others:

- **Attend local union meetings regularly.** If you cannot attend meetings, talk to your shop steward or other members about what took place and try to make the next one.
- **Stay informed.** Keep up with current events and what's happening in your workplace. Visit [Teamster.org](#) and [your local union's web site](#) to keep up with news that affects you and your union.
- **Participate in union elections.** Whether it's elections for officers, contract votes or local union business, your opinion counts and can make a difference.

- **Get to know your steward**, he or she is your primary contact with your union and can answer many of your questions or refer you to the appropriate resources.
- **Get to know your local officers** and trustees. Many local unions provide contact information and bios on their web sites.
- **Review your local union bylaws**. Each Teamster local is autonomous and has its own set of rules and guidelines.
- **Attend union rallies** and events when you can. You may not be able to make them all, but standing together shows strength in numbers.
- **Become an e-activist**. If you are online regularly, [register with Teamster.org](#) and be sure to **sign up for Teamster Action Alerts** to be notified about key issues and ways you can take action online. Read and participate on [blog sites](#) in your community or state, or start your own blog. Join other Teamsters on [MySpace](#), [YouTube](#), Facebook and other social networking sites. Comment on local newspaper or TV station web sites to provide the Teamster perspective.
- **Spread the word**. If you hear about an issue that concerns you, tell your friends, relatives and coworkers and show them how to get involved. Educate others. Talk about what being a Teamster means to you. Tell your friends, relatives and other workers you bump into about benefits of being a Teamster.

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How much will I pay in dues?

Teamsters Union dues are 2.5 times the hourly wage rate per month. For example, if you make \$12 an hour, your dues would be \$30 per month. However, if you make less than \$11 an hour, then your dues rate is 2 times your hourly rate. And if you are a public sector employee, your dues rate is 2.25 times your hourly rate.

Also, some locals may charge initiation fees and these vary by location. Talk to a local union representative for details.

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How will my dues money be used?

Dues provide the resources to stand up for good jobs and benefits, decent working conditions and a better future for our families. That's why union members in private industry earn 38 percent more on average than nonunion workers. They also receive 54 percent more in benefits. None of this would be possible without the strength that comes from our Teamster dues.

Most of your dues, 78 percent, stay with your local union in order to fund activities that give workers more power at the bargaining table, in the statehouse and in the community. Some of these activities include:

- Organizing expenses;
- Office equipment and regular administration expenses;
- Attorneys to assist in negotiations, grievances and arbitration;
- Training;
- Research into companies and industries to gather information for negotiations and organizing; and
- Accountants to analyze the company's books.

Members receive information about how dues money is spent by their local at regular monthly membership meetings, and local unions also file annual reports with the U.S. Department of Labor. The International Union publishes its annual audited financial statement in Teamster magazine, which is sent to every member.

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What is a steward?

The steward is the go-to union representative on the job site. He or she has a number of responsibilities, from on-site contract enforcement and assisting in grievance procedures, to keeping members informed and motivated about their union. Many locals will hold steward training sessions to help you grow into your new role. Contact your local or review its bylaws for more information.

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How do I become a steward?

Because each Teamster local has its own set of bylaws, each local differs somewhat in the way stewards are selected and the duties they are given. Stewards can either be elected by the membership or appointed by the local union. Usually you will have a designated steward for your job, area or shift, so the number of stewards will vary based on the size of the bargaining unit. Check your local union's bylaws for specific information.

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How do I become an organizer?

Check with your local to see if it has an organizing program and sign up to be a volunteer member organizer. This will allow you to see an organizing campaign from the inside and gain experience if you wish to work for the union as a full-time organizer. If your local doesn't have an organizing program, check with your Joint Council and volunteer to help out on one of the Teamsters national organizing campaigns. If you have organizing experience and want to work for the Teamsters Organizing Department, you can send your resume to:

Organizing Department

International Brotherhood of Teamsters
25 Louisiana Ave. N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20001

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I know of some workers in another shop that want to join the Teamsters. What should I do?

Contact your local's organizing office. If your local doesn't have an organizing program, ask to speak with the business agent that represents that industry. The business agent will assess the situation on the ground and may call upon the Teamsters Organizing Department for guidance or assistance. While it's important for you to be positive about your union experience, organizing campaigns can get ugly. Misunderstandings and miscommunication will often be distorted by management. And there may also be larger strategies or jurisdictional issues at play below the surface. For these reasons, it is important to work with and through your local.

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What is the grievance procedure?

The grievance procedure is a negotiated article within your contract that enables the union to enforce the terms of the contract and protect the rights of workers. If management violates the contract, the grievance procedure allows the member to follow a process that can provide relief or justice.

Teamster contracts may define a grievance in several ways: It could be “a dispute between the union and management over the application and/or interpretation of the agreement,” or “any dispute or difference arising between an employee and management or between the union and management.” Each grievance procedure has specific steps with time limits that must be followed. The steps in a grievance procedure vary, but a typical one may include:

- Step One: The steward and the grievant meet with the supervisor within 10 days of the occurrence to resolve the grievance. Management has five days to respond.
- Step Two: If there is no settlement at Step One, a union representative, the grievant and a management representative will meet to try to resolve the grievance.
- Step Three: If still unresolved, the grievance will be heard by an arbitrator or panel who will render a decision.

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How do I file a grievance?

Almost every Teamster contract has a provision for filing grievances. Generally, if you feel that management has violated the terms of your collective bargaining agreement, you should talk to your steward who will determine if there is indeed a contract violation.

The steward will first try to help you resolve the issue informally. This may include speaking with your supervisor. If the steward has determined that there is a violation of the contract but is unable to resolve the issue, then he or she will assist you in writing up a grievance form. The form asks for information such as:

- Who is involved in the grievance (supervisor and members)?
- When did the grievance occur?
- Where did the grievance occur?
- What part of the contract was violated?
- What resolution is desired?

For example, a contract may specify that overtime has to be distributed by seniority. If overtime is given to an employee with less seniority than others, the members with greater seniority may have a grievance.

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What happens when our contract expires?

Sixty days prior to the contract expiration, the union must notify the company in writing of its intention to renegotiate the labor contract. The union then begins preparing for negotiations by selecting a bargaining committee, formulating proposals that will be given to management's negotiating team, doing research necessary to support the union's proposals, developing a communications strategy for the members during the negotiations as well as with the public, if difficult negotiations are expected. If the union and management are still in negotiations when the contract expires, the union has three choices:

- To accept management's proposals;
- To extend the contract expiration date with the joint agreement of both the union and management (a common choice); or
- To agree with the employer that they cannot reach settlement and declare an impasse in which the employer is free to implement its final offer and the union is free to strike if the members vote in favor of that option. More than 95 percent of contracts are settled without workers having to strike.

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What is a strike?

A strike occurs when employees collectively agree to stop working in order to gain concessions from an employer, typically after contract negotiations break down. While strikes tend to grab media attention, they are rare and typically a last resort. More than 95 percent of all Teamster contracts are negotiated without a strike being called.

Before a strike is called, the union typically notifies the company that it intends to call a strike vote. A majority of workers in the bargaining unit must vote in favor of a strike before one can be called. The decision rests with the affected workers. Most strikes are called for economic reasons—to improve wages, health benefits, retirement benefits, etc. And because most contracts include a **no-strike clause**, they typically occur only after a contract expires, not during the term of the contract.

Strikes can be called at any time if extremely unsafe working conditions occur or if the company has participated in an “unfair labor practice.” But these types of noneconomic strikes are very rare.

Most Teamster contracts also include language that protects Teamster members who refuse to cross active picket lines of other striking unions. Check with your steward or local for more information on the language and protections in your contract.

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What is a no-strike clause?

Most employers insist that the union agree not to strike for the duration of a contract. Such an agreement is enforceable in court and makes **wildcat strikes** illegal.

No-strike clauses have been interpreted to ban almost all strikes during the life of the contract, except strikes in response to abnormally dangerous working conditions. Strikes are still legal, of course, when the contract expires.

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What is strike pay and how much would I receive?

When strikers stop working, they do not receive their normal paychecks, but they will receive some money from the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Strike Fund. Many local unions also maintain their own strike funds to help their workers through difficult times. Local strike benefits are determined by the local. Strike benefits from the International Union are based on the following formula:

If you earn less than \$11 per hour, you will receive between \$75 and \$110 per week. For all other members, strike pay is equivalent to four times your monthly dues amount per week. For example, if your monthly dues payment is \$70, you will receive \$280 per week ($70 \times 4 = 280$).

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What is an unfair labor practice?

Employers may be charged with unfair labor practices (ULP) if they attempt to deprive their workers of the right to form, join or assist a labor union; the right to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing; or the right to engage in “concerted activity” for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection. Specifically, section 8(a) of the National Labor Relations Act makes it unfair for the employer to prevent workers from exercising the above rights by:

- Interfering, restraining or coercing their workers;
- Dominating or seeking to control the union;
- Discriminating against workers for union activity;
- Discharging a worker who files a ULP or testifies to a ULP; or

- Refusing to bargain in good faith with a duly elected union.

Since the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947, labor organizations have been restricted in ways similar to employers. This amendment to the National Labor Relations Act makes it illegal for a union to:

- Coerce people to become union members;
- Use threats, intimidation or violence;
- Force an employer to punish a worker because he/she doesn't get along with the union;
- Charge excessive union dues; or
- Refuse to bargain in good faith with the employer.

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How can I help my local union start up a web site?

Web sites have become a vital communications tool for local unions. An effective web site can build member activity as well as serve as an organizing and community outreach tool. If your local union does not have a web site, start by contacting your local union officers. Building a web site will require some up-front costs and monthly fees. And there is also staff time to consider. Many locals have organized stewards, business agents, member volunteers and retirees to help keep their sites up to date.

Help is also available from the staff of the International's Communications Department. They can advise your local on what a web site would cost, the types of content and services you could offer and the amount of time needed to maintain a web site.

To help simplify things, the Teamsters Union has recently teamed up with Unions-America.com, a GCC-Teamster employer, to provide [Teamster-Active](#), an Internet-based web site service. Local unions can build and update their web sites over the Internet, so there is no need to purchase or learn expensive software. Locals can choose a pre-designed web site template and color scheme, select the features they want and add their own text, photos, events, videos and more. And every Teamster-Active web site will include a GCC union bug.

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How should I handle complaints about my steward, business agent or local?

Most stewards, business agents and local officers work very hard to provide Teamster members with the best representation possible. But sometimes problems do occur. The best way to resolve complaints is to start as close to the problem as possible. For example, if you have a complaint about your steward, your first call should be to your business agent; if you have a problem with your business agent, you should talk to your local's principal officer.

Business agents generally cover several work sites within the same industry, so he or she will be most aware of what's going on in your workplace and will be familiar with your steward and the issues the steward is facing on a day-to-day basis. The source of your complaint may actually be management. If the business agent is unable to address your concerns, the next call should be to your local. All Teamster locals are autonomous and procedures for dealing with member issues may vary. Some locals may have a staff member assigned to resolving member problems. If that is not the case, ask to speak with your principal officer. You may want to make an appointment or set up a time when you are both free to talk about your complaint. If your local is unable to resolve the matter, you can call the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Legal Department, (202) 624-6945. Only contact the Legal Department if you have exhausted all local options.

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