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AN EXTENDED GUIDE · NO. 2029

Updated November 2026

Delivery Driving with DoorDash, Instacart, and Uber Eats — A Plain-English Guide

Flexible income from your car and phone The honest picture, including the catches

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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1 The Short Version

Delivery driving through apps like DoorDash, Instacart, and Uber Eats lets you earn money on your own schedule by picking up food or groceries and bringing them to customers, using your own car and phone. You sign up, get approved, and then turn the app on whenever you want to work — there is no boss assigning you shifts, no set hours, and you can stop whenever you like. For people who want flexible, part-time income, it is one of the easier ways to start earning without a traditional job.

That flexibility is the appeal, but it comes with trade-offs worth understanding before you start: you are self-employed, which means handling your own taxes and expenses, your earnings vary and are not guaranteed, and the wear on your car is a real cost. This guide explains, in plain language, how each of these apps works, what is involved in signing up and doing the work well, how the money and taxes actually work, and how to decide whether it is worth it for you.

It is honest about both the freedom and the catches.

- Delivery apps let you earn on your own schedule using your car and phone.
- You turn the app on when you want to work — no set shifts or boss.
- DoorDash and Uber Eats deliver food; Instacart delivers groceries.
- You're self-employed, so you handle your own taxes, expenses, and car wear.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> The appeal is real flexibility: no boss, no set shifts, work when you want. The catch is that you're self-employed — earnings vary and aren't guaranteed, and you handle your own taxes, expenses, and the real cost of wear on your car. Go in understanding both sides.

2 How the Apps Work

All these apps work on the same basic idea: a customer places an order, the app offers the delivery to available drivers nearby, and you accept or decline it. If you accept, the app guides you to pick up the order — from a restaurant for food apps, or you shop for the items yourself at a store for grocery delivery — and then to the customer's address to drop it off.

You are paid per delivery, and customers can add a tip, which often makes up a meaningful part of the earnings.

The main differences are in what you deliver and how much work each job is. DoorDash and Uber Eats are food delivery: you pick up a prepared order and drive it to the customer, relatively quick jobs. Instacart is grocery delivery, where for many orders you also do the shopping — walking the store, picking items, checking out — which takes longer but can pay more per order.

Some people drive for more than one app at once to keep busy. Understanding this shared pattern, with those variations, tells you most of what the work actually involves day to day.

- A customer orders, the app offers it to nearby drivers, and you accept or decline.
- You pick up (or shop for) the order and deliver it to the customer's address.
- You're paid per delivery, plus customer tips, which can be significant.
- DoorDash and Uber Eats are food; Instacart often includes shopping the order.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> All three work the same way: the app offers you a nearby order, you accept, pick up or shop, and deliver. The difference is the work per job — food delivery is quick pickups, while Instacart often means shopping the groceries yourself, which takes longer but can pay more.

3 What You Need to Start

The requirements to start are modest, which is part of why these jobs are accessible. Generally you need to be an adult of the minimum age the app sets, have a valid driver's license and auto insurance, a reliable car (though some apps allow bikes or scooters in dense cities), and a smartphone that can run the app. You will also need to pass a background check, which the app runs as part of signing up, and provide your details for payment and taxes.

Beyond the formal requirements, a few practical things help: a phone mount for your car so you can follow the navigation safely, a phone charger since the app drains the battery, and insulated bags for keeping food hot or cold, which some apps expect. You do not need special skills or experience; if you can drive, use a smartphone app, and deal politely with people, you have the essentials. The low barrier to entry is genuine, so if the idea appeals, the requirements are unlikely to be what stops you.

- Minimum age, a valid driver's license, and auto insurance.
- A reliable car (some apps allow bike or scooter in dense cities) and a smartphone.
- Passing the app's background check and providing payment and tax details.
- Helpful extras: a phone mount, a charger, and insulated delivery bags.

> **TIP**
>
> The barrier to entry is genuinely low — if you can drive, use a smartphone, and deal politely with people, you have the essentials. Just add a phone mount and charger for safe navigation, and insulated bags to keep food at temperature.

4 Signing Up

Signing up is done through the app or the company's website, and the process is similar across them. You create an account, provide your personal information, driver's license, and vehicle details, and consent to a background check, which verifies your driving record and criminal history and can take anywhere from a few days to a couple of weeks to clear. You also set up how you will be paid, typically a bank account for deposits.

Once approved, you may receive some materials, like the insulated bag some apps provide or require, and you can activate your account and start accepting deliveries. It is worth signing up carefully, entering your information accurately to avoid delays in the background check, and reading what the app tells you about how it works in your area.

Some people sign up for more than one app during this period so they have options once approved. The sign-up itself is straightforward; the main thing is patience while the background check clears before you can begin.

1. Create an account in the app or on the company's website.
2. Provide your personal, license, and vehicle information accurately.
3. Consent to the background check and wait for it to clear.
4. Set up your payment method, then activate and start accepting deliveries.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Enter your information accurately to avoid delays in the background check, which can take days to a couple of weeks. Many people sign up for more than one app during this wait, so they have options the moment they're approved.

5 Doing the Work Well

Once you are driving, a few habits make the work smoother and lead to better tips and ratings. Be prompt and reliable: pick up and deliver without unnecessary delay, since customers are waiting and apps track your reliability. Communicate through the app when helpful, such as letting a customer know if a restaurant is running slow or confirming where to leave a grocery order. Follow delivery instructions carefully, since getting the order to the right door the way the customer asked is what earns good ratings and tips.

Keep food secure and at temperature with your insulated bags, handle orders carefully so nothing spills, and be courteous in the brief interactions you have. For grocery shopping on Instacart, pick good-quality items, communicate about substitutions when something is out of stock, and follow the customer's preferences. These are not complicated, but doing them consistently sets apart drivers who earn well and keep high ratings from those who struggle. Good service is genuinely rewarded on these platforms through tips and continued access to orders, so the effort pays off directly.

- Be prompt and reliable — customers are waiting and apps track this.
- Communicate through the app about delays, substitutions, or drop-off details.
- Follow delivery instructions and get the order to the right door as asked.
- Keep food secure and at temperature, and be courteous in brief interactions.

GOOD TO KNOW

Good service is directly rewarded here through tips and continued access to orders. Be prompt, follow the delivery instructions exactly, communicate about delays or substitutions, and keep food at temperature — simple habits that separate drivers who earn well from those who struggle.

6 How the Money Actually Works

Being clear-eyed about the money is essential, because the headline earnings can be misleading. You are paid a base amount per delivery, which varies by app, distance, and effort, plus any tip the customer adds, and tips often make up a large share of good earnings. Apps sometimes offer bonuses for busy times or for completing a set number of deliveries. Earnings are higher during peak demand — meal times, weekends, bad weather — and thinner at slow times, so when you work affects what you make.

The crucial part people overlook is that your gross earnings are not your profit. Out of what you earn, you pay for gas, and you bear the wear, maintenance, and depreciation on your car, which are real costs that add up with the miles you drive. A sensible driver tracks both earnings and these costs to know their actual hourly profit, which is often lower than the gross suggests.

This does not mean it is not worth doing, only that you should judge it by what you keep after expenses, not by the gross figure the app shows.

- You earn a base amount per delivery plus customer tips, which matter a lot.
- Apps may add bonuses, and earnings are higher at peak demand times.
- Gross earnings aren't profit — gas, maintenance, and car wear come out of them.
- Judge the work by what you keep after expenses, not the gross figure shown.

WATCH OUT

The number the app shows is gross, not profit. Gas, maintenance, and the wear and depreciation on your car all come out of it, and they add up with the miles. Track both your earnings and these costs so you know your real hourly take — it's often lower than the gross suggests.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

7 Taxes and Being Self-Employed

When you drive for these apps, you are an independent contractor, not an employee, which has real tax consequences you must plan for. No taxes are withheld from your pay, so the money you receive is before tax, and you are responsible for setting aside and paying your own income tax and self-employment tax on your earnings. This catches many new drivers off guard, so it is wise to set aside a portion of what you earn from the start rather than facing a surprise bill.

The good news is that as a self-employed person you can deduct your business expenses, most importantly your vehicle costs, which can substantially reduce the income you are taxed on. The simplest common method is the standard mileage deduction, where you deduct a set amount for every business mile driven, so keeping a careful log of your delivery miles is genuinely valuable.

The apps provide an earnings summary at tax time. Because taxes for the self-employed are more involved than for employees, it is worth reading up on the basics or consulting a tax professional, especially in your first year, so you handle it correctly and keep what you are entitled to.

- You're an independent contractor; no taxes are withheld from your pay.
- You must set aside and pay your own income and self-employment tax.
- You can deduct business expenses, especially vehicle costs — track your miles.
- Consider reading up or consulting a tax professional, especially your first year.

WATCH OUT

No taxes are withheld, so set aside a portion of every payment from the start to avoid a surprise bill. Keep a careful log of your delivery miles — the mileage deduction can substantially cut the income you're taxed on, and it's worth a tax professional's help your first year.

8 Staying Safe on the Road and Off

Delivery driving puts you on the road a lot and sometimes in unfamiliar places, so some sensible safety habits matter. On the road, do not let the app rush you into unsafe driving; set up your navigation before you go, use a phone mount so you are not handling the phone while driving, and accept that a late delivery is far better than an accident. Drive within your limits and in conditions you are comfortable with, and take breaks on long sessions.

Off the road, use ordinary caution at pickups and drop-offs: be aware of your surroundings, trust your instincts if a situation feels off, and follow the app's drop-off instructions, which often let you leave orders at the door without a face-to-face interaction. The apps have safety features like sharing your trip status and emergency buttons, worth knowing before you need them.

Delivery driving is generally safe, but like any job that has you out and about, it rewards staying alert and not letting the pressure to earn override your own good judgment about safety.

- Set navigation before driving and use a phone mount — never handle the phone while moving.
- A late delivery is always better than an accident; drive within your limits.
- Use ordinary caution at pickups and drop-offs; trust your instincts.
- Learn the app's safety features, like trip-sharing and emergency buttons.

WATCH OUT

Never let the app's pressure to be fast override safe driving — a late delivery beats an accident every time. Set up navigation before you move, use a phone mount, and trust your instincts at any pickup or drop-off that feels off.

9 Is It Worth It for You?

Whether delivery driving is worth it depends on your situation and what you want from it. It tends to suit people who value flexibility above all — who want to earn around other commitments, pick their own hours, and have no interest in a fixed schedule — and who have a reliable, reasonably efficient car and a market with enough demand near them. As a source of flexible supplemental income, it genuinely works for many people.

It is a weaker fit if you need steady, guaranteed income, since earnings vary and are not promised, or if your car is expensive to run or already high-mileage, since the vehicle costs can eat much of the profit. It also asks you to manage the self-employed side — taxes and expenses — which some people would rather avoid.

The honest way to judge it is to try it for a while, track your real earnings minus your real costs, and see what hourly profit you actually make and whether the flexibility is worth it to you. For many it is a useful option; for some the numbers do not justify the wear and effort.

- It suits people who value flexibility and have a reliable, efficient car.
- It works well as flexible supplemental income in a market with demand.
- It's a weaker fit if you need guaranteed income or your car is costly to run.
- Judge it by trying it and tracking real earnings minus real costs.

GOOD TO KNOW

The honest test is to try it a while and track your real earnings minus your real costs — gas and car wear included — to see your actual hourly profit. It's a strong option for flexible side income with an efficient car; a weaker one if you need steady pay or drive a costly vehicle.

10 Getting Started Smartly

If you decide to try it, a few choices early on set you up well. Consider signing up for more than one app, so that when one is slow you can switch to another and keep your time productive; many experienced drivers run two or three. Start during busy periods — meal times, weekends — when orders and tips are more plentiful, so your first impression reflects the better end of the earnings rather than a dead afternoon.

Begin close to home and in areas you know, which makes navigation easier and keeps your unpaid driving between orders short, then expand as you get comfortable. Track your earnings and mileage from day one so you can judge the real profit and handle taxes, rather than trying to reconstruct it later. And give it a fair trial of several sessions before deciding, since the first delivery or two is always the most awkward and things get much smoother once the routine clicks.

A thoughtful start makes the difference between a frustrating first week and a smooth one.

1. Consider signing up for two or three apps to stay busy when one is slow.
2. Start during busy periods for more orders and better tips.
3. Begin close to home in areas you know, then expand as you get comfortable.
4. Track earnings and mileage from day one, and give it a fair multi-session trial.

TIP

Start during busy meal times and weekends, close to home, and sign up for more than one app so you're not idle when one is slow. Track earnings and mileage from day one, and give it several sessions — the first delivery or two is always the most awkward.

11 A Simple Way to Begin

If delivery driving appeals to you, here is a clear path from curious to earning sensibly.

1. Decide what you want from it and check there's enough demand in your area.
2. Sign up for one or more apps and complete the background check.
3. Equip your car with a phone mount, charger, and insulated bags.
4. Start at busy times near home, delivering promptly and following instructions.
5. Track your earnings and mileage, and set aside money for taxes.
6. After a fair trial, judge it by your real profit and the value of the flexibility.

> *Delivery driving won't make you rich, but for the right person it's an honest, flexible way to turn spare hours and a reliable car into real income — as long as you judge it by what you keep after gas and wear, not by the number on the screen.*

12 Recap

Delivery apps like DoorDash, Instacart, and Uber Eats let you earn flexible income using your car and phone, accepting deliveries when you choose. Signing up is easy — a license, insurance, a car, a smartphone, and a background check — and doing well means being prompt, communicative, and courteous. The crucial cautions are financial: your gross earnings are not profit once gas and car wear are counted, and as an independent contractor you must handle your own taxes and track your mileage.

Drive safely, try it during busy times near home, and judge it by your real profit after costs.

- These apps offer flexible income using your own car and phone.
- Getting started needs a license, insurance, a car, a smartphone, and a background check.
- Do well by being prompt, communicative, and courteous for better tips and ratings.
- Gross isn't profit — count gas and car wear, and handle your own taxes and mileage.
- Drive safely, start at busy times near home, and judge it by real profit.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Delivery driving is an accessible, flexible way to earn — but treat it like the small business it is. Track earnings against gas and car wear, set aside money for taxes, log your miles, drive safely, and decide based on your real hourly profit and how much the flexibility is worth to you.

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.

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GOOD TO KNOW

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