

So what are the stages of operator training?

Basic Operator Training

Basic Operator Training is, as the name suggests, just that. It's important to note that Basic Operator Training should always take place 'off the job'. Any individual attending Basic Operator Training will learn the basic practical skills of operating a lift truck – simple manoeuvring and basic hydraulic controls - and gain an understanding of the principles governing safe operation.

As well as learning to operate the machine, operators will also learn about the risks and hazards associated with operation. Also covered during this training are important skills such as pre-use inspection and routine basic maintenance like re-fuelling or battery care.

Basic Operator Training is the foundation, It provides a solid base upon which more specific training can be built.

Specific Job Training

Specific Job Training is where context is added to the basic skills learnt in the first stage of training. This is where the operator learns about the operating principles specific to the equipment they will be using, with focus on any attachments they might use.

The operator will learn about the layout and configuration of the controls in the type of machine they will be using – after all, who's to say that the machine they used in Basic Operating Training is identical to the machine they will be using day-to-day?

But it's not all about the machine by this stage; during Specific Job training the individual will learn about conditions they are likely to encounter at work – for example confined areas, the racking system, cold stores, other vehicles and the surfaces they'll be operating on.

Importantly, during Specific Job Training, the individual will also be instructed on site rules such as speed limits, pedestrian areas, traffic flow and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

As with Basic Operator Training, Specific Job Training must take place away from the job. It is often combined with Basic Operator Training and can be theoretical or practical, depending on the availability of safe and appropriate training areas.

Familiarisation Training

This is closely supervised training that introduces the operator to the 'live work' environment for the first time. This is where the skills and knowledge that have been gained over the first two stages of training begin to be put to use in the workplace. The operator starts with simple tasks and builds towards more complex procedures, allowing them to develop their skills and build their confidence.

As with stage two, site layout and rules form an important part of Familiarisation training. It is also often the case that the 'off-the-job' nature of Specific Job Training makes instruction in some elements of the site impossible. This is the time to cover those.

Only once all three stages of training are completed satisfactorily and recorded should an 'Authorisation to Operate' be issued. This is issued by the employer and it is their acknowledgement that the individual is qualified to operate specific equipment, within a specific environment.

Briefly looking at the three essential stages of initial training, it is clear to see how Basic Training on its own could leave an operator inexperienced and out of their depth when faced with operating in the live environment.

These three parts of the training process are hugely important when it comes to the safety and security of staff, as well as stock and equipment, Operator training is an on-going process that doesn't just stop at Basic Operator Training, or even Specific Job and Familiarisation. When you consider the vital role of ongoing supervision, assessment and Refresher training in maintaining competence you can see that employers and operators alike have an obligation to keep training at the heart of workplace safety.