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## Earn & Learn through Apprenticeships

What's the first thing that pops into your mind when you imagine yourself preparing for your career? Are you envisioning yourself on a college campus, heading to your next class with a backpack filled with textbooks and term papers? If so, that's great. After all, earning a college degree is certainly an important achievement that can lead you to a satisfying and rewarding career.

But what if you see something different for yourself? After all, a four-year college degree isn't for everyone — *and it's certainly not the only pathway to launch a successful career!* Perhaps you're the type who prefers to learn by doing instead of sitting in a lecture hall or reading a textbook. Maybe you enjoy figuring out how to fix equipment, using tools, or building things. And you'd rather wear a tool belt than a backpack. If that's the case, an [apprenticeship program](#) might be right for you!

### ***Drilling Down: What's an Apprenticeship?***

An apprenticeship is a respected alternative to college that offers many benefits — including the opportunity to *earn while you learn!* More specifically, according to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), “an apprenticeship is an arrangement in which you get **hands-on training, technical instruction, and a paycheck** — all at the same time. Apprentices work for a sponsor, such as an individual employer or a business-union partnership, who pays their wages and provides the training.”

Apprenticeship programs prepare workers for jobs in a variety of industries (listed below). Click the link for resources and information about the apprentice-based occupations within that industry (and note that *some* of the related occupations *require* an apprenticeship to enter).

<a href="#">Advanced manufacturing</a>	<a href="#">Construction</a>	<a href="#">Energy</a>
<a href="#">Financial services</a>	<a href="#">Healthcare</a>	<a href="#">Hospitality</a>
<a href="#">Information Technology</a>	<a href="#">Telecommunications</a>	<a href="#">Transportation</a>

The length of apprenticeship programs vary (depending on the complexity of the occupation / industry, program, and employer / sponsor). Averaging about 3 – 4 years in duration, some apprentice programs take as little as 12 months to complete; others up to 6 years. Graduates of these programs are known as journey workers



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Most formal apprenticeship programs are registered with the DOL. Registration indicates that the program meets federal standards for fairness, safety, and training. A nationally-recognized certificate is awarded upon completion of the registered apprentice program from either the DOL or an approved state agency. The certificate provides proof to potential employers of the apprentice's skills.

(For more information: [Registered Apprenticeship Program](#); [Careers with Registered Apprenticeships](#); [Apprenticeship Industries](#); [Industry Recognized Apprenticeships](#).)

## ***The Tape Measure: Occupational Outlook***

If earning a paycheck while learning a skill in an occupation with plenty of job opportunities sounds appealing to you, here are some encouraging statistics to consider:

- The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects employment in many occupations with apprenticeships will grow *at least as fast (if not faster)* than the average of all occupations over the next decade (2018-2028).
- Earnings for many of the top occupations with apprenticeships were well above the median annual wage of \$38,640 for all occupations in 2018.
- The DOL counted approximately 585,000 active apprentices in more than 23,000 registered programs in 2018.

The table below lists the occupations with the greatest number of active apprentices along with the job outlook and median annual wages for each. The seven occupations in the table accounted for almost *6 million jobs in total* for 2018 and are expected to increase by another 500,000 over the 2018-2018 decade.

(For more information and breakdown by occupation: [Apprenticeships: Outlook & Wages in Selected Occupations](#).)



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Table 1. Selected occupations with many apprentices, 2018



Selected occupations with many apprentices: employment growth, projected 2018–28, and employment and median annual wages, 2018

Occupation	Employment growth, projected 2018–28	Employment, 2018	Median annual wage, 2018
Carpenters	8% (Faster than average)	1,006,500	\$46,590
Construction laborers	11% (Much faster than average)	1,405,000	35,800
Electrical power-line installers and repairers	8% (Faster than average)	119,400	70,910
Electricians	10% (Faster than average)	715,400	55,190
Heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers	5% (As fast as average)	1,958,800	43,680
Plumbers, pipefitters, and steamfitters	14% (Much faster than average)	500,300	53,910
Sheet metal workers	8% (Faster than average)	143,000	48,460

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (employment growth, employment, and wages), U.S. Department of Labor (selected occupations, based on federal data on active apprentices in fiscal year 2018).

## ***Building the Foundation: How Apprenticeships Work***

Apprenticeship programs are sponsored by individual employers, labor unions, and employer associations. The sponsor selects the apprentice, develops the training standards, delivers or provides access to technical instruction, and pays the apprentice's wages and other expenses. Usually the sponsor and the apprentice sign an agreement detailing the specifics of the program including:

- the skills the apprentice will learn on the job,
- the related instruction / training the apprentice will receive,



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- the rate of pay (which typically starts out at about half of what a qualified worker in the occupation earns and increases as the apprentice advances),
- and the duration of the program.

By signing the agreement, the sponsor commits to training the apprentice and to make every effort to keep him / her employed; and the apprentice pledges to perform the work tasks and complete the necessary technical instruction.

Many apprentice programs require the apprentice to complete at least 144 hours of technical instruction and 2,000 hours of on-the-job training each year. In registered apprenticeships, the program is generally more formal than most other types of on-the-job instruction in that there is a structured plan enabling the apprentice to practice every major element of the occupation.

Under the supervision of an experienced worker, the apprentice usually starts out by learning simple, repetitive work tasks and then gradually takes on duties that are more complex. In addition, the apprentice becomes skilled at the basics through the technical instruction. Depending on the nature of the work, this instruction may cover topics such as using the required equipment, drafting, reading blueprints, and estimating costs.

## ***The Blueprint: How to Find an Apprenticeship***

While job opportunities for occupations with apprenticeships may be plentiful, it's not always that easy to find a program if you don't know where to look. Here are some helpful tips:

- Search for apprenticeship openings / sponsors at: [Apprenticeship.gov Job Listings](https://www.apprenticeship.gov/job-listings).
- Contact your [state apprenticeship agency](#) for information about finding apprenticeships in your state.
- Contact local unions.
- Network to uncover opportunities.

## ***Read the Manual: Occupational Information***

Want to learn more about occupations (including the nature of the work tasks, required skills, salary range, and career path)? You can access profiles for more than 900



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occupations through the U.S. Department of Labor's [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#); [O\\*NET](#); [CareerOneStop](#); and [My Next Move](#).