



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).

Advanced manufacturing	Construction	Energy
Financial services	Healthcare	Hospitality
Information Technology	Telecommunications	Transportation

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



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:

- In 2024, the U.S. Department of Labor reported 311,339 new apprentices entering registered apprenticeship programs.
- Earnings for many of the top occupations with apprenticeships are well above the median annual wage of \$48,060 for all occupations in 2023.
- The DOL counted approximately 679,960 active apprentices in more than 27,000 registered programs in 2024.

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