



# You Don't Have to Find Your Way Back Alone

Adults returning to education often begin with a goal but no map. They may want to earn a high-school equivalency credential, improve their English, qualify for a different occupation, update their computer skills, or obtain an industry certification. What they frequently do not know is which program to choose, whom to trust, or how to pay for it. The good news is that adult learners do not have to navigate this territory alone. Federal, state, and local resources can help them identify a goal, evaluate training, and locate possible financial assistance.

## Begin with the Goal

Before searching for a school, define what the education is supposed to accomplish. Ask:

- Am I preparing for a specific occupation?
- Do I need a license or certification?
- Am I missing basic reading, mathematics, English, or digital skills?
- Do I need a short course, an apprenticeship, or a degree?
- Is the training required by employers or merely advertised by the school?

A clear goal prevents the learner from purchasing an attractive course that does not lead anywhere.

## CareerOneStop: Exploring Careers and Training

[CareerOneStop](#) is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor and provides career, training, and job-search information. Its [Find Training](#) section helps users explore:

- Adult basic education
- High-school equivalency programs
- Short-term occupational training
- Community colleges and universities
- Certifications and licenses
- Apprenticeships and internships
- Scholarships and other ways to pay for training

The site's Local Training Finder allows users to search by occupation, program, and location. Some programs are marked as eligible under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, although eligibility for individual financial assistance must be determined locally.

## **American Job Centers: Local, Human Assistance**

Websites are useful, but sometimes an adult needs to sit across from another human being and ask, "Where do I begin?" Nearly 2,300 [American Job Centers](#) provide free employment and training assistance across the country. Services vary by location but may include:

- Career counseling
- Skills and interest assessments
- Information about in-demand occupations
- Résumé and job-search workshops
- Free computer access
- Referrals to local training providers
- Information about possible training assistance

Job seekers should ask specifically about programs available in their state or workforce area because funding, eligibility, and approved training options differ by location.

## **LINCS: Adult Education and Literacy**

The U.S. Department of Education maintains the [Literacy Information and Communication System](#), commonly called LINCS. Its Learner Center connects adults with free resources involving:

- Reading and writing
- Mathematics
- English-language learning
- High-school equivalency preparation
- Job and digital skills

LINCS also offers materials for teachers, tutors, program managers, and adult-education professionals. It is especially useful for learners who need to strengthen basic academic skills before beginning occupational training. The Department of Education's [Adult Programs](#) page provides additional information about adult education, literacy, career pathways, English-language instruction, and vocational-rehabilitation resources.

## **O\*NET: Discovering What a Job Requires**

Training should be selected only after the learner understands the occupation. [O\\*NET OnLine](#) describes the tasks, knowledge, abilities, technology, education, and preparation associated with more than 1,000 occupations. It can help adults compare what they already know with what a job currently requires.

A useful exercise is to select a target occupation and create three lists:

- 1 Qualifications I already possess
- 2 Qualifications I need to refresh
- 3 Qualifications I still need to acquire

That comparison turns a broad wish—"I need a better job"—into a manageable training plan.

## **Apprenticeship.gov: Learning through Paid Work**

Adults interested in structured, work-based learning should visit [Apprenticeship.gov](#). Registered apprenticeships combine paid employment, instruction, mentoring, progressive wage increases, and an industry-recognized credential. Opportunities extend beyond the traditional construction trades into areas such as healthcare, transportation, information technology, public service, and advanced manufacturing.

The site's [Apprenticeship Job Finder](#) allows career seekers to search for current openings and apply through the employer or program sponsor.

## Community Colleges and Public Libraries

Do not overlook the institutions closest to home. Community colleges often provide adult basic education, English instruction, vocational certificates, industry testing, and short courses developed with local employers. Their workforce-development offices may offer programs that do not appear in the regular college catalog.

Public libraries may provide computer instruction, online-learning access, résumé assistance, tutoring, and help using career databases. A library card can be one of the least expensive educational tools available.

## Evaluate before Enrolling

A training program should be treated like any other major purchase. Before enrolling, ask:

- What specific skill or credential will I earn?
- Do local employers recognize it?
- What percentage of students complete the program?
- Does the program prepare students for a licensing or certification exam?
- What is the total cost, including books, equipment, testing, and fees?
- Is financial assistance a grant, a loan, or an employer benefit?
- Can credits transfer to another institution?
- What job-placement claims can the school document?

Avoid pressure to enroll immediately because a credible program should welcome careful questions.

## The Bottom Line

Returning to education requires courage, but it should not require wandering blindly through advertisements, acronyms, and promises. Begin with the occupation or goal, determine which qualification is actually needed, and use public resources to compare programs, costs, and career requirements. Then choose the shortest credible path that provides the necessary skill.

The adult learner must still attend the classes and do the work, but finding the right starting point can—and should—be a shared effort.