



Apprenticeships: How to Earn While You Learn

Starting a career can present a frustrating problem: employers want experience, but gaining that experience often requires a job. An apprenticeship offers one way forward by combining paid work with structured training.

For students, unemployed workers, and people changing careers, an apprenticeship can provide a route into skilled employment. The important first step is to understand the occupation, the program, and the commitment involved.

Understand What an Apprenticeship Offers

A Registered Apprenticeship combines paid work, instruction, mentoring, progressive wage increases, and a recognized completion credential. Apprentices develop skills through supervised practice while learning the knowledge behind the work.

The U.S. Department of Labor’s [career-seeker guide](#) explains these features and directs applicants to employers and program sponsors.

Not every position advertised as an “apprenticeship” is a Registered Apprenticeship. Ask whether the program is registered and which agency oversees it. Also ask what training and credential you will receive.

Choose the Occupation Before Choosing the Program

Begin by investigating the work itself. Consider its duties, schedule, physical demands, working environment, and prospects in your area.

Apprenticeships are closely associated with skilled trades, but opportunities also exist in other industries. Availability depends on local employers and program sponsors, so explore what is actually offered rather than assuming every field has a nearby opening.

Our companion article, **“How to Use the Bureau of Labor Statistics Before Choosing Your Next Job,”** explains how to research occupations before committing to training. Use that information alongside current apprenticeship announcements and conversations with people doing the work.

Find Programs and Current Openings

Start with the [Apprenticeship Finder](#), searching by location and relevant keywords. Read each listing carefully and follow the employer’s or sponsor’s application instructions.

You can also investigate employers, union training programs, industry associations, and community colleges in your area. A local American Job Center may help you identify opportunities and understand where to apply.

Distinguish a program that exists from one that is recruiting now. Ask about application windows, waiting lists, and upcoming information sessions. If no opening is available, find out when to check again.

Check the Entry Requirements

Apprenticeships are designed to develop skills, but that does not mean every program accepts applicants without prerequisites.

Depending on the occupation and sponsor, requirements may involve education, minimum age, an aptitude assessment, an interview, or the ability to perform particular job tasks. Transportation can also matter when work and instruction take place at different locations.

Read the announcement before spending money on preparatory classes or equipment. Ask the sponsor which requirements are essential and whether any can be completed before the program begins.

If you already have relevant employment or classroom experience, ask whether it can count toward your training. Credit for prior experience varies by program, according to the [Apprenticeship.gov FAQs](#).

Understand the Pay, Schedule, and Costs

“Earn while you learn” is an important benefit, but you still need to understand the financial arrangement.

Ask about the starting wage, expected work hours, and requirements for wage increases. Find out whether benefits are offered and when eligibility begins.

Clarify how instruction fits around employment. Classes may take place during the workday, in the evening, online, or in scheduled blocks. Ask whether instructional time is paid.

Also identify any expenses you would be expected to cover, such as books, tools, protective equipment, transportation, or tuition. Do not assume that every cost is included simply because the position is paid.

Compare the complete arrangement with your budget and responsibilities.

Ask How Training and Progress Are Managed

A worthwhile training conversation should go beyond the job title. Ask who will supervise your learning, how skills will be taught, and how progress will be assessed.

Useful questions include:

- What skills will I learn, and in what sequence?
- Who will mentor me during the workday?
- How long does the program normally take?
- What determines completion and advancement?
- What support is available if I struggle with a class or task?
- What happens if work slows down or my employment ends?

Get important terms in writing and review them before accepting. A clear explanation of expectations helps both you and the sponsor decide whether the arrangement is suitable.

Understand the Credential You Will Earn

Successful completion of a Registered Apprenticeship leads to a nationally recognized Certificate of Completion of Apprenticeship. Some programs may also connect with college credit or additional credentials, but you should confirm the specific arrangement.

Ask how employers in your intended field recognize the qualification. If the occupation requires a license, find out whether completing the apprenticeship satisfies all requirements or whether separate examinations or applications remain.

A completion credential, college degree, and occupational license are different things. Make sure you understand which ones the program provides or helps you pursue.

Prepare a Focused Application

Treat the application as you would any other employment opportunity. Follow instructions, submit documents on time, and prepare to explain why the work interests you.

Your résumé can include school projects, part-time jobs, volunteer work, and other responsibilities that demonstrate reliability, problem-solving, teamwork, or practical ability.

You do not need to pretend you already possess the skills the program is intended to teach. Give evidence that you can learn, follow instructions, and meet commitments.

Prepare for any announced assessment, and ask the sponsor whether official practice materials are available. Selection may be competitive, so consider more than one suitable opportunity.

Consider Preparation Programs When Needed

If you are not yet ready to enter an apprenticeship, investigate pre-apprenticeship options. These programs are intended to help people prepare for apprenticeships or other employment.

Before enrolling, ask which apprenticeship sponsors the program works with, what preparation it provides, whether there are costs, and how participants move into employment. Do not assume participation guarantees an apprenticeship place.

An apprenticeship can make training and employment part of the same path. Choose one by examining the work, the instruction, the financial terms, and the qualification you will carry forward.