

Construction Tradesperson

At a Glance

Construction tradespeople work together to build everything from houses to skyscrapers. Each worker specializes in a trade or one area of skilled work.

16 Career Clusters

Architecture & Construction

Earnings

Earnings Range: 35K - 80K

Level of Education

- 2-Year College or Technical Training

Core Tasks

- Read blueprints and estimate materials needed
- Use power and hand tools to shape metal, wood, glass, pipes, wires, or other materials
- Work with other tradespeople to construct buildings of all sizes
- Common types of tradespeople include plumbers, electricians, carpenters, and bricklayers

Attributes & Abilities

- Able to read blueprints
- Physically fit
- Work well as part of a team
- Hand-eye coordination
- Communication skills

Workplace

- Most trades are physically demanding careers
- Work outdoors most of the time
- A lot of work is done high up on ladders or scaffolds
- Wear hard hats and other protective gear on construction sites
- Most work a 5-day, 40-hour week

Job Description

Do you ever walk by a construction site and wonder what all those people are doing? Who makes the patterns in the brick? Who installs the windows? Who builds the doorframes? How do all these things come together into one building? This is the work of skilled construction tradespeople.

People in these jobs specialize in one area. They have a skill or "trade" that sets them apart. They are many trades to choose from. They include everyone from plumbing, to carpentry, to heavy equipment operation.

To create any building, you need many different tradespeople. For instance, bricklayers work with bricks and stone. They make walls, floors, and driveways. Glaziers handle glass fittings. They install windows and doors. Plasterers use plaster and stucco to create walls and ceilings.

Sheet metal workers build and install ductwork. Their work is used in heating and cooling systems. Ironworkers build steel frames. These are used in large structures, like stadiums and bridges.

You have probably heard of electricians, carpenters, and painters. These trades are more familiar. That's because they work inside homes as well as on construction sites.

To find out more about these specific trades, check out those profiles in the Similar Careers section.

Working Conditions

Most construction trades are physically demanding. Some tasks have to be done outdoors, in all kinds of weather.

This work can be dirty or dusty. Workers may have to climb ladders or scaffolds, which can be dangerous. All workers on construction sites have to wear hard hats and other protective gear.

They may also have to travel some distance to the work site. In some cases, workers have to provide their own transportation.

Tradespeople usually work 8 hours a day, 5 days a week. When they have to work longer hours, or on weekends, they get overtime pay.

Hours are often more flexible for those who work for non-unionized contractors. Hours for these workers may depend on how much they want to work. They can also depend on how many contracts the employer takes on.

Earnings

Income in this field depends on the trade. For instance, painters earn lower wages than ironworkers.

Even within the same trade, income varies. Pay depends on many factors, including level of skill and experience. Local economic conditions play a role, too.

In general, construction tradespeople can earn anywhere from around \$25,000 to \$90,000 a year. Those with very specialized skills may earn more.

Most people in this field begin as apprentices or trainees. They work under the supervision of a fully qualified tradesperson. Qualified tradespeople are known as journeypersons. Apprentices earn a percentage of what a journeyperson earns. This increases as they gain experience. Some entry-level workers may start at less than \$25,000 a year.

Income in this field also depends how much work tradespeople get during the year. The industry is affected by economic cycles. When the economy slows down, so does construction. And that means less work.

Massachusetts Wages

Earnings and outlook information is not available for this occupation.

Education

The best way to learn a trade is to do an apprenticeship. Formal programs are available for most trades. They are offered through employers and trade unions. Trade associations also offer programs. Apprenticeships mix on-the-job training with in-class learning.

As an apprentice, you work under the supervision of a fully qualified tradesperson. Programs last between 2 and 5 years. When you finish, you become a journeyperson in that trade. In some trades, you may need to write an exam at the end of your training.

It's a good idea to get your high school diploma. Employers often like to hire high school graduates. In some places, a high school diploma may be required for certain trades. In some cases, apprentices also need to be at least 18 years old. You might need a driver's license to work in certain jobs.

Related College Programs

- Construction Trades, General

Other Suggested Qualifications

In the construction trades, mechanical or machine shop courses are helpful, as well as mathematics (especially geometry), mechanical drawing, and blueprint reading. Tradespeople need good hand-eye coordination and they should be physically fit in order to lift and carry heavy equipment and supplies across construction sites. They should also work well as members of a team and have good communication skills.

Sample High School Program of Study

This Program of Study can serve as a guide, along with other career planning materials, as learners continue on a career path. Courses listed within this plan are only recommended coursework and should be individualized to meet each learner's educational and career goals.

Construction Architecture & Construction

Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
English/Language Arts			
English/Language Arts I	English/Language Arts II	English/Language Arts III Technical Writing	English/Language Arts IV
Math			
Algebra I	Geometry	Algebra II	Construction Math Statistics
Science			
Earth or Life or Physical Science	Biology	Physics	Chemistry
Social Studies/Sciences			
State History Civics or World History	U.S. History	Economics Psychology	
Career & Technical Courses			
Introduction to the Built Environment	The Language of Architecture and Construction Information Technology	Safety, Health and the Workplace Environment Principles of	Applications in Construction

Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
	Applications	Construction	

States' Career Clusters Initiative, 2008, www.careerclusters.org.

Important

- Check with your advisor to make sure that your course selections satisfy your graduation requirements.
- Courses available may vary from school to school.

Sample Career Path

People take different pathways through their careers, but no one starts at the top. This is an example of how the earnings, education and experience requirements, and responsibilities might progress for someone in this occupation.

Level 1

Sample Title	Laborer / Helper
Earnings	\$18,000 to \$25,000 a year
Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good physical condition (a strong back is a must) • Basic math and geometry skills • Willingness to learn and follow directions
Responsibilities	Setting up and cleaning up job sites; transporting materials (bricks, mortar, wood, tile) for construction tradespeople; completing simple construction tasks under the supervision of experienced tradespeople; keeping equipment well-maintained (cleaning, greasing, or oiling saws, drills, hammers, and other equipment).

Level 2

Sample Title	Apprentice
Earnings	\$20,000 to \$35,000 a year
Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For many construction trades, a high school diploma
Responsibilities	Learning on the job under the supervision of journeypersons.

Level 3

Sample Title	Journeyperson
Earnings	\$35,000 to \$55,000 a year

Level 3

Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Completion of a certain number of hours of on-the-job training• Completion of a certain amount of in-class training• Successful completion of a licensing exam, if necessary
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Responsibilities	Performing all the duties of a fully qualified tradesperson; training apprentices; supervising laborers/helpers.
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Level 4

Sample Title	Specialized Journeyperson or Foreperson
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Earnings	\$45,000 to \$80,000 a year
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Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Several years of work experience as a fully qualified journeyperson
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Responsibilities	Managing other construction tradespeople; performing specialized custom work.
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Related Careers

Here are some other occupations that you might be interested in. Click on an occupation name to learn more.

- Bricklayer / Stonemason
- Carpenter
- Combat Engineer
- Commercial Diver
- Concrete Mason
- Construction Laborer
- Construction Manager
- Demolition Expert
- Drywaller
- Electrician
- Energy Auditor
- Flooring Installer
- Glazier
- Heavy Equipment Operator
- Home Inspector
- Insulator
- Ironworker
- Landscaper
- Painter
- Plasterer
- Plumber
- Roustabout / Leasehand
- Renovator
- Surface Driller
- Water Well Driller

Related Military Careers

- Construction Specialist

Career Clusters

Career Clusters are groups or families of occupations that share common characteristics such as knowledge requirements, skill sets, and/or goals.

Architecture & Construction

National Employment by Industry

Industry	% Employed
Construction	
Self-Employed	

Source: O*Net Online, Browse by Industry, US Department of Labor
<http://online.onetcenter.org/find/industry>

Other Resources

Build Your Future – Choose Your Career Path

This program of the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) aims to promote careers and education in the construction industry. Here you can find out more about getting started in construction.

<http://byf.org/path>

Building Advantage – Apprenticeship Program

This organization aims to raise awareness about construction and trade unions. Here you can find excellent career videos to help you learn more about a variety of careers.

<http://www.buildingadvantage.org/apprenticeship>

Home Builders Institute (HBI)

HBI provides training for careers in the building industry. Scroll over Programs and click on Career & Certification Services to learn more about the services they offer.

<http://www.hbi.org>

National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC)

This organization supports women in or wishing to become part of the construction industry. Be sure to check out the Education section.

<http://www.nawic.org>

Occupational Outlook Handbook – Construction Laborers and Helpers

Career information from the US Department of Labor.

<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/construction-and-extraction/construction-laborers-and-helpers.htm>