

Tilesetter

At a Glance

Tilesetters install and repair the tiles that cover floors, walls, and ceilings. Their handiwork is found in all kinds of places, from bathrooms to kitchens to swimming pools.

16 Career Clusters

Architecture & Construction

Earnings

Earnings Range: 10 - 34/hr

Level of Education

- High School
- 2-Year College or Technical Training

Core Tasks

- Measure rooms and estimate the cost of materials
- Lay out the tile design
- Use cutting tools to cut tiles to size
- Fasten down tiles using cement or mastic
- Fill the spaces between tiles with grout, which is a fine cement, and wipe off any excess

Attributes & Abilities

- Physically fit
- Hard-working
- Work well with your hands
- Able to solve math problems quickly and accurately
- An eye for color and design

Workplace

- Employed by tile, masonry, and general contractors, or self-employed
- Work mostly indoors
- Most work a 5-day, 40-hour week, but overtime is sometimes necessary
- There is some danger of cuts from tools and sharp tiles
- On construction sites they must wear safety boots and hard hats, and many wear kneepads

Job Description

People have been tiling their bathrooms since ancient Egyptian times. Tiles are water resistant, long lasting, and easy to clean. They can be used to cover floors, walls, or ceilings. Modern tilesetters install and repair tiles in all kinds of places. They might work in the bathroom of a house one day, and tile the floor of a shopping mall the next.

Tilesetters often begin a job by studying blueprints of the area and taking measurements. They may also estimate the cost of materials and labor for customers. Some of them even help the customer choose the tiles.

Tiles come in all shapes, sizes, and patterns. They also come in many materials, including ceramic, glass, and slate. In some cases, tilesetters design the patterns in which the tiles will be put down.

Before they are stuck down, the tiles are arranged on the floor. This way, the tilesetter can look at the pattern and make any needed changes. Some areas are a challenge to tile, like around pipes, washbasins, and corners. The tiles for these areas are cut to size using special cutting tools and saws.

Tiles are stuck in place with cement mortar or a sticky paste called mastic. If the tilesetters are using cement, they nail a metal mesh support to the wall. Then, they apply two layers of cement. They also apply cement to the back of the tiles and stick them in the right place.

Once each tile has been set in the adhesive, tilesetters tap the surface to make sure it's even and flat. When the cement has dried, they fill the spaces between tiles with a fine cement called grout. They wipe off any extra grout with a damp sponge and wait for it to dry. Then, they apply a sealant to protect the grout from water and stains.

Working Conditions

Some tilesetters work for trade, building, and masonry contractors or construction companies. They tend to work on large projects, such as new homes, malls, and restaurants.

Other people in this trade are self-employed. They contract their skills out to customers and home contractors. They often work on smaller projects like home repairs and renovations.

This tends to be indoor work. Work spaces are often fairly quiet and clear. Tile work is usually done in new buildings where most construction is already complete. In some cases, they work in homes and buildings that aren't finished yet.

Most people in this trade work 5 days, and 40 hours, a week. Some overtime may be required to meet deadlines. When they do the tile in stores or offices, they may work evenings and weekends. This way, they won't disturb customers or employees.

There is a lot of bending, kneeling, and stretching in tile work. Many workers wear pads to protect their knees. There is also a danger of cuts from tools and sharp tiles. People have to wear safety boots and hardhats on work sites.

Earnings

Tilesetters are usually paid an hourly wage. Most earn in the range of \$12 to \$34 an hour. The national median wage is about \$19 an hour. For those who work full time, that works out to \$24,000 to \$71,000 a year, with a median income of \$40,000.

Income levels for tilesetters depend on their employer, location, and experience. The number of hours they work during the year will also affect income.

Entry-level workers with no experience or training may earn minimum wage. People in apprenticeships usually earn about half as much as a trained worker. Their pay increases as they progress through the program.

People in the construction industry may face periods without work. Bad weather and a poor economy can delay building projects. However, workers can prepare for these periods getting extra training. For example, they can transfer their skills to bricklaying or plastering.

People who work full time often get benefits. These can include a health plan, paid sick days, and holidays. Self-employed workers must provide their own benefits.

Many people in this trade belong to a union. The union leaders discuss wages and benefits on behalf of the whole group.

Massachusetts Wages

Occupation: Tile and Marble Setters

Level of Experience

Hourly

Annual

Entry Wage	\$26.11	\$54,320
Median Wage	\$41.02	\$85,320
Experienced Wage	\$46.03	\$95,750

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics <http://www.bls.gov>

Massachusetts Outlook

Occupation: Tile and Marble Setters

Employment

2014	1,100
2024	1,140

Change

Number	40
Percentage	3.2

Annual Average Openings

Total	Growth	Replacement
20	--	--

Source: Projections Central <http://www.projectionscentral.com>

Education

There is no formal education required to become a tilesetter. Most people learn the trade through on-the-job training or a formal apprenticeship. You can choose either path if you want a career in tile work.

Many people start out as helpers to experienced tilesetters. They first learn the basic skills, like how to mix and apply cement and mastic. Later, they learn how to cut and install tile, apply grout, and do finishing work.

Employers tend to prefer if you have a high school diploma plus some relevant courses. It's a good idea to take courses in math, mechanical drawing, and shop. These courses are also available at 2-year colleges and vocational schools.

Other people enter the trade through a formal apprenticeship. Unions, contractor associations, and other groups run these programs. This type of program gives you training on the job and in class. You will study blueprint reading, tile layout, and math.

To be an apprentice, you usually need to be at least 18 years old. You should have the physical ability to perform the work. A high school diploma is often required as well. Apprenticeship programs last 2 to 4 years.

If you want to be a self-employed tilesetter, business and accounting courses can be an asset. You will likely have to prepare your own estimates and invoices and do your own accounting.

Related College Programs

- Construction Trades, General

Other Suggested Qualifications

In addition to being physically fit and hard-working, tilesetters need to be good with their hands and precise in their work. Math skills are important: tilesetters should be able to calculate weights and angles, and take accurate wall and ceiling measurements. They must also be capable of figuring out how much material is required and the length of time needed to complete the work. Other useful skills include a good sense of color and design. Self-employed tilesetters typically have to prepare their own estimates and invoices, and do their own accounting. Business and accounting skills are important for these tilesetters.

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			

Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Introduction to the Built Environment	The Language of Architecture and Construction Information Technology Applications	Safety, Health and the Workplace Environment Principles of Construction	Applications in 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	Apprentice or Trainee
Earnings	Minimum wage to \$12 an hour
Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preferably a high school diploma (usually required for apprentices) • Good physical condition • Willing to learn
Responsibilities	Assisting tilesetters (preparing work surfaces, cutting tiles, cleaning up); moving tiles and mixing cement.

Level 2

Sample Title	Fully-Qualified Tilesetter
Earnings	\$13 to \$25 an hour
Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of on-the-job training or an apprenticeship
Responsibilities	Measuring areas to be tiled; cleaning areas; cutting tiles; laying tiles; grouting and finishing.

Level 3

Sample Title	Foreperson
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Level 3

Earnings \$25 to \$35 an hour

Requirements

- 5 to 10 years of job experience
- Good interpersonal skills

Responsibilities Overseeing all tilesetters; doing site supervision; making sure everything runs smoothly and that jobs are completed on time.

Level 4

Sample Title Owner of Tilesetting Company

Earnings \$30,000 to \$80,000 a year

Requirements

- Many years of experience
- Business knowledge

Responsibilities Doing everything a foreperson does plus handling the money (for example, giving job quotes, balancing the books; ordering materials and supplies).

Related Careers

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

- Bricklayer / Stonemason
- Carpenter
- Concrete Mason
- Construction Tradesperson
- Craftsperson
- Drywaller
- Flooring Installer
- Glazier
- Insulator
- Painter
- Plasterer
- Potter
- Roofer

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
Self-Employed	48
Construction	44

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

Other Resources

National Tile Contractors Association (NTCA)

This membership association offers educational workshops and works toward bettering the ceramic tile industry. Scroll over Education & Certification and then on Ask The Experts/FAQ to get answers to tiling questions.

<http://www.tile-assn.com>

Ceramic Tile Institute of America (CTIOA)

This organization promotes the use of ceramic tiles and natural stone through education. Click on Educational Services under the Categories heading to find information on courses and certification.

<http://www.ctioa.org>

Choose Construction

This is a career and education guide for students focusing on the construction industry in the US. Click on Career Options to discover different careers.

<http://www.chooseconstruction.org>

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 Terrazzo and Mosaic Association (NTMA)

A non-profit organization representing terrazzo contractors. Be sure to explore the Design Tools section for great resources.

<http://www.ntma.com>

InfoTile.Com (Australia)

An international resource for information on tiles.

<http://www.infotile.com>

Click here to access their Installing Tile guide:

<http://www.infotile.com/installingguide.aspx>

Occupational Outlook Handbook – Tile and Marble Setters

Career information from the US Department of Labor.

<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/construction-and-extraction/tile-and-marble-setters.htm>