

Camera Operator

Run the camera on film, television, live sport and news. Heavy gear, long days, union rates.

TYPICAL PAY

\$76,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$40k to \$114k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

2 to 6 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Film and television sets, studios, sports venues, news trucks, live e...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
Media arts, physics and any shop course. Shoot constantly and learn to edit what you shoot.
- 2 Training (optional)** 1 to 2 years
A 2-year college film or broadcasting diploma, or a one-year private film school. Or start as a paid production assistant instead.
- 3 Get on set** 1 to 2 years
Trainee or second assistant camera on shorts, commercials and low-budget productions. Say yes to everything.
- 4 Join the union** 2 to 4 years in
Work permit days on union productions, then apply for membership in a film technicians local such as IATSE (International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees) Local 873 in Toronto.
- 5 Operate** Year 4 and beyond
Move from first assistant camera to operator, and later to director of photography if you want to light as well as shoot.

Pros and cons

- + Strong union rates and overtime once you are in
- + Short and cheap training compared with the pay
- + You are on set, making the thing, not in an office
- Physically hard on your back, shoulders and knees
- Freelance by nature, so slow months happen
- Getting union membership takes years and connections

Good to know

Toronto and Vancouver are among North America's bigges...

The Canadian Media Producers Association puts total film and television production volume at about \$10.2 billion in 2025, supporting roughly 181,000 jobs, a large share of them crew positions.

You start by not touching the camera

New camera crew begin as trainees or second assistants: loading media, building the rig, keeping the paperwork. Operators are promoted from that job, not hired around it.

Optional boosts

Stabilizer and gimbal work. Drone flying. Live multi-camera. Underwater or aerial.

Where these numbers come from

Job Bank: Camera Operator in Canada, wages (updated November 2025)
IATSE Local 873, Toronto motion picture technicians
Vancouver Film School: Film Production program
Canadian Media Producers Association

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in Canadian dollars, based on Government of Canada Job Bank wage data and published salary grids. They vary by province, employer and experience. Tuition is for domestic students. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/ca/careers/camera-operator>



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