

CNC Machinist

Program and run CNC (computer numerical control) machines that cut metal to a hundredth of a millimetre.

TYPICAL PAY

\$62,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$44k to \$86k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

2 to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Machine shops, aerospace and auto plants, tool rooms

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
Math, physics and any manufacturing or shop class. Blueprint reading starts here.
- 2 College program (fast route)** 1 to 2 years
A one-year CNC (computer numerical control) certificate or two-year precision machining diploma. You leave able to set up and run machines.
- 3 Or apprentice as a machinist** About 4 years
Ontario's General Machinist trade is 8,000 hours: 7,280 on the job and 720 in school over three levels. College time can count toward it.
- 4 Certificate of Qualification and Red Seal** After your hours
Pass the provincial machinist exam and add the Red Seal endorsement, recognized across Canada.
- 5 Programmer** 1 to 3 years on the job
Learn CAM (computer-aided manufacturing) software to write the programs instead of just running them. This is where pay jumps.

Pros and cons

- + Fast entry, running machines within a year
- + Precision work with clear, measurable results
- + Paths into programming, quality and tool making
- Operator pay stays low until you can program
- Standing all shift in a loud shop with coolant and oil
- Manufacturing slumps mean layoffs

Optional boosts

CAM (computer-aided manufacturing) programming. Multi-axis machining. Tool and die or mould making. Quality inspection.

Good to know

One of the first Red Seal trades

Machinist was designated a Red Seal trade in 1965, in the program's first years. It is recognized in every province and territory.

The program is 70 years old

Numerical control was invented in the 1950s to machine aircraft parts from punched tape. The letter codes CNC (computer numerical control) machines read today still descend from that system.

Where these numbers come from

Job Bank: CNC (computer numerical control) machinists, wages (updated Nov 2025)

Red Seal Program: Machinist

Skilled Trades Ontario: General Machinist (429A)

Skilled Trades Ontario: CNC (computer numerical control) Programmer (670C)

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/cnc-machinist>



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