

Composer

Write music for film, TV, games, ads and the concert stage. No licence, no gatekeeper, and very little money at the start.

TYPICAL PAY

\$36,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$30k to \$101k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

4 to 8 years

after high school

DEMAND

Limited

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Home studios, film and game companies, orchestras, schools

How you get there

- 1 Play an instrument seriously** Years before you decide
Most composers start here. Reading music and hearing harmony are the tools of the job.
- 2 Music degree or conservatory** 4 years
A Bachelor of Music with a composition stream, for example at the University of Toronto, McGill, the University of British Columbia or Universite de Montreal. Admission is by audition plus a portfolio of your own pieces.
- 3 Learn the software** Alongside school
Notation and recording programs, sample libraries, mixing. Screen work is written and delivered on a computer.
- 4 Build credits** 2 to 4 years
Student films, theatre, games, ensembles that will read your piece. Every finished project is a calling card.
- 5 Get known by directors and music supervisors** Ongoing
Nearly all screen work comes from people who have worked with you or heard your reel.

Pros and cons

- + You make something that did not exist before
- + Work from anywhere with a laptop and headphones
- + Royalties can pay you for years after a job ends
- Median pay is about \$36,000, well below most careers needing a degree
- Income is lumpy: feast, then months of nothing
- Endless rewrites at someone else's taste

Optional boosts

Orchestration. Mixing and mastering. Game audio. Fast turnaround.

Good to know

One organization pays nearly every Canadian composer

SOCAN (the Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers of Canada) represents more than 185,000 music creators and publishers. If your music is played on the radio, in a show or in a bar i...

Thirty seconds can outearn a symphony

A short cue placed in a national ad campaign or a long-running series can pay far more over time than a concert piece that took a year to write. Screen and game work is where most composing income in Ca...

Where these numbers come from

Job Bank: Composer in Canada, wages (updated Nov 2025)
SOCAN (Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers of Canada)
Canada Council for the Arts: grants
University of Toronto Faculty of Music

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/composer>



Scan for the full clicker