

Illustrator

You draw for a living: books, games, magazines, packaging. The portfolio decides everything.

TYPICAL PAY

\$65,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$42k to \$110k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Limited

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Home studios, game and film studios, publishers, ad agencies

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 10 to 12
Draw constantly. Visual arts if your school has it, plus any computer or media course. Start posting work online.
- 2 Build an admission portfolio** Grade 12
Most illustration programs judge a portfolio alongside grades. Sheridan College and OCAD University (Ontario College of Art and Design) both require one, with an assessment fee.
- 3 Art school or self-teaching** 2 to 4 years
A 4-year illustration degree, a 2 to 3 year college diploma, or a structured self-taught plan built on online courses and mentors.
- 4 Placement and first clients** During and just after school
Sheridan College builds in a 14-week work placement. Outside school you find small paying jobs: local magazines, band posters, covers for small presses.
- 5 Working illustrator** 1 to 3 years after school
A focused portfolio of 10 to 15 pieces in one lane, an agent or a direct client list, and repeat work.

Pros and cons

- + You make things people keep
- + Works from anywhere, no licence, no gatekeeper
- + You can start earning before you finish school
- Income is uneven, especially for the first three years
- Job Bank rates the 3-year outlook as limited in most provinces
- AI image tools have cut hard into the cheap end of the market

Good to know

You usually keep the drawing

Under Canadian copyright law a freelance illustrator owns the copyright in what they draw unless the contract hands it over. That is why illustrators license a use instead of selling the picture outright.

The pool is bigger than it looks

Job Bank counts about 93,200 people in the group that holds illustrators and graphic designers. Most of them are designers, which is one reason illustration jobs feel scarce.

Optional boosts

Concept art. Storyboarding. 3D modelling. Motion.

Where these numbers come from

Job Bank: Illustrator in Canada, wages (updated November 2025)

Job Bank: Illustrator in Canada, job outlook

Sheridan College: Honours Bachelor of Illustration

OCAD University

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/illustrator>



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