

Penetration Tester

Get paid to break into companies' computer systems, with their written permission, so real attackers cannot.

TYPICAL PAY

\$103,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$62k to \$150k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

3 to 6 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Security consulting firms, banks, tech companies, government, re...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
 Computer science, math and English. Start learning Linux and basic networking at home now.
- 2 Diploma or degree** 2 to 4 years
 A 2-year college cybersecurity diploma (Seneca, Algonquin, and the polytechnics in Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver) or a 4-year computer science degree. Co-op programs help a lot.
- 3 First job in IT or security** 1 to 3 years
 Help desk, network technician, or security operations analyst. Most testers do 1 to 3 years here first. Practice hacking legally on training platforms in your spare time.
- 4 Get certified and move into testing** 6 to 12 months of study
 The OSCP (Offensive Security Certified Professional) is the certification most employers ask for. Its exam is a 24-hour hands-on test where you break into real machines.
- 5 Specialize** Ongoing
 Web apps, cloud, mobile, hardware, or red teaming (full attack simulations). Each specialty raises your rate.

Pros and cons

- + Puzzle solving you get paid well for
- + Remote friendly and in demand worldwide
- + No licence, skill is what counts
- Constant studying; the tools and attacks change every year
- Report writing is a big part of the job and nobody warns you
- Deadlines and billable-hour pressure at consulting firms

Good to know

The exam is 24 hours long

The OSCP (Offensive Security Certified Professional) exam gives you 24 hours to break into a set of machines while a proctor watches over a video link, then another day to write the report. People book time o...

Canada has a national cyber defence centre

The Canadian Centre for Cyber Security is part of the Communications Security Establishment, the country's signals intelligence agency. It publishes threat alerts and advice for business...

Optional boosts

OSCP (Offensive Security Certified Professional). CompTIA Security+. Web and cloud specialties. CISSP (Certified Information Systems Security Professional).

Where these numbers come from

Job Bank: Cybersecurity analyst (NOC 21220), wages (updated Nov 2025)
 OffSec: PEN-200 course and OSCP certification
 SAIT: Cyber Security diploma
 Seneca Polytechnic: Cybersecurity and Threat Management graduate certificate

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/penetration-tester>



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