

Railway Conductor

Run the train crew, switch the cars and own the paperwork. Hired off a high school diploma and trained on pay.

TYPICAL PAY

\$90,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$51k to \$117k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

1 to 2 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Rail yards, locomotive cabs, freight terminals, away-from-home bunk...

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
Grade 12 or equivalent, and you must be 18 or older.
- 2 Apply and get through screening** Weeks to months
Aptitude testing, panel interview, criminal record check, medical, hearing, vision and a drug and alcohol screen.
- 3 Paid classroom training** About 8 to 12 weeks
Operating rules, safety, air brakes, dangerous goods and paperwork. Held at a company training centre, often out of province.
- 4 On-the-job training and qualifying** Several months
Supervised trips with a qualified crew, then a certification exam. Federal rules require an overall mark of at least 80%.
- 5 Working conductor** Ongoing
You hold a spot on the seniority list. Junior people work the spare board until traffic or retirements move them up.

Pros and cons

- + Strong pay with no tuition and no degree
- + Pension and union protection at the big carriers
- + A clear promotion ladder to locomotive engineer
- The call board owns your calendar for years
- Cold, dark, outdoors and physically hard
- You will likely have to move to get hired

Good to know

The conductor, not the engineer, is in charge of the train

On most Canadian freight railways the conductor is responsible for the train, its paperwork and its crew. The engineer runs the locomotive; the conductor runs the trip.

Four rail jobs are certified by federal regulation

The Railway Employee Qualification Standards Regulations list locomotive engineer, conductor, yard foreman and transfer hostler as positions that need formal training, an 80% exam mark and re-exami...

Optional boosts

Locomotive engineer promotion. Qualifying on extra territory. Dangerous goods and hazardous materials training. Yard foreman.

Where these numbers come from

Job Bank: Railway Conductor, wages (updated Nov 2025)
Railway Employee Qualification Standards Regulations
Transport Canada: Rail transportation
CN Careers

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/railway-conductor>



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