Accountant (CPA)

Count, check and explain the money. A four year degree, one hard exam, and a job in every town.

TYPICAL PAY	PAY RANGE	TIME TO QUALIFY
$83,680 a year, full time	**$56k to $144k** starting to experienced	**4 to 6 years** after high school

DEMAND	LICENCE NEEDED	WHERE YOU WORK
Very high job outlook	**Yes** regulated job	**Accounting firms, company finance teams, government agencies, self...**

How you get there

1. **High school diploma** — Grade 12
   Take every math course offered, plus any business or accounting elective. Good spreadsheet habits start here.
2. **Bachelor's degree in accounting** — 4 years
   Four years at a public or private university. An internship in your third year is how most people get their first job offer.
3. **Meet your state's credit rule** — 0 to 1 year
   Many states still ask for 150 semester credits, about a year past a normal degree, often taken as a master's. Several states now allow a bachelor's degree plus extra work experience instead. Check your own state board.
4. **Pass the Uniform CPA Examination** — 12 to 18 months
   Three core sections covering auditing, financial reporting, and taxation and regulation, plus one discipline section you choose. Most people study 300 to 400 hours in total.
5. **Experience and license** — 1 year
   Usually one year of work signed off by a licensed CPA (certified public accountant), then your state board issues the license.

Pros and cons

+ Every business in the country needs one
+ A clear, published exam route to higher pay
+ Works in any state and in any industry

– Busy season means 55 to 70 hour weeks
– The exam is long and people fail sections
– Detail errors are a big deal and get caught

Good to know

April 15 runs the calendar
The federal tax filing deadline sets the rhythm of the whole profession. Firms call January to April busy season, and a lot of accountants take their real holiday in May.

The exam has a clock on it
Once you pass your first section, most states give you 30 months to pass the other three before the first one expires. That deadline is why people study while working.

Optional boosts

CPA (certified public accountant). Certified Management Accountant. Certified Internal Auditor. Certified Fraud Examiner.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Accountants and Auditors (13-2011.00)
NASBA (National Association of State Boards of Accountancy)
Gies College of Business, University of Illinois: Accountancy
USAJOBS: the federal government's official jobs site

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: https://career.help/us/careers/accountant

Scan for the full clicker