

Actor

Paid by the hour, hired by the job. No license, no degree required, and no guarantee of work.

TYPICAL PAY

\$60,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$34k to \$299k

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

Theaters, film and television sets, voice studios, theme parks, com...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 9 to 12
 Every school play, every community theater audition. Voice and movement training starts paying off early.
- 2 Training, if you want it** 0 to 4 years
 A four year bachelor of fine arts in acting, a two or three year conservatory, or ongoing private classes. All three are respected. Admission is by audition, not grades.
- 3 Build credits** 1 to 3 years
 Student films, small theaters, unpaid shorts. You need footage and a resume before an agent will meet you.
- 4 Get representation** Varies
 An agent submits you for auditions you cannot reach yourself. They take a percentage, usually 10 percent, and they never charge you up front.
- 5 Join a union** After qualifying work
 Actors' Equity Association for stage, and the screen actors union for film and television. Union membership unlocks the contracts with minimum pay, pensions and health coverage.

Pros and cons

- + No license, no degree, no gatekeeping exam
- + You can start at 14 in a school play
- + Work you are genuinely proud of
- 91 percent of people in it call it extremely competitive
- Income is unpredictable and often small
- Employment is projected to be flat through 2034

Good to know

The government pays actors by the hour

Most occupations in the national wage survey get an annual salary figure. Actors get an hourly one, because the work is too irregular to add up into a year. That single detail tells you more about the job tha...

About 57,000 actors, and flat growth

The Department of Labor's occupation database counted roughly 57,000 people employed as actors in 2024 and projects little or no change in that number through 2034. It is a small field that is not gett...

Optional boosts

Singing. Dialects and accents. Stage combat and movement. Improvisation.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Actors (27-2011.00)
 O*NET OnLine: Actors, wages and outlook
 Actors' Equity Association: how to join

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/actor>



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