

Barber

A licensed trade you can finish in under a year, with your own chair and your own clients at the end of it.

TYPICAL PAY

\$38,210

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$29k to \$76k

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

Barbershops, salons, a rented booth, home and mobile visits

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma or GED (General Educational Development test)** Grade 12
Most states require one before you can enroll in barber school.
- 2 Barber school** 9 to 15 months
A state approved program. Full-time programs usually run at least 9 months, and each state sets its own required hours, commonly somewhere around 1,000 to 1,500.
- 3 Or an apprenticeship, in some states** 2 to 3 years
A few states let you train under a licensed barber in a working shop instead of paying tuition. The hour count is higher, but you earn while you learn.
- 4 State board exam** A few weeks after school
A written test plus a practical exam where you cut and shave on a mannequin or a live model in front of an examiner.
- 5 Get licensed and build a book** 1 to 3 years
Your first year is about speed and regulars. After that you choose between commission, booth rent and your own shop.

Pros and cons

- + Licensed and working in about a year
- + Your clients follow you, not the shop
- + Tips and cash flow from your first week in the chair
- You build income slowly from an empty book
- Standing all day, and your wrists and back pay for it
- No paid sick days unless you arrange them yourself

Optional boosts

Straight razor shaves and beard work. Fades and detail work. Hair replacement systems. Color.

Good to know

The pole is a surgical leftover

Barbers once pulled teeth and let blood as well as cutting hair. The red stripe on the pole stands for blood, the white for the bandage, and the pole itself for the stick patients gripped to make a vein stand out.

Every state licenses barbers, and no two agree

Required school hours, whether an apprenticeship counts, and what a barber may legally do to hair color are all set state by state. There is no national barber license.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Barbers
California Board of Barbering and Cosmetology
Apprenticeship.gov: Registered Apprenticeship, US Department of Labor

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/barber>



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