

Barista

The most common first job in the country, and a real craft if you decide to take it seriously.

TYPICAL PAY

\$31,200

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$23k to \$43k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 1 year

after high school

DEMAND

Good

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Coffee shops, cafes, drive-through kiosks, hotel and airport counters

How you get there

- 1 No qualification needed** Now
 Cafes hire on attitude, reliability and whether you stay calm in a rush. Many hire at 16.
- 2 Apply** Days to weeks
 Chains hire online. Independents still hire off a resume handed over in person at a quiet hour, which is worth knowing.
- 3 On the job training** 1 to 2 weeks
 Espresso, milk, the register, food safety and cleaning, usually inside one or two weeks.
- 4 Get good on purpose** 6 months to 2 years
 Dialing in a grinder, tasting properly, latte art, and knowing where the coffee came from. This is what separates a trade from a job.
- 5 Move up or move across** 1 to 5 years
 Shift lead and store manager, or sideways into roasting, wholesale, cafe ownership and equipment work.

Pros and cons

- + You can start with no qualifications at all
- + Tips, and shifts that fit around school
- + A genuine craft sitting underneath a simple job
- Low pay that does not rise much without moving up
- Very early starts and split shifts
- Rude customers are simply part of the job

Good to know

Espresso is a method, not a bean

There is no espresso plant. Espresso is coffee brewed by forcing hot water through finely ground coffee under pressure, so any coffee can be an espresso if you grind and brew it that way.

Card readers changed the job

Tip prompts on card machines pushed tipping into places that never had it. For many baristas tips are now a predictable few dollars an hour rather than the loose change left in a jar.

Optional boosts

Specialty Coffee Association certification. Competition. Roasting. Wholesale and training.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Fast Food and Counter Workers, the group baristas are counted in
 Specialty Coffee Association: Coffee Skills Program
 US Department of Labor: minimum wages for tipped employees
 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/barista>



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