

Choreographer

Make the dances and teach them to the people performing them. Almost everyone does it after years of dancing first.

TYPICAL PAY

\$55,310

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$34k to \$139k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

4 to 10 years

after high school

DEMAND

Good

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Dance studios, theaters, companies, film and television set...

How you get there

- Serious dance training** Years, starting young
 Most choreographers started in a studio well before high school. Ballet technique underneath whatever style you love is the usual foundation.
- High school**
 Keep training outside school. Start making short pieces on your friends now, badly, on purpose. That is how you learn.
- College dance program or a company job** 4 years, or none
 A BFA (Bachelor of Fine Arts) in dance is the common route, and schools like Ohio State also offer graduate degrees. Plenty of people skip it and audition straight into a company instead.
- Perform first, choreograph second** 3 to 8 years
 Very few people are hired to make dances before they have danced professionally. This is where the years go.
- Build a body of work** Ongoing
 Small commissions, student pieces, your own company, music videos. Video of finished work is your resume.

Pros and cons

- + You make the thing, and it exists because you made it
- + No licensing gate, no exam, no permission needed to start
- + Work travels: theater, film, television, cruise ships, schools
- Income is uneven and often seasonal
- Years of dancing first, usually on a dancer's pay
- Rejection is constant and mostly unexplained

Good to know

Dances can be copyrighted

Choreography has been protected by United States copyright law since 1976, as long as it is written down or recorded. That is why a choreographer can be paid royalties every week a Broadway show runs.

There is a union, and it is old

The Stage Directors and Choreographers Society was founded in 1965 and negotiates contracts for Broadway, touring shows, off-Broadway and resident theaters across the country.

Optional boosts

More than one style. Filming and editing. Rehearsal directing. Teaching credentials.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Choreographers (27-2032.00)
 Stage Directors and Choreographers Society
 Dance/USA, the national service organization for dance
 Ohio State University Department of Dance

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/choreographer>



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