

Customs Broker

Get imported goods legally into the country. One federal exam stands between you and a licensed career.

TYPICAL PAY

\$80,730

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$48k to \$134k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

1 to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

**Brokerage and freight forwarding
offices, ports and airports, import...**

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma or GED (General Educational Development certificate)** Grade 12
 Enough to get an entry level job in a brokerage. Being organized and precise matters more than your transcript.
- 2 Get into a brokerage** 1 to 3 years
 Start as an entry writer, import clerk or operations assistant. You learn tariff classification, valuation and country of origin rules on real freight.
- 3 Study for the exam** 3 to 9 months
 It is open book, on the tariff schedule and the customs regulations, but the books are enormous. Courses run through the National Customs Brokers and Forwarders Association of America and private providers.
- 4 Sit the examination** One day
 The Customs Broker License Examination runs twice a year, on the fourth Wednesday of April and October. 80 questions, and you need 57 right to pass.
- 5 Apply for the license** Several months
 You must be at least 21, a United States citizen, not a federal employee, and of good moral character. Then a background investigation and fingerprinting.

Pros and cons

- + A licensed, nationally recognized career with no degree required
- + Very low cost to enter compared with anything else that pays this well
- + Office work, normal weeks, no shift rotation
- The exam is brutal. Recent sittings have passed only 12% to 30% of candidates
- Deadline pressure is constant and mistakes cost clients money
- Tariff policy shifts with politics and can reshape your workload overnight

Optional boosts

Certified Customs Specialist. Export credentials. Free trade agreement expertise. A trade compliance role at an importer.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Compliance Officers

Customs and Border Protection: customs brokers

Customs and Border Protection: the broker license examination

National Customs Brokers and Forwarders Association of America

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/customs-broker>

Good to know

Most candidates fail

Customs and Border Protection publishes the results. Before appeals, the April 2026 exam passed 22% of candidates, October 2025 passed 12% and April 2025 passed 30%. Sitting it twice is normal and nobody...

It is open book and still that hard

You are allowed the tariff schedule and the customs regulations in the room with you. The difficulty is that the answer is buried in thousands of pages and you have limited time to find it.



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