

Day trader

Buy and sell stocks, options or futures within the same day, with your own money. Most people who try lose it.

TYPICAL INCOME

\$0

a year, varies widely

INCOME RANGE

\$0 to \$50k

most to the successful few

TIME TO QUALIFY

2 to 5 years

after high school

DEMAND

Limited

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Home, with a laptop or a desk of screens and a broker account

How you get there

- 1 Learn how markets work** 2 to 3 months
Orders, spreads, margin, options and taxes, from free broker and regulator material before any paid course.
- 2 Practice with fake money** 3 to 6 months
Use a broker's practice account and write down every trade and why you made it.
- 3 Trade very small with real money** 6 to 12 months
Tiny positions in a cash account, so mistakes cost little. Real money feels different from practice.
- 4 Keep a full record** 1 to 2 years
A journal of every trade, fee and result. If it does not show a profit after costs for a year or more, you do not have an edge yet.
- 5 Only then think about scaling up** Years
Most traders who succeed kept a job until their record covered several years and their savings could cover a year of losses.

Pros and cons

- + No boss, no degree and no license needed
- + You can start small and learn with fake money for free
- + Work from anywhere with a good connection
- Most people who try lose money
- No paycheck, benefits or retirement match
- Stressful and lonely, with losing streaks that hurt

Good to know

Less than a bank teller

In the Brazilian study of almost 20,000 day traders, only 0.5% of those who kept going for over 300 days earned more than a bank teller's starting salary.

Losers keep going

In Taiwan, 74% of all day trading volume came from traders with a history of losses. People kept trading despite the evidence in their own accounts.

Optional boosts

Risk a tiny slice per trade. Stick to one market and one method. Measure everything. Stop trading on bad days.

Where these numbers come from

Chague, De-Losso and Giovannetti (2020): Day Trading for a Living?
Barber, Lee, Liu, Odean and Zhang (2020): Learning, Fast or Slow, Review of Asset Pricing Studies
Financial Industry Regulatory Authority: Regulatory Notice 26-10, new intraday margin standards
Financial Industry Regulatory Authority: Understanding the new intraday margin requirements

Numbers checked October 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/day-trader>



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