Economist

Measure how money, work and prices actually behave, then say what a policy or a merger will really do.

TYPICAL PAY **$124,720** a year, full time	PAY RANGE **$67k to $238k** starting to experienced	TIME TO QUALIFY **4 to 9 years** after high school
DEMAND **Limited** job outlook	LICENCE NEEDED **No** anyone can do it	WHERE YOU WORK **Federal agencies, consulting firms, banks, universities, tech compani...**

How you get there

1. **High school diploma** — Grade 12
   Take calculus if your school has it. That one course decides how hard the first year of an economics major feels.
2. **Bachelor's degree in economics** — 4 years
   Add real math: calculus through multivariable, linear algebra and statistics. An economics degree without math closes the door to graduate school.
3. **Research assistant job** — 1 to 2 years
   Two years at the Federal Reserve, a federal agency, a consulting firm or a university lab. This is where you learn to handle real data, and where your recommendation letters come from.
4. **Master's degree or doctorate** — 2 to 6 years
   A master's degree is enough for most government and industry jobs. A doctorate takes 5 to 6 funded years and is required to be called an economist in research and academic work.
5. **Economist role** — After graduate school
   Agency, bank, consulting firm, tech company or university. The job title changes but the work is the same: data, models, and writing up what they mean.

Pros and cons

+ High pay for a research career
+ The doctorate is funded, so the longest path is also the cheapest
+ Your work can change a real policy or a real merger

– Slow growth in the number of jobs with the actual title
– Six or more years of school for the best roles
– A lot of careful work gets ignored for political reasons

Good to know

The economics Nobel is not really a Nobel
Alfred Nobel never endowed a prize in economics. Sweden's central bank created one in his memory in 1968, and it is awarded alongside the originals. Some of Nobel's own descendants have objected to it e...

It was insulted into its nickname
The Victorian writer Thomas Carlyle called economics the dismal science in 1849. He meant it as an attack, and economists have been using the phrase about themselves ever since.

Optional boosts

Labor economics. Industrial organization and antitrust. Health economics. Forensic economics.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Economists (19-3011.00)
American Economic Association
Federal Reserve Board: economic research and careers
USAJOBS, the federal government's official hiring site

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/economist

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