

Enlisted Service Member

Join straight out of high school, get trained and paid from day one, and sign away several years of your choices to do it.

TYPICAL PAY

\$38,452

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$25k to \$53k

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

Bases in the United States and overseas, ships, aircraft, field units

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
A diploma is the standard requirement across the branches. Stay out of legal trouble and get reasonably fit before you apply.
- 2 Talk to a recruiter and take the ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery)** Weeks
This test decides whether you qualify and, just as importantly, which jobs you are allowed to pick.
- 3 Medical exam and contract** A few days
At a Military Entrance Processing Station you are examined, screened and then sign a contract naming your job and your term of service.
- 4 Basic training** 2 to 3 months
Roughly 8 to 13 weeks depending on the branch. Fitness, weapons, drill and the transition to military life.
- 5 Job school** 1 month to 2 years
Technical training in your specialty. A few weeks for some jobs, more than a year for languages, nuclear work or advanced electronics.
- 6 First unit** Ongoing
You arrive at your assigned base or ship as a qualified junior member and start doing the job for real.

Pros and cons

- + Paid, housed and trained from the week after high school, with no debt
- + Real technical skills and security clearances that civilians pay for
- + Education benefits that cover a degree afterwards
- You cannot quit. A contract is years long and legally binding
- You move every two or three years and do not choose where
- Deployments mean long separations from family and real physical risk

Optional boosts

Technical and cyber jobs. Medical specialties. Aviation maintenance. Language training.

Where these numbers come from

O*NET OnLine: Military Enlisted Tactical Operations and Air/Weapons Specialists and Crew Members, All Other (55-3019.00)

United States Army: money and pay charts

Military OneSource: military pay guide

Careers in the Military

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/enlisted-service-member>

Good to know

Everyone at the same rank is paid the same

Congress sets one basic pay table for all six branches. A Navy sailor, an Air Force technician and a Marine at the same rank with the same years of service earn identical basic pay, no matter how different the...

The allowances are not taxed

Housing and food allowances are paid on top of basic pay and are not subject to income tax. That is why a junior service member's real spending power is higher than their salary figure looks next to a civili...



Scan for the full clicker