

Esports player

Play a video game competitively for prize money or a team salary. A few hundred people in the country make a living.

TYPICAL INCOME

\$0

a year, varies widely

INCOME RANGE

\$0 to \$150k

most to the successful few

TIME TO QUALIFY

2 to 6 years

after high school

DEMAND

Limited

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Your bedroom, a team house or practice facility, arenas for big events

How you get there

- 1 Reach the top of ranked play** Years, often from age 12 to 16
Scouts look at the top few hundred players on a region's ladder. Being very good is not enough.
- 2 Join amateur teams and online tournaments** 1 to 3 years
Play with a fixed team, learn communication and roles, and build a record people can look up.
- 3 Get noticed by a second-tier team** 1 to 2 years
Development leagues and academy teams. Pay is low or nothing, but this is where top teams scout.
- 4 Sign with a top-league team** Often age 18 to 21
Riot's top Valorant leagues require players to be 18. Contracts set salary, streaming rules and prize splits.
- 5 Plan the exit** A career of about 3 to 6 years
Most pros stop competing in their mid-twenties and move to streaming, coaching or work in the industry.

Pros and cons

- + You get paid to play the game you love, if you make it
- + Travel, crowds and a real fan base
- + Streaming can turn a short career into a longer one
- Only a few hundred people in the country make a living
- Careers usually end in the mid-twenties
- Leagues and teams fold, and games fall out of fashion

Good to know

Reaction speed starts slowing at 24

A study of 3,305 StarCraft II players aged 16 to 44 found that in-game response speed begins to decline at about age 24. Older players made up for it with smarter play, not speed.

\$1.68 billion, shared very unevenly

Esports Earnings has tracked about \$1.68 billion in prize money across about 134,000 players and 653 games. The top player alone, a Dota 2 pro, has won about \$7.2 million.

Optional boosts

A top ladder rank held for months. A role and a champion or agent pool. Clear communication in English. A clean record.

Where these numbers come from

Esports Earnings: prize money totals by player, game and country
Esports Earnings: top United States players by prize money, 2025
Thompson, Blair and Henrey (2014), Over the Hill at 24, PLOS ONE
National Association of Collegiate Esports: about varsity programs

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/esports-player>



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