

Fashion Designer

Design clothes, shoes and accessories that get made and sold. A portfolio opens the door, not a diploma.

TYPICAL PAY

\$80,960

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$39k to \$147k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

2 to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Limited

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

**Apparel company design rooms,
sample rooms, factories, studios,...**

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grade 12
Art, sewing, and any class that teaches you to draw a figure. Start a sketchbook and start making real things, badly, now.
- 2 Build an application portfolio** 6 to 12 months
Fashion programs admit on a portfolio: drawings, garments you sewed, an idea carried through. Schools publish exactly what they want to see.
- 3 Fashion school** 2 to 4 years
A two-year associate degree or a four-year bachelor's. Draping, pattern making, sewing, textiles, and digital design tools.
- 4 Internships while you study** Two summers
One or two in a design room. This is how almost every first job actually happens in this industry.
- 5 Assistant designer, then designer** 2 to 4 years
Two to four years supporting a designer before you own a category of your own.

Pros and cons

- + You make real objects people wear
- + A two-year degree can genuinely get you in
- + Skills transfer to costume, technical design and buying
- Employment is expected to grow slower than average
- The jobs are concentrated in two expensive cities
- Unpaid or barely paid internships filter people out

Good to know

Copying a design is mostly legal here

Copyright in the United States protects a print on fabric but generally not the cut and shape of a garment, because clothing counts as a useful article. That is why fast fashion copies of a runway silhouette a...

The cheapest famous fashion school is a public one

The Fashion Institute of Technology is part of the State University of New York, so in-state students pay public college prices for a program that feeds directly into the New York industry. Its main fashion design...

Optional boosts

Pattern making and draping. Technical design. 3D garment software. Sustainability and materials.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Fashion Designers (27-1022.00)
Council of Fashion Designers of America
Fashion Institute of Technology: Fashion Design
National Endowment for the Arts

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/fashion-designer>



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