

Film Director

Decide what every shot, performance and cut is meant to do. Nobody hires you for it until you have already done it.

TYPICAL PAY

\$90,360

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$46k to \$199k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

3 to 8 years

after high school

DEMAND

Good

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Film and television sets, location shoots, editing suites, production...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grade 12
Make things constantly with a phone and free editing software. Drama, English and art classes matter more than any technology class.
- 2 Film school, or not** 0 to 4 years
A degree gives you equipment, collaborators and a deadline. Plenty of working directors skipped it and learned on sets instead.
- 3 Work on other people's sets** 2 to 5 years
Production assistant, camera assistant, editor, assistant director. You learn how a set really runs and you meet everyone.
- 4 Direct your own short work** Ongoing
Shorts, music videos, spec commercials, documentary pieces. This becomes the reel that gets you meetings.
- 5 First paid directing job** Year 5 to 10
Usually a commercial, a low budget feature or an episode of television handed to you by someone who has seen your work.

Pros and cons

- + You decide what the thing actually is
- + No license, no gatekeeping exam, anyone can start
- + Guild work brings residuals, health and pension
- Years of unpaid directing before anyone pays you
- Project work means gaps with no income at all
- Twelve to fourteen hour shoot days, six days a week

Optional boosts

Assistant directing. Editing. Commercials and music videos. Documentary.

Good to know

The directors' organization is a union

The Directors Guild of America bargains contracts with studios, keeps lists of signatory employers, and handles complaints about conduct on set. It looks like a prestigious club from the outside. It works like a...

The wage survey cannot tell directors from producers

There is one occupation code for producers and directors together, covering film, television, radio and stage. Any salary number you read for directing in the United States is really a number for both jobs at o...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Producers and Directors (27-2012.00)
Directors Guild of America
University of Southern California School of Cinematic Arts
American Film Institute Conservatory

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/film-director>



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