

Forensic Scientist

Analyze evidence in a crime laboratory and then defend your findings under cross examination.

TYPICAL PAY

\$72,060

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$48k to \$117k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

4 to 6 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

State and city crime laboratories, medical examiner offices, federal...

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
 Chemistry and biology are the two that decide whether this path is open to you. Keep your record clean, because every lab runs a deep background check.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
 Forensic science, chemistry or biology. A chemistry degree is often the safer choice, because it opens laboratory work everywhere if crime labs do not hire that year.
- 3 Internship in a laboratory** Summers
 Crime labs and medical examiner offices take a small number of interns. It is the single strongest thing on an application.
- 4 Apply and clear the background**
 Application, written test, panel interview, drug history, and at many agencies a polygraph. Expect months, and expect competition.
- 5 In-house training and a competency test** 6 to 18 months
 New analysts do not touch real casework alone. You work under a trainer through a written program and pass a competency test before your results go to court.

Pros and cons

- + Real laboratory science with a public purpose
- + Government pay scales, pension and job security
- + Training is paid for once you are hired
- Far more graduates than jobs, so getting hired takes patience
- Evidence from violent crime and child cases is genuinely disturbing
- Cross examination is designed to make you look wrong

Good to know

Television lied to a whole generation

Results take weeks, not an ad break. Analysts do not interview suspects, do not carry guns and usually do not visit scenes. Juries who expect otherwise are a known problem that prosecutors now pl...

The science itself got put on trial

A major national review found that several long-accepted comparison disciplines had weaker scientific backing than courts assumed. The federal standards agency now runs a committee structure and a pub...

Optional boosts

DNA analysis. Toxicology. Firearms and tool marks. Digital forensics.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Forensic Science Technicians (19-4092.00)
 American Academy of Forensic Sciences
 University of Central Florida, Bachelor of Science in Forensic Science
 National Institute of Standards and Technology: forensic science

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/forensic-scientist>



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