

Game Developer

Build the thing you grew up playing. Great work, hard industry, and a portfolio matters more than a diploma.

TYPICAL PAY

\$135,980

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$82k to \$215k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

2 to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Game studios, publishers, remote teams, your own bedroom

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 9 to 12
 Start making now. Learn one language properly and finish small games, even bad ones. Finished beats ambitious every single time.
- 2 Learn an engine** 6 months to 2 years, alongside school
 Unity uses the C sharp language, Unreal Engine uses C++. Both are free. Pick one and go deep rather than sampling both.
- 3 Degree, usually computer science** 2 to 4 years
 Four years at a public university is the safest bet. Specialist game programs exist and some are excellent, but they cost more and narrow your options.
- 4 Build a portfolio** Throughout
 Three to five finished projects, published where people can play them, plus game jams. For a programming job, one deep technical project beats five shallow ones.
- 5 First job** After graduation
 Junior programmer, associate designer, or quality assurance with a plan to move. Expect to apply to a lot of places. Internships are the strongest route in.

Pros and cons

- + You make things millions of people play
- + Skills transfer straight into higher-paid software jobs
- + You can start learning today for free
- Games pay less than other software for the same skill
- Crunch before shipping is still normal at many studios
- Tens of thousands of game jobs were cut between 2023 and 2025

Good to know

Games out-earn movies and music together

Worldwide, video games take in more money than the movie box office and recorded music combined. The biggest releases cost as much to make as a blockbuster film and employ more people for lon...

The store takes a third

The big digital storefronts keep roughly 30 cents of every dollar a game earns. Sell \$100,000 worth of game and about \$70,000 reaches you, before taxes and before you pay anyone who helped.

Optional boosts

C++ and engine internals. Graphics and shader programming. Tools and pipeline programming. Multiplayer and networking.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Software Developers (15-1252.00)
 DigiPen Institute of Technology, game development degrees
 International Game Developers Association
 Apprenticeship.gov, United States Department of Labor

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/game-developer>



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