

Locksmith

Open what is stuck, secure what is not, and learn a trade you can run out of a van.

TYPICAL PAY

\$51,320

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$36k to \$79k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

1 to 3 years

after high school

DEMAND

Limited

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Service vans, hardware shops, campuses, hospitals, offices

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
Shop class, electronics and anything mechanical. Fine motor skill and patience matter more than grades.
- 2 Get hired by a shop** Weeks to months of asking
Start as a helper or counter person cutting keys. This is how almost everyone learns. Small independent shops are more likely to take on a beginner than a big franchise.
- 3 Learn the mechanics** 1 to 3 years
Pin tumbler locks, rekeying, master key systems, door hardware, safes. Some people add a short trade course or the training ALOA (the locksmith trade association) runs at its conventions.
- 4 Get registered if your state requires it** Weeks
A background check and fingerprints in the states that license the trade. In others you can simply start working.
- 5 Certify and specialize** Ongoing
Take ALOA exams, add automotive key programming or electronic access control, or move into safe work.

Pros and cons

- + No tuition and no degree, you learn while being paid
- + Genuinely interesting puzzle work rather than repetition
- + Easy to go out on your own with a van and a phone
- The overall job count is shrinking, so getting the first job takes persistence
- Emergency calls come at night and on holidays
- Cheap online tools and unlicensed operators undercut honest prices

Optional boosts

Certified Registered Locksmith. Certified Professional Locksmith. Certified Master Locksmith. Safe and vault work.

Good to know

Car keys turned into computers

Since the late 1990s most car keys carry a transponder chip that the vehicle has to recognize before it will start. That is why a spare key costs hundreds of dollars instead of two. Locksmiths who invested in...

Safes get opened by feel

A skilled safe technician can open many mechanical combination safes by manipulation: turning the dial and reading the tiny mechanical feedback from the wheels inside, no drilling and no dama...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Locksmiths and Safe Repairers (49-9094.00)

ALOA Security Professionals Association: certifications

California Bureau of Security and Investigative Services: locksmiths

Texas Department of Public Safety: private security individual licenses

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/locksmith>



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