

Machinist

Cut metal to a thousandth of an inch and make the parts everything else is built from.

TYPICAL PAY

\$58,750

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$39k to \$80k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

1 to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Limited

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

**Machine shops, factories,
aerospace and medical suppliers,...**

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
Shop class if your school still has one, plus geometry and trigonometry. Both get used daily.
- 2 Pick your entry** Right after school
A community college machining certificate, a registered apprenticeship that pays from day one, or getting hired as an operator and learning inside the shop.
- 3 Learn to run and then set up machines** 1 to 3 years
Running a job someone else set up is the entry level. Setting up your own, choosing tools and holding tolerance is where the pay is.
- 4 Add programming** During or after
CNC (computer numerical control) programming and CAM (computer-aided manufacturing) software turn a machine operator into a machinist who can quote and plan a job.
- 5 Credential and specialize** Ongoing
Credentials from NIMS (the National Institute for Metalworking Skills) prove the skill on paper. Then move toward tool and die, mold making, inspection or aerospace work.

Pros and cons

- + Cheap or free to train for, with real earnings from the start
- + Genuine craft skill that takes years to build and cannot be faked
- + Overtime is nearly always available
- The federal outlook for the occupation is below average as automation spreads
- Standing all shift on concrete, with noise, oil and metal chips
- Shift work is common because the machines run around the clock

Optional boosts

Tool and die making. Five-axis machining. Swiss screw machining. Quality inspection.

Good to know

The unit of the trade is a thousandth of an inch

Machinists talk in thousandths, and call them thou. A human hair is roughly two to four of them thick. Precision work routinely holds tolerances tighter than that, which is why the measuring tools cost m...

Machinists built everything else

Before there were machinists there was no way to make two identical parts. The trade made interchangeable parts possible, and interchangeable parts made mass production possible. Every other...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Machinists (51-4041.00)

National Institute for Metalworking Skills: credentialing
Apprenticeship.gov

Houston Community College: manufacturing programs

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/machinist>



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