

Makeup Artist

Paint faces for camera, stage, weddings and counters. The film and television side pays well, and getting in takes years of logged days.

TYPICAL PAY

\$97,150

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$23k to \$167k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

1 to 5 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Film and television sets, theaters, photo studios, salons, weddings

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
Art, theater tech and chemistry. Do makeup for every school play and every friend who will sit still, and photograph all of it.
- 2 Get licensed if your state needs it** 6 to 12 months
An esthetician or cosmetology program. Texas requires 750 hours for an esthetician license plus a written and a practical exam.
- 3 Build a portfolio and a kit** 1 to 2 years
Test shoots with photographers, student films, theater. Free work is normal at this stage and should stop within about a year.
- 4 Assist working artists** 1 to 3 years
You carry the kit, you clean brushes, you watch. This is where you learn set etiquette, continuity and speed.
- 5 Log days toward the union roster** 3 to 5 years
In Los Angeles one route is 60 days a year in three different years within the last five, documented with pay stubs and call sheets.

Pros and cons

- + Training is short and cheap compared with a degree
- + Union film and television work pays well with real benefits
- + You see your work on screen and on stage
- The first few years pay almost nothing
- Freelance work is feast and famine, with no sick pay
- Days are 12 to 14 hours and start before dawn

Optional boosts

Hair as well as makeup. Special effects and prosthetics. Airbrush and camera-ready technique. Period and character research.

Good to know

The high median hides two different jobs

The wage survey line called makeup artists, theatrical and performance is small and dominated by union film and television crews in Los Angeles and New York. Everyone doing makeup at a spa,...

You have to pass a color blindness test

To join the Make-Up Artists and Hair Stylists Guild in Los Angeles, makeup artists have to pass a color blindness test and complete a safety class. Hair stylists joining the same local have to show a state...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Makeup Artists, Theatrical and Performance
Local 706, the Make-Up Artists and Hair Stylists Guild: how to join
Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation: esthetician license
Federal Student Aid

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/makeup-artist>



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