

Metal Fabricator

Turn flat steel and drawings into stairs, tanks, trailers and building frames. Cut it, bend it, fit it, weld it.

TYPICAL PAY

\$51,330

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$38k to \$72k

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

**Fabrication shops, steel mills,
shipyards, truck and trailer plants**

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma or an equivalency certificate** Grade 12
Shop, welding and geometry classes matter more here than your grade point average.
- 2 Get in the door** 0 to 1 year
Two routes. Hire on as a shop helper and learn from the fitters, or do a one-year welding and fabrication certificate first so you arrive already able to burn and weld.
- 3 Learn layout** 1 to 2 years
Cutting and welding is the easy half. Reading a drawing, squaring a frame and allowing for the way steel pulls as it cools is what makes you a fabricator instead of a welder.
- 4 Pass welding qualification tests** A day each
Employers test you on the specific joints and positions your work requires. Those test records are your real credential.
- 5 Lead fitter or shop foreman** 4 years and up
Running a job from the drawing to the paint booth, or moving into inspection, estimating or programming the cutting machines.

Pros and cons

- + You can start with no debt and no degree
- + You point at real things you built
- + Indoor, year round work in most shops
- Employment in this occupation is expected to decline
- Loud, hot, dirty, and hard on your knees and back
- Burns, cuts and fume exposure are routine risks

Good to know

A fabricator is not just a welder

Welding is one step near the end. The skill that gets paid is layout: turning a flat drawing into marks on a plate so that the pieces actually fit when you stand them up.

Steel moves when you weld it

Heat makes steel expand, and as the weld cools it pulls. Good fabricators build that pull into the setup on purpose, clamping and sequencing welds so the finished piece ends up straight.

Optional boosts

More welding processes. CNC (computer numerical control) plasma and laser programming. Certified Welding Inspector. Blueprint reading and estimating.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Structural Metal Fabricators and Fitters
American Welding Society: certification and education
Apprenticeship.gov, the federal Registered Apprenticeship site
Mine Safety and Health Administration, 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/metal-fabricator>



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