

Nail Technician

Manicures, pedicures and nail art. A few hundred hours of school, a state license, then you build a client list.

TYPICAL PAY

\$35,760

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$29k to \$50k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 1 year

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

**Nail salons, day spas, hair salons,
booth rental, mobile and home vis...**

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grade 12
Finish it. Most states require a diploma or an equivalent, and a minimum age of 16 or 17.
- 2 Nail school** 2 to 6 months
A state approved course. New York requires 250 hours; other states set their own number and some are considerably higher.
- 3 Pass the state exams** One day each
A written exam on sanitation, anatomy and state law, plus a practical exam where you perform services on a hand model.
- 4 Get licensed and hired** Weeks
Apply to your state board, then start on commission at a salon that has walk-in traffic.
- 5 Build a book, then rent a station** 2 to 5 years
Once your regulars fill your week, booth rental or your own small salon is where the money is.

Pros and cons

- + Licensed and earning in under a year for a few thousand dollars
- + Creative work with a visible result every hour
- + Flexible hours and easy to work part-time
- Low pay, with a median in the mid thirties
- Chemical fumes and dust, so ventilation and a good mask matter
- Hunched posture, and wrist and neck strain are common

Optional boosts

Nail art. Hard gel and acrylic extensions. Full cosmetology license. Medical or advanced pedicure training.

Good to know

The state board really does inspect

State boards send inspectors into salons unannounced to check licenses, sanitation and equipment. Fines fall on the salon and on the individual technician, which is why implements are disinfected betwe...

Hours vary enormously between states

New York requires a 250 hour course for a nail specialty license. Other states set a completely different number, and some require more than double that. There is no national standard, so check your own state b...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Manicurists and Pedicurists (39-5092.00)
New York State Department of State: get a nail specialty license
California Board of Barbering and Cosmetology: applicants
National-Interstate Council of State Boards of Cosmetology

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/nail-technician>



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