

Non-Destructive Tester

Use sound, X-rays and magnets to find cracks in pipelines, bridges and aircraft without cutting anything open. High school diploma in, six figures possible.

TYPICAL PAY

\$78,350

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$47k to \$118k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

1 to 3 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Refineries, pipelines, fabrication shops, aircraft hangars, bridges, p...

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma or GED (General Educational Development certificate)** Grades 11 and 12
That is the stated entry requirement. Shop, physics and math help more than anything else.
- 2 Training in a method** A few weeks to a year
Either a technical school program or classroom hours paid for by an employer. Ultrasonic and radiographic testing are the two that pay best.
- 3 Trainee hours on the job** 6 to 18 months
You work under a certified technician and log experience hours. Each method has its own requirement.
- 4 Level one, then level two** 1 to 3 years in total
Written exam, a practical exam and a vision test. Level two means you can interpret results and sign them, which is where the pay changes.
- 5 Level three** Several more years
The senior grade. You write procedures, train others and take responsibility for a company's testing program.

Pros and cons

- + A real six figure ceiling with no college degree
- + Employers usually pay for your training and certification
- + The certification works anywhere in the country
- Travel, night shifts and long stretches away from home
- Outdoors in whatever weather the job site has
- Radiography means working with radioactive sources and wearing a dose badge

Optional boosts

Ultrasonic testing. Radiographic testing. Electromagnetic testing. Magnetic particle and liquid penetrant testing.

Good to know

There are six main methods

The professional body names ultrasonic, radiographic, liquid penetrant, magnetic particle, electromagnetic and acoustic emission testing. Most technicians end up certified in three or four of them.

Your certificate may not be yours

Under the usual American system, certification is issued by your employer against a published written practice. Change companies and the new one can make you sit the exams again.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Non-Destructive Testing Specialists (17-3029.01)
American Society for Nondestructive Testing: certification
American Society for Nondestructive Testing
Apprenticeship.gov, 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/non-destructive-tester>



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