

Nuclear Engineer

Keep reactors running safely and design the next ones. A small field, a long career, and almost no room for a careless day.

TYPICAL PAY

\$133,970

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$93k to \$196k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

4 to 8 years

after high school

DEMAND

Limited

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Power stations, national laboratories, engineering firms, th...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
 Physics, chemistry and as much math as your school offers. Calculus before college is a real advantage.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
 Nuclear engineering, or mechanical or electrical engineering with a nuclear minor. Choose a program accredited by ABET (the national acc...
- 3 Internship or co-op** Summers
 A summer at a plant, a reactor vendor or a national laboratory. This is how almost everyone gets hired.
- 4 FE (Fundamentals of Engineering) exam** Final year
 Sit it in your final year while the material is fresh. It makes you an engineer in training.
- 5 Four years of engineering work** 4 years
 Then you are eligible for the professional exam. There is a nuclear version of it among the twenty or so offered.
- 6 PE (Principles and Practice of Engineering) licensure** After 4 years of work
 Optional in this field but it raises your pay and lets you sign off work in your own name.

Pros and cons

- + One of the best paid engineering fields in the country
- + Genuine stability, with employers who still offer pensions
- + Work that matters for clean electricity and for medicine
- Federal projections have the occupation shrinking
- Very few universities teach it, so you may have to move to study
- Enormous amounts of documentation and regulatory process

Good to know

A fifth of American electricity

The United States runs the largest fleet of power reactors in the world. The Department of Energy says they generate nearly 20 percent of the country's electricity and almost half of its clean energy.

Students still get to run a reactor

Penn State's Breazeale Reactor was the first licensed nuclear research reactor in the country and is still the longest operating one. Undergraduates do experiments on it.

Optional boosts

Reactor licensing. Small modular reactors. Medical isotopes. Decommissioning and waste.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Nuclear Engineers (17-2161.00)

NCEES: Principles and Practice of Engineering exam

American Nuclear Society

Penn State Ken and Mary Alice Lindquist Department of Nuclear Engineering

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/nuclear-engineer>



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