

Optician

Turn an eye prescription into glasses and contact lenses that actually fit. Two years or less to get started, and in many states no license at all.

TYPICAL PAY

\$47,260

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$36k to \$77k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 2 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Optical shops, eye doctor offices, retail chains, hospital eye clinics

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
The usual requirement. Math, physics and any retail or customer service job help more than you would think.
- 2 Get hired into an optical** Immediate
Retail chains, independent shops and eye doctors' offices all hire assistants with no experience and train them.
- 3 Learn the craft** 1 to 2 years
Frame selection and adjustment, pupil measurements, lens types and coatings, reading a prescription, and edging lenses in the lab.
- 4 Get certified** A few months of study
Sit the national eyeglasses exam, and the contact lens exam if you want to fit contacts. Certification is what turns an assistant into an optician on paper.
- 5 State license where it applies** Varies by state
In licensed states you need either a two-year accredited degree or a supervised training program plus the exams before you can dispense on your own.

Pros and cons

- + Working in health care within a year, with little or no debt
- + A real craft: measurement, machines and fitting by hand
- + You see the result immediately when someone puts the glasses on
- Pay tops out lower than most health careers on this site
- Commission targets can pull against what the customer actually needs
- Online eyewear sellers have taken a chunk of the market

Optional boosts

Contact lens certification. Advanced certification. Lab and edging skill. Low vision aids.

Good to know

Half the country does not license this job

Roughly twenty states require an optician license and the rest require nothing at all. It is one of the widest regulatory splits of any health occupation in the United States, and it means the same work can ne...

There are only about seventeen accredited programs

The Commission on Opticianry Accreditation accredits two-year opticianry degree programs, and the national list runs to roughly seventeen colleges. Most opticians in the country therefore learned...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Opticians, Dispensing (29-2081.00)
American Board of Opticianry and National Contact Lens Examiners
Commission on Opticianry Accreditation
New York State Education Department: ophthalmic dispensing license requirements

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/optician>



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