

Painter and Decorator

Prepare and finish walls, buildings and steel. Easy to start, harder than it looks to be good at.

TYPICAL PAY

\$49,400

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$37k to \$79k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

1 to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Houses and apartments, commercial buildings, bridges an...

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma or an equivalency certificate** Grade 12
Most employers want one. Some crews will hire without it, but apprenticeships usually will not.
- 2 Get on a crew, or apply to an apprenticeship** Weeks to months
Residential painting will hire you as a helper straight away. A registered apprenticeship is more selective and pays you to learn properly.
- 3 Learn the preparation, not just the paint** First year
Sanding, patching, caulking, masking and priming are most of the job. Anyone can roll a wall. Good preparation is what customers are paying for.
- 4 Registered apprenticeship** 3 to 4 years
Three to four years of paid work on the job plus classroom hours, through a union training center or an employer program registered with the Department of Labor.
- 5 Journey-level painter** After your hours
Full rate, able to run a job. From here you can move into industrial coatings, estimating, or start your own business.

Pros and cons

- + You can start within weeks and earn straight away
- + No debt, and an apprenticeship costs you almost nothing
- + Visible finished work at the end of every job
- Pay at the residential end is low and competition is constant
- Hard on shoulders, knees and lungs over a career
- Weather and the building cycle make work seasonal in cold states

Optional boosts

Certified renovator for lead-safe work. Industrial coatings inspection. Scaffold, aerial lift and confined space training. Wallcovering and decorative finishes.

Good to know

Most of the job is not painting

Experienced painters reckon preparation is the majority of the hours on any repaint: washing, scraping, filling, sanding, caulking and masking. The paint is the fast part, and the part customers see.

1978 is the year that rules the trade

Lead-based paint was banned for homes in the United States in 1978. Any paid work disturbing paint in a home, childcare center or preschool built before that year falls under the federal lead rule, and...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Painters, Construction and Maintenance (47-2141.00)

International Union of Painters and Allied Trades

Apprenticeship.gov: Registered Apprenticeship

Environmental Protection Agency: Lead Renovation, Repair and Painting Program

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/painter-decorator>



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