

Photographer

Get paid for pictures. No license, no gatekeeper, and no salary either unless you build the business.

TYPICAL PAY

\$44,660

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$31k to \$92k

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

**Studios, weddings and events,
client locations, newsrooms, your...**

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 9 to 12
Shoot constantly. Yearbook, school sports, local bands, anything with people in it. Volume is how you get good.
- 2 Assist or second shoot** 6 to 24 months
Carry bags and lights for a working photographer, or shoot alongside a wedding photographer. You learn more in six months of this than in two years of classes.
- 3 Formal study, optional** 2 to 4 years
A two year community college program or a four year degree in photography or visual media. Useful for technique, contacts and access to studio gear.
- 4 Register a business** Weeks
Get a business name, a bank account, contracts, insurance and a way to invoice. This is the step most talented people skip and regret.
- 5 Build repeat clients** Years 2 to 5
A steady income comes from clients who book you again, not from viral photos.

Pros and cons

- + No license, no degree, no permission needed to start
- + You own your work and your schedule
- + Every specialty is a different life, and you can switch
- Income is uneven and the first years are thin
- Weekends and evenings, especially in events
- Phone cameras and stock libraries killed the low end of the market

Optional boosts

Commercial and product. Weddings and events. Real estate and architecture. Photojournalism.

Good to know

The top tenth earn triple the bottom tenth

The federal wage survey puts photographers at \$30,820 at the tenth percentile and \$91,810 at the ninetieth. Almost none of that spread is about owning better cameras. It is about who the client is and what t...

You can register thousands of photos at once

The United States Copyright Office runs group registration programs for photographers, with separate routes for published and unpublished photographs. Without them, registering a year of work o...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Photographers (27-4021.00)
United States Copyright Office: registering photographs
Rochester Institute of Technology: Photographic and Imaging Arts degree
Internal Revenue Service: self-employment tax

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/photographer>



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