

Police Officer

Hired first, trained second, paid from the first day of the academy. No degree required in most of the country.

TYPICAL PAY

\$76,210

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$48k to \$115k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

1 to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Patrol cars, city streets, station houses, courtrooms

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma or equivalent** Grade 12
 The legal minimum nearly everywhere. Keep your record clean from now on: the background investigation covers drugs, driving, debt, employment and social media.
- 2 Reach the minimum age** 0 to 3 years
 Most agencies hire at 21, a few at 20. If you finish high school at 18 you will likely wait, and college, military service or a dispatch job are the usual ways to fill it.
- 3 Apply and get through testing** 6 to 12 months
 Written examination, physical fitness test, oral board, background investigation, polygraph in some states, then medical and psychological screening. It takes months and most applicants do not finish it.
- 4 Academy** About 6 months
 A state-certified academy, roughly six months in most states, covering law, firearms, driving, tactics, first aid and report writing. You are paid the whole time.
- 5 Field training** 4 to 12 months
 Several months riding with a training officer who evaluates you daily, then a probation period. Only after that are you on your own.

Pros and cons

- + Paid from the first day of training, with no degree and no debt
- + A pension and benefits that private work rarely matches
- + Dozens of different assignments within one career
- Shift work that damages sleep, health and relationships
- Real physical danger, and the constant possibility of using force
- You absorb other people's worst days and it accumulates

Good to know

The same job pays wildly differently

The national median for a patrol officer is \$76,210 a year, but the Los Angeles Police Department advertises entry-level pay of \$93,730 to \$127,660. Where you pin the badge matters more to your income than...

The hiring process filters harder than the academy

Written test, fitness test, oral board, a background investigation that contacts former employers and neighbors, a polygraph in some states, then medical and psychological screening. Most applicants are...

Optional boosts

Detective or investigations. Traffic and collision reconstruction. K-9 handler. School resource officer.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers, wages and tasks
 Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training, California
 Los Angeles Police Department: salary and benefits
 USAJOBS: the federal government hiring site

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/police-officer>



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