

Printing Press Operator

Run the machines that print packaging, labels, books and signs. Learn it on the payroll, not in a lecture hall.

TYPICAL PAY

\$45,780

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$33k to \$64k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

1 to 3 years

after high school

DEMAND

Limited

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Commercial print shops, packaging and label plants, newspapers, sign...

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
Math, shop and any graphic arts class. Color vision matters more here than grades do.
- 2 Get hired as a helper** Straight after high school
Press helper, feeder, bindery hand or material handler. Apply directly to packaging plants and commercial printers.
- 3 Learn the machine** 1 to 3 years
Makeready, plate hanging, ink and water balance, registration, color matching, and washing up. This is where the trade actually lives.
- 4 Registered apprenticeship, where offered** 2 to 4 years
There are two dozen registered apprenticeship titles in this trade, including Offset Press Operator and Web-Press Operator, all of them paid.
- 5 Run your own shift** After you are signed off
You own the press, the quality and the schedule for those hours, and you train the helper behind you.

Pros and cons

- + You are paid from day one with no tuition at all
- + A real skill you can take to any plant in the country
- + You finish a shift with something physical to point at
- The industry is shrinking, so choose your employer carefully
- Nights, weekends and rotating shifts are normal
- Noise, ink, solvent and standing on concrete all shift

Good to know

Almost all color printing uses four inks

Full color work is printed in CMYK (cyan, magenta, yellow and black), four transparent inks laid down in tiny dots. Your eye mixes them. Getting those four units to line up within a fraction of a millimeter is...

The job is shrinking, and the numbers say so

Federal occupation data counts about 150,200 printing press operators, with employment projected to decline over the decade. There are still roughly 13,700 openings a year as older operators retir...

Optional boosts

Flexographic packaging. Wide format and digital. Color management. Maintenance skills.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Printing Press Operators (51-5112.00)

O*NET OnLine: Printing Press Operators

PRINTING United Alliance, the industry association

Apprenticeship.gov, the Department of Labor apprenticeship finder

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/printing-press-operator>



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