

Security Guard

Watch, patrol, report. One of the fastest jobs in America to get licensed for, and a doorway into a lot of others.

TYPICAL PAY

\$38,020

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$30k to \$59k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

up to 1 year

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

**Office lobbies, hospitals,
warehouses, malls, events, data c...**

How you get there

- 1 High school or an equivalency** Grades 11 and 12
Most employers want a diploma or a GED (a high school equivalency credential). Some do not require either.
- 2 Decide armed or unarmed** A decision, not a step
Unarmed is faster, cheaper and far more common. Armed needs a separate permit, more training and usually a minimum age of 21.
- 3 State registration** 2 to 8 weeks
Take the required training course, submit fingerprints for a criminal background check, pay the fee and receive your guard registration.
- 4 Get hired and learn the site** First months
Post orders, patrol routes, access control, incident reports and radio procedure. Your first month is mostly learning one building.
- 5 Move up or move over** Year 2 onward
Shift supervisor, account manager, in-house corporate security, or use the experience to apply to police, corrections or federal work.

Pros and cons

- + You can be licensed and working within weeks, with almost no cost
- + Overtime and night differential are easy to find
- + Clear route into policing, corrections or corporate security
- Entry pay is low and raises at contract agencies are small
- Nights, weekends and holidays, permanently
- Long hours of boredom, then a confrontation with no backup

Optional boosts

An armed permit. Security certifications. Eligibility for a security clearance. CPR, first aid and emergency medical training.

Good to know

A guard is not a police officer

You have no special arrest powers, no authority to search and no immunity. Your real tools are presence, observation and a written report. Understanding that line is what keeps security officers out of...

One state office covers five industries

California's Bureau of Security and Investigative Services licenses alarm companies, locksmiths, private investigators, private security and repossession agencies. In other states those five sit under compl...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Security Guards (33-9032.00)
California Bureau of Security and Investigative Services
ASIS International: security certifications
USAJOBS: the federal government's official employment 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/security-guard>



Scan for the full clicker