

Software Developer

You write the thing, then spend most of your time working out why it does not do what you meant.

TYPICAL PAY

\$135,980

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$82k to \$215k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

2 to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Tech companies, banks, hospitals, government agencies, remote tea...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 9 to 12
 Math as far as you can take it, plus any computing class. Then build something small on your own and finish it. Finishing is the skill.
- 2 Computer science degree** 2 to 4 years
 Four years at a public university, or two years at community college then transfer. The University of Washington's Allen School, for example, offers both a computer science and a computer engineering bachelor's degree.
- 3 Internships** Summers
 Two summers of real work before you graduate is the single biggest factor in landing a first job, and internships at large firms pay well.
- 4 The interview gauntlet** 1 to 6 months
 Technical interviews in this field test problem solving under pressure. People prepare for months, and that preparation is separate from your degree.
- 5 Junior to senior** 5 years in
 The first two years are about learning a real codebase and a real team. Senior titles usually arrive around year five.

Pros and cons

- + The highest median pay on this site for a four-year degree
- + Remote and hybrid work is genuinely common
- + No license, no renewals, no board to answer to
- Junior hiring is much harder than it was a few years ago
- Layoffs hit this field in waves, regardless of how good you are
- Sitting at a screen all day, with the wrist, back and eye problems that follow

Optional boosts

Backend and distributed systems. Machine learning. Security. Boring industries.

Good to know

The job is mostly reading, not writing

Working developers spend far more time reading existing code than producing new code. Almost every task starts by understanding something somebody else built, often years ago and often without n...

The biggest employers are not technology companies

Banks, insurers, hospital systems, retailers and government agencies employ enormous numbers of developers. The famous technology firms get the attention, but most of this workforce writes software fo...

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Software Developers (15-1252.00)
 University of Washington, Allen School: undergraduate degrees
 Apprenticeship.gov: the federal apprenticeship job finder
 USAJOBS (the official federal 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/software-developer>



Scan for the full clicker