

Software Tester

You try to break things before customers do, then prove exactly how you broke them.

TYPICAL PAY

\$104,300

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$61k to \$167k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

2 to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Good

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

Software teams, banks, health technology, game studios, remote...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 10 to 12
 Math and any computing class. Being the person who notices the thing everyone else missed is the actual talent here.
- 2 A computing qualification** 2 to 4 years
 A two-year community college degree in information technology or a four-year computer science degree. The University of Washington's Allen School, for example, offers computer science and computer engineering bachelor's degrees.
- 3 Learn to write test code** Alongside study
 One programming language plus a test framework. This is the difference between a job with a ceiling and a career.
- 4 First job** Year 1
 Junior quality assurance analyst on a software team, mostly executing and writing up tests that already exist.
- 5 Automation, then lead** 3 to 6 years in
 Owning the automated test suite, then the release process, then a team. Some testers move sideways into development from here.

Pros and cons

- + An easier entry into well-paid software work than the developer route
- + A two-year public college degree can be enough to start
- + Very remote friendly
- Purely manual testing has a low ceiling and is shrinking
- Lower pay and less status than developers on the same team
- You deliver bad news for a living, and not everyone takes it well

Optional boosts

Test automation. Performance and load testing. Security testing. Regulated industries.

Good to know

The first bug was an actual insect

In 1947 operators of the Harvard Mark II computer found a moth stuck in a relay, taped it into the logbook and wrote that they had found a bug. The word was already in engineering use, but that page is why it...

You cannot test everything

Even a simple screen has more combinations of inputs and states than anyone could ever try. Testing is the craft of deciding which small set of checks is most likely to find the problems that matter.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Software Quality Assurance Analysts and Testers (15-1253.00)
 American Software Testing Qualifications Board
 University of Washington, Allen School: undergraduate degrees
 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-tester>



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