

Sommelier

You own the wine list in a restaurant, buy the bottles and sell them at the table. The exams are famously hard and the pay is mostly tips.

TYPICAL PAY

\$35,230

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$18k to \$65k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

1 to 5 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

**Fine dining restaurants, hotels,
wine bars, wine shops, importers...**

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
That is the only school requirement. Hospitality classes help but are not needed.
- 2 Get into a restaurant with a real wine list** 6 to 18 months
Start as a busser, runner or server. You are learning service first and wine second, because a sommelier who cannot run a section is no use.
- 3 Introductory Sommelier Course and Examination** A few days
The first of four levels run by the Court of Master Sommeliers Americas. A short course and a written exam. You must be of legal drinking age.
- 4 Certified Sommelier Examination** Usually 1 to 2 years later
Theory, blind tasting and a service test where an examiner plays a difficult guest. This is the badge that gets you hired as a sommelier.
- 5 Advanced and Master** 5 years and up
The Advanced Sommelier Course and Examination, then the Master Sommelier Diploma Examination. Years of study each, and most candidates never finish.

Pros and cons

- + No degree and no debt, you learn on a paid job
- + You get paid to taste things most people never see
- + A good night on tips beats a lot of salaried jobs
- Nights, weekends and holidays, permanently
- Median pay across the whole server group is only about \$35,000
- Standing for ten hours, and alcohol is always in front of you

Good to know

The top exam has beaten almost everyone

The Court of Master Sommeliers Americas runs four levels, ending in the Master Sommelier Diploma Examination. Since it began in the late 1960s only a few hundred people in the Americas have passed it. Ca...

You have to name the wine without seeing the label

Blind tasting is a graded part of the Certified and Advanced exams. You get a glass and a few minutes to talk through the grape, the country, the region and the year, out loud, in a set order, while an exa...

Optional boosts

Certified Specialist of Wine. WSET (Wine and Spirit Education Trust) Level 3 Award in Wines. Spirits and sake certifications. Advanced Sommelier.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Waiters and Waitresses (35-3031.00)
Court of Master Sommeliers Americas
Wine and Spirit Education Trust
Society of Wine Educators

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/sommelier>



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