

CAREER KIT

Electrician Career Kit: 90-Day Action Plan

How to Become an Electrician

2026-10 edition

Inside: at-a-glance summary · step-by-step path · costs & requirements · 90-day action plan · documents checklist · exams · interview questions · resume bullets · common mistakes · 13-week tracker · resources

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At a glance

To become an electrician, you need a high school diploma or GED, a 4–5 year paid apprenticeship (about 8,000 hours on the job plus classroom training), and in most states a journeyman license exam. Union apprenticeships are often tuition-free, so your main costs are tools, books and fees, usually a few hundred to a few thousand dollars. The median electrician earns \$63,190 a year (BLS, May 2025).

Timeline	4–5 years (apprenticeship to journeyman)
Typical cost	\$500–\$5,000 (more if you choose trade school first)
Education	High school diploma or GED, with at least one year of algebra
License	Journeyman license in most states; rules vary by state and city
Median pay	\$63,190 per year
Job outlook	+9% (2025–35), faster than average

Step-by-step path

1. Finish high school or get your GED

Time: 0–12 months · Cost: \$0–\$150

Almost every apprenticeship requires a diploma or GED. Most also want at least one passed year of algebra, and some ask for your transcript. If you are weak in math, take an algebra refresher now, because the entrance test checks it.

2. Choose your route: union, merit shop or trade school

Time: 2–6 weeks of research

Union apprenticeships run through local IBEW-NECA training centers (JATCs). Non-union (merit shop) apprenticeships run through IEC or ABC chapters and their member contractors. A trade school pre-apprenticeship program is optional, but it can help you get hired if you have no experience.

3. Apply and pass the aptitude test and interview

Time: 1–6 months · Cost: \$0–\$100

Watch for application windows at your local JATC or IEC/ABC chapter, since many accept applications only on set dates. Union programs use an aptitude test covering algebra and reading comprehension, followed by an interview. Expect a small application fee and bring your ID, diploma and transcripts.

4. Work as an apprentice and complete classroom hours

Time: 4–5 years · Cost: Often tuition-free; books and tools extra

You work full time under a licensed electrician and get paid from day one, with raises as you progress. Most programs require about 2,000 hours of on-the-job work per year plus several hundred classroom hours. Log your hours carefully, because your state will ask for proof.

5. Get basic safety credentials

Time: 1–3 days · Cost: \$50–\$100

Get an OSHA 10-Hour Construction card early; many employers require it. Learn lockout/tagout and NFPA 70E arc-flash basics, which your program or employer usually provides. A valid driver's license is also required for many jobs.

6. Pass your state's journeyman electrician exam

Time: 2–3 months of study · Cost: \$100–\$400 in exam and license fees

Once you have the required hours (commonly around 8,000), apply to your state or local licensing board to sit for the journeyman exam. The test focuses on the National Electrical Code edition your state has adopted, plus electrical theory and local rules. A few states license only at the city or county level, so check where you will work.

7. Keep your license current and plan your next level

Time: Ongoing

Most states require continuing education to renew your license, often tied to new NEC editions. After a few years as a journeyman (often 2 or more), you can test for a master electrician or electrical contractor license. Specialties like industrial controls, solar or low voltage can raise your pay.

Costs & requirements

Estimated costs (USD)

Item	Low	High	Note
Apprenticeship tuition	\$0	\$2,000	Union JATC programs are often tuition-free; some merit shop programs charge yearly tuition, sometimes paid by the employer.
Books and code book	\$150	\$800	Includes your NEC code book and course materials.
Hand tools and tool bag	\$300	\$1,500	Most apprentices start with a basic set and build up over time.
Application and aptitude test fees	\$0	\$100	
OSHA 10-Hour Construction card	\$50	\$100	
Journeyman exam and license fees	\$100	\$400	Varies by state and testing provider.
Optional trade school program	\$1,000	\$20,000	Not required. Cost varies widely by school and program length.
Total	\$1,600	\$24,900	

Requirements

Age	Most apprenticeship programs require you to be at least 18. There is no upper age limit.
Education	High school diploma or GED, usually with one passed year of algebra.
Aptitude test	Union programs use an aptitude test in algebra and reading comprehension; merit shop programs have their own screening.
Physical ability	You climb ladders, work in tight spaces and lift heavy materials. Normal color vision matters because wires are color-coded.
Driver's license	Many employers require a valid driver's license and reliable transportation to job sites.
Drug screening	Most apprenticeships and contractors require a drug test before you start.
Licensing	Most states require a journeyman license after your apprenticeship. Hours, exams and fees differ by state, and some states license locally.

90-Day Action Plan

Tick each box as you finish the task. Do the phases in order; it is fine if a phase takes a little longer.

Phase 1: Prepare

Days 1–30

Goal: Confirm the path in your state and get application-ready.

- ☐ Look up your state's electrician licensing board and write down the hours and exams required for a journeyman license.
- ☐ List every IBEW-NECA JATC, IEC chapter and ABC chapter within commuting distance, with their application dates.
- ☐ Order your high school or GED transcript and confirm you have a passed algebra credit.
- ☐ Take an Algebra 1 refresher and do at least 20 practice problems a week.
- ☐ Practice timed reading comprehension passages twice a week.
- ☐ Get a copy of your driver's license, birth certificate or passport, and Social Security card ready.
- ☐ Book an OSHA 10-Hour Construction course.

Phase 2: Apply

Days 31–60

Goal: Submit applications and get through testing.

- ☐ Submit applications to at least two programs, ideally one union and one merit shop.
- ☐ Take a full timed practice aptitude test and review every missed question.
- ☐ Finish your OSHA 10 card and add it to your resume.
- ☐ Write a one-page resume focused on hands-on work, reliability and safety.
- ☐ Call or email five local electrical contractors to ask if they hire helpers or sponsor apprentices.
- ☐ Prepare answers to the 12 interview questions in this kit and practice out loud.
- ☐ Visit a supply house or job fair and talk to working electricians about local programs.

Phase 3: Start

Days 61–90

Goal: Land a spot and start working.

- ☐ Attend interviews in clean work clothes and bring copies of all documents.
- ☐ If you are ranked or waitlisted, take a helper or laborer job in the meantime to build hours and references.
- ☐ Buy a starter tool set: lineman's pliers, strippers, screwdrivers, tape measure, level and a non-contact voltage tester.
- ☐ Buy steel- or composite-toe boots and safety glasses.
- ☐ Set up a simple log (notebook or app) to track your on-the-job hours by date and task.
- ☐ Read the first chapters of the NEC to learn how the book is organized.
- ☐ Follow up with every program you applied to by email or phone.

Documents checklist

Gather these early. Keep originals in one folder and scans in the cloud.

- ☐ High school diploma or GED certificate
- ☐ Official high school transcript showing algebra
- ☐ Government photo ID (driver's license or passport)
- ☐ Birth certificate or proof of work authorization
- ☐ Social Security card
- ☐ Valid driver's license and driving record if requested
- ☐ DD-214 if you are a veteran
- ☐ OSHA 10 card
- ☐ Any college or trade school transcripts
- ☐ Resume and two or three references
- ☐ Application fee payment (some programs take cash or money order only)

Exams & how to prepare

Apprenticeship aptitude test

What it is: Entry test for union (IBEW-NECA) apprenticeships covering algebra and reading comprehension. Merit shop programs use their own assessments.

How to prepare: Review Algebra 1 (equations, functions, ratios) and practice timed reading passages. Free algebra courses are enough for most people.

Journeyman electrician exam

What it is: State or local licensing exam, usually given by providers like PSI or Pearson VUE, or through the NASCLA accredited exam in participating states. It covers the adopted NEC edition, electrical theory, calculations and local rules.

How to prepare: Practice looking up answers quickly in your tabbed NEC book, since most exams are open-book and timed. Work through practice tests and focus on load calculations, conductor sizing and grounding.

Master electrician exam

What it is: Advanced license exam for experienced journeymen. It covers more complex code, design and calculations, and often business and law.

How to prepare: Take it after several years of journeyman work. Use an exam prep course for the business and law portion if your state includes one.

Interview questions

1. Why do you want to be an electrician?

Tip: Give a concrete reason, like a project you did or a person you worked with, not just the pay.

2. What hands-on work have you done?

Tip: Mention any construction, mechanical, auto or DIY work and what you learned from it.

3. How do you handle working outdoors in heat or cold?

Tip: Show you understand the conditions and have worked through them before.

4. Tell us about a time you made a mistake at work.

Tip: Pick a real example, say what you did to fix it and what you changed afterward.

5. How do you feel about heights and tight spaces?

Tip: Be honest. If you are fine with them, give an example.

6. How will you get to job sites that change often?

Tip: Confirm you have reliable transportation and a valid license.

7. What does safety mean to you on a job site?

Tip: Mention PPE, lockout/tagout and speaking up when something looks wrong.

8. Can you commit to night classes while working full time?

Tip: Explain how you will manage your schedule and family commitments.

9. How do you take criticism from a supervisor?

Tip: Say you listen, ask questions and apply the correction right away.

10. What did you like and dislike about math in school?

Tip: Be honest and show what you have done to improve, like a refresher course.

11. Where do you see yourself in five years?

Tip: Say journeyman license, then a specialty or master license.

12. Why should we pick you over other applicants?

Tip: Point to reliability, attendance and willingness to learn, with one example each.

Resume bullet examples

Adapt these to what you actually did. Use numbers wherever you can.

- Completed OSHA 10-Hour Construction safety training.
- Assisted with residential remodeling, including drywall, framing and fixture installation.
- Maintained perfect attendance for 12 months at a full-time warehouse job.
- Operated forklifts and pallet jacks safely with zero recordable incidents.
- Completed an Algebra refresher course with a final score of 90%.
- Read and followed work orders and basic diagrams to complete tasks on schedule.
- Loaded, organized and inventoried tools and materials for a crew of five.
- Troubleshoot and repaired small engines and household appliances as a side job.

Common mistakes to avoid

1. Missing application windows because you did not check program dates early.
2. Skipping algebra prep and failing the aptitude test.
3. Applying to only one program instead of several.
4. Not logging your apprenticeship hours, then struggling to prove them to the state.
5. Buying an expensive tool kit before you know what your employer provides.
6. Paying for a costly trade school without checking whether local apprenticeships are free.
7. Studying an old NEC edition for your journeyman exam.

13-week progress tracker

Fill this in by hand each week.

Week	Focus	Done?	Notes
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			

Resources, salary & disclaimer

Resources

- **Electrical Training Alliance (IBEW-NECA)**

<https://electricaltrainingalliance.org/>

- **Independent Electrical Contractors (IEC)**

<https://ieci.org/>

- **Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC)**

<https://www.abc.org/>

- **Apprenticeship.gov Job Finder**

<https://www.apprenticeship.gov/apprenticeship-job-finder>

- **CareerOneStop License Finder**

<https://www.careeronestop.org/Toolkit/Training/find-licenses.aspx>

- **OSHA Outreach Training Program**

<https://www.osha.gov/training/outreach>

Salary

Bottom 10%	Median	Top 10%
Less than \$42,640	\$63,190 per year (\$30.38 per hour)	More than \$108,510

Outlook: Employment is projected to grow 9% from 2025 to 2035, faster than the average for all occupations, with about 72,700 openings per year.

Source: BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook, Electricians, May 2025 data —
<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/construction-and-extraction/electricians.htm>

Disclaimer. Requirements vary by state and change over time. Verify with the official sources listed. This guide is not legal or career advice.