

CAREER KIT

HVAC Technician Career Kit: 90-Day Action Plan

How to Become an HVAC Technician

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 HVAC technician, you need a high school diploma or GED, 6 months to 2 years of training through a trade school or apprenticeship, and EPA Section 608 certification to handle refrigerants. Some states and cities also require a license. Expect to spend from almost nothing in a paid apprenticeship to about \$15,000 for a trade school program; the median HVAC technician earns \$61,010 a year (BLS, May 2025).

Timeline	6 months–2 years of training; 3–5 years for an apprenticeship
Typical cost	\$0–\$15,000+
Education	High school diploma or GED
License	EPA Section 608 certification (federal); state or local license in some areas
Median pay	\$61,010 per year
Job outlook	+11% (2025–35), much faster than average

Step-by-step path

1. Finish high school or get your GED

Time: 0–12 months · Cost: \$0–\$150

Trade schools and apprenticeships expect a diploma or GED. Math, basic physics and shop classes help, because you will work with electrical circuits, pressures and temperatures. If you are already out of school, review basic algebra and electricity.

2. Pick a training route

Time: 2–4 weeks of research

You can enroll in an HVAC certificate or associate degree program, join a registered apprenticeship, or get hired as a helper and train on the job. School is faster to start and teaches theory; apprenticeships pay you while you learn but take longer. Compare total cost, schedule and job placement help before you sign up.

3. Complete HVAC training

Time: 6 months–5 years · Cost: \$0–\$15,000+

Certificate programs usually take 6 months to 1 year, and associate degrees about 2 years. Apprenticeships typically last 3 to 5 years and combine paid work with classroom hours. Focus on electrical troubleshooting, refrigeration cycles, airflow and safety.

4. Pass the EPA Section 608 exam

Time: 1–4 weeks of study · Cost: \$20–\$150

Federal law requires certification to buy or handle most refrigerants. The exam has a Core section plus Type I (small appliances), Type II (high-pressure systems) and Type III (low-pressure systems); passing all of them gives you Universal certification. Many schools include the exam, and the certification does not expire.

5. Get hired as an entry-level technician or helper

Time: 1–3 months

Apply to residential service companies, commercial mechanical contractors, and facility maintenance departments. Your first role may be installer or helper, working alongside a senior tech. A clean driving record matters because most jobs use company vans.

6. Get licensed if your state or city requires it

Time: Varies by state · Cost: \$100–\$500 in exam and license fees

Licensing rules vary a lot. Some states license HVAC technicians directly, others license only contractors, and some leave it to cities or counties. Where a license is required, you usually need documented work experience (often 2 to 5 years) and a passing exam score.

7. Add certifications and specialize

Time: Ongoing

Optional certifications such as NATE or HVAC Excellence can help you earn trust with employers and customers. You can specialize in commercial refrigeration, controls, heat pumps or boilers. Many technicians later get a contractor license and start their own business.

Costs & requirements

Estimated costs (USD)

Item	Low	High	Note
HVAC certificate program	\$1,500	\$15,000	Community colleges are usually cheaper than private trade schools.
Associate degree in HVAC	\$5,000	\$35,000	Optional. Cost depends heavily on public vs. private school.
Apprenticeship tuition	\$0	\$2,000	Many apprenticeships are low-cost or employer-paid.
EPA Section 608 exam	\$20	\$150	Price depends on the certifying organization and proctoring.
Starter tools	\$500	\$2,500	Gauges, multimeter, hand tools. Some employers provide larger equipment.
State or local license fees	\$0	\$500	Only where a license is required.
Optional NATE certification exams	\$150	\$400	
Total	\$7,170	\$55,550	

Requirements

Age	Most employers and apprenticeships require you to be at least 18. There is no upper age limit.
Education	High school diploma or GED. Postsecondary HVAC training is not always required, but many employers prefer it.
EPA Section 608 certification	Required by federal law to purchase and handle most refrigerants.
State or local license	Required in some states and cities, often after 2–5 years of experience and an exam. Check your state board.
Driver's license	Most service jobs require a valid driver's license and a clean driving record.
Physical ability	You work in attics, crawl spaces and on rooftops, often in extreme heat or cold, and lift heavy equipment.
Background and drug screening	Common for residential service jobs, since you work inside customers' homes.

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: Choose your route and get certified-ready.

- ☐ Check your state and city licensing rules for HVAC technicians and contractors and write them down.
- ☐ Compare three training options: a community college program, a trade school and an apprenticeship, including total cost.
- ☐ Buy an EPA 608 study guide and study 30 minutes a day.
- ☐ Review basic electricity: voltage, current, resistance and reading a multimeter.
- ☐ Pull your driving record and fix any issues you can.
- ☐ Gather your diploma or GED, ID and Social Security card.

Phase 2: Certify and apply

Days 31–60

Goal: Pass EPA 608 and start applying.

- ☐ Schedule and take the EPA 608 Universal exam with an EPA-approved certifying organization.
- ☐ Enroll in your chosen training program or submit apprenticeship applications.
- ☐ Write a one-page resume that lists EPA 608, mechanical experience and a clean driving record.
- ☐ Apply to at least 10 HVAC companies for helper, installer or apprentice roles.
- ☐ Practice answers to the 12 interview questions in this kit.
- ☐ Visit a local HVAC supply house and ask the counter staff which companies are hiring.

Phase 3: Start working

Days 61–90

Goal: Land your first job and build good habits.

- ☐ Interview and accept a role with real training, ride-alongs and a clear raise schedule.
- ☐ Buy starter hand tools, a quality multimeter and work boots; ask your employer what they supply first.
- ☐ Keep a notebook of every system type and fault you see, with the fix.
- ☐ Learn your company's maintenance checklist for furnaces and AC units by heart.
- ☐ Start logging work hours and tasks in case your state needs proof of experience later.
- ☐ Pick one optional certification, such as a NATE exam, to target in your first year.

Documents checklist

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

- ☐ High school diploma or GED certificate
- ☐ Government photo ID
- ☐ Social Security card or proof of work authorization
- ☐ Valid driver's license
- ☐ Motor vehicle record (driving history)
- ☐ EPA Section 608 certification card
- ☐ HVAC school transcript or certificate, if any
- ☐ OSHA 10 card, if you have one
- ☐ Resume and two or three references
- ☐ DD-214 if you are a veteran

Exams & how to prepare

EPA Section 608 Technician Certification

What it is: Federal refrigerant-handling exam with a Core section and Type I, II and III sections. Passing all four gives Universal certification. It is offered by EPA-approved certifying organizations and does not expire.

How to prepare: Study an EPA 608 study guide and take practice tests until you score well on every section. Focus on regulations, recovery requirements, leak repair rules and safety.

State or local HVAC license exam

What it is: Required in some states and cities for technicians or contractors. It usually covers mechanical codes, refrigeration, electrical, and sometimes business and law.

How to prepare: Get the candidate bulletin from your state board, which lists the reference books allowed, and practice with timed tests.

NATE certification (optional)

What it is: Industry certification from North American Technician Excellence. It has a core exam and specialty exams such as air conditioning, heat pumps and gas heating.

How to prepare: Take it after you have some field experience. NATE publishes knowledge areas for each specialty exam.

Interview questions

1. Why do you want to work in HVAC?

Tip: Give a specific reason, such as fixing things or steady demand, plus a real example.

2. Are you EPA 608 certified?

Tip: If yes, say which type. If not, say when you are scheduled to test.

3. How comfortable are you with electrical work?

Tip: Be honest and mention specific things you can do, like using a multimeter.

4. How do you handle working in hot attics or on cold rooftops?

Tip: Show you understand the conditions and know how to stay safe.

5. Describe the basic refrigeration cycle.

Tip: Walk through compressor, condenser, metering device and evaporator in simple terms.

6. How would you handle an upset customer whose AC is out?

Tip: Stay calm, listen, explain what you will check and give honest timelines.

7. Are you available for on-call and overtime in peak season?

Tip: Be clear about what you can commit to; peak season is part of the job.

8. Is your driving record clean?

Tip: Answer honestly; they will check it.

9. Tell us about a time you solved a hard problem.

Tip: Explain the steps you took, not just the outcome.

10. How do you keep a job site clean in a customer's home?

Tip: Mention shoe covers, drop cloths and cleaning up before you leave.

11. What tools do you own?

Tip: List what you have and show you are willing to build your kit.

12. Where do you want to be in three years?

Tip: Mention leading service calls on your own and adding certifications.

Resume bullet examples

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

- Earned EPA Section 608 Universal certification.
- Completed a 9-month HVAC certificate program covering refrigeration, electrical and airflow.
- Performed preventive maintenance on residential furnaces and AC units under supervision.
- Used multimeters and manifold gauges to assist with system diagnostics.
- Maintained a clean driving record for five years.
- Provided friendly, clear service to customers in a retail role with strong reviews.
- Repaired small engines and household appliances as a side job.
- Kept tools and van inventory organized for a two-person service crew.

Common mistakes to avoid

1. Paying for an expensive private school without comparing community college or apprenticeship options.
2. Putting off the EPA 608 exam, which limits the jobs you can get.
3. Ignoring electrical fundamentals, the skill most new techs struggle with.
4. Accepting a job with no real training plan or ride-alongs.
5. Not tracking work hours needed for a future state license.
6. Buying every tool at once instead of building your kit as you learn.

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

- **EPA Section 608 Technician Certification**

<https://www.epa.gov/section608>

- **North American Technician Excellence (NATE)**

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

- **HVAC Excellence**

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

- **Apprenticeship.gov Job Finder**

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

- **CareerOneStop License Finder**

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

Salary

Bottom 10%	Median	Top 10%
Less than \$40,050	\$61,010 per year (\$29.33 per hour)	More than \$95,210

Outlook: Employment is projected to grow 11% from 2025 to 2035, much faster than the average for all occupations, with about 40,600 openings per year.

Source: BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook, Heating, Air Conditioning, and Refrigeration Mechanics and Installers, May 2025 data — <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/installation-maintenance-and-repair/heating-air-conditioning-and-refrigeration-mechanics-and-installers.htm>

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