

CAREER KIT

Plumber Career Kit: 90-Day Action Plan

How to Become a Plumber

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 a plumber, you need a high school diploma or GED and a 4–5 year paid apprenticeship, followed in most states by a journeyman license exam. Apprenticeships often cost little beyond tools, books and fees, so your total is usually a few hundred to a few thousand dollars. The median plumber earns \$63,800 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
License	Journeyman license in most states; rules vary by state and city
Median pay	\$63,800 per year
Job outlook	+7% (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

Apprenticeships require a diploma or GED. Math, especially basic algebra and geometry, helps with measuring, pipe sizing and slope. If you are rusty, review it before you apply, since many programs test it.

2. Check your state's plumbing license rules

Time: 1–2 weeks

Most states and some cities require plumbers to be licensed. Look up how many hours you need, whether you must register as an apprentice, and which code your area uses (often the Uniform Plumbing Code or International Plumbing Code). Some states also require a separate license for gas lines.

3. Apply for a plumbing apprenticeship

Time: 1–6 months · Cost: \$0–\$100

Union apprenticeships run through local United Association (UA) training centers. Non-union apprenticeships run through groups like PHCC, ABC or individual plumbing contractors. Expect an application, sometimes an aptitude test, and an interview.

4. Register as an apprentice if your state requires it

Time: 1–4 weeks · Cost: \$0–\$100

Many states make apprentices register with the plumbing board before they work. This is how your hours get counted toward a license. Keep copies of everything you submit.

5. Complete your apprenticeship

Time: 4–5 years · Cost: Often low or no tuition; tools and books extra

You work full time under a licensed plumber and attend classes, usually in the evenings. Most apprenticeships last 4 or 5 years, with about 2,000 paid work hours per year. You learn drain and water systems, fixtures, gas piping, codes and blueprint reading.

6. Pass the journeyman plumber exam

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

After you meet your state's experience requirement, apply for the journeyman exam. It usually has a written code test, and some states add a hands-on practical. Study the exact code edition and reference books listed in your exam bulletin.

7. Grow toward a master plumber license

Time: Ongoing

Most states require continuing education to renew your license. With more years as a journeyman, you can test for a master plumber license, which lets you pull permits, supervise others or run your own business. Requirements for experience and exams differ by state.

Costs & requirements

Estimated costs (USD)

Item	Low	High	Note
Apprenticeship tuition	\$0	\$2,000	Union programs are often low-cost or free; some merit shop programs charge tuition, sometimes paid by the employer.
Books and code book	\$150	\$600	
Hand tools	\$300	\$1,500	Employers usually provide large equipment like drain machines and threaders.
Apprentice registration	\$0	\$100	Only in states that require it.
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 length.
Total	\$1,550	\$24,600	

Requirements

Age	Most apprenticeships require you to be at least 18. There is no upper age limit.
Education	High school diploma or GED.
Apprentice registration	Many states require you to register as a plumbing apprentice before working.
Licensing	Most states and some localities require a license, often after 2–5 years of experience and an exam.
Physical ability	You crawl under homes, dig, lift heavy pipe and fixtures, and work in tight spaces.
Driver's license	Most service jobs require a valid driver's license to drive company trucks.
Drug screening	Common for apprenticeships and service companies.

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: Understand your state's path and get ready to apply.

- ☐ Look up your state plumbing board and write down the apprentice registration, hours and exam requirements.
- ☐ Find out whether your area uses the UPC or IPC.
- ☐ List every UA local, PHCC chapter, ABC chapter and plumbing contractor within commuting distance.
- ☐ Order your high school or GED transcript.
- ☐ Review fractions, basic algebra and measurements for 20 minutes a day.
- ☐ Book an OSHA 10-Hour Construction course.

Phase 2: Apply

Days 31–60

Goal: Get applications in and interviews booked.

- ☐ Submit applications to at least two apprenticeship programs.
- ☐ Call or visit five plumbing contractors and ask about apprentice or helper openings.
- ☐ Write a one-page resume focused on hands-on work and reliability.
- ☐ Finish your OSHA 10 card.
- ☐ Practice the 12 interview questions in this kit out loud.
- ☐ Take a practice entrance test if your target program uses one.

Phase 3: Start

Days 61–90

Goal: Land a position and set up for licensing.

- ☐ Interview and accept a role that registers you as an apprentice and counts your hours.
- ☐ Register with your state plumbing board if required.
- ☐ Buy a starter tool set: pipe wrenches, tubing cutter, adjustable pliers, tape measure, level and a headlamp.
- ☐ Buy waterproof work boots, gloves and safety glasses.
- ☐ Start a work log with dates, hours and tasks.
- ☐ Begin reading your state's plumbing code, starting with definitions and drainage.

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
- ☐ Government photo ID
- ☐ Social Security card or proof of work authorization
- ☐ Valid driver's license
- ☐ OSHA 10 card
- ☐ Apprentice registration form for your state, if required
- ☐ Any trade school transcripts or certificates
- ☐ Resume and two or three references
- ☐ DD-214 if you are a veteran

Exams & how to prepare

Apprenticeship entrance test

What it is: Some union and merit shop programs give a basic test in math, reading and mechanical reasoning before an interview.

How to prepare: Review fractions, basic algebra and geometry, and practice reading comprehension.

Journeyman plumber exam

What it is: State or local licensing exam covering the adopted plumbing code (often UPC or IPC), drainage and venting, water supply, gas piping and safety. Some states include a practical section.

How to prepare: Get your state's candidate bulletin, use the listed code edition, and practice timed questions. Learn to find code sections quickly if the exam is open-book.

Master plumber exam

What it is: Advanced exam for experienced journeymen, covering system design, advanced code and often business and law.

How to prepare: Take it after you meet your state's journeyman experience requirement. A prep course helps with design calculations and business sections.

Interview questions

1. Why do you want to be a plumber?

Tip: Give a concrete reason and a real example of hands-on work you enjoyed.

2. Are you comfortable with dirty or smelly work?

Tip: Be honest and show you understand it is part of the job.

3. How do you feel about crawl spaces and tight areas?

Tip: Say how you have handled similar conditions before.

4. What hands-on experience do you have?

Tip: Mention construction, maintenance, auto or DIY work.

5. Can you work early mornings, overtime or on-call?

Tip: Be clear about what you can commit to.

6. How will you balance work and evening classes?

Tip: Explain your plan for time and family commitments.

7. How do you treat a customer's home?

Tip: Mention shoe covers, drop cloths, cleaning up and clear communication.

8. Tell us about a time you made a mistake.

Tip: Explain what you did to fix it and what you learned.

9. How are your math skills?

Tip: Be honest and mention any refresher work you have done.

10. What does safety mean to you?

Tip: Talk about PPE, trench safety and asking when you are unsure.

11. Do you have reliable transportation?

Tip: Confirm your license and how you get to job sites.

12. Where do you see yourself in five years?

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

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 demolition, framing and fixture removal.
- Replaced faucets, toilet parts and garbage disposals in family and rental properties.
- Maintained perfect attendance for 12 months at a full-time job.
- Loaded and organized tools and materials for a three-person crew.
- Read work orders and measurements to cut and fit materials accurately.
- Provided courteous service to customers in a retail role.
- Operated a skid steer and hand tools safely on a landscaping crew.

Common mistakes to avoid

1. Working for a contractor that does not register you, so your hours do not count toward a license.
2. Not keeping your own log of hours and tasks.
3. Applying to only one apprenticeship program.
4. Paying for an expensive trade school before checking local apprenticeships.
5. Studying the wrong code (UPC vs. IPC) or the wrong edition for your exam.
6. Ignoring gas piping rules, which often need a separate license.

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

- **United Association (UA)**

<https://ua.org/>

- **Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Contractors Association (PHCC)**

<https://www.phccweb.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 \$44,150	\$63,800 per year (\$30.67 per hour)	More than \$108,420

Outlook: Employment is projected to grow 7% from 2025 to 2035, much faster than the average for all occupations, with about 42,000 openings per year.

Source: BLS Occupational Outlook Handbook, Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters, May 2025 data — <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/construction-and-extraction/plumbers-pipefitters-and-steamfitters.htm>

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