Information about the apprenticeship program system in Canada.


How does the apprenticeship "system" work? - What you should know

In Canada, many people assume that an apprenticeship is either a government-sponsored "training program", or it is similar to a "co-operative (co-op) program" for which you can enroll or register at your local college or post-secondary training institution. This is not exactly the case. **An apprenticeship is an agreement** that is signed by the apprentice, the employer, and the apprenticeship authority (office) of the province/territory where the apprentice and the employer work.

When you sign your apprenticeship training agreement you will learn a trade from your employer and fulfill the training and education requirements for your trade that are established by the government apprenticeship authority (office) of the province/territory where you will work. Generally, you will alternate between periods of work "on-the-job" (up to 80% of the time) and periods of "in class" instruction (up to 20% of the time). After you have fulfilled your on-the-job and in-class requirements (anywhere from 2 to 5 years or more, depending upon the trade), you will take a provincial/territorial trade exam. When you pass the exam, you will have the legal right to work as a fully-qualified tradesperson (also known as a "journeyperson") in your province/territory.

**Factors affecting the in-class and on-the job portions of your apprenticeship**

The answer to this question depends upon several factors. The order in which you complete the on-the-job and in-class portions of your apprenticeship training may depend upon:

- Your trade
- The region in which you live,
- The current labour market (whether or not there is a shortage of skilled workers in your trade), and
- The province/territory in which you live - among other factors.

For example, in some provinces/territories (and in some trades) you may be required to complete a probationary period or pre-apprenticeship program before you begin the on-the-job portion of your apprenticeship training. In other provinces and territories (and in other trades) you may be required to complete all or part of the on-the-job portion of your apprenticeship training before you begin the in-class portion of your apprenticeship training.

Furthermore, in some provinces/territories (and in some trades) you may have the opportunity to choose when, where and what subjects you will take for the in-class portion of your apprenticeship training. In other provinces and territories (and in other trades) you may have little or no choice: you may need to take mandatory courses for your trade and/or you may need to take courses in a different location than your home town or city.

The only way to be certain of these things is to check the training and education requirements for your trade in the province/territory where you will work.

**Apprenticeships are a provincial responsibility in Canada**
Apprenticeships, as part of the educational system in Canada, are a provincial responsibility. Links to each of the provinces’ apprenticeship website is available at:

http://www.apprenticetrades.ca/EN/displayContent/default.asp?userAction=LOADARTICLE&txtArticleID=1036

Probationary period and "pre-apprenticeship" programs

Some provinces and territories may require you to complete a probationary period before entering into an apprenticeship agreement. Furthermore, some colleges and training institutions may offer a "pre-apprenticeship program" which may give you some skills or prepare you for apprenticeship training. However, even if you enroll in a pre-apprenticeship program, you will still need to find an employer to hire you as an actual apprentice so that you may complete all of the training requirements for your trade. Contact your provincial/territorial government apprenticeship office for more information.

How to find an employer

Network

Just like any job seeker might do, some skilled tradespeople find employers through contacts they make searching for a skilled trades job through post-secondary institutions or training institutions, or through networking with skilled trades-related organizations (like trade unions or professional associations, for example),

Talk to people in the trade

It is recommended that you communicate with tradespeople who are already employed in the trade that you wish to learn. They can be a good source of information about becoming a skilled tradesperson. They may even know of employers who may be willing to hire an apprentice. If you do not personally know a skilled tradesperson who is employed in the trade that you wish to learn, two possible places to locate such people may be through your local skilled trade union/professional association or through a trades-related training program at community college or other post-secondary institution.

Upgrade your job

Other skilled tradespeople first start working for an employer as a regular employee in a job that is not trades-related, and then they approach their employer about hiring and training them as a skilled trades apprentice. For example, a thirty-something year old man began working as a general delivery person for a construction company. After a year or two of learning about the company and observing its employees, he decided to approach his employer about hiring him as a plumbing apprentice. Today, several years later, he is a fully qualified journeyperson plumber working for the same construction company and earning more than twice the pay.
Search job boards/internet

Some other skilled tradespeople locate job leads through the "trades", "construction", "manufacturing" etc sections of major job boards such as: Monster.ca, Workopolis, working.canada.com etc. If you are doing a search on these sites, use the keyword "trades" or use the name of your trade to see what your search reveals.

Need to know where to find an employer, what to say, how to prepare? (NB: If you click on this link and little or no content appears on the page, click the "refresh" button).

More information about: Starting a career - finding work as an apprentice

FAQs

What is Apprenticeship?
In most province/territories apprenticeship is an agreement between the employer (or joint training board), provincial/territorial government and apprentice (worker). During the course of the apprenticeship the apprentice will work for an employer and receive on the job training, as well as go to school periodically for more formal training. Upon finishing the term (which varies by trade and province/territory) of the apprenticeship and meeting conditions for hours worked, the apprentice is awarded a certificate of apprenticeship and/or a Certification of Qualification*.

What is the Interprovincial Standards (Red Seal) Program?
The Interprovincial Standard (Red Seal) Program is an endorsement to the provincially/territorially issued Certification of Qualification* It confirms that the holder has achieved 70% or higher on the Interprovincial/territorial exam for their trade, allowing them to work in any province/territory in Canada.

Interprovincial Standards (Red Seal) Program web site: http://www.red-seal.ca/english/index_e.shtml

What Trades are Apprenticeable?
Apprenticeable trades vary by province/territory, although a large number of trades are common to all regions.

For a specific list of trades by province/territory refer to the Information Finder.

What are Compulsory Trades?
A compulsory trade is one where you must, by law, be a certified journeyperson or registered apprentice to do the work of that trade. The trades that are compulsory vary by province/territory.

How Do I Get More Information?
The best starting point is the Apprenticeship Branch in your province/territory.

Refer to the Information Finder and search for "contact information".
**What is a Designated Trade?**
A designated trade is one regulated by a province's or territory's legislation. This legislation generally provides for formal training and certification for trades that have been "designated".

**How Do I Become an Apprentice?**
In most provinces/territories you need to have an entry level job in the trade. Your employer must register you as an apprentice in that trade with the provincial/territorial apprenticeship branch. There are academic requirements that vary by trade and province/territory, although Grade 12 is recommended for most trades. As a registered apprentice you will be expected to attend in-school technical training as well as learning on the job.

**What Wages are Paid to Apprentices?**
For most trades apprentices are paid a proportion of the journeyperson's rate. The proportion generally increases for every year/level the apprentice progresses in the apprenticeship program. In some jurisdictions, these proportions are set out in trade regulations.

*For further information on a specific trade please refer to the Information Finder.*

**What is a Journeyperson?**
A journeyperson is someone who has a Certification of Qualification* or Certificate of Apprenticeship in a specific trade.

* The term for trade certification varies by province and territory.

**What is a C of Q*?**
A Certification of Qualification* is awarded to the apprentice who has successfully completed his in-school technical training, has completed the required number of on the job hours for their trade and passed all required exam(s).