

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

INTENDED FOR HIGH SCHOOLERS INTERESTED IN THE CONSTRUCTION TRADES

How do I choose a skilled trade that is a fit for me?

There are nearly 20 different trade pathways to choose from that each require a variety of skill sets and focus on different areas of construction. The WRTP/BIG STEP teams offer services to help you find a fit and get connected with industry professionals in the field. You can also explore the trades at <https://www.buildingadvantage.org/programs/pick-a-trade>. Consider factors such as your comfort with working in closed spaces and at heights, your desire to work in extreme weather conditions, and your math skill level.

What is the process to starting an apprenticeship right out of high school?

You will need to be 18 and have a high school diploma or HSED to be eligible to start an apprenticeship. Each skilled trade has a unique application and process to complete, and for many trades you can begin to submit these documents in your senior year of high school. You will complete your application by submitting your high school transcripts and finishing the steps in the application process. You do not need to have any college certifications or degrees to be eligible for an apprenticeship after high school.

When does an apprenticeship begin?

The first step is to complete the application process. These processes and application days depend on your trade. The WRTP/BIG STEP team can help you with this through their apprenticeship readiness services. Your construction apprenticeship will be through the state of Wisconsin, and you will sign a contract. When you get to this point, you will be hired and also be part of your local trade union.

What classes do I take in high school?

Your math courses will be especially important if you are considering a career in construction. Take Algebra and practice skills like basic calculations, reading a ruler, and understanding fractions. The skilled trades will want you to have a good understanding of reading, language, and science as well. Most trade application processes require passing test scores, so your reading, math, and language ACT scores will be important. Definitely take the opportunity to enroll in any career and technical education classes such as construction or welding. Reach out to WRTP/BIG STEP for training opportunities as well.

What does the schedule look like for an apprenticeship throughout the year?

If you complete the application process, get selected, and find an opportunity with a contractor to begin an apprenticeship, then you will spend about 80% of your time on the job and 20% of your time in school. An apprenticeship with the construction union trades is an “earn to learn” program, meaning you are paid from the start of your apprenticeship for the job you do, learn from professionals in the field, and also have an opportunity to attend classes.

Be aware that construction is often seasonal work, so apprentices may be out of work or laid off at certain points in the year (i.e. colder months). You will need to plan for this in how you spend your money and time, but part of being in a construction union is to support you in finding work when contractors are hiring.

What is a typical week like for an apprentice?

A construction apprenticeship is a full-time opportunity. You will be working and attending classes periodically. The class schedule will vary based on the trade apprenticeship program you begin. Some trades have apprentices once or twice a week, sometimes in the evenings or on weekends. Some trades have apprentices attend classes during slower parts of the season when there is not as much work in the field. This schedule will depend on the trade you choose and how local training centers run the program.

What do I do while waiting for an apprenticeship?

You may have a wait before getting hired once you complete the application process for apprenticeship. Be patient. Be persistent. You may choose to take courses or trainings, and this is a good time to work on your resume and interview skills. Reach out to WRTP/BIG STEP to learn more about their services. Stay connected to your local union to learn about job opportunities and hiring contractors.

Can I get a good paying job right out of high school?

Yes! One perk of being part of the construction union trades is that each trade has a standard starting wage for new apprentices that is very competitive and offers strong benefits like health insurance and retirement savings. You will be eligible for wage increases as you earn hours towards your apprenticeship. Apprenticeships typically last 3 - 5 years, and you get paid the entire time you are working. You then can become a journey worker making over \$30/hour. This could happen in about 5 years after graduating high school depending on industry need.

What are opportunities for growth in the field such as promotions and wage increases?

As part of your local construction union, you will be eligible for wage increases based on your number of hours earned as an apprentice. From an apprentice, you work towards being a journeyworker who is an experienced professional in the field and trains apprentices. There are also opportunities to work to be a foreman leading crews on a job site, or perhaps even a superintendent overseeing the work of a project. The construction industry has many employment pathways and opportunities to go back to school to continue your career!

What are current opportunities and job availability in the construction industry?

The construction industry is one that has work as long as communities are building and roadways need improvements. Based on the trade that you choose, construction work may be seasonal. The trades are a growing industry in need of a new generation to join the workforce.