

Photographers

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Significant Points

- Competition for jobs is expected to be keen because the work is attractive to many people.
- Technical expertise, a “good eye,” imagination, and creativity are essential.
- More than half of all photographers are self-employed; the most successful are able to adapt to rapidly changing technologies and are adept at operating a business.

Nature of the Work

Photographers produce and preserve images that paint a picture, tell a story, or record an event. To create commercial quality photographs, photographers need both technical expertise and creativity. Producing a successful picture requires choosing and presenting a subject to achieve a particular effect, and selecting the appropriate equipment. For example, photographers may enhance the subject’s appearance with natural or artificial light, use a particular lens depending on the desired range or level of detail, or draw attention to a particular aspect of the subject by blurring the background.

Today, many cameras adjust settings such as shutter speed and aperture automatically. They also let the photographer adjust these settings manually, allowing greater creative and technical control over the picture-taking process. In addition to automatic and manual cameras, photographers use an array of film, lenses, and equipment—from filters, tripods, and flash attachments to specially constructed lighting equipment.

Photographers use either a traditional camera that records images on silver halide film that is developed into prints or a digital camera that electronically records images. Some photographers send their film to laboratories for processing. Color film requires expensive equipment and exacting conditions for correct processing and printing. (See the statement on photographic process workers and processing machine operators elsewhere in the *Handbook*.) Other photographers, especially those who use black and white film or who require special effects, prefer to develop and print their own photographs. Photographers who do their own film developing must have the technical skill to operate a fully equipped darkroom or the appropriate computer software to process prints digitally.

Recent advances in electronic technology now make it possible for the professional photographer to develop and scan standard 35mm or other types of film, and use flatbed scanners and photofinishing laboratories to produce computer-readable, digital images from film. After converting the film to a digital image, photographers can edit and electronically transmit images using a method as simple as e-mail or as advanced as a satellite phone. This makes it easier and faster to shoot, develop, and transmit pictures from remote locations.

Using computers and specialized software, photographers also can manipulate and enhance the scanned or digital image to create a desired effect. Images can be stored on portable memory devices including compact disks (CDs) or on new types of smaller “mini pocket” storage devices such as flash disks, which are small memory cards used in digital cameras. Digital

technology also allows the production of larger, more colorful, and more accurate prints or images for use in advertising, photographic art, and scientific research. Some photographers use this technology to create electronic portfolios as well. Because much photography now involves the use of computer technology, photographers must have hands-on knowledge of computer editing software.

Some photographers specialize in areas such as portrait, commercial and industrial, scientific, news, or fine arts photography. *Portrait photographers* take pictures of individuals or groups of people and often work in their own studios. Some specialize in weddings, religious ceremonies, or school photographs and may work on location. Portrait photographers who are business owners arrange for advertising, schedule appointments, set and adjust equipment, develop and retouch negatives, and mount and frame pictures. They also purchase supplies, keep records, bill customers, and may hire and train employees.

Commercial and industrial photographers take pictures of various subjects, such as buildings, models, merchandise, artifacts, and landscapes. These photographs are used in a variety of media, including books, reports, advertisements, and catalogs. Industrial photographers often take pictures of equipment, machinery, products, workers, and company officials. The pictures are used for various purposes—for example, analysis of engineering projects, publicity, or records of equipment development or deployment, such as placement of an offshore rig. This photography frequently is done on location.

Scientific photographers take images of a variety of subjects to illustrate or record scientific or medical data or phenomena, using knowledge of scientific procedures. They typically possess additional knowledge in areas such as engineering, medicine, biology, or chemistry.

News photographers, also called *photojournalists*, photograph newsworthy people, places, and sporting, political, and community events for newspapers, journals, magazines, or television. Some news photographers are salaried staff; others are self-employed and are known as freelance photographers.

Fine arts photographers sell their photographs as fine artwork. In addition to technical proficiency, fine arts photographers need artistic talent and creativity.

Self-employed, or freelance, photographers may license the use of their photographs through stock photo agencies or con-



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tract with clients or agencies to provide photographs as necessary. Stock agencies grant magazines and other customers the right to purchase the use of photographs, and, in turn, pay the photographer on a commission basis. Stock photo agencies require an application from the photographer and a sizable portfolio. Once accepted, a large number of new submissions usually is required from the photographer each year.

Working Conditions

Working conditions for photographers vary considerably. Photographers employed in government and advertising agencies usually work a 5-day, 40-hour week. On the other hand, news photographers often work long, irregular hours and must be available to work on short notice. Many photographers work part-time or variable schedules.

Portrait photographers usually work in their own studios but also may travel to take photographs at the client's location, such as a school, a company office, or a private home. News and commercial photographers frequently travel locally, stay overnight on assignments, or travel to distant places for long periods.

Some photographers work in uncomfortable or even dangerous surroundings, especially news photographers covering accidents, natural disasters, civil unrest, or military conflicts. Many photographers must wait long hours in all kinds of weather for an event to take place and stand or walk for long periods while carrying heavy equipment. News photographers often work under strict deadlines.

Self-employment allows for greater autonomy, freedom of expression, and flexible scheduling. However, income can be uncertain and the continuous, time-consuming search for new clients can be stressful. Some self-employed photographers hire assistants who help seek out new business.

Employment

Photographers held about 130,000 jobs in 2002. More than half were self-employed, a much higher proportion than the average for all occupations. Some self-employed photographers have contracts with advertising agencies, magazines, or others to do individual projects at a predetermined fee, while others operate portrait studios or provide photographs to stock photo agencies.

Most salaried photographers work in portrait or commercial photography studios. Newspapers, magazines, television broadcasters, and advertising agencies employ most of the others. Most photographers work in metropolitan areas.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Employers usually seek applicants with a "good eye," imagination, and creativity, as well as a good technical understanding of photography. Entry-level positions in photojournalism or in industrial or scientific photography generally require a college degree in journalism or photography. Freelance and portrait photographers need technical proficiency, whether gained through a degree program, vocational training, or extensive work experience.

Many universities, community and junior colleges, vocational-technical institutes, and private trade and technical schools offer photography courses. Basic courses in photography cover equipment, processes, and techniques. Bachelor's degree programs, especially those including business courses,

provide a well-rounded education. Art schools offer useful training in design and composition.

Individuals interested in photography should subscribe to photographic newsletters and magazines, join camera clubs, and seek summer or part-time employment in camera stores, newspapers, or photo studios.

Photographers may start out as assistants to experienced photographers. Assistants learn to mix chemicals, develop film, and print photographs, and acquire the other skills necessary to run a portrait or commercial photography business. Freelance photographers also should develop an individual style of photography in order to differentiate themselves from the competition. Some photographers enter the field by submitting unsolicited photographs to magazines and to art directors at advertising agencies. For freelance photographers, a good portfolio of their work is critical.

Photographers need good eyesight, artistic ability, and good hand-eye coordination. They should be patient, accurate, and detail-oriented. Photographers should be able to work well with others, as they frequently deal with clients, graphic designers, or advertising and publishing specialists. Increasingly, photographers need to know how to use computer software programs and applications that allow them to prepare and edit images.

Portrait photographers need the ability to help people relax in front of the camera. Commercial and fine arts photographers must be imaginative and original. News photographers not only must be good with a camera, but also must understand the story behind an event so that their pictures match the story. They must be decisive in recognizing a potentially good photograph and act quickly to capture it.

Photographers who operate their own businesses, or freelance, need business skills as well as talent. These individuals must know how to prepare a business plan; submit bids; write contracts; market their work; hire models, if needed; get permission to shoot on locations that normally are not open to the public; obtain releases to use photographs of people; license and price photographs; secure copyright protection for their work; and keep financial records. Knowledge of licensing and copyright laws as well as contract negotiation procedures is especially important for self-employed photographers, in order to protect their rights and their work.

After several years of experience, magazine and news photographers may advance to photography or picture editor positions. Some photographers teach at technical schools, film schools, or universities.

Job Outlook

Photographers can expect keen competition for job openings because the work is attractive to many people. The number of individuals interested in positions as commercial and news photographers usually is much greater than the number of openings. Those who succeed in landing a salaried job or attracting enough work to earn a living by freelancing are likely to be the most creative, able to adapt to rapidly changing technologies, and adept at operating a business. Related work experience, job-related training, or some unique skill or talent—such as a background in computers or electronics—also are beneficial to prospective photographers.

Employment of photographers is expected to increase about as fast as the average for all occupations through 2012. Demand

for portrait photographers should increase as the population grows. As the number of electronic versions of magazines, journals, and newspapers increases on the Internet, commercial photographers will be needed to provide digital images.

Job growth, however, will be constrained somewhat by the widespread use of digital photography and the falling price of digital equipment. Besides increasing photographers' productivity, improvements in digital technology reduce barriers of entry into this profession and allow more individual consumers and businesses to produce, store, and access photographic images on their own. Declines in the newspaper industry also will reduce demand for photographers to provide still images for print.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of salaried photographers were \$24,040 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$17,740 and \$34,910. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$14,640, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$49,920. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of salaried photographers were \$31,460 for newspapers and periodicals and \$21,860 for other professional or scientific services.

Salaried photographers—more of whom work full time—tend to earn more than those who are self-employed. Because most freelance and portrait photographers purchase their own equipment, they incur considerable expense acquiring and maintaining cameras and accessories. Unlike news and commercial photographers, few fine arts photographers are successful enough to support themselves solely through their art.

Related Occupations

Other occupations requiring artistic talent and creativity include architects, except landscape and naval; artists and related workers; designers; news analysts, reporters, and correspondents; and television, video, and motion picture camera operators and editors.

Sources of Additional Information

Career information on photography is available from:

- ▶ Professional Photographers of America, Inc., 229 Peachtree St. NE., Suite 2200, Atlanta, GA 30303.
- ▶ National Press Photographers Association, Inc., 3200 Croasdaile Dr., Suite 306, Durham, NC 27705. Internet: <http://www.nppa.org>