



Careers for people who are creative

Dennis Vilorio (updated by Elka Torpey) | December 2018

Note: This is an update of an [article originally published](#) in 2015.

If you think creativity is only for artists, think again. People use creativity every day in all kinds of ways, whether posting on social media or developing a mobile app.

For some people, creativity is an essential part of their work. “To be creative is the most exciting thing you can do,” says Chris Triola, owner of a textile design studio in Lansing, Michigan. “It’s as necessary to me as eating and breathing.”

But making creativity your career typically requires hard work and perseverance. For workers who do it on their own, it also means learning how to market themselves and run a business.

This article highlights selected occupations that involve creativity. It uses U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data to show employment, projected openings, and wages for these occupations. And it points out how to get started in a creative career.

Occupations and outlook

Most occupations involve some form of creativity. A [salesperson](#), for example, might design a more engaging product pitch, and a [physicist](#) might devise a new way of understanding nature.

In some occupations, creativity is an integral part of the job. Artists and related workers, designers, and media and communication workers, for example, all use creativity nearly every day.

The tables show, for selected occupations, employment and the percentage of self-employed workers in 2016; projected openings, on average, from 2016 to 2026; and median annual wages in 2017. Except for three of these occupations—[craft artists](#), [floral designers](#), and [photographers](#)—wages were above the \$37,690 median for all workers. However, these wage data do not include self-employed workers, and the rate of self-employment was higher in the occupations shown in the tables compared with 6 percent, the rate of self-employment in all occupations.

Artists and related workers

Artists and related workers create aesthetic pieces that try to capture certain beliefs, feelings, or ideas. For example, a painter may try to express happiness through a watercolor landscape of a summer day. Workers in the occupations shown in table 1 typically develop a unique style, which helps to set them apart from others in their field.

Table 1. Selected occupations for artists and related workers

Employment and percent self-employed, 2016; projected openings, 2016–26 annual average; and median annual wage, 2017



Occupation	Employment, 2016	Percent self-employed, 2016	Occupational openings, projected 2016–26 annual average	Median annual wage, 2017 [1]
Art directors	90,300	59%	7,700	\$92,500
Craft artists	12,500	60	1,100	34,940
Fine artists, including painters, sculptors, and illustrators	28,000	59	2,400	49,520
Multimedia artists and animators	73,700	59	6,600	70,530

[1] Excludes self-employed workers.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections.

The occupations in table 1 are projected to have a total of about 17,800 openings each year, on average, from 2016 to 2026. [Art directors](#) is projected to have the most openings of the occupations in the table. It also had the highest median annual wage of any occupation in this article: \$92,500.

Designers

Designers, such as those in table 2, make original creations that have practical or aesthetic purpose. Businesses in nearly all industries rely on designers to develop and implement ideas for products or services. Designers may start a project by sketching ideas on paper or creating a computer prototype. Feedback from clients and staff members helps refine the ideas into a final product.

Table 2. Selected occupations for designers

Employment and percent self-employed, 2016; projected openings, 2016–26 annual average; and median annual wage, 2017



Occupation	Employment, 2016	Percent self-employed, 2016	Occupational openings, projected 2016–26 annual average	Median annual wage, 2017 [1]
Commercial and industrial designers	39,700	19	3,900	\$65,970
Fashion designers	23,800	19	2,300	67,420
Floral designers	55,000	19	4,500	26,350
Graphic designers	266,300	18	26,000	48,700
Interior designers	66,500	19	6,500	51,500

[1] Excludes self-employed workers.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections.

BLS projects the occupations in table 2 to have a total of about 43,200 openings each year, on average, over the 2016–26 decade. [Graphic designers](#) is projected to have more than twice as many openings as any other occupation in this article. With a median annual wage of \$67,420, [fashion designers](#) had the highest wage of the occupations in table 2.

Media and communication workers

The media and communication workers in table 3 use words or images to convey information and ideas. Some write fictional stories; others capture information or describe actual events, such as breaking news.

Table 3. Selected occupations for media and communication workers

Employment and percent self-employed, 2016; projected openings, 2016–26 annual average; and median annual wage, 2017



Occupation	Employment, 2016	Percent self-employed, 2016	Occupational openings, projected 2016–26 annual average	Median annual wage, 2017 [1]
Editors	127,400	20	12,000	\$58,770
Technical writers	52,400	3	5,700	70,930
Writers and authors	131,200	64	12,600	61,820
Photographers	147,300	68	10,300	32,490

[1] Excludes self-employed workers.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections.

Overall, BLS projects about 40,600 openings, each year, on average from 2016 to 2026 for the occupations in table 3. [Writers and authors](#) is projected to have the most openings of these occupations. [Technical writers](#) had a median annual wage of \$70,930, the highest of the occupations in the table.

Getting started

You'll need some combination of skills, education and training, and experience to get started in a creative career. Networking and promoting your work are also important.

Skills

Creative workers need technical skills relevant to their occupation, which may involve use of certain equipment. For example, a craft artist who specializes in woodworking needs to be able to make bevel and groove cuts with a saw and a chisel, among other tools.

Communication skills are also important for creative workers. Having ideas is not enough; you must be able to share those ideas through writing or speaking.

And for many people in creative occupations, business skills are pivotal to success—especially if you’re self-employed. The [Small Business Administration](#) and the nonprofit [SCORE](#) offer information for small business owners through free or low-cost resources and services, including workshops, networking events, and one-on-one mentorships.

Education, training, and experience

According to BLS, most creative occupations typically require a bachelor’s degree for workers to qualify at the entry level. And in about half of these occupations, workers receive on-the-job training to help them hone their craft. (See table 4.)

Table 4. Education, work experience, and training for selected creative occupations



Occupation	Entry-level education	Work experience	On-the-job training
Artists and related workers			
Art directors	Bachelor's degree	5 years or more	None
Craft artists	No formal educational credential	None	Long-term on-the-job training
Fine artists, including painters, sculptors, and illustrators	Bachelor's degree	None	Long-term on-the-job training
Multimedia artists and animators	Bachelor's degree	None	None
Designers			
Commercial and industrial designers	Bachelor's degree	None	None
Fashion designers	Bachelor's degree	None	None
Floral designers	High school diploma or equivalent	None	Moderate-term on-the-job training
Graphic designers	Bachelor's degree	None	None
Interior designers	Bachelor's degree	None	None
Set and exhibit designers	Bachelor's degree	None	None
Media and communication workers			
Editors	Bachelor's degree	Less than 5 years	None
Photographers	High school diploma or equivalent	None	Long-term on-the-job training
Technical writers	Bachelor's degree	Less than 5 years	Short-term on-the-job training
Writers and authors	Bachelor's degree	None	Long-term on-the-job training

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections.

Getting an education can help you to build a solid technical and artistic foundation—and may improve employment prospects. Even in occupations that don't typically require education in a formal program, creative workers usually benefit from hands-on learning. For example, you could start out as a hobbyist, then turn your passion into a career after discovering a market for your work.

As table 4 also shows, most creative occupations don't require work experience in a related occupation to qualify for entry-level positions. Still, in occupations such as [illustrators](#) and photographers, workers may have started out as assistants or apprentices. Among the few that do need experience is [editors](#); workers in this occupation typically gain experience in a related one, such as [reporter](#).

Networking and self-promotion

To pursue a creative career, you should expect to take the initiative in networking and promoting your work. This process is often difficult in the beginning, when you don't have a large portfolio or many professional connections. But it usually gets easier as you build a reputation.

Having an online portfolio and a social media presence may help you to market your creativity. And applying for grants, such as through the [National Endowment for the Arts](#), offers potential funding.

Above all, remember to be patient. As workers in most fields can attest, it usually takes years to develop a solid career.



For more information

To learn more about the creative occupations in this article—and hundreds of others—see the [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#) (OOH). Each OOH profile includes information about work environment, pay, job outlook, and more.

Visit the *Career Outlook* archives for a list of articles about careers that use [creativity](#). And for a list of nearly 300 occupations that require creative skills, visit the [O*NET OnLine database](#).

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