

Job Outlook for Flight School Graduates

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[The earning potential for flight school](#) graduates varies greatly depending on the industry. Airline pilots' earnings' are amongst the highest in the country and depend on the pilots' rank, experience, aircraft type and the size of the airline.

Aircraft pilots and flight engineers are expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations. Regional airlines and low-cost carriers will present the best opportunities; pilots attempting to get jobs at the major airlines will face strong competition.

Employment of aircraft pilots and flight engineers is projected to grow 12 percent from 2008 to 2018, which is about as fast as the average for all occupations. Population growth and an expanding economy in the long run are expected to boost the demand for air travel, contributing to job growth. New jobs will be created as airlines expand their capacity to meet this rising demand by increasing the number of planes in operation and the number of flights offered.

Job Prospects

Job opportunities are expected to be best for experienced pilots with the regional airlines and low-cost carriers, which are expected to grow faster than the major airlines. Opportunities with air cargo carriers also should arise because of increasing security requirements for shipping freight on passenger airlines, growth in electronic commerce, and increased demand for global freight. Business, commuter, corporate, and on-demand air taxi travel also should provide some new jobs for pilots.

Pilots attempting to get jobs at the major airlines will face strong competition, as those firms tend to attract many more applicants than the number of job openings. Applicants also will have to compete with laid-off pilots for any available jobs. Pilots who have logged the greatest number of flying hours using sophisticated equipment typically have the best prospects. For this reason, military pilots often have an advantage over other applicants.

In addition to job openings arising from employment growth, opportunities will result from the need to replace workers transferring to other occupations or leaving the labor force. Additional openings will result from the mandatory retirement of commercial airline pilots at age 65.

Employment of pilots is sensitive to cyclical swings in the economy. During recessions, when a decline in the demand for air travel forces airlines to ground planes and curtail the number of flights, airlines may temporarily furlough some pilots.

Earning Potential

Earnings of aircraft pilots and flight engineers vary greatly depending whether they work as airline or commercial pilots. Earnings also depend on factors such as rank, seniority, and the size and type of aircraft flown. For example, pilots who fly jet aircraft usually earn higher salaries than pilots who fly turboprops. Airline pilots and flight engineers may earn extra pay for night and international flights. In May 2008, median annual wages of airline pilots, copilots, and flight engineers were \$111,680. The middle 50 percent earned between \$81,580 and \$150,480.

Median annual wages of commercial pilots were \$65,340 in May 2008. The middle 50 percent earned between \$45,680 and \$89,540. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$32,020, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$129,580.

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