

Money

50 Best Jobs in America

What makes a great job? High pay. Great prospects. And work that--even on a tough day--gives you a charge.

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(MONEY Magazine) - Forget "plastics." Today's career advice, in a word: computers. In two words: health care. Job opportunities in those fields will abound over the next decade, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. And many of them will offer high pay--and high satisfaction too. That explains why, by the reckoning of MONEY and the compensation experts at Salary.com, technology and health care account for nearly a third of the 50 Best Jobs in America. Besides crunching numbers on job growth and pay, we graded jobs on stress level, flexibility in work environment and hours, creativity, and ease of entry and advancement in the field. America's top job? Look to your right and read why that man is smiling. This Guy Has the Best Job in America Don't You Just Hate Him? Mark Dochtermann, 34 DIRECTOR OF TECHNOLOGY ELECTRONIC ARTS

"When I saw my first computer, it was love at first sight. As a kid I spent a lot of time on a Commodore 64, writing my own programs, figuring out games, hacking. You can learn an awful lot about programming doing that. I majored in computer engineering but never thought I could work in the game industry--it was a dream job.

After college I sent one of my creations to a small game company. Next thing I knew, I was their programmer. Since then I've built a career in the "first-person shooter" category with games like Duke Nukem 3D. During the tech boom, when others left games for the money in start-ups, I stayed. I make a good living, and I'd rather work on a game I don't care for than write code for a financial company.

I'm building a product that entertains. Unlike engineers in commerce or aerospace, I can push the envelope without someone getting hurt. Still, there's stress. The worst is a bug or defect. And you can't waste time tweaking that last whiz-bang feature, given the market pressures. But there's no better feeling than seeing your game on the shelves.

Today I manage a team of 65. The hours remain a challenge, and I still do a lot of coding. It's important to work with the group, and it's the best way to stay on the cutting edge."

1 Software engineer

\$80,500 AVERAGE PAY 46% 10-YEAR GROWTH 44,800 ANNUAL JOB OPENINGS STRESS B FLEXIBILITY B CREATIVITY A EASE OF ENTRY C

WHY IT'S GREAT Software engineers are needed in virtually every part of the economy, making this one of the fastest-growing job titles in the U.S. Even so, it's not for everybody. Designing, developing and testing computer programs requires some pretty advanced math skills and creative problem-solving ability. If you've got them, though, you can work and live where you want: Telecommuting is quickly becoming widespread. The profession skews young--the up-all-night-coding thing gets tired--but consulting and management positions aren't hard to come by once you're experienced.

WHAT'S COOL Cutting-edge projects, like designing a new video game or tweaking that military laser. Extra cash from freelance gigs. Plus, nothing says cool like great prospects.

WHAT'S NOT Jobs at the biggest companies tend to be less creative (think Neo, pre-Matrix). Outsourcing is a worry. Eyestrain and back, hand and wrist problems are common.

TOP-PAYING JOB Release engineers, who are responsible for the final version of any software product, earn six figures.

EDUCATION Bachelor's degree, but moving up the ladder often requires a master's.

2 College professor

\$81,500 AVERAGE PAY 31% 10-YEAR GROWTH 95,300 ANNUAL JOB OPENINGS STRESS B FLEXIBILITY A CREATIVITY A EASE OF ENTRY C
"You have a lot of interaction with creative, interesting, motivated people, and you have new ideas all the time. Every time you go to class, something unexpected happens." --JEAN ANN LINNEY, 55, VICE PRESIDENT AND ASSOCIATE PROVOST AT NOTRE DAME

WHY IT'S GREAT While competition for tenure-track jobs will always be stiff, enrollment is rising in professional programs, community colleges and technical schools--which means higher demand for faculty. It's easier to break in at this level, and often you can teach with a master's and professional experience. Demand is especially strong in fields that compete with the private sector (health science and business, for example). The category includes moonlighting adjuncts, graduate TAs and college administrators.

WHAT'S COOL Professors have near-total flexibility in their schedules. Creative thinking is the coin of the realm. No dress code!

WHAT'S NOT The tick-tick-tick of the tenure clock; grading papers; salaries at the low end are indeed low.

TOP-PAYING JOB University presidents' pay can hit \$550,000 or more, but most make about half that.

EDUCATION Master's or professional degree; Ph.D. for most tenured jobs.

3 Financial adviser

\$122,500 AVERAGE PAY 26% 10-YEAR GROWTH 6,100 ANNUAL JOB OPENINGS STRESS C FLEXIBILITY B CREATIVITY B EASE OF ENTRY B
"Most people don't know their goals. I know how helpless I felt years ago when my husband died young. It's the best feeling to bring people from defining their goals to realizing them." --DEBORAH FELDMAN, 55, CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER, CHICAGO

WHY IT'S GREAT Twenty years ago, no one ever said, "I want to be a financial adviser when I grow up." Now there are nearly 300 college programs for financial planning, and M.B.A.s, lawyers and accountants are jumping to this lucrative but more people-friendly profession. As company pensions die out and Americans increasingly have to manage their own retirement savings, financial planning is no longer just for the rich. And with Gen X-ers entering their peak earning years and boomers nearing retirement, business will get better still.

WHAT'S COOL If you have a knack for numbers and a way with people, you can use Wall Street skills without selling your soul. You can work for yourself, for a small shop or for a giant financial services firm.

WHAT'S NOT Compliance rules mean lots of paperwork. Stress? You have to build a practice from the ground up.

TOP-PAYING JOB Advisers who manage client portfolios earn \$200,000-plus.

EDUCATION A college degree, plus certification and continuing education.

4 Human-resources manager

\$73,500 AVERAGE PAY 23% 10-YEAR GROWTH 32,300 ANNUAL JOB OPENINGS STRESS B FLEXIBILITY A CREATIVITY B EASE OF ENTRY A
"Our ability to attract the right employees, keep them engaged and provide intellectual stimulation is what differentiates us. My role: Create a culture that makes us the employer of choice." --SEAN WOODROFFE, 42, SENIOR V.P. OF HR, FINANCIAL GUARANTEE INSURANCE CO.

WHY IT'S GREAT At more and more companies, HR is no longer about benefits administration and the employee newsletter. Those tasks are increasingly outsourced, and directors and v.p.s are considered strategic planners. Even lower-level managers are expected to design employee programs that also

benefit the bottom line. International HR and compliance are especially hot. There's a wide variety of work, from self-employed benefits specialists to corporate recruiters and HR generalists.

WHAT'S COOL The mission: to make work more rewarding for workers. You help shape corporate culture and strategy.

WHAT'S NOT Fighting the "fluffy HR" stereotype; firing people.

TOP-PAYING JOB Senior HR directors make around \$285,000; at the C-suite level, it's more like \$1 million-plus.

EDUCATION Bachelor's degree, often followed by master's level work or professional certification.

5 Physician assistant

\$75,000 AVERAGE PAY 50% 10-YEAR GROWTH 4,000 ANNUAL JOB OPENINGS STRESS C FLEXIBILITY B CREATIVITY B EASE OF ENTRY C
"We can focus on medicine and spend time with patients. To shake the hand of someone who was nearly dead or cure someone of an illness, there is no feeling like that in the world." --LAWRENCE HERMAN, 52, PHYSICIAN'S ASSISTANT, HOLBROOK, N.Y.

WHY IT'S GREAT For most doctors, the worst part of their job is filling out paperwork and battling insurers. Physician's assistants get to skip all that. Under a doctor's supervision, they provide routine health care--conducting physical exams, ordering lab tests, prescribing medications, treating illnesses. PAs can specialize, from the E.R. to pediatrics to orthopedics, and they can switch fields. Thanks to an aging population and demand for more cost-effective care, this job offers a level of security other professions can't match.

WHAT'S COOL Doctors' work, bankers' hours. PAs average 35 to 40 hours a week, and they can work part time and in a variety of settings.

WHAT'S NOT You're not the ultimate decision maker on patient treatment; there's little room for advancement.

TOP-PAYING JOB Specialists in cardiothoracic surgery earn over \$100,000.

EDUCATION Four years of college, two to three years of training in an accredited program, plus national exam for certification.

6 Market research analyst

\$82,500 AVERAGE PAY 20% 10-YEAR GROWTH 16,000 ANNUAL JOB OPENINGS STRESS C FLEXIBILITY B CREATIVITY C EASE OF ENTRY B

WHY IT'S GREAT If you want to know what the next big thing is, this is your field. Before launching a product or service, companies turn to market research analysts who collect and evaluate data about consumer wants, needs and buying habits. You get to work on a huge variety of projects: In a single day you might run a taste test on a new vodka flavor, evaluate a rebranding campaign for a hot dog and analyze political polling data.

WHAT'S COOL Testing products before they hit the market. You talk to lots of people and get to ask them personal questions you wouldn't dare pose at a party.

WHAT'S NOT Being mistaken for a telemarketer; deadlines; number crunching.

TOP-PAYING JOB A senior exec or partner in a consulting firm can earn more than \$200,000.

EDUCATION B.A.; M.A. in statistics helps.

7 Computer/IT analyst

\$83,500 AVERAGE PAY 36% 10-YEAR GROWTH 67,300 ANNUAL JOB OPENINGS STRESS C FLEXIBILITY C CREATIVITY D EASE OF ENTRY B

WHY IT'S GREAT Seems like the entire world is at the mercy of information technology folks, thanks to the rapid spread of computers and swell of the Internet. And all of these jobs pay well, from desktop support technician to Webmaster to database work. Entry-level analysts make \$60,000 and above. Senior database specialists and IT managers command six-figure salaries and decent bonuses. A bachelor's degree is enough to get started.

WHAT'S COOL Telecommuting and freelance gigs abound. Plus: e-mail snooping!

WHAT'S NOT Carpal tunnel syndrome; outsourcing will mean fewer entry-level and nonspecialized jobs.

TOP-PAYING JOB Network operations directors, who are responsible for a company's intranet, earn \$250,000-plus.

EDUCATION From a B.S. to a Ph.D.

8 Real estate appraiser

\$66,000 AVERAGE PAY 23% 10-YEAR GROWTH 4,500 ANNUAL JOB OPENINGS STRESS A FLEXIBILITY B CREATIVITY D EASE OF ENTRY B

WHY IT'S GREAT The housing boom has meant beaucoup bucks for appraisers in recent years, but the field hasn't gotten as crowded as real estate brokerage. And because valuations are needed whenever any property is sold, mortgaged, insured, taxed or developed, there's going to be work even when the market slows. A quarter of appraisers have steady nine-to-five government gigs assessing property for tax purposes.

WHAT'S COOL Abundant self-employment opportunities. Research isn't the pain that it used to be, thanks to the Internet.

WHAT'S NOT There's still a lot of legwork; advancement is limited.

TOP-PAYING JOB Collateral appraisers, who work with lenders, earn \$130,000-plus.

EDUCATION Bachelor's degree; licensing and certification requirements vary by state.

9 Pharmacist

\$92,000 AVERAGE PAY 25% 10-YEAR GROWTH 10,100 ANNUAL JOB OPENINGS STRESS B FLEXIBILITY B CREATIVITY C EASE OF ENTRY C

WHY IT'S GREAT Demand for pharmacists is exploding as the population ages and new medications are developed. By 2010 the number of prescriptions filled is expected to rise 27% to 4.1 billion. Pharmacists also give advice on over-the-counter meds and help patients manage chronic conditions like diabetes. About 60% work in retail settings, the rest in hospitals and nursing homes and in research or sales for drug companies.

WHAT'S COOL Pharmacists are in such demand that graduates today can expect multiple job offers, signing bonuses and \$90K-plus salaries.

WHAT'S NOT Dealing with insurers and angry patients; limited advancement.

TOP-PAYING JOB Pharmacists at major retail chains can earn six figures.

EDUCATION A doctor of pharmacy degree program is six years long.

10 Psychologist

\$66,500 AVERAGE PAY 19% 10-YEAR GROWTH 6,800 ANNUAL JOB OPENINGS STRESS C FLEXIBILITY B CREATIVITY A EASE OF ENTRY C

WHY IT'S GREAT Feel stressed or anxious? So do a lot of people. That and the decreasing stigma attached to seeking help have fueled demand for psychological services. The pay is good, the hours are flexible, and it's pretty hard to top the psychological benefit that comes with bringing relief to a troubled mind. Greater awareness of how mental health and behavior issues affect learning makes school psychology a particularly fast-growing specialty.

WHAT'S COOL Shrinks are four times as likely to be self-employed as other professionals.

WHAT'S NOT Years of training; stiff competition for slots in graduate programs; insurers.

TOP-PAYING JOB Clinical and counseling psychologists can earn \$95,000-plus.

EDUCATION Ph.D. and one-year internship; to be a school psychologist, three years of graduate study and a one-year internship.

HOW WE DID IT

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In This Issue

- Profiles of the 10 Best Jobs in America
- Details on compensation and growth, plus job-satisfaction grades, for the top 50 careers
- Results from the online survey of 26,000 workers by CNNMoney.com and Salary.com

Open the gatefold that follows page 97.

On CNNMoney.com

- The stats on more than 200 top jobs
- Salary.com's Salary Wizard, which provides local pay rates for the best jobs and thousands of others
- More from our online survey

Go to cnnmoney.com/bestjobs

I LIKE MY JOB: 63% of respondents to a MONEY/Salary.com survey rated their job satisfaction as 5 or higher, on a scale of 1 to 7.

BUT IT'S TOUGH: 56% rated on-the-job stress as 5 or higher. Biggest gripes: "too much work" and "no room to advance."

STUCK IN THE OFFICE: 67% of dissatisfied workers said they can't telecommute.

OUT OF THE CAR: 64% of the most satisfied workers had short commutes. ■