

# Comparing salaries

Students research a U.S. Department of Labor website to get salary information for multiple careers.

## Learning goals

### Big idea

Planning now for life after high school can help set you up for success after you graduate.

### Essential questions

- What are the salaries of some career options I might consider in the future?
- What do high-paying careers have in common?

### Objectives

- Research the salaries of various occupations
- Discover high-paying careers

### What students will do

- Analyze the salaries of multiple careers.
- Explore the five highest-paying occupations in their state.


### NOTE

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Please remember to consider your students' accommodations and special needs to ensure that all students are able to participate in a meaningful way.

### KEY INFORMATION

**Building block:**

 Financial knowledge and decision-making skills

**Grade level:** Middle school (6-8)

**Age range:** 11-14

**Topic:** Earn (Learning about careers, Making money)

**School subject:** CTE (Career and technical education), Math

**Teaching strategy:** Blended learning, Cooperative learning

**Bloom's Taxonomy level:** Understand, Apply

**Activity duration:** 45-60 minutes

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### National Standards for Personal Financial Education, 2021

Earning income: 4-1, 4-2, 8-1, 8-2, 8-3, 8-4, 12-4

These standards are cumulative, and topics are not repeated in each grade level. This activity may include information students need to understand before exploring this topic in more detail.

## Preparing for this activity

- While it's not necessary, completing the "[Making connections between education and income](#)" activity first may make this one more meaningful.
- Print copies of all student materials for each student, or prepare for students to access them electronically.
- Become familiar with the [careeronestop.org](https://www.careeronestop.org) website's "Salary Finder" page at <https://www.careeronestop.org/Toolkit/Wages/find-salary.aspx> and its "Salaries" page at <https://www.careeronestop.org/ExploreCareers/Plan/salaries.aspx>.
- Secure access to the Internet and computers or tablets so students can conduct research.

### What you'll need

#### THIS TEACHER GUIDE

- **Comparing salaries** (guide)  
[cfpb\\_building\\_block\\_activities\\_comparing-salaries\\_guide.pdf](#)

#### STUDENT MATERIALS

- **Comparing salaries** (worksheet)  
[cfpb\\_building\\_block\\_activities\\_comparing-salaries\\_worksheet.pdf](#)
- **Computers or tablets with Internet access**
- **Careeronestop.org's "Salary Finder" page** at <https://www.careeronestop.org/Toolkit/Wages/find-salary.aspx>
- **Careeronestop.org's "Salaries" page** at <https://www.careeronestop.org/ExploreCareers/Plan/salaries.aspx>

## Exploring key financial concepts

As students start thinking about life after high school, they can explore careers they'd like to pursue and how they might prepare for those careers to help set them up for success after graduation. Understanding the knowledge and skills different careers require, the opportunities those careers might provide, and the education or training options available can help students decide what's best for them and plan for the future. Another factor to consider when exploring careers that are of interest is how much those

#### TIP

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Because careers, education requirements, and pay levels change, students should be encouraged to always look for the most up-to-date information.

careers pay. Knowing the median salary of different careers can help workers make decisions about their future.

## Teaching this activity

### Whole-class introduction

- Introduce the activity by explaining to students that when beginning to plan the future they want for themselves, it can be helpful to consider different factors, including salary.
- Distribute the “Comparing salaries” worksheet.
- Be sure students understand key vocabulary:
  - **Career:** A profession that may span your lifetime and includes your education, training, professional memberships, volunteering, and full history of paid work. Can be a synonym for occupation.
  - **Job:** A specific arrangement where you do tasks for an employer.
  - **Occupation:** Describes a type of work with associated tasks, education and training, typical wages, work settings, and more. Can be a synonym for career.
  - **Salary:** Compensation received by an employee for services performed. A salary is a fixed sum paid for a specific period of time worked, such as weekly or monthly.
  - **Wage:** Compensation received by employees for services performed. Usually, wages are computed by multiplying an hourly pay rate by the number of hours worked.
- Ask students to think of three careers they might like in the future.
  - If a student doesn’t know what career they’re interested in, see what classes interest them the most and try to brainstorm ideas that relate to those classes.
  - You can also have them explore careers using the Occupational Outlook Handbook on the Bureau of Labor Statistics website at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>.
- Explain that students will visit the U.S. Department of Labor-sponsored [careeronestop.org](http://careeronestop.org) website to find out the salaries of different careers.

#### TIP

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Visit CFPB’s financial education glossary at [consumerfinance.gov/financial-education-glossary/](https://consumerfinance.gov/financial-education-glossary/).

## Individual work

- Direct students to visit [careeronestop.org's "Salary Finder" page at https://www.careeronestop.org/Toolkit/Wages/find-salary.aspx](https://www.careeronestop.org/Toolkit/Wages/find-salary.aspx).
- Have students type in a keyword or click the "List of Occupations" link to find each of the three careers they're researching, one at a time.
  - Be sure students enter their city, state, or zip code to get local information.
  - Consider having the students use the school's location and compare that to a different type of community, such as comparing a rural area to a large city.
- Ask students to review the salary information for their state to fill out the first table on the worksheet.
- Next, direct students to [careeronestop.org's "Salaries" page at https://www.careeronestop.org/ExploreCareers/Plan/salaries.aspx](https://www.careeronestop.org/ExploreCareers/Plan/salaries.aspx).
- Have students click on the "Highest-Paying Careers" link and select their state using the drop-down list in the "Your search" box on the left.
- Ask students to review the list of the highest-paid careers in their state to fill out the second table on the worksheet.
- Students will then answer the reflection questions.

## Wrap-up

- Bring the students back together and ask a few volunteers to share their selected occupations and what they learned.
- Ask for volunteers to share their answers to the reflection questions.

## Suggested next steps

Consider searching for other [CFPB activities](#) that address the topic of earning, including learning about careers or making money. Suggested activities include "[Distinguishing between earned and unearned income](#)" and "[Starting your own business](#)."

## Measuring student learning

Students' answers on their worksheets and during discussion can give you a sense of their understanding. **Keep in mind that students' answers may vary, as there may not be only one right answer.** The important thing is for students to have reasonable justification for their answers.