

Frequently Asked Questions

Question: What is the name of the apprenticeship and where is it located?

Answer: The Southwest Regional Apprentice Program (often abbreviated as 'SWRAP') is located at Naval Air Station North Island in San Diego, CA. (On the island of Coronado.)

Question: Do I have to enlist in the Navy?

Answer: No. SWRAP apprentices are civilian employees of the Department of Navy. SWRAP apprentices work 'for' the military but are not 'in' the military.

Question: How much school is involved?

Answer: Apprentices take six semesters (three years) of college classes.

Question: Do I get a degree?

Answer: Yes, apprentices graduate from the program with an Associate's of Science Degree in Business Management.

Question: How much does the apprenticeship cost?

Answer: All tuition and fees are paid for by the Federal government. The only cost to the apprentice is textbooks.

Question: Where would I work?

Answer: SWRAP apprentices work at one of three locations (called 'commands'): Portsmouth Naval Shipyard – San Diego Detachment (PNS-SD); Puget Sound Naval Shipyard – San Diego Detachment (PSNS-SD); or, Southwest Regional Maintenance Center (SWRMC). PNS-SD is located in Point Loma. PSNS is located in Coronado. SWRMC is located at 32nd St. (For those not familiar with San Diego, all three of these are in the local San Diego area.)

Question: How much do I get paid?

Answer: As of January 2025, the starting pay for an apprentice is \$21.38 per hour.

Question: How long before I get a raise?

Answer: Apprentices can expect to get a raise approximately every six months.

Question: How much can I eventually make?

Answer: At the end of their fourth year, apprentices will make anywhere from \$31.12 per hour to \$34.13 per hour, depending on their specific trade and command. Additionally, former apprentices are typically sought after employees and often move into supervision and management where they can earn significantly more money, commensurate with increased responsibility and scope of influence.

Question: What time does work start?

Answer: Start time is different at the different commands. However, you may expect to start work very early in the morning – typically, between 5:30 and 6:30 AM.

Question: How long is a typical work day and typical work week?

Answer: A normal workday is 8 hours. A normal work week is 40 hours.

Question: What is the schedule like?

Answer: Two weeks on / two weeks off. Meaning, for two weeks, apprentices spend eight hours at school, splitting their time between college classes and trade instruction. For the next two weeks, apprentices work at their individual commands, learning their trades. Then the cycle repeats. There is also a summer and a winter break, during which time the apprentice works full time.

Question: Is there any overtime?

Answer: Maybe. Overtime is at the discretion of each command and each trade. Some apprentices work many hours of overtime; others work very few hours of overtime. But no matter how much or how little overtime you work, all overtime is paid at 1.5 times your normal rate of pay.

Question: Is there any travel?

Answer: Again, maybe. Some commands and trades do travel (or 'go TDY') for training or for shipboard work. Others do not. However, all applicants should be aware that there is the potential for travel, particularly in the summer months and during the Holiday breaks when school is not in session. Note that work travel is fully paid for, including hotels, rental cars, flights and per diem.

Question: Are the college classes hard?

Answer: The classes are normal college-level courses, taught by professors from Southwestern College. However, because of the compressed schedule, some students have said that taking classes at the apprenticeship is more difficult than taking the same classes at the college.

Question: What trades can I choose from?

Answer: Apprentices don't get to pick their own trades. After the interview process, the various commands and trades select apprentices that they believe are a good fit. Apprentices can request a particular trade or command, but the final decision is up to the command.

Question: Well, what trades can choose me?

Answer: SWRAP includes numerous trades, such as electricians, machinists, marine mechanics, pipefitters, riggers and welders. (And many others.)

Question: What about benefits?

Answer: As Federal employees, apprentices receive all the same benefits that typical Federal employees receive, including paid time off, paid sick leave, Federal holidays, 12 weeks of paid maternity/paternity leave, a defined pension, 401k (called TSP), health and dental benefits, and more.

Question: Can anyone apply?

Answer: No, you must meet certain requirements. For example: you must be 18 years of age by the time of your first day of work; you must be an American citizen; you must be able to pass a Security background check; and you must pass a pre-employment aptitude test.

Question: When can I apply and when can I start working?

Answer: Each year, during the Spring timeframe (Feb-Apr), SWRAP accepts applications via USAJobs.gov.

Question: When would I actually start working?

Answer: Most new hires start between October and December.

Question: Why is the hiring process so long?

Answer: The Navy does everything possible to ensure that new employees are suitable for long-term employment with the Federal government. SWRAP graduates are the future supervisors, managers and leaders of our various Naval Shipyards. The Navy invests a lot of time and money in each and every apprentice that joins our program. We want to make sure that each person is the right fit for our organization(s).

Question: Are you only looking for people with experience?

Answer: We are looking for anyone who has a positive attitude and a willingness to learn. Many of our most successful apprentices came into the program with no hands-on experience at all.

Question: Do you only hire guys?

Answer: We are an equal opportunity employer. We do not discriminate based on gender, race, age or sexual orientation. Not only do we not discriminate, we actively encourage women and minorities to apply for our program. If you have a positive attitude and a willingness to learn, we are eager to train you!

Question: Getting paid to go to school and learn a trade while being a full-time Federal employee sounds great. What's the catch?

Answer: There is no catch, but there are several potential stumbling blocks:

- *First, we lose many applicants because of security clearance issues. One tip: if you have any outstanding debts in collection, pay them in full and as soon as possible. Security will not clear applicants who have active debts in collection.*
- *Second, SWRAP is academically rigorous. Students must earn a "C" or better in all classes to remain in the program.*
- *Third, apprentices are required to sign a Continued Service Agreement. This agreement states that graduated apprentices will continue to work for their command for at least 31 months following the end of school or they will be required to reimburse the Federal government for all tuition and fees that the government has paid on their behalf.*
- *And last, as we have already mentioned, typical workdays start as early as 5:30 AM. If that is too early for you to arrive on time and ready to work or learn, the apprenticeship may not be the right fit for your lifestyle.*