

Airline and Commercial Pilots

SOC: 53-2010 • Career Profile Report

■ Key Facts

\$198,100

Median Salary

155,400

Employment

+4.0%

Growth Rate

■ Requirements & Salary Range

Education: See Requirements (BLS)

■ Automation Risk Assessment

Medium Risk - 35.0% probability of being automated in the next 10-20 years.

This job has some routine elements but still requires human judgment and interaction.

■■ Work-Life Balance

4.6/10 - Fair work-life balance

■ Personality Fit (RIASEC)

Higher scores indicate better personality fit for this career type.

Realistic	8.6/10	Investigative	4.4/10
Artistic	3.4/10	Social	5.8/10
Enterprising	4.8/10	Conventional	7.4/10

■ Top Skills Required

Communication skills, Observational skills, Problem-solving skills, Quick reaction time

✓ Strengths

- High Demand
- Flexible Work
- Continuous Learning

■ Challenges

- Burnout Risk
- Rapid Technological Change

■ What They Do

Airline and Commercial Pilots are aviation professionals who operate aircraft to **transport passengers and cargo safely and efficiently**. They are responsible for navigating complex airspace, managing advanced flight systems, and making real-time decisions to ensure safety under varying weather and operational conditions. While airline pilots typically fly scheduled passenger routes, commercial pilots perform a wide range of specialized flights, including cargo transport, charter services, firefighting, and aerial surveying.

This career is well suited for individuals who thrive under responsibility, enjoy technical systems, and are comfortable making critical decisions in dynamic environments.

What Do Airline and Commercial Pilots Do?

Pilots plan and conduct flights while maintaining strict safety and regulatory standards. Their work extends well beyond takeoff and landing to include preparation, coordination, and post-flight review.

Common responsibilities include:

- Conducting preflight inspections of aircraft systems and controls
- Reviewing weather conditions, fuel requirements, and flight plans
- Operating aircraft during takeoff, flight, and landing
- Communicating with air traffic control and flight crews
- Monitoring instruments, navigation systems, and fuel usage
- Responding to in-flight changes, delays, or emergencies
- Completing post-flight reports and maintenance logs

Types of Airline and Commercial Pilots

This occupation includes multiple pilot roles with different missions and aircraft types:

- Airline Pilots: Fly passengers on scheduled domestic or international routes.
- Commercial Pilots: Operate aircraft for charter flights, cargo, or specialized services.
- Cargo Pilots: Transport freight and mail for logistics companies.
- Charter and Corporate Pilots: Fly private aircraft for businesses or individuals.
- Aerial Application and Survey Pilots: Perform firefighting, agricultural spraying, or mapping.
- Flight Instructors (related role): Train and certify new pilots.

Skills and Abilities Needed

Pilots must combine technical precision with situational awareness and calm decision-making.

Core Professional Skills

Personal Qualities That Matter

Education and Certification Pathway

Becoming a pilot requires structured training, flight hours, and certification:

- High School Diploma or Equivalent: Required minimum education
- Flight Training: Instruction through flight schools, colleges, or the military
- Pilot Certifications: Private Pilot License (PPL), Commercial Pilot License (CPL), and Airline Transport Pilot (ATP) certificate
- Flight Hours: Accumulation of required logged flight time
- Medical Certification: FAA medical clearance to fly
- Ongoing Training: Regular simulator checks and recurrent training

Airline pilots must meet higher flight-hour thresholds and certification standards than most commercial pilots.

Where Do Airline and Commercial Pilots Work?

Pilots are employed across many aviation sectors:

- Commercial Airlines
- Cargo and Logistics Companies
- Charter and Corporate Flight Departments
- Aerial Services and Firefighting Operations
- Flight Schools and Training Organizations
- Government and Emergency Services

Work schedules often include nights, weekends, holidays, and time away from home.

How Much Do Airline and Commercial Pilots Earn?

Earnings vary widely based on aircraft type, employer, experience, and flight hours:

- Commercial Pilots: Typically earn professional salaries depending on specialization
- Airline First Officers: Earn structured pay that increases with seniority
- Airline Captains: Often earn significantly higher compensation due to responsibility and experience

Pay structures commonly include hourly flight pay, seniority-based increases, and benefits.

Is This Career Difficult?

Piloting is technically and mentally demanding. Training is intensive, certification standards are strict, and the responsibility for passenger and crew safety is significant. The challenge lies in maintaining focus, precision, and situational awareness while managing irregular schedules and time away from home.

Who Should Consider Becoming an Airline or Commercial Pilot?

This career may be a strong fit if you:

- Enjoy technology, systems, and aviation
- Are comfortable with responsibility and structured procedures
- Can remain calm and decisive in high-pressure situations
- Value teamwork and communication
- Want a career that combines travel with technical skill

How to Prepare Early

- Take courses in math, physics, and technology
- Develop strong discipline and decision-making skills
- Explore flight simulators or introductory flight lessons
- Maintain physical health to meet medical requirements
- Research flight training pathways and certifications

Airline and commercial pilots keep people and goods moving safely through the skies, combining technical mastery, discipline, and judgment in one of the most responsibility-driven careers in transportation.