



POLICE OFFICER

JOB DESCRIPTION

Police officers maintain law and order on a local and national level. In this role, you may conduct patrols to reassure the public and deter criminal activity, work with community groups to promote lawful behavior, respond to calls from the public for assistance, catch and testify against offenders, and investigate crimes by gathering evidence and questioning suspects and witnesses.



SALARY

Trainee police officer ★★★★★

Senior police officer ★★★★★

INDUSTRY PROFILE

A varied, diverse, and expanding profession • Strong competition for entry-level jobs • Opportunities for promotion and career development are good

RELATED CAREERS

- ▶ **PROBATION OFFICER** *see pp. 244–245*
- ▶ **BODYGUARD** Accompanies individuals or groups of people and takes any necessary action to protect them from harmful or violent situations. Bodyguards are usually hired by important public figures, such as government officials.
- ▶ **CUSTOMS OFFICER** Monitors, investigates, and prevents illegal trade across international borders. Activities include intelligence gathering, cooperating with international agencies, and inspecting suspicious cargo at ports and airports.
- ▶ **SECURITY OFFICER** Uses closed-circuit television and in-store observation of shoppers and staff to prevent shoplifting or damage to property in retail stores and shopping malls.

**Policing is high-risk:
58,000 officers
are assaulted in
the United States
every year.**

AT A GLANCE



YOUR INTERESTS Law enforcement • Criminal law • Psychology • Sociology • Physical Education (PE) • English • Mathematics



ENTRY QUALIFICATIONS Entry requirements vary, but potential officers must pass stringent aptitude and fitness tests as well as background checks.



LIFESTYLE Official working hours are regular, but shiftwork to cover evenings, weekends, and public holidays may be required. Overtime is available.



LOCATION Work is in a wide range of settings, from investigating crime scenes to desk work at a police station or testifying in a court of law.



THE REALITIES Police officers get excellent benefits, but they encounter high-risk situations and work long hours. Serving a community is rewarding.

CAREER PATHS

Although competition for entry-level jobs is high, police work offers good prospects for career progression. After successfully completing an initial training period, officers can then specialize in a range of different roles. Promotion through senior roles is based on performance. Officers are also encouraged—and, in some states, required—to take ongoing training throughout their career.

GRADUATE You need a good general education to apply for entry positions. The exact requirements vary between regional police forces, but a bachelor's degree along with experience of community work, volunteering alongside police officers in your local area, or working as a police community support officer will improve your prospects.



POLICE OFFICER After an initial training period, which varies by state and involves training in investigative methods, policing skills, and legislation, officers progress by choosing a specialization.



RIVER POLICE Performs river or coastal patrols on specialty police vessels, investigating illegal activity and arresting criminals. River police train in areas including advanced boat handling or diving.



DETECTIVE Investigates serious crimes, including murder, assault, theft, sexual offenses, and fraud. A detective's duties include gathering information, collecting evidence, and interviewing suspects.



**TRAFFIC OFFICER/
PATROLMAN** Specializes in road safety, dealing with traffic offenses, responding to accidents, and checking vehicles to ensure they are insured and taxed.



SPECIALTY OFFICER Prevents crime or apprehends criminals using specialized training or techniques. Officers can work in areas such as child protection, vice, fraud, or narcotics (drugs), or undergo training in the use of firearms and special tactics, such as anti-terrorism.

SKILLS GUIDE



The ability to communicate clearly and confidently in potentially dangerous situations.



Good team-working skills for collaborating on cases with colleagues and specialty officers.



The capacity to behave with tact, diplomacy, and respect when dealing with the public.



Solid problem-solving skills to respond quickly, effectively, and appropriately to crisis situations.



Physical strength to pursue and apprehend criminals, and mental stamina to stay calm at all times.