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Join the Military

Most people join the military by enlisting in one of its branches. Enlisted members make up most of the military workforce. They receive training in a job specialty and do most of the hands-on work. Usually, you'll sign up for four years of active duty and four years inactive. After you've completed your active duty time, you can either extend your contract or re-enlist if you want to continue serving.

Officers make up a much smaller part of the workforce. To join as an officer, you typically must have a four-year college degree and complete an officer program. Most officers are managers who plan and direct operations. Others are professionals like doctors and lawyers. Officers get paid more than enlisted members and enjoy certain other benefits.

You do not have to join as an officer to become one though. You can join as an enlisted member and attend officer training later on.

Requirements for Joining the Military

The U.S. military has six branches of service: the Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, and Space Force. The requirements to join are similar for all six. The main differences are in age limits, test scores, and fitness levels. Men and women meet different fitness standards. Besides the requirements listed here, a branch may have other requirements.

Age Limits for Enlisting

You must be at least 17 to enlist in any branch of the active military. The oldest you can be to enlist for active duty in each branch is:

Coast Guard: 31

Marines: 28

Navy: 39

Army: 35

Air Force: 39

Space Force: 39

Some branches have different age limits for their part-time Reserve and National Guard. Visit each service's recruiting website for its part-time age limits.

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Requirements for Enlisting If You Are Not a U.S. Citizen

You do not have to be a U.S. citizen to enlist in the military, but you may have fewer options. If you are not a U.S. citizen, you must:

Have a permanent resident card, also known as a Green Card

Currently live in the U.S.

Speak, read, and write English fluently

Educational and Testing Requirements for Enlisting

You must take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test. The ASVAB has 10 subtests.

Your scores on four of those make up your Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) score. This score determines which branch(es) you may join. Each branch has its own lowest score for joining.

Your scores on all 10 sub-tests determine which job specialties you qualify for.

You can prepare for the ASVAB by taking sample questions.

You must have a high school diploma or a GED to enlist. The services accept only a small number of people with GEDs each year. You can increase your chances of qualifying with a GED by:

Earning some college credits and

Scoring well on the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT)

Health and Fitness Requirements for Enlisting

You must pass a military entrance medical exam. This includes a physical exam, hearing test, vision test, and height and weight measurements.

Each service has its own physical requirements and fitness standards. These depend on the demands of its mission. Even within the same branch, some jobs have tougher or extra requirements.

Steps for Joining the Military

Start by doing some research about your options for joining the military. Learn about the six active-duty branches and their part-time counterparts. Know the main differences between officers and enlisted members. And explore the career fields you can enter for each branch.

Once you know which branch you're considering, contact a recruiter. A recruiter will give you an overview and answer your questions about that service. If you're interested in more than one branch, contact a recruiter for each. If you're interested in joining as an officer, the recruiter will explain any options you may be eligible for.

If you decide to enlist, you will report to a military entrance processing station (MEPS). You'll spend a day or two completing pre-enlistment steps. These include taking the ASVAB, having a physical exam, meeting with a career counselor, and if you're accepted, taking the oath of enlistment. From there you'll receive orders for basic training, usually to start within a few weeks. If you enrolled in a delayed entry program, you'll go home and get orders for basic training within a year.

Contact a Recruiter or Apply Online

Air Force

Army

Navy

Marine Corps

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Coast Guard

Space Force

Reference

[The Handbook of Posttraumatic Growth: Research and Practice](#)

[Clinical Research in Complementary Therapies: Principles, Problems and Solutions](#)