Median Salary: 55, 000. 80, 000 – 27 000.

Astronauts go through very specialized and intense training to prepare for these space missions. They must pass certain physical requirements as well as comprehensive academic and mental exams. Astronauts fly to various destinations to conduct research and experiments. These missions may vary and therefore the actual focus and responsibilities of the astronaut will change with each mission.  
  
There are various roles that an astronaut may serve as a part of the spacecraft’s crew, ranging from a mission specialist to a commander. The more experience and background that an astronaut has, the more responsibilities that astronaut may have. Not only are astronauts responsible for fulfilling the terms, or purpose, of their mission, but they are also responsible for ensuring safety of the spacecraft and the crew. They help each member of their crew to maintain normal functions and to stay safe to work through the missions. Astronauts often will observe the environment they fly to, taking something from there or bringing something back there.  
  
Astronauts must go through training for each mission that they serve on. They must ensure that they maintain appropriate physical shape, as that comes into play for successfully flying on the spacecraft and carrying out the missions.

**Training/Educational Requirements**

Though the minimum educational requirement for an astronaut is a bachelor’s degree, there is usually a more specific focus preferred than that. Though it is not necessarily always spelled out, it is preferred if an astronaut has a bachelor’s degree in a space-related focus, such as math, biology or some other form of science, engineering, or even psychology. Many astronauts have advanced degrees.  
  
The training program is the most intense part of the requirement for astronauts. Astronauts must be in excellent physical shape, and this may be a focus of their training program. They must pass physical exams to be selected for a mission. Astronauts must follow a very stringent training program as set forth by NASA that involves comprehension exams, physical exams, and tests knowledge and abilities in a variety of different areas. Passing these exams and the overall training program is an extremely important measure to meet. Astronauts will be trained in simulation exercises so that they can get the feel of being in space, and so that they are prepared for the work that lies ahead of them. Initial and ongoing training is an extremely important part of the job as an astronaut.

**How to Get Hired**

The best way to get hired initially is to show great promise in a related field. The educational requirement is part of the equation, as is working in the field. It can help to work previously in a field such as engineering or piloting, if one wants to become a mission specialist. To be hired as an astronaut pilot or mission commander, actual flying experience and a solid background in a related field will become an important consideration. As an astronaut gains more experience, she or he may move on to different roles with increased responsibility.

**Job Prospects, Employment Outlook, and Career Development**

Though it is a rather competitive field, there is always a need for astronauts. Once in the field, there is great chance of career advancement and stability. Once astronauts are selected to work as part of a crew, that experience becomes quite valuable in getting hired and selected for further missions.

**Working Environment**

The working environment for an astronaut is unlike any other profession. Though astronauts may spend a majority of their time in classrooms, simulation environments, or gyms to improve upon their physical requirements, astronauts also spend part of their time in actual spacecrafts. It’s important to remember that the time spent on missions is minimal compared to the actual preparation, but all of the work that astronauts put in is fundamental to that time spent on missions.  
  
Astronauts may work long hours, particularly when they are on missions—up to 100 hours a week in some instances. Astronauts must be able to stay calm in what can prove to be stressful environments. They must be focused on safety and on ensuring that they are physically and mentally prepared for their missions.

**Salary and Benefits**

Though the average salary for an astronaut is around $55,000, this can be a bit deceptive as salaries actually fall into rather wide range. Astronauts can work in a variety of different positions and therefore the salary can be anywhere from $27,000 for those just starting out to over $80,000 for those with great experience and responsibilities. Astronauts receive excellent benefits, including medical coverage, paid vacation, tuition reimbursement, pension savings account, and potentially even more.

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