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## Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-11 Edition

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### Significant Points

- [» Employment is projected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations, although growth will vary by specialty; overall job opportunities for engineers are expected to be good.](#)
- [» A bachelor's degree in engineering is required for most entry-level jobs, but some research positions may require a graduate degree.](#)
- [» Starting salaries are among the highest of all college graduates.](#)
- [» Continuing education is critical for engineers in order to keep up with improvements in technology.](#)

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### Nature of the Work [About this section](#)

Engineers apply the principles of science and mathematics to develop economical solutions to technical problems. Their work is the link between scientific discoveries and the commercial applications that meet societal and consumer needs.

Many engineers develop new products. During the process, they consider several factors. For example, in developing an industrial robot, engineers specify the functional requirements precisely; design and test the robot's components; integrate the components to produce the final design; and evaluate the design's overall effectiveness, cost, reliability, and safety. This process applies to the development of many different products, such as chemicals, computers, powerplants, helicopters, and toys.

In addition to their involvement in design and development, many engineers work in testing, production, or maintenance. These engineers supervise production in factories, determine the causes of a component's failure, and test manufactured products to maintain quality. They also estimate the time and cost required to complete projects. Supervisory engineers are responsible for major components or entire projects. (See the statement on [engineering and natural sciences managers](#) elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

Engineers use computers extensively to produce and analyze designs; to simulate and test how a machine, structure, or system operates; to generate specifications for parts; to monitor the quality of products; and to control the efficiency of processes. Nanotechnology, which involves the creation of high-performance materials and components by integrating atoms and molecules, also is introducing entirely new principles to the design process.

Most engineers specialize. Following are details on the 17 engineering specialties covered in the Federal Government's Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system. Numerous other specialties are recognized by professional societies, and each of the major branches of engineering has numerous subdivisions. Civil engineering, for example, includes structural and transportation engineering, and materials engineering includes

ceramic, metallurgical, and polymer engineering. Engineers also may specialize in one industry, such as motor vehicles, or in one type of technology, such as turbines or semiconductor materials.

**Aerospace engineers** design, test, and supervise the manufacture of aircraft, spacecraft, and missiles. Those who work with aircraft are called *aeronautical engineers*, and those working specifically with spacecraft are *astronautical engineers*. Aerospace engineers develop new technologies for use in aviation, defense systems, and space exploration, often specializing in areas such as structural design, guidance, navigation and control, instrumentation and communication, and production methods. They also may specialize in a particular type of aerospace product, such as commercial aircraft, military fighter jets, helicopters, spacecraft, or missiles and rockets, and may become experts in aerodynamics, thermodynamics, celestial mechanics, propulsion, acoustics, or guidance and control systems.

**Agricultural engineers** apply their knowledge of engineering technology and science to agriculture and the efficient use of biological resources. Accordingly, they also are referred to as *biological and agricultural engineers*. They design agricultural machinery, equipment, sensors, processes, and structures, such as those used for crop storage. Some engineers specialize in areas such as power systems and machinery design, structural and environmental engineering, and food and bioprocess engineering. They develop ways to conserve soil and water and to improve the processing of agricultural products. Agricultural engineers often work in research and development, production, sales, or management.

**Biomedical engineers** develop devices and procedures that solve medical and health-related problems by combining their knowledge of biology and medicine with engineering principles and practices. Many do research, along with medical scientists, to develop and evaluate systems and products such as artificial organs, prostheses (artificial devices that replace missing body parts), instrumentation, medical information systems, and health management and care delivery systems. Biomedical engineers also may design devices used in various medical procedures, imaging systems such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), and devices for automating insulin injections or controlling body functions. Most engineers in this specialty need a sound background in another engineering specialty, such as mechanical or electronics engineering, in addition to specialized biomedical training. Some specialties within biomedical engineering are biomaterials, biomechanics, medical imaging, rehabilitation engineering, and orthopedic engineering.

**Chemical engineers** apply the principles of chemistry to solve problems involving the production or use of chemicals and other products. They design equipment and processes for large-scale chemical manufacturing, plan and test methods of manufacturing products and treating byproducts, and supervise production. Chemical engineers also work in a variety of manufacturing industries other than chemical manufacturing, such as those producing energy, electronics, food, clothing, and paper. In addition, they work in healthcare, biotechnology, and business services. Chemical engineers apply principles of physics, mathematics, and mechanical and electrical engineering, as well as chemistry. Some may specialize in a particular chemical process, such as oxidation or polymerization. Others specialize in a particular field, such as nanomaterials, or in the development of specific products. They must be aware of all aspects of chemical manufacturing and how the manufacturing process affects the environment and the safety of workers and consumers.

**Civil engineers** design and supervise the construction of roads, buildings, airports, tunnels, dams, bridges, and water supply and sewage systems. They must consider many factors in the design process from the construction costs and expected lifetime of a project to government regulations and potential environmental hazards such as earthquakes and hurricanes. Civil engineering, considered one of the oldest engineering disciplines, encompasses many specialties. The major ones are structural, water resources, construction, transportation, and geotechnical engineering. Many civil engineers hold supervisory or administrative positions, from supervisor of a construction site to city engineer. Others may work in design, construction, research, and teaching.

**Computer hardware engineers** research, design, develop, test, and oversee the manufacture and installation of computer hardware, including computer chips, circuit boards, computer systems, and related equipment such as keyboards, routers, and printers. ([Computer software engineers](#)—often simply called computer engineers—design and develop the software systems that control computers. These workers are covered elsewhere in the *Handbook*.) The work of computer hardware engineers is similar to that of electronics engineers in that they may design and test circuits and other electronic components; however, computer hardware engineers do that work only as it relates to computers and computer-related equipment. The rapid advances in computer technology are largely a result of the research, development, and design efforts of these engineers.

**Electrical engineers** design, develop, test, and supervise the manufacture of electrical equipment. Some of this equipment includes electric motors; machinery controls, lighting, and wiring in buildings; radar and navigation systems; communications systems; and power generation, control, and transmission devices used by electric utilities. Electrical engineers also design the electrical systems of automobiles and aircraft. Although the terms

*electrical* and *electronics engineering* often are used interchangeably in academia and industry, electrical engineers traditionally have focused on the generation and supply of power, whereas electronics engineers have worked on applications of electricity to control systems or signal processing. Electrical engineers specialize in areas such as power systems engineering or electrical equipment manufacturing.

**Electronics engineers, except computer**, are responsible for a wide range of technologies, from portable music players to global positioning systems (GPS), which can continuously provide the location of, for example, a vehicle. Electronics engineers design, develop, test, and supervise the manufacture of electronic equipment such as broadcast and communications systems. Many electronics engineers also work in areas closely related to computers. However, engineers whose work is related exclusively to computer hardware are considered computer hardware engineers. Electronics engineers specialize in areas such as communications, signal processing, and control systems or have a specialty within one of these areas—control systems or aviation electronics, for example.

**Environmental engineers** use the principles of biology and chemistry to develop solutions to environmental problems. They are involved in water and air pollution control, recycling, waste disposal, and public health issues. Environmental engineers conduct hazardous-waste management studies in which they evaluate the significance of the hazard, advise on its treatment and containment, and develop regulations to prevent mishaps. They design municipal water supply and industrial wastewater treatment systems, conduct research on the environmental impact of proposed construction projects, analyze scientific data, and perform quality-control checks. Environmental engineers are concerned with local and worldwide environmental issues. Some may study and attempt to minimize the effects of acid rain, global warming, automobile emissions, and ozone depletion. They also may be involved in the protection of wildlife. Many environmental engineers work as consultants, helping their clients to comply with regulations, prevent environmental damage, and clean up hazardous sites.

**Health and safety engineers, except mining safety engineers and inspectors**, prevent harm to people and property by applying their knowledge of systems engineering and mechanical, chemical, and human performance principles. Using this specialized knowledge, they identify and measure potential hazards, such as the risk of fires or the dangers involved in handling toxic chemicals. They recommend appropriate loss prevention measures according to their probability of harm and potential damage. Health and safety engineers develop procedures and designs to reduce the risk of illness, injury, or damage. Some work in manufacturing industries to ensure that the designs of new products do not create unnecessary hazards. They must be able to anticipate, recognize, and evaluate hazardous conditions, as well as develop hazard control methods.

**Industrial engineers** determine the most effective ways to use the basic factors of production—people, machines, materials, information, and energy—to make a product or provide a service. They are concerned primarily with increasing productivity through the management of people, methods of business organization, and technology. To maximize efficiency, industrial engineers study product requirements carefully and then design manufacturing and information systems to meet those requirements with the help of mathematical methods and models. They develop management control systems to aid in financial planning and cost analysis, and they design production planning and control systems to coordinate activities and ensure product quality. They also design or improve systems for the physical distribution of goods and services and determine the most efficient plant locations. Industrial engineers develop wage and salary administration systems and job evaluation programs. Many industrial engineers move into management positions because the work is closely related to the work of managers.

**Marine engineers and naval architects** are involved in the design, construction, and maintenance of ships, boats, and related equipment. They design and supervise the construction of everything from aircraft carriers to submarines and from sailboats to tankers. Naval architects work on the basic design of ships, including the form and stability of hulls. Marine engineers work on the propulsion, steering, and other systems of ships. Marine engineers and naval architects apply knowledge from a range of fields to the entire process by which water vehicles are designed and produced. Other workers who operate or supervise the operation of marine machinery on ships and other vessels sometimes may be called marine engineers or, more frequently, ship engineers, but they do different work and are covered under [water transportation occupations](#) elsewhere in the *Handbook*.

**Materials engineers** are involved in the development, processing, and testing of the materials used to create a range of products, from computer chips and aircraft wings to golf clubs and snow skis. They work with metals, ceramics, plastics, semiconductors, and composites to create new materials that meet certain mechanical, electrical, and chemical requirements. They also are involved in selecting materials for new applications. Materials engineers have developed the ability to create and then study materials at an atomic level, using advanced processes to replicate the characteristics of those materials and their components with computers. Most materials engineers specialize in a particular material. For example, metallurgical engineers specialize in metals such as steel, and ceramic engineers develop ceramic materials and the processes for making them into useful

products such as glassware or fiber-optic communication lines.

**Mechanical engineers** research, design, develop, manufacture, and test tools, engines, machines, and other mechanical devices. Mechanical engineering is one of the broadest engineering disciplines. Engineers in this discipline work on power-producing machines such as electric generators, internal combustion engines, and steam and gas turbines. They also work on power-using machines such as refrigeration and air-conditioning equipment, machine tools, material-handling systems, elevators and escalators, industrial production equipment, and robots used in manufacturing. Some mechanical engineers design tools that other engineers need for their work. In addition, mechanical engineers work in manufacturing or agriculture production, maintenance, or technical sales; many become administrators or managers.

**Mining and geological engineers, including mining safety engineers**, find, extract, and prepare coal, metals, and minerals for use by manufacturing industries and utilities. They design open-pit and underground mines, supervise the construction of mine shafts and tunnels in underground operations, and devise methods for transporting minerals to processing plants. Mining engineers are responsible for the safe, economical, and environmentally sound operation of mines. Some mining engineers work with geologists and metallurgical engineers to locate and appraise new ore deposits. Others develop new mining equipment or direct mineral-processing operations that separate minerals from the dirt, rock, and other materials with which they are mixed. Mining engineers frequently specialize in the mining of one mineral or metal, such as coal or gold. With increased emphasis on protecting the environment, many mining engineers are working to solve problems related to land reclamation and to water and air pollution. Mining safety engineers use their knowledge of mine design and practices to ensure the safety of workers and to comply with State and Federal safety regulations. They inspect the surfaces of walls and roofs, monitor air quality, and examine mining equipment for compliance with safety practices.

**Nuclear engineers** research and develop the processes, instruments, and systems used to derive benefits from nuclear energy and radiation. They design, develop, monitor, and operate nuclear plants to generate power. They may work on the nuclear fuel cycle—the production, handling, and use of nuclear fuel and the safe disposal of waste produced by the generation of nuclear energy—or on the development of fusion energy. Some specialize in the development of nuclear power sources for naval vessels or spacecraft; others find industrial and medical uses for radioactive materials—for example, in equipment used to diagnose and treat medical problems.

**Petroleum engineers** design methods for extracting oil and gas from deposits below the earth. Once these resources have been discovered, petroleum engineers work with geologists and other specialists to understand the geologic formation and properties of the rock containing the reservoir, to determine the drilling methods to be used, and to monitor drilling and production operations. They design equipment and processes to achieve the maximum profitable recovery of oil and gas. Because only a small proportion of oil and gas in a reservoir flows out under natural forces, petroleum engineers develop and use various enhanced recovery methods, including injecting water, chemicals, gases, or steam into an oil reservoir to force out more of the oil and doing computer-controlled drilling or fracturing to connect a larger area of a reservoir to a single well. Because even the best techniques in use today recover only a portion of the oil and gas in a reservoir, petroleum engineers research and develop technology and methods for increasing the recovery of these resources and lowering the cost of drilling and production operations.

**Work environment.** Most engineers work in office buildings, laboratories, or industrial plants. Others may spend time outdoors at construction sites and oil and gas exploration and production sites, where they monitor or direct operations or solve onsite problems. Some engineers travel extensively to plants or worksites here and abroad.

Many engineers work a standard 40-hour week. At times, deadlines or design standards may bring extra pressure to a job, requiring engineers to work longer hours.



*Engineers design tests for new products.*

## Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

[About this section](#)

Engineers typically enter the occupation with a bachelor's degree in an engineering specialty, but some basic research positions may require a graduate degree. Engineers offering their services directly to the public must be licensed. Continuing education to keep current with rapidly changing technology is important for engineers.

**Education and training.** A bachelor's degree in engineering is required for almost all entry-level engineering jobs. College graduates with a degree in a natural science or mathematics occasionally may qualify for some engineering jobs, especially in specialties that are in high demand. Most engineering degrees are granted in electrical and electronics engineering, mechanical engineering, and civil engineering. However, engineers trained in one branch may work in related branches. For example, many aerospace engineers have training in mechanical engineering. This flexibility allows employers to meet staffing needs in new technologies and specialties in which engineers may be in short supply. It also allows engineers to shift to fields with better employment prospects or to those which more closely match their interests.

Most engineering programs involve a concentration of study in an engineering specialty, along with courses in both mathematics and the physical and life sciences. Many programs also include courses in general engineering. A design course, sometimes accompanied by a computer or laboratory class or both, is part of the curriculum of most programs. Often, general courses not directly related to engineering, such as those in the social sciences or humanities, also are required.

In addition to the standard engineering degree, many colleges offer 2-year or 4-year degree programs in engineering technology. These programs, which usually include various hands-on laboratory classes that focus on current issues in the application of engineering principles, prepare students for practical design and production work, rather than for jobs that require more theoretical and scientific knowledge. Graduates of 4-year technology programs may get jobs similar to those obtained by graduates with a bachelor's degree in engineering. Engineering technology graduates, however, are not qualified to register as professional engineers under the same terms as graduates with degrees in engineering. Some employers regard technology program graduates as having skills between those of a technician and an engineer.

Graduate training is essential for engineering faculty positions and some research and development programs, but is not required for the majority of entry-level engineering jobs. Many experienced engineers obtain graduate degrees in engineering or business administration to learn new technology and broaden their education. Numerous high-level executives in government and industry began their careers as engineers.

The Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) accredits college and university programs in engineering and engineering technology. ABET accreditation is based on a program's faculty, curriculum, and facilities; the achievement of a program's students; program improvements; and institutional commitment to specific principles of quality and ethics. Graduation from an ABET-accredited program may be required for engineers who need to be licensed.

Although most institutions offer programs in the major branches of engineering, only a few offer programs in the smaller specialties. Also, programs with the same title may vary in content. For example, some programs emphasize industrial practices, preparing students for a job in industry, whereas others are more theoretical and are designed to prepare students for graduate work. Therefore, students should investigate curricula and check accreditations carefully before selecting a college.

Admissions requirements for undergraduate engineering schools include a solid background in mathematics (algebra, geometry, trigonometry, and calculus) and science (biology, chemistry, and physics), in addition to courses in English, social studies, and humanities. Bachelor's degree programs in engineering typically are designed to last 4 years, but many students find that it takes between 4 and 5 years to complete their studies. In a typical 4-year college curriculum, the first 2 years are spent studying mathematics, basic sciences, introductory engineering, humanities, and social sciences. In the last 2 years, most courses are in engineering, usually with a concentration in one specialty. Some programs offer a general engineering curriculum; students then specialize on the job or in graduate school.

Some engineering schools have agreements with 2-year colleges whereby the college provides the initial engineering education and the engineering school automatically admits students for their last 2 years. In addition, a few engineering schools have arrangements that allow students who spend 3 years in a liberal arts college studying preengineering subjects and 2 years in an engineering school studying core subjects to receive a bachelor's degree from each school. Some colleges and universities offer 5-year master's degree programs. Some 5-year or even 6-year cooperative plans combine classroom study with practical work, permitting students to gain valuable experience and to finance part of their education.

**Licensure.** All 50 States and the District of Columbia require licensure for engineers who offer their services directly to the public. Engineers who are licensed are called professional engineers (PEs). This licensure generally requires a degree from an ABET-accredited engineering program, 4 years of relevant work experience, and completion of a State examination. Recent graduates can start the licensing process by taking the examination in two stages. The initial Fundamentals of Engineering (FE) examination can be taken upon graduation. Engineers who pass this examination commonly are called engineers in training (EITs) or engineer interns (EIs). After acquiring suitable work experience, EITs can take the second examination, called the Principles and Practice of Engineering exam. Several States have imposed mandatory continuing education requirements for relicensure. Most States recognize licensure from other States, provided that the manner in which the initial license was obtained meets or exceeds their own licensure requirements. Many civil, mechanical, and chemical engineers are licensed PEs. Independently of licensure, various certification programs are offered by professional organizations to demonstrate competency in specific fields of engineering.

**Other qualifications.** Engineers should be creative, inquisitive, analytical, and detail oriented. They should be able to work as part of a team and to communicate well, both orally and in writing. Communication abilities are becoming increasingly important as engineers interact more frequently with specialists in a wide range of fields outside engineering.

Engineers who work for the Federal Government usually must be U.S. citizens. Some engineers, particularly nuclear engineers and aerospace and other engineers working for defense contractors, may need to hold a security clearance.

**Certification and advancement.** Beginning engineering graduates usually work under the supervision of experienced engineers and, in large companies, also may receive formal classroom or seminar-type training. As new engineers gain knowledge and experience, they are assigned more difficult projects with greater independence to develop designs, solve problems, and make decisions. Engineers may advance to become technical specialists or to supervise a staff or team of engineers and technicians. Some eventually may become engineering managers or enter other managerial or sales jobs. In sales, an engineering background enables them to discuss a product's technical aspects and assist in product planning, installation, and use. (See the statements under [management and business and financial occupations](#), and the statement on [sales engineers](#) elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

Numerous professional certifications for engineers exist and may be beneficial for advancement to senior technical or managerial positions. Many certification programs are offered by the professional societies listed as sources of additional information for engineering specialties at the end of this statement.

## Employment

[About this section](#) 

In 2008, engineers held about 1.6 million jobs. Following is the distribution of employment by engineering specialty:

Civil engineers	278,400
Mechanical engineers	238,700
Industrial engineers	214,800
Electrical engineers	157,800

Electronics engineers, except computer	143,700
Computer hardware engineers	74,700
Aerospace engineers	71,600
Environmental engineers	54,300
Chemical engineers	31,700
Health and safety engineers, except mining safety engineers and inspectors	25,700
Materials engineers	24,400
Petroleum engineers	21,900
Nuclear engineers	16,900
Biomedical engineers	16,000
Marine engineers and naval architects	8,500
Mining and geological engineers, including mining safety engineers	7,100
Agricultural engineers	2,700
Engineers, all other	183,200

About 36 percent of engineering jobs were found in manufacturing industries, and another 30 percent were in the professional, scientific, and technical services industries, primarily in architectural, engineering, and related services. Many engineers also worked in the construction, telecommunications, and wholesale trade industries.

Federal, State, and local governments employed about 12 percent of engineers in 2008. About 6 percent were in the Federal Government, mainly in the U.S. Departments of Defense, Transportation, Agriculture, Interior, and Energy, and in the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Many engineers in State and local government agencies worked in highway and public works departments. In 2008, about 3 percent of engineers were self-employed, many as consultants.

Engineers are employed in every State, in small and large cities and in rural areas. Some branches of engineering are concentrated in particular industries and geographic areas; for example, petroleum engineering jobs tend to be located in States with sizable petroleum deposits, such as Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Alaska, and California. Other branches, such as civil engineering, are widely dispersed, and engineers in these fields often move from place to place to work on different projects.

## Job Outlook

[About this section](#)

Employment of engineers is expected to grow [about as fast as the average](#) for all occupations over the next decade, but growth will vary by specialty. Biomedical engineers should experience the fastest growth, while civil engineers should see the largest employment increase. Overall job opportunities in engineering are expected to be [good](#).

**Overall employment change.** Overall engineering employment is expected to grow by 11 percent over the 2008–18 decade, about as fast as the average for all occupations. Engineers traditionally have been concentrated in slower growing or declining manufacturing industries, in which they will continue to be needed to design, build, test, and improve manufactured products. However, increasing employment of engineers in engineering, research and development, and consulting services industries should generate most of the employment growth. The job outlook varies by engineering specialty, as discussed later.

Competitive pressures and advancing technology will force companies to improve and update product designs and to optimize their manufacturing processes. Employers will rely on engineers to increase productivity and expand output of goods and services. New technologies continue to improve the design process, enabling engineers to produce and analyze various product designs much more rapidly than in the past. Unlike the situation in some other occupations, however, technological advances are not expected to substantially limit employment opportunities in engineering, because engineers are needed to provide the ideas that lead to improved products and more productive processes.

The continued globalization of engineering work will likely dampen domestic employment growth to some degree. There are many well-trained, often English-speaking, engineers available around the world who are willing to work at much lower salaries than U.S. engineers. The rise of the Internet has made it relatively easy for part of the engineering work previously done by engineers in this country to be done by engineers in other countries, a factor that will tend to hold down employment growth. Even so, there will always be a need for onsite engineers to interact with other employees and clients.

**Overall job prospects.** Overall job opportunities in engineering are expected to be good, and, indeed, prospects will be excellent in certain specialties. In addition to openings from job growth, many openings will be created by the need to replace current engineers who retire; transfer to management, sales, or other occupations; or leave

engineering for other reasons.

Many engineers work on long-term research and development projects or in other activities that continue even during economic slowdowns. In industries such as electronics and aerospace, however, large cutbacks in defense expenditures and in government funding for research and development have resulted in significant layoffs of engineers in the past. The trend toward contracting for engineering work with engineering services firms, both domestic and foreign, also has made engineers more vulnerable to layoffs during periods of lower demand.

It is important for engineers, as it is for workers in other technical and scientific occupations, to continue their education throughout their careers, because much of their value to their employer depends on their knowledge of the latest technology. Engineers in high-technology areas, such as biotechnology or information technology, may find that their technical knowledge will become outdated rapidly. By keeping current in their field, engineers will be able to deliver the best solutions and greatest value to their employers. Engineers who have not kept current in their field may find themselves at a disadvantage when seeking promotions or during layoffs.

***Employment change and job outlook by engineering specialty.***

***Aerospace engineers*** are expected to have 10 percent growth in employment over the projections decade, [about as fast as the average](#) for all occupations. New technologies and new designs for commercial and military aircraft and spacecraft produced during the next decade should spur demand for aerospace engineers. The employment outlook for aerospace engineers appears favorable. Although the number of degrees granted in aerospace engineering has begun to increase after many years of declines, new graduates continue to be needed to replace aerospace engineers who retire or leave the occupation for other reasons.

***Agricultural engineers*** are expected to have employment growth of 12 percent over the projections decade, [about as fast as the average](#) for all occupations. Employment growth should result from the need to increase crop yields to feed an expanding population and to produce crops used as renewable energy sources. Moreover, engineers will be needed to develop more efficient agricultural production and to conserve resources. In addition, engineers will be needed to meet the increasing demand for biosensors, used to determine the optimal treatment of crops.

***Biomedical engineers*** are expected to have employment growth of 72 percent over the projections decade, [much faster than the average](#) for all occupations. The aging of the population and a growing focus on health issues will drive demand for better medical devices and equipment designed by biomedical engineers. Along with the demand for more sophisticated medical equipment and procedures, an increased concern for cost-effectiveness will boost demand for biomedical engineers, particularly in pharmaceutical manufacturing and related industries. Because of the growing interest in this field, the number of degrees granted in biomedical engineering has increased greatly. Many biomedical engineers, particularly those employed in research laboratories, need a graduate degree.

***Chemical engineers*** are expected to have an employment decline of 2 percent over the projections decade. Overall employment in the chemical manufacturing industry is expected to continue to decline, although chemical companies will continue to employ chemical engineers to research and develop new chemicals and more efficient processes to increase output of existing chemicals. However, there will be employment growth for chemical engineers in service-providing industries, such as professional, scientific, and technical services, particularly for research in energy and the developing fields of biotechnology and nanotechnology.

***Civil engineers*** are expected to have employment growth of 24 percent over the projections decade, [much faster than the average](#) for all occupations. Spurred by general population growth and the related need to improve the Nation's infrastructure, more civil engineers will be needed to design and construct or expand transportation, water supply, and pollution control systems, and buildings and building complexes. They also will be needed to repair or replace existing roads, bridges, and other public structures. Because construction industries and architectural, engineering, and related services employ many civil engineers, employment opportunities will vary by geographic area and may decrease during economic slowdowns, when construction is often curtailed.

***Computer hardware engineers*** are expected to have employment growth of 4 percent over the projections decade, [slower than the average](#) for all occupations. Although the use of information technology continues to expand rapidly, the manufacture of computer hardware is expected to be adversely affected by intense foreign competition. As computer and semiconductor manufacturers contract out more of their engineering needs to both domestic and foreign design firms, much of the growth in employment of hardware engineers is expected to take place in the computer systems design and related services industry.

***Electrical engineers*** are expected to have employment growth of 2 percent over the projections decade. Although strong demand for electrical devices—including electric power generators, wireless phone transmitters, high-density batteries, and navigation systems—should spur job growth, international competition and the use of



engineering services performed in other countries will limit employment growth. Electrical engineers working in firms providing engineering expertise and design services to manufacturers should have better job prospects.

**Electronics engineers, except computer**, are expected to experience [little to no employment change](#) over the projections decade. Although rising demand for electronic goods—including communications equipment, defense-related equipment, medical electronics, and consumer products—should continue to increase demand for electronics engineers, foreign competition in electronic products development and the use of engineering services performed in other countries will limit employment growth. Growth is expected to be fastest in service-providing industries—particularly in firms that provide engineering and design services.

**Environmental engineers** are expected to have employment growth of 31 percent over the projections decade, [much faster than the average](#) for all occupations. More environmental engineers will be needed to help companies comply with environmental regulations and to develop methods of cleaning up environmental hazards. A shift in emphasis toward preventing problems rather than controlling those which already exist, as well as increasing public health concerns resulting from population growth, also are expected to spur demand for environmental engineers. Because of this employment growth, job opportunities should be favorable.

**Health and safety engineers, except mining safety engineers and inspectors**, are expected to have employment growth of 10 percent over the projections decade, [about as fast as the average](#) for all occupations. Because health and safety engineers make production processes and products as safe as possible, their services should be in demand as concern increases for health and safety within work environments. As new technologies for production or processing are developed, health and safety engineers will be needed to ensure that they are safe.

**Industrial engineers** are expected to have employment growth of 14 percent over the projections decade, [faster than the average](#) for all occupations. As firms look for new ways to reduce costs and raise productivity, they increasingly will turn to industrial engineers to develop more efficient processes and reduce costs, delays, and waste. This focus should lead to job growth for these engineers, even in some manufacturing industries with declining employment overall. Because their work is similar to that done in management occupations, many industrial engineers leave the occupation to become managers. Numerous openings will be created by the need to replace industrial engineers who transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force.

**Marine engineers and naval architects** are expected to have employment growth of 6 percent over the projections decade, [slower than the average](#) for all occupations. Continued demand for naval vessels and recreational small craft should more than offset the long-term decline in the domestic design and construction of large oceangoing vessels. Good prospects are expected for marine engineers and naval architects because of growth in employment, the need to replace workers who retire or take other jobs, and the limited number of students pursuing careers in this occupation.

**Materials engineers** are expected to have employment growth of 9 percent over the projections decade, [about as fast as the average](#) for all occupations. Growth should result from increased use of composite and other nontraditional materials developed through biotechnology and nanotechnology research. As manufacturing firms contract for their materials engineering needs, most employment growth is expected in professional, scientific, and technical services industries.

**Mechanical engineers** are expected to have employment growth of 6 percent over the projections decade, [slower than the average](#) for all occupations. Mechanical engineers are involved in the production of a wide range of products, and continued efforts to improve those products will create continued demand for their services. In addition, some new job opportunities will be created through the effects of emerging technologies in biotechnology, materials science, and nanotechnology. Additional opportunities outside of mechanical engineering will exist because the skills acquired through earning a degree in mechanical engineering often can be applied in other engineering specialties.

**Mining and geological engineers, including mining safety engineers**, are expected to have employment growth of 15 percent over the projections decade, [faster than the average](#) for all occupations. Following a lengthy period of decline, strong growth in demand for minerals is expected to create some employment growth over the 2008–18 period. Moreover, many currently employed mining engineers are approaching retirement age, a factor that should create additional job openings. Furthermore, relatively few schools offer mining engineering programs, resulting in good job opportunities for graduates. The best opportunities may require frequent travel or even living overseas for extended periods as mining operations around the world recruit graduates of U.S. mining engineering programs.

**Nuclear engineers** are expected to have employment growth of 11 percent over the projections decade, [about as fast as the average](#) for all occupations. Most job growth will be in research and development and engineering

services. Although no commercial nuclear power plants have been built in the United States for many years, increased interest in nuclear power as an energy source will spur demand for nuclear engineers to research and develop new designs for reactors. They also will be needed to work in defense-related areas, to develop nuclear medical technology, and to improve and enforce waste management and safety standards. Nuclear engineers are expected to have good employment opportunities because the small number of nuclear engineering graduates is likely to be in rough balance with the number of job openings.

**Petroleum engineers** are expected to have employment growth of 18 percent over the projections decade, [faster than the average](#) for all occupations. Petroleum engineers increasingly will be needed to develop new resources, as well as new methods of extracting more from existing sources. Excellent opportunities are expected for petroleum engineers because the number of job openings is likely to exceed the relatively small number of graduates. Petroleum engineers work around the world, and in fact, the best employment opportunities may include some work in other countries.

## Projections Data

[About this section](#)

### Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2008	Projected Employment, 2018	Change, 2008-18		Detailed Statistics	
				Number	Percent		
<b>Engineers</b>	17-2000	1,571,900	1,750,300	178,300	11	<a href="#">[PDF]</a>	<a href="#">[XLS]</a>
<b>Aerospace engineers</b>	17-2011	71,600	79,100	7,400	10	<a href="#">[PDF]</a>	<a href="#">[XLS]</a>
<b>Agricultural engineers</b>	17-2021	2,700	3,000	300	12	<a href="#">[PDF]</a>	<a href="#">[XLS]</a>
<b>Biomedical engineers</b>	17-2031	16,000	27,600	11,600	72	<a href="#">[PDF]</a>	<a href="#">[XLS]</a>
<b>Chemical engineers</b>	17-2041	31,700	31,000	-600	-2	<a href="#">[PDF]</a>	<a href="#">[XLS]</a>
<b>Civil engineers</b>	17-2051	278,400	345,900	67,600	24	<a href="#">[PDF]</a>	<a href="#">[XLS]</a>
<b>Computer hardware engineers</b>	17-2061	74,700	77,500	2,800	4	<a href="#">[PDF]</a>	<a href="#">[XLS]</a>
<b>Electrical and electronics engineers</b>	17-2070	301,500	304,600	3,100	1	<a href="#">[PDF]</a>	<a href="#">[XLS]</a>
<b>Electrical engineers</b>	17-2071	157,800	160,500	2,700	2	<a href="#">[PDF]</a>	<a href="#">[XLS]</a>
<b>Electronics engineers, except computer</b>	17-2072	143,700	144,100	400	0	<a href="#">[PDF]</a>	<a href="#">[XLS]</a>
<b>Environmental engineers</b>	17-2081	54,300	70,900	16,600	31	<a href="#">[PDF]</a>	<a href="#">[XLS]</a>
<b>Industrial engineers, including health and safety</b>	17-2110	240,400	273,700	33,200	14	<a href="#">[PDF]</a>	<a href="#">[XLS]</a>
<b>Health and safety engineers, except mining safety engineers and inspectors</b>	17-2111	25,700	28,300	2,600	10	<a href="#">[PDF]</a>	<a href="#">[XLS]</a>
<b>Industrial engineers</b>	17-2112	214,800	245,300	30,600	14	<a href="#">[PDF]</a>	<a href="#">[XLS]</a>
<b>Marine engineers and naval architects</b>	17-2121	8,500	9,000	500	6	<a href="#">[PDF]</a>	<a href="#">[XLS]</a>
<b>Materials engineers</b>	17-2131	24,400	26,600	2,300	9	<a href="#">[PDF]</a>	<a href="#">[XLS]</a>
<b>Mechanical engineers</b>	17-2141	238,700	253,100	14,400	6	<a href="#">[PDF]</a>	<a href="#">[XLS]</a>
<b>Mining and geological engineers, including mining safety engineers</b>	17-2151	7,100	8,200	1,100	15	<a href="#">[PDF]</a>	<a href="#">[XLS]</a>
<b>Nuclear engineers</b>	17-2161	16,900	18,800	1,900	11	<a href="#">[PDF]</a>	<a href="#">[XLS]</a>
<b>Petroleum engineers</b>	17-2171	21,900	25,900	4,000	18	<a href="#">[PDF]</a>	<a href="#">[XLS]</a>
<b>All other engineers</b>	17-2199	183,200	195,400	12,200	7	<a href="#">[PDF]</a>	<a href="#">[XLS]</a>

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on [Occupational Information Included in the Handbook](#).

## Earnings

[About this section](#)

Earnings for engineers vary significantly by specialty, industry, and education. Variation in median earnings and in the earnings distributions for engineers in a number of specialties is especially significant. Table 1 shows wage distributions in May 2008 for engineers in specialties covered in this statement.

**Table 1. Earnings distribution by engineering specialty, May 2008**

<b>Specialty</b>	<b>Lowest 10%</b>	<b>Lowest 25%</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Highest 25%</b>	<b>Highest 10%</b>
<b>Aerospace engineers</b>	\$58,130	\$72,390	\$92,520	\$114,530	\$134,570
<b>Agricultural engineers</b>	43,150	55,430	68,730	86,400	108,470
<b>Biomedical engineers</b>	47,640	59,420	77,400	98,830	121,970
<b>Chemical engineers</b>	53,730	67,420	84,680	105,000	130,240
<b>Civil engineers</b>	48,140	58,960	74,600	94,470	115,630
<b>Computer hardware engineers</b>	59,170	76,250	97,400	122,750	148,590
<b>Electrical engineers</b>	52,990	64,910	82,160	102,520	125,810
<b>Electronics engineers, except computer</b>	55,330	68,400	86,370	106,870	129,920
<b>Environmental engineers</b>	45,310	56,980	74,020	94,280	115,430
<b>Health and safety engineers, except mining safety engineers and inspectors</b>	43,540	56,190	72,490	90,740	106,220
<b>Industrial engineers</b>	47,720	59,120	73,820	91,020	107,270
<b>Marine engineers and naval architects</b>	43,070	57,060	74,140	94,840	118,630
<b>Materials engineers</b>	51,420	63,830	81,820	102,040	124,470
<b>Mechanical engineers</b>	47,900	59,230	74,920	94,400	114,740
<b>Mining and geological engineers, including mining safety engineers</b>	45,020	57,970	75,960	96,030	122,750
<b>Nuclear engineers</b>	68,300	82,540	97,080	115,170	136,880
<b>Petroleum engineers</b>	57,820	80,040	108,020	148,700	>166,400
<b>Engineers, all other</b>	49,270	67,360	88,570	110,310	132,070

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