

EARLY SERVICE MEMBER MILESTONES



Officer Paths

Commissioned officers are military leaders who often have a four-year degree or equivalent. They plan operations, make critical decisions and exercise command over enlisted service members, noncommissioned officers and other lower-ranking officers. There are many ways to become an officer, but all of them share very similar milestones. Please note that this timeline does not represent all pathways or guarantee milestone timing.

THE PATHS TO BECOMING AN OFFICER

- ✓ **Military Service Academies** — Five prestigious four-year military academies where cadets are commissioned as officers upon graduation. Tuition is fully funded.
- ✓ **Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC)** — A military training program offered at many colleges where cadets are commissioned as officers upon completion. Highly competitive scholarships and other financial incentives help students pay for college in exchange for a service commitment. These two to four-year programs are not available for the Coast Guard or Space Force.
- ✓ **Senior Military Colleges** — Six colleges around the U.S. that offer a combination of higher education with military instruction. Students who either opt in to a commissioning track or receive an ROTC scholarship are required to serve upon graduation.
- ✓ **Officer Candidate School and Officer Training School (OCS/OTS)** — Military schools that qualified civilians or enlisted service members with bachelor's degrees can attend to become commissioned officers.
- ✓ **Direct Commissioning** — An alternate path for highly qualified or specialized individuals in certain fields. Direct commissions are based on selection and consideration directly by the chain of command. The Marine Corps does not offer a path to directly commission.
- ✓ **Warrant Officers** — Warrant officers earn their leadership responsibilities by becoming technical experts as enlisted members. Once these specialists reach the rank of chief warrant officer 2, they receive the same status as a commissioned officer. Note that warrant officer pathways are not available in the Air Force or Space Force.

MILESTONE 1

START HERE

RESEARCHING AND SELECTING A PATH

When: Anytime during or after high school

- ✓ For **Service Academies** and **ROTC**, determine which Service branch might be a best fit to identify which academies or programs to apply to.
- ✓ For **ROTC** and **Senior Military Colleges**, look into schools that offer educational programs that align with interests. If **ROTC**, ensure those schools offer this program as well.
- ✓ For **OCS/OTS**, decide whether to:
 - Go to college first, then commission through OCS/OTS.
 - Enlist in the Military and earn a bachelor's degree while serving, then commission through OCS/OTS. For more information about enlisting, visit [Today'sMilitary.com](https://www.Today'sMilitary.com).
- ✓ For **Direct Commissioning**, look into which highly specialized professions might qualify for direct commissioning and explore universities that offer degrees in these fields. These in-demand professions are subject to change based on needs of the Military.

Note: Contacting military recruiters, college ROTC programs, and Service academies are great ways to learn more information about your options.

MILESTONE 2

PREPARING AND APPLYING TO SCHOOLS

When: Anytime during or after high school

- ✓ For **all**, ensure all requirements are met before applying. Criteria can include GPA, test scores, age, marital and dependent status, citizenship, and physical condition. Also, ensure important documents are readily available, which can include standardized test results, high school degrees/certificates, and more.
- ✓ For **Service Academies**, work to obtain a congressional nomination, as these account for 75% of all Service academy appointments.
- ✓ For **ROTC**, interview with and submit applications to selected participating colleges. Apply for an ROTC scholarship directly through the Service branch at this time as well.
- ✓ For **Senior Military Schools, Direct Commissioning, and OCS/OTS** (if not enlisting), fill out and submit applications to the school(s) of your choice.

Note: Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) programs provide high schoolers with valuable experience that is often applicable to many officer paths. Note that JROTC cadets do not become military officers upon completion and are not required to serve.

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ATTENDING COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OR A SERVICE ACADEMY

When: Anytime after high school

- ✓ For all, attend four year programs at these schools to earn a bachelor's degree or equivalent.
- ✓ For **Military Service Academies** and **Senior Military Colleges**, curriculums consist of military instruction, physical training and academics.
- ✓ For **ROTC**, the curriculum consists of the school's traditional academic training supplemented by military instruction and physical training.



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LEARNING JOB SKILLS & LEADERSHIP TRAINING

- ✓ Once commissioned, officers receive additional training for their specific roles through programs like Commissioned Officer Training, the Basic Officer Leadership Course, and on-the-job training.



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REPORTING TO A FIRST DUTY STATION

- ✓ Relocate, if necessary, to a unit assignment. Here officers will lead their fellow Service members in accomplishing missions and fulfilling responsibilities.
- ✓ Officers in the Reserve and National Guard will return home and report to their units for weekend drills and training.



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GRADUATING AND EARNING A COMMISSION

When: Generally, after four years of education and instruction

- ✓ For **Military Service Academies**, graduates are commissioned as officers in the Military and are required to serve a minimum of five years.
- ✓ For **ROTC**, cadets are commissioned as officers upon completion. Service commitment duration varies by Service branch.
- ✓ For **Senior Military Colleges**, cadets who have accepted a commissioning track or scholarship become officers upon graduating. Service commitment duration varies by Service branch.
- ✓ Graduates from four-year colleges, individuals with sufficient college credit hours, enlisted service members transitioning into officer roles or those with specialized skills or professional degrees seeking a Direct Commission can apply to OCS/OTS to become officers. Depending on the Service branch, OCS/OTC is 9.5 to 17 weeks in duration. Applicants that are not already enlisted may need to attend MEPS for screening and complete physical training. Letters of recommendation, officer indoctrination training, and other requirements may also be needed to directly commission as an officer.

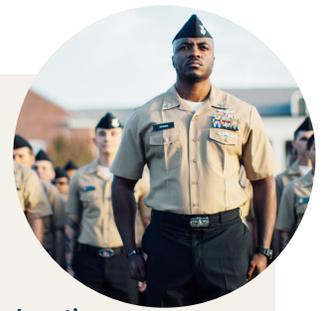
Note: All commissioned officers are required to maintain a SECRET security clearance.

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CONTINUING TO GROW

When: Generally, after four years of education and instruction

- ✓ Apply and improve upon specialized skills while performing leadership duties.
- ✓ Achieve higher ranks during military service. Promotions are largely based upon time in service and/or time in pay grade, and a track record of honorable service.



Although this guide represents some early milestones that aspiring military officers may encounter, it offers only a small glimpse of what it's like to be a part of the Military. For a more complete picture of career opportunities, military life, education, benefits and more, please visit [TodaysMilitary.com](https://www.TodaysMilitary.com)