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## Painters and Paperhangers

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### Significant Points

- Employment prospects for painters should be excellent due to the large numbers of workers who leave the occupation for other jobs; paperhangers will face very limited opportunities.
- Most workers learn informally on the job as helpers, but some experts recommend completion of an apprenticeship program.
- About 42 percent of painters and paperhangers are self-employed.

### Nature of the Work

Paint and wall coverings make surfaces clean, attractive, and bright. In addition, paints and other sealers protect exterior surfaces from wear caused by exposure to the weather.

*Painters* apply paint, stain, varnish, and other finishes to buildings and other structures. They choose the right paint or finish for the surface to be covered, taking into account durability, ease of handling, method of application, and customers' wishes. Painters first prepare the surfaces to be covered, so that the paint will adhere properly. This may require removing the old coat of paint by stripping, sanding, wire brushing, burning, or water and abrasive blasting. Painters also wash walls and trim to remove dirt and grease, fill nail holes and cracks, sandpaper rough spots, and brush off dust. On new surfaces, they apply a primer or sealer to prepare the surface for the finish coat. Painters also mix paints and match colors, relying on knowledge of paint composition and color harmony. In large paint shops or hardware stores, mixing and matching are automated.

There are several ways to apply paint and similar coverings. Painters must be able to choose the right paint applicator for each job, depending on the surface to be covered, the characteristics of the finish, and other factors. Some jobs need only a good bristle brush with a soft, tapered edge; others require a dip or fountain pressure roller; still others are best done using a paint sprayer. Many jobs need several types of applicators. In fact, painters may use an assortment of brushes, edgers, and rollers for a single job. The right tools speed the painter's work and also produce the most attractive surface.

Some painting artisans specialize in creating unique finishes by using one of many decorative techniques. These techniques often involve "broken color," a process created by applying one or more colors in broken layers over a different base coat to produce a mottled or textured effect. Often these techniques employ glazes or washes applied over a solid colored background. Glazes are made of oil-based paints and give a sleek glow to walls. Washes are made of latex-based paints that have been thinned with water and can add a greater sense of depth and texture. Other decorative painting techniques include sponging, rag-rolling, stippling, sheen striping, dragging, distressing, color blocking, marbling, and faux finishes.

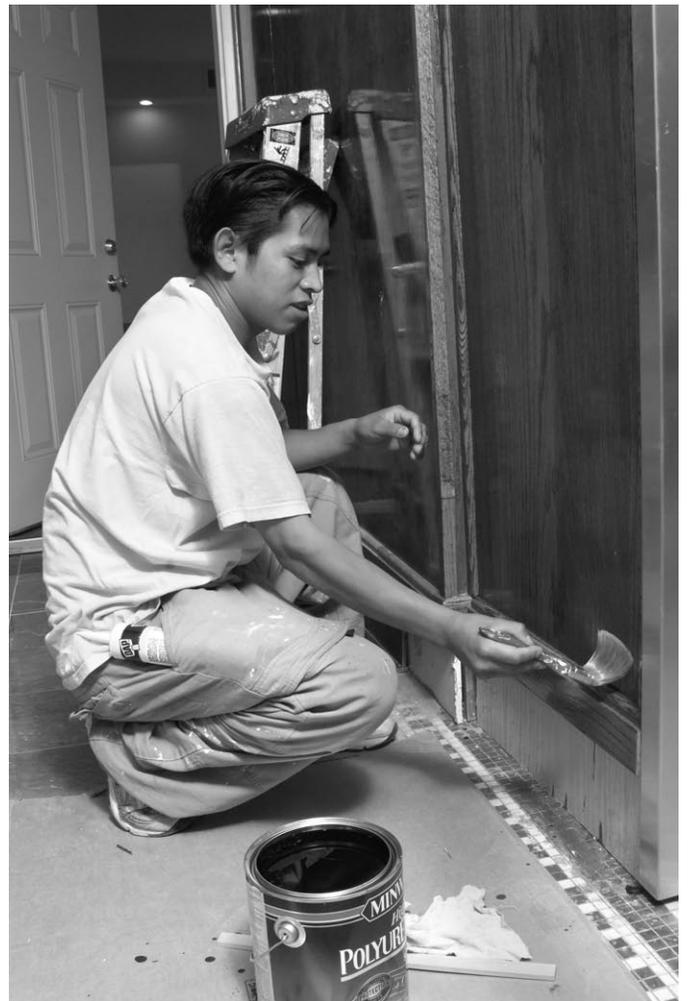
Some painters specialize in painting industrial structures to prevent deterioration. One example is applying a protective coating to steel bridges to fight corrosion. The coating most

commonly used is a waterborne acrylic solvent that is easy to apply and environmentally friendly, but other specialized and sometimes difficult-to-apply coatings may be used. Painters may also coat interior and exterior manufacturing facilities and equipment such as storage tanks, plant buildings, lockers, piping, structural steel, and ships.

When painting any industrial structure, workers must take necessary safety precautions depending on their project. Those who specialize in interior applications such as painting the inside of storage tanks, for example, must wear a full-body protective suit. When working on bridges, painters are often suspended by cables and may work at extreme heights. When working on tall buildings, painters erect scaffolding, including "swing stages," scaffolds suspended by ropes, or cables attached to roof hooks. When painting steeples and other conical structures, they use a bosun's chair, a swing-like device.

*Paperhangers* cover walls and ceilings with decorative wall coverings made of paper, vinyl, or fabric. They first prepare the surface to be covered by applying "sizing," which seals the surface and makes the covering adhere better. When redecorating, they may first remove the old covering by soaking, steaming, or applying solvents. When necessary, they patch holes and take care of other imperfections before hanging the new wall covering.

After the surface has been prepared, paperhangers must prepare the paste or other adhesive, unless they are using pretreated paper. They then measure the area to be covered, check the



*Self-employed, independent painting contractors account for 2 out of 5 painters and paperhangers.*

covering for flaws, cut the covering into strips of the proper size, and closely examine the pattern in order to match it when the strips are hung. Much of this process can now be handled by specialized equipment.

The next step is to brush or roll the adhesive onto the back of the covering, if needed, and to then place the strips on the wall or ceiling, making sure the pattern is matched, the strips are straight, and the edges are butted together to make tight, closed seams. Finally, paperhangers smooth the strips to remove bubbles and wrinkles, trim the top and bottom with a razor knife, and wipe off any excess adhesive.

**Work environment.** Most painters and paperhangers work 40 hours a week or less; about 24 percent have variable schedules or work part time. Painters and paperhangers must stand for long periods, often working from scaffolding and ladders. Their jobs also require a considerable amount of climbing, bending, and stretching. These workers must have stamina because much of the work is done with their arms raised overhead. Painters, especially industrial painters, often work outdoors, almost always in dry, warm weather. Those who paint bridges or building infrastructure may be exposed to extreme heights and uncomfortable positions; some painters work suspended with ropes or cables.

Some painting jobs can leave a worker covered with paint. Drywall dust created by electric sanders prior to painting requires workers to wear protective safety glasses and a dust mask. Painters and paperhangers sometimes work with materials that are hazardous or toxic, such as when they are required to remove lead-based paints. In the most dangerous situations, painters work in a sealed self-contained suit to prevent inhalation of or contact with hazardous materials. Although workers are subject to falls from ladders, the occupation is not as hazardous as some other construction occupations.

### Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Painting and paperhanging is learned mostly on the job, but some experts recommend completion of an apprenticeship program.

**Education and training.** Most painters and paperhangers learn through on-the-job training and by working as a helper to an experienced painter. However, there are a number of formal and informal training programs that provide more thorough instruction and a better career foundation. In general, the more formal the training received, the more likely the individual will enter the profession at a higher level. There are limited informal training opportunities for paperhangers because there are fewer paperhangers and helpers are usually not required.

If available, apprenticeships generally provide a mixture of classroom instruction and paid on-the-job training. Apprenticeships

for painters and paperhangers consist of 2 to 4 years of on-the-job training, supplemented by a minimum of 144 hours of related classroom instruction each year. A high school education or its equivalent, with courses in mathematics, usually is required to enter an apprenticeship program. Apprentices receive instruction in color harmony, use and care of tools and equipment, surface preparation, application techniques, paint mixing and matching, characteristics of different finishes, blue-print reading, wood finishing, and safety.

Besides apprenticeships, some workers gain skills by attending technical schools that offer training prior to employment. These schools can take about a year to complete. Others receive training through local vocational high schools.

Whether a painter learns the trade through a formal apprenticeship or informally as a helper, on-the-job instruction covers similar skill areas. Under the direction of experienced workers, trainees carry supplies, erect scaffolds, and do simple painting and surface preparation tasks while they learn about paint and painting equipment. As they gain experience, trainees learn to prepare surfaces for painting and paperhanging, to mix paints, and to apply paint and wall coverings efficiently and neatly. Near the end of their training, they may learn decorating concepts, color coordination, and cost-estimating techniques. In addition to learning craft skills, painters must become familiar with safety and health regulations so that their work complies with the law.

**Other qualifications.** Painters and paperhangers should have good manual dexterity, vision, and color sense. They also need physical stamina and balance to work on ladders and platforms. Apprentices or helpers generally must be at least 18 years old and in good physical condition, in addition to the high school diploma or equivalent that most apprentices need.

**Certification and advancement.** Some organizations offer training and certification to enhance the skills of their members. People interested in industrial painting, for example, can earn several designations from the National Association of Corrosion Engineers in several areas of specialization, including one for coating applicators, called Protective Coating Specialist. Courses range from 1 day to several weeks depending on the certification program and specialty.

Painters and paperhangers may advance to supervisory or estimating jobs with painting and decorating contractors. Many establish their own painting and decorating businesses. For those who would like to advance, it is increasingly important to be able to communicate in both English and Spanish in order to relay instructions and safety precautions to workers with limited English skills; Spanish-speaking workers make up a large part of the construction workforce in many areas. Paint-

### Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-16	
				Number	Percent
Painters and paperhangers.....	47-2140	473,000	526,000	53,000	11
Painters, construction and maintenance.....	47-2141	463,000	517,000	54,000	12
Paperhangers.....	47-2142	9,900	8,700	-1,200	-12

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*.

ing contractors need good English skills to deal with clients and subcontractors.

### Employment

Painters and paperhangers held about 473,000 jobs in 2006; about 98 percent were painters. Around 38 percent of painters and paperhangers work for painting and wall covering contractors engaged in new construction, repair, restoration, or remodeling work. In addition, organizations that own or manage large buildings—such as apartment complexes—may employ painters, as do some schools, hospitals, factories, and government agencies.

Self-employed independent painting contractors accounted for 42 percent of all painters and paperhangers, significantly greater than the 20 percent of all construction trades workers combined.

### Job Outlook

Employment of painters and paperhangers is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations, reflecting increases in the stock of buildings and other structures that require maintenance and renovation. Excellent employment opportunities are expected for painters due to the need to replace the large number of workers who leave the occupation; paperhangers will have very limited opportunities.

**Employment change.** Overall employment is expected to grow by 11 percent between 2006 and 2016, about as fast as the average for all occupations. Driving employment growth will be retiring baby boomers who either purchase second homes or otherwise leave their existing homes that then require interior painting. Investors who sell properties or rent them out will also require the services of painters prior to completing a transaction. The relatively short life of exterior paints in residential homes as well as changing color and application trends will continue to support demand for painters. Painting is labor-intensive and not susceptible to technological changes that might make workers more productive and slow employment growth.

Growth of industrial painting will be driven by the need to prevent corrosion and deterioration of the many industrial structures by painting or coating them. Applying a protective coating to steel bridges, for example, is cost effective and can add years to the life expectancy of a bridge.

Employment of paperhangers should decline rapidly as many homeowners take advantage of easy application materials and resort to cheaper alternatives, such as painting.

**Job prospects.** Job prospects for painters should be excellent because of the need to replace workers who leave the occupation for other jobs. There are no strict training requirements for entry into these jobs, so many people with limited skills work as painters or helpers for a relatively short time and then move on to other types of work with higher pay or better working conditions.

Opportunities for industrial painters should be excellent as the positions available should be greater than the pool of qualified individuals to fill them. While industrial structures that require painting are located throughout the Nation, the best employment opportunities should be in the petrochemical industry

in the Gulf Coast region, where strong demand and the largest concentration of workers exists.

Very few openings will arise for paperhangers because the number of these jobs is comparatively small and cheaper, more modern decorative finishes such as faux effects and sponging have gained in popularity at the expense of paper, vinyl, or fabric wall coverings.

Jobseekers considering these occupations should expect some periods of unemployment, especially until they gain experience. Many construction projects are of short duration, and construction activity is cyclical in nature. Remodeling, restoration, and maintenance projects, however, should continue as homeowners undertake renovation projects and hire painters even in economic downturns. Nonetheless, workers in these trades may experience periods of unemployment when the overall level of construction falls. On the other hand, shortages of these workers may occur in some areas during peak periods of building activity.

### Earnings

In May 2006, median hourly earnings of wage and salary painters, construction and maintenance, were \$15.00, not including the earnings of the self-employed. The middle 50 percent earned between \$12.19 and \$19.51. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$9.97, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$25.62. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of painters were as follows:

Local government .....	\$20.11
Drywall and insulation contractors .....	16.18
Nonresidential building construction .....	15.68
Residential building construction.....	15.04
Painting and wall covering contractors .....	14.62

In May 2006, median earnings for wage and salary paperhangers were \$16.21. The middle 50 percent earned between \$13.12 and \$20.62. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$10.34, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$26.77.

Earnings for painters may be reduced on occasion because of bad weather and the short-term nature of many construction jobs. Hourly wage rates for apprentices usually start at 40 to 50 percent of the rate for experienced workers and increase periodically.

Some painters and paperhangers are members of the International Brotherhood of Painters and Allied Trades. Some painters are members of other unions.

### Related Occupations

Painters and paperhangers apply various coverings to decorate and protect wood, drywall, metal, and other surfaces. Other construction occupations in which workers do finishing work include carpenters; carpet, floor, and tile installers and finishers; drywall installers, ceiling tile installers, and tapers; painting and coating workers, except construction and maintenance; and plasterers and stucco masons.

### Sources of Additional Information

For details about painting and paperhanging apprenticeships or work opportunities, contact local painting and decorating con-

tractors, local trade organizations, a local of the International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, a local joint union-management apprenticeship committee, or an office of the State apprenticeship agency or employment service.

For information about the work of painters and paperhangers and training opportunities, contact:

➤ Associated Builders and Contractors, Workforce Development Department, 4250 North Fairfax Dr., 9th Floor, Arlington, VA 22203. Internet: <http://www.trytools.org>

➤ International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, 1750 New York Ave. NW., Washington, DC 20006.

Internet: <http://www.iupat.org>

➤ National Center for Construction Education and Research, P.O. Box 141104, Gainesville, FL 32614.

Internet: <http://www.nccer.org>

➤ Painting and Decorating Contractors of America, 1801 Park 270 Dr., Suite 220, St.Louis, MO 63146.

Internet: <http://www.pdca.org>

For general information about the work of industrial painters and opportunities for training and certification as a protective coating specialist, contact:

➤ National Association of Corrosion Engineers, 1440 South Creek Dr., Houston, TX 77084.

Internet: <http://www.nace.org>