
Food and Beverage Serving and Related Workers

Significant Points

- Most jobs are part time and have few educational requirements, attracting many young people to the occupation—21 percent of these workers were 16 to 19 years old in 2008, about six times the proportion for all workers.
- Job openings are expected to be abundant through 2018, which will create excellent opportunities for jobseekers.
- Tips comprise a major portion of earnings for servers, so keen competition is expected for jobs in fine dining and more popular restaurants where potential tips are greatest.

Nature of the Work

Food and beverage serving and related workers are the front line of customer service in full-service restaurants, casual dining eateries, and other food service establishments. These workers greet customers, escort them to seats and hand them menus, take food and drink orders, and serve food and beverages. They also answer questions, explain menu items and specials, and keep tables and dining areas clean and set for new diners. Most work as part of a team, helping coworkers to improve workflow and customer service.

Waiters and waitresses, also called servers, are the largest group of these workers. They take customers' orders, serve food and beverages, prepare itemized checks, and sometimes accept payment. Their specific duties vary considerably, depending on the establishment. In casual-dining restaurants serving routine, straightforward fare, such as salads, soups, and sandwiches, servers are expected to provide fast, efficient, and courteous service. In fine dining restaurants, where more complicated meals are prepared and often served over several courses, waiters and waitresses provide more formal service emphasizing personal, attentive treatment at a more leisurely pace. Waiters and waitresses may meet with managers and chefs before each shift to discuss the menu and any new items or specials, review ingredients for potential food allergies, or talk about any food safety concerns. They also discuss coordination between the kitchen and the dining room and any customer service issues from the previous day or shift. In addition, waiters and waitresses usually check the identification of patrons to ensure they meet the minimum age requirement for the purchase of alcohol and tobacco products wherever those items are sold.

Waiters and waitresses sometimes perform the duties of other food and beverage service workers, including escorting guests to tables, serving customers seated at counters, clearing and setting up tables, or operating a cash register. However, full-service restaurants frequently hire other staff, such as hosts and hostesses, cashiers, or dining room attendants, to perform these duties.

Bartenders fill drink orders either taken directly from patrons at the bar or through waiters and waitresses who place drink orders for dining room customers. Bartenders check the identification of customers seated at the bar to ensure they meet the minimum age requirement for the purchase of alcohol and tobacco products. They prepare mixed drinks, serve bottled or draught beer, and pour wine or other beverages. Bartenders must know a wide range of drink recipes and be able to mix drinks accurately, quickly, and without waste. Some establishments, especially those with higher volume, use equipment that automatically measures, pours, and mixes drinks at the push of a button. Bartenders who use this equipment, however, still must work quickly to handle a large volume of drink orders and be familiar with the ingredients for special drink requests. Much of a bartender's work still must be done by hand.

Besides mixing and serving drinks, bartenders stock and prepare garnishes for drinks; maintain an adequate supply of ice, glasses, and other bar supplies; and keep the bar area clean for customers. They also may collect payment, operate the cash register, wash glassware and utensils, and serve food to customers who dine at the bar. Bartenders usually are responsible for ordering and maintaining an inventory of liquor, mixers, and other bar supplies.

Hosts and hostesses welcome guests and maintain reservation and waiting lists. They may direct patrons to coatrooms, restrooms, or to a place to wait until their table is ready. Hosts and hostesses assign guests to tables suitable for the size of their group, escort patrons to their seats, and provide menus. They also enter reservations, arrange parties, and assist with other special requests. In some restaurants, they act as cashiers.

Dining room and cafeteria attendants and bartender helpers—sometimes referred to collectively as the bus staff—assist waiters, waitresses, and bartenders by cleaning and setting tables, removing dirty dishes, and keeping serving areas stocked with supplies. They may also assist waiters and waitresses by bringing meals out of the kitchen, distributing dishes to individual diners, filling water glasses, and delivering condiments. Cafeteria attendants stock serving tables with food, trays, dishes, and silverware. They may carry trays to dining tables for patrons. Bartender helpers keep bar equipment clean and glasses washed. Dishwashers clean dishes, cutlery, and kitchen utensils and equipment.

Food also is prepared and served in limited-service eateries, which don't employ servers and specialize in simpler preparations that often are made in advance. Two occupations with large numbers of workers are common in these types of establishments: combined food preparation and serving workers, including fast food; and counter attendants, cafeteria, food concession, and coffee shop. Combined food preparation and serving workers are employed primarily by fast food restaurants. They take food and beverage orders, retrieve items when ready, fill drink cups, and accept payment. They also may heat food items and assemble salads and sandwiches, which constitutes food preparation. Counter attendants take orders and serve food in snack bars, cafeterias, movie theatres, and coffee shops over a counter or steam table. They may fill cups with coffee, soda, and other beverages and may prepare fountain specialties, such as milkshakes and ice cream sundaes. Counter attendants take carryout orders from diners and wrap or place

items in containers. They clean counters, write itemized bills, and sometimes accept payment. Other workers, referred to as foodservers, nonrestaurant, serve food to patrons outside of a restaurant environment. They might deliver room service meals in hotels or meals to hospital rooms or act as carhops, bringing orders to parked cars.

Work environment. Food and beverage service workers are on their feet most of the time and often carry heavy trays of food, dishes, and glassware. During busy dining periods, they are under pressure to serve customers quickly and efficiently. The work is relatively safe, but injuries from slips, cuts, and burns often result from hurrying or mishandling sharp tools. Three occupations—food servers, nonrestaurant; dining room and cafeteria attendants and bartender helpers; and dishwashers—reported higher incident rates than many occupations throughout the economy.

Part-time work is more common among food and beverage serving and related workers than among workers in almost any other occupation. In 2008, those on part-time schedules included half of all waiters and waitresses and almost three-fourths of all hosts and hostesses.

Food service and drinking establishments typically maintain long dining hours and offer flexible and varied work opportunities. Many food and beverage serving and related workers work evenings, weekends, and holidays. The long business hours allow for more flexible schedules that appeal to many teenagers who can gain valuable work experience. More than one-fifth of all food and beverage serving and related workers were 16 to 19 years old in 2008—about six times the proportion for all workers.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Most food and beverage service jobs are entry level and require a high school diploma or less. Generally, training is received on the job; however, those who wish to work at more upscale restaurants, where income from tips is greater and service standards are higher, may need previous experience or vocational training.

Education and training. There are no specific educational requirements for most food and beverage service jobs. Many employers prefer to hire high school graduates for waiter and waitress, bartender, and host and hostess positions, but completion of high school usually is not required for fast-food workers, counter attendants, dishwashers, and dining room attendants and bartender helpers. Many entrants to these jobs are in their late teens or early twenties and have a high school education or less. Usually, they have little or no work experience. Food and beverage service jobs are a major source of part-time employment for high school and college students, multiple job holders, and those seeking supplemental incomes.

All new employees receive some training from their employer. They learn safe food handling procedures and sanitation practices, for example. Some employers, particularly those in fast-food restaurants, teach new workers using self-study programs, on-line programs, audiovisual presentations, and instructional booklets that explain food preparation and service skills. But most food and beverage serving and related workers pick up their skills by observing and working with more experienced workers. Some full-service restaurants also provide new dining room employees with some form of classroom



Food and beverage serving workers assist diners at cafeterias.

training that alternates with periods of on-the-job work experience. These training programs communicate the operating philosophy of the restaurant, help establish a personal rapport with other staff, teach formal serving techniques, and instill a desire to work as a team. They also provide an opportunity to discuss customer service situations and the proper ways to handle unpleasant circumstances or unruly patrons.

Some food serving workers can acquire more skills by attending relevant classes offered by public or private vocational schools, restaurant associations, or large restaurant chains. Some bartenders acquire their skills through formal vocational training either by attending a school for bartending or a vocational and technical school where bartending classes are taught. These programs often include instruction on State and local laws and regulations, cocktail recipes, proper attire and conduct, and stocking a bar. Some of these schools help their graduates find jobs. Although few employers require any minimum level of educational attainment, some specialized training is usually needed in food handling and legal issues surrounding serving alcoholic beverages. Employers are more likely to hire and promote employees based on people skills and personal qualities than education.

Other qualifications. Restaurants rely on good food and customer service to retain loyal customers and succeed in a competitive industry. Food and beverage serving and related workers who exhibit excellent personal qualities—such as a neat appearance, an ability to work as part of a team, and a natural rapport with customers—will be highly sought after. Most States require workers who serve alcoholic beverages to be at least 18 years of age, but some States require servers to be older. For bartender jobs, many employers prefer to hire people who are 25 or older. All servers that serve alcohol need to be familiar with State and local laws concerning the sale of alcoholic beverages.

Waiters and waitresses need a good memory to avoid confusing customers' orders and to recall faces, names, and preferences of frequent patrons. Knowledge of a foreign language can be helpful to communicate with a diverse clientele and staff. Restaurants and hotels that have rigid table service standards often offer higher wages and have greater income potential from tips, but they may also have stiffer employment requirements, such as prior table service experience or higher education attainment than other establishments.

Advancement. Due to the relatively small size of most food-serving establishments, opportunities for promotion are limited. After gaining experience, some dining room and cafeteria attendants and bartender helpers advance to waiter, waitress, or bartender jobs. For waiters, waitresses, and bartenders, advancement usually is limited to finding a job in a busier or more expensive restaurant or bar where prospects for tip earnings are better. Some bartenders, hosts and hostesses, and waiters and waitresses advance to supervisory jobs, such as dining room supervisor, maitre d', assistant manager, or restaurant general manager. A few bartenders open their own businesses. In larger restaurant chains, food and beverage service workers who excel often are invited to enter the company's formal management training program. (For more information, see food service managers elsewhere in the Handbook.)

Employment

Food and beverage serving and related workers held 7.7 million jobs in 2008. The distribution of jobs among the various food and beverage serving occupations was as follows:

Combined food preparation and serving workers, including fast food.....	2,701,700
Waiters and waitresses	2,381,600
Counter attendants, cafeteria, food concession, and coffee shop.....	525,400
Dishwashers	522,900
Bartenders	508,700
Dining room and cafeteria attendants and bartender helpers	420,700
Hosts and hostesses, restaurant, lounge, and coffee shop.....	350,700
Food servers, nonrestaurant.....	189,800
All other food preparation and serving related workers	50,900

The overwhelming majority of jobs for food and beverage serving and related workers were found in food services and drinking places, such as restaurants, fast food outlets, bars, and catering or contract food service operations. Other jobs were in hotels, motels, and other traveler accommodation establish-

ments; amusement, gambling, and recreation establishments; educational services; nursing care facilities; and civic and social organizations.

Jobs are located throughout the country but are more plentiful in larger cities and tourist areas. Vacation resorts offer seasonal employment.

Job Outlook

Average employment growth is expected, and job opportunities should be excellent for food and beverage serving and related workers as turnover is generally very high among these workers, but job competition is often keen for jobs at upscale restaurants.

Employment change. Overall employment of these workers is expected to increase by 10 percent over the 2008-18 decade, which is about as fast as the average for all occupations. Food and beverage serving and related workers are projected to have one of the largest numbers of new jobs arise, about 761,000, over this period. The growth in jobs is expected to increase as the population continues to expand. However, employment will grow more slowly than in the past as people change their dining habits. The growing popularity of take-out food and the growing number and variety of places that offer carryout options, including at many full-service restaurants, will slow the growth of waiters and waitresses and other serving workers.

Projected employment growth will vary by job type. Employment of combined food preparation and serving workers, which includes fast-food workers, is expected to increase faster than the average for all occupations. The limited service segment of the food services and drinking places industry has a low price advantage, fast service, and has been adding healthier foods. Slower than average employment growth is expected for waiters and waitresses, hosts and hostesses, and dining room and cafeteria attendants and bartender helpers, as more people use take-out service. Employment of bartenders, dishwashers, and counter attendants, cafeteria, food concession, and coffee shop will grow about as fast as average. Nonrestaurant servers, such as those who deliver food trays in hotels, hospitals, residential care facilities, or catered events, are expected to have average employment growth.

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2008	Projected Employment, 2018	Change, 2008-2018	
				Number	Percent
Food and beverage serving and related workers	-	7,652,400	8,413,100	760,700	10
Food and beverage serving workers.....	35-3000	6,307,200	6,962,300	655,100	10
Bartenders	35-3011	508,700	549,500	40,800	8
Fast food and counter workers	35-3020	3,227,100	3,670,400	443,300	14
Combined food preparation and serving workers, including fast food	35-3021	2,701,700	3,096,000	394,300	15
Counter attendants, cafeteria, food concession, and coffee shop	35-3022	525,400	574,400	49,000	9
Waiters and waitresses	35-3031	2,381,600	2,533,300	151,600	6
Food servers, nonrestaurant	35-3041	189,800	209,100	19,300	10
Other food preparation and serving related workers.....	35-9000	1,345,200	1,450,800	105,600	8
Dining room and cafeteria attendants and bartender helpers	35-9011	420,700	444,000	23,300	6
Dishwashers	35-9021	522,900	583,400	60,400	12
Hosts and hostesses, restaurant, lounge, and coffee shop.....	35-9031	350,700	373,400	22,800	6
Food preparation and serving related workers, all other.....	35-9099	50,900	50,000	-900	-2

(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*.

Job prospects. Job opportunities at most eating and drinking places will be excellent because many people in these occupations change jobs frequently, which creates a large number of openings. Keen competition is expected, however, for jobs in popular restaurants and fine dining establishments, where potential earnings from tips are greatest.

Earnings

Food and beverage serving and related workers derive their earnings from a combination of hourly wages and customer tips. Earnings vary greatly, depending on the type of job and establishment. For example, fast-food workers and hosts and hostesses usually do not receive tips, so their wage rates may be higher than those of waiters and waitresses and bartenders in full-service restaurants, but their overall earnings might be lower. In many full-service restaurants, tips are higher than wages. In some restaurants, workers contribute all or a portion of their tips to a tip pool, which is distributed among qualifying workers. Tip pools allow workers who don't usually receive tips directly from customers, such as dining room attendants, to feel a part of a team and to share in the rewards of good service.

In May 2008, median hourly wages (including tips) of waiters and waitresses were \$8.01. The middle 50 percent earned between \$7.32 and \$10.35. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$6.73, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$14.26 an hour. For most waiters and waitresses, higher earnings are primarily the result of receiving more in tips rather than higher hourly wages. Tips usually average between 10 percent and 20 percent of guests' checks; waiters and waitresses working in busy or expensive restaurants earn the most.

Bartenders had median hourly wages (including tips) of \$8.54. The middle 50 percent earned between \$7.53 and \$10.98. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$7.00, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$14.93 an hour. Like waiters and waitresses, bartenders employed in public bars may receive more than half of their earnings as tips. Service bartenders often are paid higher hourly wages to offset their lower tip earnings.

Median hourly wages (including tips) of dining room and cafeteria attendants and bartender helpers were \$8.05. The middle 50 percent earned between \$7.39 and \$9.44. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$6.82, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$11.67 an hour. Most received over half of their earnings as wages; the rest of their income was a share of the proceeds from tip pools.

Median hourly wages of hosts and hostesses were \$8.42. The middle 50 percent earned between \$7.50 and \$9.70. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$6.88, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$11.89 an hour. Wages comprised the majority of their earnings. In some cases, wages were supplemented by proceeds from tip pools.

Median hourly wages of combined food preparation and serving workers, including fast food, were \$7.90. The middle 50 percent earned between \$7.26 and \$9.12. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$6.67, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$10.67 an hour. Although some combined food preparation and serving workers receive a part of their earnings as tips, fast-food workers usually do not.

Median hourly wages of counter attendants in cafeterias, food concessions, and coffee shops (including tips) were \$8.42. The middle 50 percent earned between \$7.57 and \$9.64 an hour.

The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$6.97, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$11.73 an hour.

Median hourly wages of dishwashers were \$8.19. The middle 50 percent earned between \$7.47 and \$9.35. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$6.90, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$10.74 an hour.

Median hourly wages of food servers outside of restaurants were \$9.32. The middle 50 percent earned between \$7.93 and \$11.64. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$7.20, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$14.69 an hour.

Many beginning or inexperienced workers earn the Federal minimum wage (\$7.25 per hour as of July 24, 2009), but many States set minimum wages higher than the Federal minimum. Also, various minimum wage exceptions apply under specific circumstances to disabled workers, full-time students, youth under age 20 in their first 90 days of employment, tipped employees, and student-learners. Tipped employees are those who customarily and regularly receive more than \$30 a month in tips. The employer may consider tips as part of wages, but the employer must pay at least \$2.13 an hour in direct wages.

Many employers provide free meals and furnish uniforms, but some may deduct from wages the cost, or fair value, of any meals or lodging provided. Food and beverage service workers who work full time often receive typical benefits, but part-time workers usually do not. In some large restaurants and hotels, food and beverage serving and related workers belong to unions—principally the Unite HERE and the Service Employees International Union.

Related Occupations

Other workers who prepare or serve food and drink for diners include:

- Cashiers
- Chefs, head cooks, and food preparation and serving supervisors
- Cooks and food preparation workers
- Flight attendants
- Retail salespersons

Sources of Additional Information

Information about job opportunities may be obtained from local employers and local offices of State employment services agencies.

A guide to careers in restaurants plus a list of 2- and 4-year colleges offering food service programs and related scholarship information is available from:

► National Restaurant Association, 1200 17th St. NW., Washington, DC 20036. Internet: <http://www.restaurant.org>

For general information on hospitality careers, contact:

► International Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education, 2810 North Parham Rd., Suite 230, Richmond, VA 23294. Internet: <http://www.chrie.org>

The Occupational Information Network (O*NET) provides information on a wide range of occupational characteristics. Links to O*NET appear at the end of the Internet version of this occupational statement, accessible at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/ocos162.htm>