

Air Traffic Controller

An air traffic controller directs aircraft on the ground and in the sky, acting as the traffic police of the skies. Using radar, computers, and radio communication, they guide pilots safely through takeoff, landing, and flight while avoiding other aircraft and hazardous weather. They work at airports and air traffic control centers, helping keep millions of passengers and pilots safe every day.

► School to Career Pathway

- You must be a US citizen and be under the age of 31.
- You must pass a medical exam and security check.
- You must pass the FAA air traffic pre-employment tests
- Earn an associate or bachelor's degree or graduate from an FAA-approved Air Traffic Collegiate Training Initiative (AT-CTI) program.

► Durable Skills

As an air traffic controller, you need:

- Strong communication skills to give clear, concise instructions, listen carefully to pilots, and communicate effectively in English.
- Math skills to accurately calculate speeds, times, distances, headings, and altitude changes.
- Organizational skills to coordinate multiple flights, prioritize tasks, and safely manage air traffic.
- Problem-solving skills to assess changing conditions, think quickly, and provide pilots with safe, effective solutions.

► Paycheck Peek

\$69.51 hourly, \$144,580 annually

*Note that annual wages vary by location (state, city, or work setting)



Core Duties

Direct Aircraft Movements

Give pilots instructions for taking off, landing, climbing, descending, and changing direction to keep air traffic moving safely.

Monitor Air Traffic

Use radar and computer systems to track the location and speed of multiple aircraft at the same time.

Maintain Safe Separation

Ensure there is enough distance between airplanes to prevent collisions both in the air and on airport runways.

Communicate with Pilots

Share important information about weather, runway conditions, traffic, and emergencies using clear and accurate radio communication.

Respond to Emergencies

Make quick decisions and coordinate with pilots and emergency personnel when unexpected situations occur.

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Could This Be Your Thing?

- Are you a good problem solver and see solutions quickly?
- Do you have the ability to speak thoughtfully and clearly?
- Can you pay attention to many details at the same time?
- Do you like looking at maps and find understanding maps easy?
- Can you stay focused regardless of how busy the room is?

Explore Similar Career Pathways

- commercial pilots
- public safety telecommunicators

Dig Deeper Here

Find out more about all careers at: [US Bureau of Labor Statistics Student's Desk](#)

Find out more about STEM careers at: [Careers with STEM: Science](#)

Find out more about the careers above:

- [O*NET Online: Air Traffic Controller](#)
- [O*NET Online: Commercial Pilot](#)
- [O*NET Online: Public Safety Telecommunicators](#)