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So You Want To Be An Astronaut

NASA ASTRONAUTS

Alan Shepherd, John Glenn, Jr., and Sally Ride are names that conjure up images of bravery and adventure. As astronauts, they are part of a select group who probably have some of the most recognizable names in our country.

When the space program began in 1959, NASA asked the U.S. Military services to list their members who met specific qualifications. After a series of intense physical and psychological screenings, NASA selected seven men from an original field of 500 candidates. Since then, much has changed. Today, aspiring astronauts compete with an average of 3,500 other applicants for about 20 slots as mission specialists or pilot astronauts that open up every two years.

Competition is keen. However, any adult man or woman in good physical condition who meets the basic qualifications, including U.S. citizenship, could be selected to enter astronaut training.

QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

The minimum requirements include a bachelor's degree in engineering, science, or mathematics from an accredited institution. However, an advanced degree is desirable. Additionally, all applicants must have substantial directly related experience and pilot astronauts must have at least 1,000 hours of experience in jet aircraft. Information on specific experience requirements, as well as additional medical and physical requirements, can be obtained from the Johnson Space Center at the address listed below.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Following a thorough review of all applications, the Astronaut Selection Board (ASB) interviews a small number of highly-qualified applicants and evaluates based on the following criteria:

- ! Experience and potential;
- ! motivation;
- ! ability to function as a member of a team;
- ! communicative abilities;
- ! adaptability; and,
- ! other related factors.

Additionally, applicants must meet NASA spaceflight medical standards. Although the ASB recommends candidates for selection, the Director of the Johnson Space Center and the NASA Administrator make the final decisions. Once selected, candidates begin a rigorous training program.

Selected applicants are first designated as "astronaut candidates" and are assigned to the Astronaut Office at the Johnson Space Center, Houston, Texas. There they undergo a one to two year training and evaluation period, after which time they are assigned technical or scientific



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responsibilities allowing them to contribute substantially to ongoing programs. They participate in the basic astronaut training program which is designed to develop the knowledge and skills required for formal mission training upon selection for a flight. (***Pilot astronaut candidates maintain proficiency in NASA aircraft during their candidate period.***)

Selection as an astronaut candidate does not insure selection as an astronaut. Final selection as an astronaut depends upon satisfactory completion of the training and evaluation period. Civilian candidates who successfully complete the training and evaluation and are selected as astronauts will become permanent Federal employees and are expected to remain with NASA for a period of at least five years.

Civilian candidates who are not selected as astronauts may be placed in other positions with NASA depending upon work requirements. Successful military candidates will be detailed to NASA for a specified tour of duty.

Although most astronauts feel they could not imagine a better career, it is clearly not for everyone. The work is often long and arduous; and travel, particularly before and after a launch, can be intensive.

HOW TO APPLY

Civilian candidates may obtain an application package through NASA's Astronaut web site at <http://astronauts.nasa.gov/>, or they may write or call the Astronaut Office at:

NASA, Johnson Space Center
Attn: AHX/Astronaut Selection Office
Houston, TX 77058
Telephone: (281) 483-5907

Active Duty Military personnel must submit applications to their respective military service and not directly to NASA. Application procedures will be disseminated by each service.

PAY AND BENEFITS

Salaries for selected **civilian** astronaut candidates are based on the Federal Government's General Schedule pay scales for grades GS-11 through GS-14 (approximately \$43,000 to \$93,000), and are set in accordance with each individual's academic achievements and experience. Other benefits include vacation and sick leave, a retirement plan, and participation in health and life insurance plans.

Selected **military** personnel will be detailed to the Johnson Space Center, but will remain in an active duty status for pay, benefits, leave, and other similar military matters.



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