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Opticianry Apprenticeships by State**FALL 2026**

Each state approaches opticianry apprenticeships differently, dividing broadly into **Regulated or Licensed States** (strict structural hours, mandatory sponsor oversight, and exams) and **Unregulated or Unlicensed States** (no state-regulated apprenticeship frameworks, where training is handled via informal on-the-job training or employers voluntarily following national recommendations).

Specific rules govern each state:**Group 1: Licensed States Requiring Board-Regulated Apprenticeships**

These states require you to register your apprenticeship with a state board, track hours, and pass specific examinations.

- **Alaska:** Requires **1,800 hours** of registered apprentice training. A licensed optician, optometrist, or physician must sign a Statement of Responsibility. You must complete an approved home-study course like the [Optical Training Institute's ODP](#) or the [NAO Career Progression Program](#) and pass both the ABO and NCLE exams.
- **Arizona:** Requires **2 years (4,000 hours)** of supervised training under a licensed optician, optometrist, or ophthalmologist. Apprentices must document their hours and pass the ABO written exam, NCLE written exam, and the corresponding practical exams to achieve licensure.
- **Arkansas:** Uniquely demands formal education rather than pure on-the-job training. You must graduate from a school of opticianry offering at least **18 months of didactic instruction** accredited by a national organization. This is paired with practical training and state written/practical board exams.
- **California:** Requires registration as a Dispensing Optician Apprentice. While there is no rigid state-mandated classroom hour curriculum, apprentices must complete hands-on training under a physician, optometrist, or registered dispensing optician and pass the national ABO (NOCE) and NCLE (CLRE) exams.
- **Connecticut:** Has a long path requiring **4 years and 8,000 hours** of registered apprenticeship training under a licensed optician. Concurrently, you must complete an Associate degree program in ophthalmic dispensing approved by the State Board of Examiners and pass the ABO-NCLE exams along with a state practical exam.

- **Florida:** Demands **3 years (6,240 hours)** of training completed within 5 years under an approved, licensed sponsor. Programs like the [Professional Opticians of Florida \(POF\)](#) curriculum grant up to 2,080 hours of credit. An orientation course must be finished in the first year, and 32 hours of dedicated contact lens training are mandatory. Licensure requires passing the ABO, NCLE, and Florida Practical Exam.
- **Georgia:** Requires a minimum of **2 calendar years and 3,000 hours** of practical experience under direct supervision. The board mandates tracking hours across specific subjects, including ophthalmic optics, laboratory techniques, and anatomy. Programs like the [ODP home study path](#) satisfy the educational element needed before taking the ABO and NCLE exams.
- **Hawaii:** Regulated by the Hawaii Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs. Requires completing either a 2-year opticianry program or **3 years of practical training/apprenticeship** under a licensed optician, optometrist, or ophthalmologist, followed by passing scores on the ABO competency exams.
- **Kentucky:** Managed by the Kentucky Board of Ophthalmic Dispensers. Requires an apprenticeship lasting at least **2 years** of full-time supervised work under a sponsor, paired with an approved study curriculum (like NAO's program) and successful passage of state practical and national written exams.
- **Massachusetts:** Requires a registered apprenticeship spanning **3 years (6,000 hours)** under an approved licensee. Apprentices must track hours, complete an approved related technical instruction curriculum, and successfully pass the ABO and NCLE written certifications alongside a state practical exam.
- **Nevada:** Known as one of the strictest states. It requires **3 years (6,000 hours)** of registered training. Apprentices must complete a rigorous, multi-year formal home-study course (such as the NAO program) and pass comprehensive local board practical exams alongside national ABO/NCLE credentials.
- **New Jersey:** Run through the New Jersey State Board of Examiners of Ophthalmic Dispensers. Requires a registered **3-year apprenticeship** totaling roughly 3,000 practical hours, alongside mandatory evening classroom instruction courses in ophthalmic science or an equivalent home study curriculum, followed by state licensing exams.
- **New York:** Requires a **2-year registered apprenticeship** under a licensed optician, optometrist, or physician. Apprentices must concurrently enroll in an approved related instructional program (such as the NAO Career Progression Program) and pass the state's practical licensing exam and national written exams.
- **North Carolina:** Administered by the North Carolina State Board of Opticians. Requires a **3-year registered apprenticeship** under a licensed sponsor. Apprentices must finish a mandatory, structured training curriculum and pass the state board's comprehensive written and practical examinations.

- **Rhode Island:** Regulated by the Department of Health. Requires a **2-year (4,000-hour) apprenticeship** program under a licensed optician, paired with an approved optical home study course and passing scores on the ABO and NCLE exams.
- **South Carolina:** Requires completing a **2-year registered apprenticeship** under a licensed professional. To qualify for the state licensing exam, apprentices must combine their practical training with an approved home study program (like NAO) and pass the basic ABO and NCLE exams.
- **Tennessee:** Supervised by the Board of Dispensing Opticians. Requires a **3-year (6,000-hour) apprenticeship** under a licensed optician, ocularist, optometrist, or ophthalmologist. The apprenticeship period can be shortened by completing accredited college courses in opticianry. ABO and NCLE exams are required.
- **Vermont:** Requires completing a registered apprenticeship of at least **2 years** under a licensed professional, or a formal degree. Unlike most states, Vermont utilizes its own state-specific testing and evaluation parameters to confirm dispensing competency.
- **Virginia:** Regulated by the Board for Hearing Aid Specialists and Opticians. Requires a **2-year apprenticeship (minimum 4,000 hours)** registered through the Virginia Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI), paired with related technical instruction (such as the NAO curriculum) and passing scores on the Virginia optician exam.
- **Washington:** Governed by the Washington State Department of Health. Requires a **3-year (6,000-hour) apprenticeship** registered with the state, alongside an approved academic course or home-study track, culminating in passing both the ABO and NCLE national exams. [\[1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19\]](#)

The **United States Department of Labor (DOL)** has recognized the [National Academy of Opticianry \(NAO\)](#) Ophthalmic Career Progression Program (OCP) **as the formal National Guideline for Apprenticeship Training in Opticianry**. This federal policy allows state-level apprenticeship agencies to reference and adopt the OCP directly into their local workplace training procedures

About United Opticians Association

Founded in 2024 through the unification of the Opticians Association of America and the National Federation of Opticianry Schools, UOA is the national organization representing opticians and accredited college programs across the United States. Dedicated to advancing the profession through education, credentialing, and advocacy, UOA serves as a unified voice for the more than 75,000 spectacle and contact lens opticians.

Opticians are trained, certified healthcare professionals who work alongside optometrists and ophthalmologists to ensure patients receive safe, effective vision correction through properly fitted eyeglasses and contact lenses.

By supporting national policy efforts and expanding professional training, UOA strengthens the workforce essential to quality eye health and vision care and advocates for the high standards necessary to ensure patient safety and public trust.