How to Become a Tax Manager

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Experienced tax professionals help individuals, small businesses, and large corporations remain fully compliant with tax regulations while minimizing their tax burden. Students interested in financial analysis may find careers as tax managers to be a rewarding way to use their skills.

Students in a Master of Accounting degree program can pursue a specialization in taxation while preparing to pass the Certified Public Accountant (CPA) exam. With real-world case studies, practical guidance from industry professionals, and in-depth coursework, master's degree programs equip accounting students with employable skills and problem-solving experience.

What Does a Tax Manager Do?

Tax managers prepare taxes for individuals and organizations of all sizes. Corporate tax managers may also advise companies on mergers, acquisitions, initial public offerings (IPOs), and other operating decisions with large-scale financial implications.

Mid-level tax managers often focus on preparing tax returns and research, ensuring compliance with city, state, and federal regulations. Senior tax managers typically oversee teams and provide strategic advice on the tax implications of financial decisions.

Where Do Tax Managers Work?

Tax managers can work in organizations' finance departments, for accounting firms, or as independent contractors. They typically work in traditional office environments, although some may work hybrid schedules or completely remotely. They often collaborate with other departments to provide strategic advice on claiming tax deductions and interpreting financial data.

Skills and Expertise

Like accountants, tax managers need to master accounting principles, financial analysis, and tax law and regulations. Technical knowledge and mathematical precision are the building blocks of their work. Soft skills are also critical to overseeing teams successfully and translate complicated tax code into actionable language for clients and executives.

Soft skills that are useful for tax managers include:

- Team management
- Communication
- Organization
- Budgeting
- Customer service
- Research
- Public speaking and presenting

Steps to Become a Tax Manager

While there is no single path to a career in tax management, certain steps can help develop the education and experience that employers value.

Step 1: Pursue a Bachelor's Degree

Tax manager positions typically require a bachelor's degree in accounting, business, finance, or taxation. This educational background offers the necessary foundation in financial analysis and accounting principles. Accounting-specific courses focus on different aspects of the role: individual taxation, business taxation, forensic accounting, and accounting analytics.

Step 2: Gain Experience in Tax Accounting

On-the-job training is also an important part of the experience needed for future tax managers. Entry-level positions in accounting with a taxation focus, such as tax analyst or tax associate, offer crucial training in reviewing financial documents and preparing tax returns. Some states require CPA license applicants to have at least two years of supervised work experience under a practicing CPA.

Step 3: Complete a Master's Degree Program

Though a master's degree is not technically required, many employers prefer tax managers who are CPAs. To qualify for the CPA exam, applicants must meet their state's education requirements. Traditionally, most states require 150 credit hours — an undergraduate degree plus 30 credit hours of postgraduate study in relevant areas, typically fulfilled through a master's degree program.

Master of Accounting programs prepare students for the CPA exam and often allow them to specialize in a particular area, such as risk management or taxation. Students can take courses covering advanced topics relevant to tax management roles, such as tax planning strategies, regulatory compliance, and merger and acquisitions.

Step 4: Obtain Licensure

While not legally required, tax managers often pursue CPA licensure. All CPAs are required to pass the Uniform CPA Examination. The exam requires test takers to pass three mandatory Core sections: Auditing and Attestation (AUD), Financial Accounting and Reporting (FAR), and Taxation and Regulation (REG). They must also pass one of three Discipline sections: Business Analysis and Reporting (BAR), Information Systems and Control (ISC), or Tax Compliance and Planning (TCP).

Each section has a four-hour time limit and is scored on a scale from 0 to 99, with a score of 75 required to pass. Eligibility requirements vary by jurisdiction, so it is important to check with each state's board of accountancy.

Some tax managers choose to pursue other licenses, such as Enrolled Agent (EA) or Certified Management Accountant (CMA). State boards of accountancy may require continuing education to maintain licensure.

Tax Manager Salary and Job Growth

Tax managers earned a median annual salary of approximately $111,500 as of May 2026, according to Payscale, with the top 10 percent earning more than $146,000.

Positions for financial managers, including tax managers, are projected to increase by 15 percent between 2024 and 2034, much faster than other occupations, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

Become a Tax Manager With a Master of Accounting

The Master of Accounting program at the A. B. Freeman School of Business at Tulane University helps students develop the specialized knowledge and team management skills needed to pursue careers as tax managers.

Students take in-depth courses covering financial analysis, tax preparation and planning, and management to prepare for the CPA exam. The program also offers a taxation concentration that includes in-depth courses and requires an independent study in taxation.

Find out how Tulane's Master of Accounting program can help you start a rewarding career as a tax manager.

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