HANDOUT · FOR CAREER AND CO-OP OFFICES

Working in the U.S. after graduation: TN status for Canadian students

SHORT ANSWER

TN status lets a Canadian citizen work in the United States in one of the professions on the USMCA list, for a U.S. employer, for up to three years at a time. For a new graduate, three things have to line up: your credential has been awarded, you have a prearranged job in a listed profession, and you apply in person — at a port of entry or an airport preclearance station — with your documents in hand.

What TN status is

TN is a work status created by the trade agreement between Canada, the United States and Mexico (USMCA, Chapter 16). It is not a general work permit: it covers only the professions on the agreement's list — all 63 of them, from engineer and accountant to registered nurse and computer systems analyst — and only for citizens of Canada or Mexico. Canadian citizens do not need a visa for it. You show up with your documents and the border officer decides at the counter. TNPath's guides are written for Canadians; Mexican citizens follow a consular process instead.

Your credential comes first

The list sets a credential for every profession, usually a bachelor's degree or a provincial licence. You apply with that credential already awarded — finished coursework, a graduation letter or an expected conferral date is not the credential itself. If your degree is conferred in June, June is when the document exists, however early you start preparing. Some professions also accept a diploma plus experience or a licence instead of a degree; the full professions list shows each entry word for word.

A prearranged job in a listed profession

TN work is arranged before you travel: a U.S. employer offers you a job in a listed profession, full-time or part-time, and writes a support letter describing the profession, the duties, how long the job lasts, your credentials and the pay. You cannot be self-employed in TN status, and you cannot look for the job after you arrive — the offer comes first, the application second.

Where you apply, and the fees

Canadians apply in person at a U.S. port of entry on the border or at preclearance in a Canadian airport, bringing a passport, the employer's letter and the credential documents. The government fees are $50 for the TN itself, plus a $30 I-94 fee at a land port — $80 in total at a land border, or $50 at airport preclearance. The officer interviews you and decides on the spot. Every fee, with its official source, is in the TN visa cost guide.

Co-op and internship terms are different

A work term during your studies is not a TN situation. Co-op and internship terms in the U.S. are usually done through the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program — the work-and-study-based exchange programs the U.S. Department of State runs, which include Intern and Trainee categories — arranged through designated program sponsors and your school's co-op office. TN status starts after the credential, with a professional-level job; it is not a student work program.

Where to read more

The TN visa guide for recent graduates goes deeper: timing your first application, what to do while you wait for conferral, and the questions new graduates ask most. The free tools on the resources page — a letter checker, a document checklist generator and a cost calculator — are the same ones applicants use.

TNPath publishes plain-English TN guides and a packet builder that turns a graduate's answers into the employer support letter and a personalized packet guide. Everything linked from this handout is free.

Last reviewed October 19, 2026. General information, not legal advice. Rules and fees change; confirm with official sources before you travel.