
Data Entry and Information Processing Workers

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Significant Points

- For many people, a job as a data entry and information processing worker is their first job after high school.
- Although overall employment is projected to decline, the need to replace workers who leave this large occupation each year should produce job openings.
- Job prospects should be best for those with expertise in appropriate computer software applications and who meet company requirements for keyboarding speed.

Nature of the Work

Organizations need to process a rapidly growing amount of information. Data entry and information processing workers help ensure the smooth and efficient handling of information. By keying in text, entering data into a computer, operating a variety of office machines, and performing other clerical duties, these workers help organizations keep up with the rapid changes that are characteristic of today's "Information Age." Data entry and information processing workers are known by various other titles, including word processors, typists, and data entry keyers, and less commonly, electronic data processors, keypunch technicians, and transcribers.

Word processors and *typists* usually set up and prepare reports, letters, mailing labels, and other text material. As entry-level workers, word processors may begin by keying headings on form letters, addressing envelopes, or preparing standard forms on computers. As they gain experience, they often are assigned tasks requiring a higher degree of accuracy and independent judgment. Senior word processors may work with highly technical material, plan and key complicated statistical tables, combine and rearrange materials from different sources, or prepare master copies.

Most keyboarding is now done on computers that normally are connected to a monitor, keyboard, and printer and may have "add-on" capabilities, such as optical character recognition readers. Word processors use this equipment to record, edit, store, and revise letters, memos, reports, statistical tables, forms, and other printed materials. Although it is becoming less common, some word processing workers are employed on centralized word processing teams that handle transcription and keying for several departments.

In addition to fulfilling the duties mentioned above, word processors often perform other office tasks, such as answering telephones, filing, and operating copiers or other office machines. Job titles of these workers frequently vary to reflect these duties. For example, administrative clerks combine word processing with filing, sorting mail, answering telephones, and other general office work. Note readers transcribe stenotyped notes of court proceedings into standard formats.

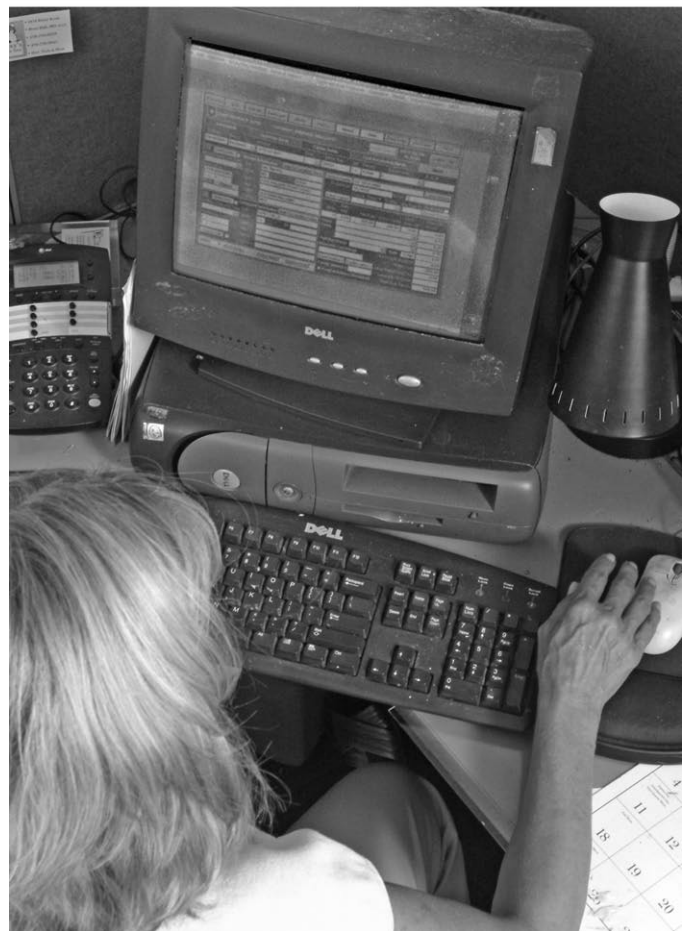
Data entry keyers usually input lists of items, numbers, or other data into computers or complete forms that appear on a computer screen. They also may manipulate existing data, edit current information, or proofread new entries into a database for accuracy.

Some examples of data sources include customers' personal information, medical records, and membership lists. Usually, this information is used internally by a company and may be reformatted before other departments or customers use it.

Keyers use various types of equipment to enter data. Many use a machine that converts the information they type to magnetic impulses on tapes or disks for entry into a computer system. Others prepare materials for printing or publication by using data entry composing software. Some keyers operate online terminals or personal computers. Increasingly, data entry keyers work with nonkeyboard forms of data entry, such as scanners and electronically transmitted files. When using the new character recognition systems, data entry keyers often enter only those data which cannot be recognized by machines. In some offices, keyers also operate computer peripheral equipment such as printers and tape readers, act as tape librarians, and perform other clerical duties.

Work environment. Data entry and information processing workers usually work a standard 40-hour week in clean offices. They sit for long periods and sometimes must contend with high noise levels caused by various office machines. These workers are susceptible to repetitive strain injuries such as carpal tunnel syndrome, neck and back injuries, and eyestrain. To help prevent these conditions, many offices have adopted regularly scheduled breaks, ergonomically designed keyboards, and workstations that allow workers to stand or sit as they wish.

Some workers in this occupation telecommute, working from their homes on personal computers linked by telephone lines to those in the main office. This arrangement enables them to



Data entry and information processing workers rely on computers to do their work.

key in material at home while still being able to produce printed copy in their offices.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Many data entry and information processing workers are hired right out of high school. Most training occurs on the job, and can be learned in a short period of time.

Education and training. Employers generally hire high school graduates who meet their requirements for accuracy and keyboarding speed. Increasingly, employers also expect applicants to have training or experience in word processing or data entry tasks. Spelling, punctuation, and grammar skills are important, as is familiarity with standard office equipment and procedures.

Students acquire skills in keyboarding and in the use of word processing, spreadsheet, and database management computer software in high schools, community colleges, business schools, temporary help agencies, or self-teaching aids such as books, tapes, and Internet tutorials.

Advancement. For many people, a job as a data entry and information processing worker is their first job after high school or after a period of full-time family responsibilities. This work frequently serves as a steppingstone to higher paying jobs with increased responsibilities. Large companies and government agencies usually have training programs to help administrative employees upgrade their skills and advance to higher level positions. It is common for data entry and information processing workers to transfer to other administrative jobs, such as secretary, administrative assistant, or statistical clerk, or to be promoted to a supervisory job in a word processing or data entry center.

Employment

Data entry and information processing workers held about 492,000 jobs in 2006 and were employed in virtually every sector of the economy. Of the data entry and information processing workers, 313,000 were data entry keyers and 179,000 were word processors and typists.

About 1 out of 5 data entry and information processing workers held jobs in firms providing administrative and support services, including temporary help and word processing agencies, and another 15 percent worked for State or local government.

Job Outlook

Although employment of data entry and information processing workers is expected to decline, job prospects will be favorable for those who have good technical skills, familiarity with office equipment, and keyboarding speed and accuracy.

Employment change. Overall employment of data entry and information processing workers is projected to moderately decline by 7 percent through the year 2016. Although data entry

and information processing workers are affected by productivity gains stemming from organizational restructuring and the implementation of new technologies, projected employment change differs among these workers. Employment of word processors and typists is expected to decline because of the proliferation of personal computers, which allows other workers to perform duties formerly assigned to word processors and typists. Most professionals and managers, for example, now use desktop personal computers to do their own word processing. However, because technologies affecting data entry keyers tend to be costlier to implement, employment of these workers will decline less than word processors and typists.

Employment growth of data entry keyers will be dampened by productivity gains as various data-capturing technologies, such as barcode scanners, voice recognition technologies, and sophisticated character recognition readers, become more prevalent. These technologies can be applied to a variety of business transactions, such as inventory tracking, invoicing, and placing orders. Moreover, as telecommunications technology improves, many organizations will increasingly take advantage of computer networks that allow data to be transmitted electronically. These networks will permit more data to be entered automatically into computers, reducing the demand for data entry keyers.

In addition to being affected by technology, employment of data entry and information processing workers will be adversely affected by businesses that are increasingly contracting out their work. Many organizations have reduced or even eliminated permanent in-house staff—for example, in favor of temporary employment and staffing services firms. Some large data entry and information processing firms increasingly employ workers in nations with relatively lower wages. As international trade barriers continue to fall and telecommunications technology improves, this transfer of jobs will mean reduced demand for data entry keyers in the United States.

Job prospects. The need to replace workers who transfer to other occupations or leave this large occupation for other reasons will produce numerous job openings each year. Job prospects will be most favorable for those with the best technical skills—in particular, expertise in appropriate computer software applications. Data entry and information processing workers must be willing to upgrade their skills continuously in order to remain marketable.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of word processors and typists in May 2006 were \$29,430. The middle 50 percent earned between \$24,180 and \$35,950. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$20,200, while the highest 10 percent earned more than \$43,330. The salaries of these workers vary by industry and by region. In

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-16	
				Number	Percent
Data entry and information processing workers	43-9020	492,000	457,000	-35,000	-7
Data entry keyers	43-9021	313,000	299,000	-15,000	-5
Word processors and typists.....	43-9022	179,000	158,000	-21,000	-12

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

May 2006, median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of word processors and typists were as follows:

Local government	\$31,210
Elementary and secondary schools	29,960
Federal government.....	29,420
State government.....	28,520
Employment services	25,220

Median annual earnings of data entry keyers in May 2006 were \$24,690. The middle 50 percent earned between \$20,460 and \$29,700. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$17,050, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$35,970. The following are median annual earnings for May 2006 in the industries employing the largest numbers of data entry keyers:

Management, scientific, and technical consulting services	\$25,860
Insurance carriers	25,760
Accounting, tax preparation, bookkeeping, and payroll services.....	23,600
Data processing, hosting, and related services.....	22,680
Employment services	22,650

Related Occupations

Data entry and information processing workers must transcribe information quickly. Other workers who deliver information in a timely manner are dispatchers, interpreters and translators, and communications equipment operators. Data entry and information processing workers also must be comfortable working with office technology, and in this regard they are similar to court reporters, medical records and health information technicians, secretaries and administrative assistants, and computer operators.

Sources of Additional Information

For information about job opportunities for data entry and information processing workers, contact the nearest office of the State employment service.

For information related to administrative occupations, including educational programs and certified designations, contact:

- International Association of Administrative Professionals, 10502 NW., Ambassador Dr., P.O. Box 20404, Kansas City, MO 64195-0404. Internet: <http://www.iaap-hq.org>
- American Management Association, 1601 Broadway, New York, NY 10019. Internet: <http://www.amanet.org>