
File Clerks

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Significant Points

- About 1 out of 4 file clerks work part time.
- A high school diploma or its equivalent is the most common educational requirement.
- Employment is expected to decline through the year 2016.

Nature of the Work

The amount of information generated by organizations continues to grow rapidly. File clerks classify, store, retrieve, and update this information. In many small offices, they often have additional responsibilities, such as entering data, performing word processing, sorting mail, and operating copying or fax machines.

File clerks, also called record, information, or record center clerks, examine incoming material and code it numerically, alphabetically, or by subject matter. Paper forms, letters, receipts, or reports are stored in files while necessary information may be entered, often electronically, into other storage devices. Some clerks operate mechanized files that rotate to bring the needed records to them; others convert documents to film that is then stored on microfilm or microfiche. A growing number of file clerks use imaging systems that scan paper files or film and store the material on computers.

In order for records to be useful, they must be up to date and accurate and readily available. File clerks ensure that new information is added to files in a timely manner and discard outdated materials or transfer them to inactive storage. Clerks also check files at regular intervals to make sure that all items are correctly sequenced and placed. When records cannot be found, file clerks attempt to locate them. As an organization's needs for information change, file clerks implement changes to the filing system.

When records are requested, file clerks locate them and give them to the person requesting them. A record may be a sheet of paper stored in a file cabinet or an image on microform. In the former case, the clerk retrieves the document manually. In the latter case, the clerk retrieves the microform and displays it on a microform reader. If necessary, file clerks make copies of records and distribute them. In addition, they keep track of materials removed from the files to ensure that borrowed files are returned.

Increasingly, file clerks use computerized filing and retrieval systems that have a variety of storage devices, such as a mainframe computer, CD-ROM, or DVD-ROM. To retrieve a document in these systems, the clerk enters the document's identification code, obtains the location of the document, and gets the document. Accessing files in a computer database is much quicker than locating and physically retrieving paper files. Still, even when files are stored electronically, backup paper or electronic copies usually are also kept.

Work environment. File clerks usually work in areas that are clean, well lit, and relatively quiet. The work is not overly strenuous but may involve a lot of standing, walking, reaching,

pulling, and bending, depending on the method used to retrieve files. Prolonged exposure to computer screens may lead to eye-strain for the many file clerks who work with computers.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

File clerks must be alert, accurate, and able to work with others. Most train on the job.

Education and training. Most employers prefer applicants with a high school diploma or a GED or a mix of education and related experience. Most new employees are trained on the job under close supervision of more experienced employees.

Other qualifications. File clerks must be able to work with others since part of the job is helping fellow workers. Clerks must be alert, accurate, and attentive while performing repetitive tasks. Willingness to do routine and detailed work is also important. Proficiency with desktop computer software is becoming increasingly important as more files are being stored electronically.

Advancement. File clerks can advance to more senior clerical office positions such as receptionist or bookkeeping clerk.

Employment

File clerks held about 234,000 jobs in 2006. Although file clerk jobs are found in nearly every sector of the economy, more than 90 percent of these workers are employed in service-providing industries, including government. Health care establishments employed around 3 out of every 10 file clerks. About 1 out of every 4 file clerks worked part time in 2006.

Job Outlook

Rapid declines in employment are expected through 2016. Job prospects should be best for jobseekers who have general office skills and who are familiar with personal computers and other office machines.

Employment change. Employment of file clerks is expected to decline rapidly by 41 percent between 2006 and 2016, largely due to productivity gains from office automation and the consolidation of clerical jobs. Most files are stored digitally and can be retrieved electronically, reducing the demand for file clerks.

Job prospects. There will be job openings for file clerks because a large number of workers will be needed to replace the workers who leave the occupation each year. The high number of separations from file clerk jobs reflects the lack of formal



File clerks are responsible for sorting, storing, and retrieving an organization's records.

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-16	
				Number	Percent
File clerks.....	43-4071	234,000	137,000	-97,000	-41

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*.

training requirements, limited advancement potential, and relatively low pay. Organizations across the economy will continue to need to hire file clerks to record and retrieve information. File clerks should find opportunities for temporary or part-time work, especially during peak business periods.

Jobseekers who have typing and other secretarial skills and who are familiar with a wide range of office machines, especially personal computers, should have the best job opportunities.

Earnings

Median hourly earnings of file clerks were \$10.62 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$8.64 and \$13.31. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$7.27, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$16.71. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest number of file clerks in May 2006 are shown below:

Local government	\$12.18
Legal services.....	11.08
General medical and surgical hospitals.....	11.02
Employment services.....	10.19
Offices of physicians.....	9.50

Related Occupations

File clerks classify and retrieve files. Other workers who perform similar duties include receptionists and information clerks and stock clerks and order fillers.

Sources of Additional Information

State employment service offices and agencies can provide information about job openings for file clerks.