
Reservation and Transportation Ticket Agents and Travel Clerks

(O*NET 43-4181.00)

Significant Points

- Most jobs are found in large metropolitan airports, reservation call centers, and train or bus stations.
- A high school diploma or its equivalent is the most common educational requirement.
- Employment is expected to show little or no growth because of the significant impact of technology on worker productivity.

Nature of the Work

Each year, millions of people travel by plane, train, ship, bus, and automobile. Many of these travelers rely on the services of reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks. Agents and clerks perform functions as varied as selling tickets, confirming reservations, checking baggage, and providing useful travel information.

Most *reservation agents* work for airlines or large hotel chains, helping people plan trips and make reservations. They usually work in reservation call centers, answering telephone or e-mail inquiries and offering travel arrangement suggestions and information such as routes, schedules, fares, and types of accommodations. They also change or confirm transportation and lodging reservations. Most agents use their own company's reservation system to obtain information needed to make, change, or cancel traveler reservations.

Transportation ticket agents are sometimes known as passenger service agents, passenger booking clerks, reservation clerks, airport service agents, ticket clerks, or ticket sellers. They work in airports, train stations, and bus stations, selling tickets, assigning seats to passengers, and checking baggage. In addition, they may answer inquiries and give directions, examine passports and visas, or check in pets. They may be required to assist customers who have trouble operating self-service ticketing machines or kiosks. Other ticket agents, more commonly known as *gate or station agents*, work in airport terminals, as-



Reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks verify schedules before printing tickets.

sisting passengers boarding airplanes. These workers direct passengers to the correct boarding area, check tickets and seat assignments, make boarding announcements, and provide special assistance to young, elderly, or disabled passengers.

Travel clerks provide travelers information on points of interest, restaurants, overnight accommodations, and availability of emergency services. In some cases, they make rental car, hotel, and restaurant reservations. Clerks also may provide assistance in filling out travel documents and answer other travel-related questions.

Work environment. Most reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks work in airports, call centers, and train and bus terminals that generally are clean and safe. Reservation and ticket agents who work in large, centralized reservation centers spend much of their day talking with customers on the telephone and using a computer to plan itineraries and to make reservations. The call center environment is often hectic and noisy. Ticket agents, who work at transportation sites may stand on their feet for long periods of time, and may have to lift heavy baggage.

Although most reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks work a standard 40-hour week, about 14 percent work part time. Some agents work evenings, late nights, weekends, and holidays. In general, employees with the most seniority tend to be assigned the more desirable shifts.

The work performed by reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks may be repetitive and stressful. They often work under stringent time constraints. Agents and clerks must work quickly and accurately to avoid mistakes and angering customers. Difficult or angry customers also can create stressful situations as agents usually bear the brunt of customers' dissatisfaction. In addition, prolonged computer use, which is common in this occupation, may lead to eyestrain.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Most reservation and transportation ticket agents spend several weeks in company-sponsored training programs learning the reservation system and other travel-related information. Good customer service skills and the ability to work quickly are important.

Education and training. A high school diploma or its equivalent is the most common educational requirement for reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks. Most airline reservation and ticket agents learn their skills through formal company training programs that can last several weeks. They learn company and industry policies as well as ticketing procedures. Trainees also learn to use the airline's computer system to obtain information on schedules, fares, and the availability of seats; to make reservations for passengers; and to prepare passenger itineraries. In addition, they must become familiar with train, airport, and airline code designations, security regulations, and safety procedures. After completing classroom instruction, new agents work under the direct guidance of a supervisor or experienced agent. During this time the supervisors may monitor telephone conversations to improve the quality of customer service so that agents learn to provide customer service in a courteous manner, while limiting the time spent on each call.

In contrast to those who work for airlines, reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks who work for bus

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-16	
				Number	Percent
Reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks	43-4181	165,000	167,000	1,800	1

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*.

lines and railroads are trained on the job through short in-house classes that last several days.

Other qualifications. Applicants usually must be 18 years of age and older and a valid driver's license may be required. Also, experience with computers and good typing skills usually are required. Agents who handle passenger luggage must be able to lift heavy objects.

Many reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks deal directly with the public, so a professional appearance and a pleasant personality are important. A clear speaking voice and fluency in English also are essential, because these employees frequently use the telephone or public-address systems. In addition, fluency in a foreign language is becoming increasingly helpful for those who deal with the public, because of the growing number of international and non-English speaking travelers.

Advancement. Reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks may advance by being transferred to a position with more responsibilities or by being promoted to a supervisory position. Many travel companies fill supervisory and managerial positions by promoting individuals within their organization, so those who acquire additional skills, experience, and training improve their opportunities for advancement. Some companies require that candidates for supervisory positions have an associate degree in a business-related field, such as management, business administration, or marketing. Within the airline industry, a ticket agent may advance to lead worker on the shift.

Employment

Reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks held about 165,000 jobs in 2006. About six out of ten agents and clerks are employed by airlines. Others work for tour operators and reservation services, hotels and other lodging places, and other companies that provide transportation services.

Although agents and clerks are found throughout the country, most work in large metropolitan airports, reservation call centers, and train or bus stations. The remainder work in small, regional airports, or in small communities served only by intercity bus or railroad lines.

Job Outlook

Employment of reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks is expected to show little or no growth during the projection period. Additionally, applicants for these jobs are likely to encounter keen competition.

Employment change. Employment of reservation and transportation ticket agents is expected grow only 1 percent from 2006 to 2016, reflecting little or no change to employment. Despite a growing and more mobile population who will likely travel more frequently, newer automated reservations and tick-

eting operations will speed transaction time and reduce the need for more workers to handle the expected higher volume of business. Most train stations and airports now have self-service ticket printing machines, or kiosks, which enable passengers to make reservations, purchase tickets, and check-in for train rides and flights themselves. Many passengers also are able to check travel times and fares, make reservations, purchase tickets, and check-in for most domestic flights on the Internet. Nevertheless, not all travel-related passenger services can be fully automated, primarily for safety and security reasons, and not all passengers use these automated services. As a result, job openings will continue to become available as increasing numbers of people travel more frequently. Additional growth will result to meet the travel needs of the growing retirement population, particularly in less traditional transportation centers, such as with boat or cruise operators or with companies who rent recreational vehicles.

Job prospects. Job applicants often face competition for these jobs, because entry requirements are relatively low and benefits for those who like to travel, particularly on the airlines, are high. Applicants who have previous experience in the travel industry, in sales, or in customer service should have the best job prospects. Those who possess a pleasant personality and strong customer service skills also should have good job opportunities. Additional job opportunities will result from the need to replace workers who transfer to other occupations, retire, or leave the labor force altogether.

Employment in these occupations may fluctuate with the economy. During recessions, discretionary passenger travel often declines, and transportation service companies are less likely to hire new workers and may institute layoffs.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks in May 2006 were \$28,540. The middle 50 percent earned between \$21,640 and \$38,540. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$17,670, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$45,400. Many employers offer discounts on travel services to their employees. In May 2006, median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest number of agents were:

Scheduled air transportation	\$32,850
Traveler accommodation.....	23,630
Travel arrangement and reservation services	22,630

Related Occupations

Other occupations that provide travel-related services include hotel, motel, and resort desk clerks; travel agents; and flight attendants. Other occupations that make sales and provide in-

formation to customers include counter and rental clerks, order clerks, customer service representatives, and receptionists and information clerks.

Sources of Additional Information

For information about job opportunities as reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks, write to the personnel manager of individual transportation companies. Addresses of airlines are available from:

► Air Transport Association of America, 1301 Pennsylvania Ave. NW., Suite 1100, Washington, DC 20004.

Internet: <http://www.airlines.org>