
Office Clerks, General

(O*NET 43-9061.00)

Significant Points

- Employment growth and high replacement needs in this large occupation will result in numerous job openings.
- Prospects should be best for those with knowledge of basic computer applications and office machinery as well as good communication skills.
- Part-time and temporary positions are common.

Nature of the Work

Rather than performing a single specialized task, general office clerks have responsibilities that often change daily with the needs of the specific job and the employer. Some clerks spend their days filing or keyboarding. Others enter data at a computer terminal. They also operate photocopiers, fax machines, and other office equipment; prepare mailings; proofread documents; and answer telephones and deliver messages.

The specific duties assigned to a clerk vary significantly, depending on the type of office in which he or she works. An office clerk in a doctor's office, for example, would not perform the same tasks that a clerk in a large financial institution or



General office clerks may send faxes and make photocopies as part of their administrative tasks.

in the office of an auto parts wholesaler would. Although all clerks may sort checks, keep payroll records, take inventory, and access information, they also perform duties unique to their employer, such as organizing medications in a doctor's office, preparing materials for presentations in a corporate office, or filling orders received by fax machine for a wholesaler.

Clerks' duties also vary by level of experience. Whereas inexperienced employees make photocopies, stuff envelopes, or record inquiries, experienced clerks usually are given additional responsibilities. For example, they may maintain financial or other records, set up spreadsheets, verify statistical reports for accuracy and completeness, handle and adjust customer complaints, work with vendors, make travel arrangements, take inventory of equipment and supplies, answer questions on departmental services and functions, or help prepare invoices or budgetary requests. Senior office clerks may be expected to monitor and direct the work of lower level clerks.

Work environment. For the most part, general office clerks work in comfortable office settings. Those on full-time schedules usually work a standard 40-hour week; however, some work shifts or overtime during busy periods. About 26 percent of clerks work part time in 2006. Many clerks also work in temporary positions.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Office clerks often need to know how to use word processing and other business software and office equipment. Experience working in an office is helpful, but office clerks also learn skills on the job.

Education and training. Although most office clerk jobs are entry-level positions, employers may prefer or require previous office or business experience. Employers usually require a high school diploma or equivalent, and some require basic computer skills, including familiarity with word processing software, as well as other general office skills.

Training for this occupation is available through business education programs offered in high schools, community and junior colleges, and postsecondary vocational schools. Courses in office practices, word processing, and other computer applications are particularly helpful.

Other qualifications. Because general office clerks usually work with other office staff, they should be cooperative and able to work as part of a team. Employers prefer individuals who can perform a variety of tasks and satisfy the needs of the many departments within a company. In addition, applicants should have good communication skills, be detail oriented, and adaptable.

Advancement. General office clerks who exhibit strong communication, interpersonal, and analytical skills may be promoted to supervisory positions. Others may move into different, more senior administrative jobs, such as receptionist, secretary, or administrative assistant. After gaining some work experience or specialized skills, many workers transfer to jobs with higher pay or greater advancement potential. Advancement to professional occupations within an organization normally requires additional formal education, such as a college degree.

Employment

General office clerks held about 3.2 million jobs in 2006. Most are employed in relatively small businesses. Although they work in every sector of the economy, about 43 percent worked

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-16	
				Number	Percent
Office clerks, general	43-9061	3,200,000	3,604,000	404,000	13

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*.

in local government, health care and social assistance, administrative and support services, finance and insurance, or professional, scientific, and technical services industries.

Job Outlook

Employment growth and high replacement needs in this large occupation is expected to result in numerous job openings for general office clerks.

Employment change. Employment of general office clerks is expected to grow 13 percent between 2006 and 2016, which is about as fast as the average for all occupations. The employment outlook for these workers will continue to be affected by the increasing use of technology, expanding office automation, and the consolidation of administrative support tasks. These factors have led to a consolidation of administrative support staffs and a diversification of job responsibilities. However, this consolidation will increase the demand for general office clerks because they perform a variety of administrative support tasks, as opposed to clerks with very specific functions. It will become increasingly common within businesses, especially those smaller in size, to find only general office clerks in charge of all administrative support work.

Job prospects. Many job openings for general office clerks are expected to be for full-time jobs; there will also be a demand for part-time and temporary positions. Prospects should be best for those who have good writing and communication skills and knowledge of basic computer applications and office machinery—such as fax machines, telephone systems, and scanners. As general administrative support duties continue to be consolidated, employers will increasingly seek well-rounded individuals with highly developed communication skills and the ability to perform multiple tasks.

Job opportunities may vary from year to year because the strength of the economy affects demand for general office clerks. Companies tend to employ more workers when the economy is strong. Industries least likely to be affected by economic fluctuations tend to be the most stable places for employment.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of general office clerks were \$23,710 in May 2006; the middle 50 percent earned between \$18,640 and \$30,240 annually. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$14,850, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$37,600. Median annual salaries in the industries employing the largest numbers of general office clerks in May 2006 were:

Local government	\$26,590
General medical and surgical hospitals.....	26,050
Elementary and secondary schools	24,230
Colleges, universities, and professional schools	23,980
Employment services	21,890

Related Occupations

The duties of general office clerks can include a combination of bookkeeping, keyboarding, office machine operation, and filing. Other office and administrative support workers who perform similar duties include bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks; communications equipment operators; customer service representatives; data entry and information processing workers; order clerks; receptionists and information clerks; secretaries and administrative assistants; stock clerks and order fillers; and tellers. Nonclerical entry-level workers include cashiers; counter and rental clerks; and food and beverage serving and related workers.

Sources of Additional Information

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

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>