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## Order Clerks

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### Significant Points

- Employment is expected to decline through 2016 due to growth in online retailing and in business-to-business electronic commerce, and because of the increasing use of automated systems that make placing orders easy and convenient.
- A high school diploma or GED is the most common educational requirement.

### Nature of the Work

Order clerks receive and process orders for a variety of goods or services, such as spare parts, consumer appliances, gas and electric power connections, film rentals, and articles of clothing. They sometimes are called order-entry clerks, order processors, or order takers.

Orders for materials, merchandise, or services can come from inside or from outside of an organization. Inside order clerks receive orders from other workers employed by the same company or from salespersons in the field. In large companies with many worksites, such as automobile manufacturers, clerks order parts and equipment from the company's warehouses.

Many other order clerks, called outside order clerks, receive orders from outside companies or directly from consumers. Order clerks in wholesale businesses, for instance, receive orders from retail establishments for merchandise that the retailer, in turn, sells to the public. An increasing number of order clerks work for catalog companies and online retailers, receiving orders from individual customers by telephone, fax, regular mail, or e-mail.

Computers provide order clerks with ready access to information such as stock numbers, prices, and inventory. The successful filling of an order frequently depends on having the right products in stock and being able to determine which products are most appropriate for the customer's needs. Some order clerks—especially those in industrial settings—must be able to give price estimates for entire jobs, not just single parts. Others



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must be able to take special orders, give expected arrival dates, prepare contracts, and handle complaints.

Many order clerks receive orders directly by telephone, recording the required information as the customer places the order. However, a rapidly increasing number of orders now are received through computer systems, the Internet, faxes, and e-mail. In some cases, these orders are sent directly from the customer's terminal to the order clerk's terminal. Orders received by regular mail are sometimes scanned into a database that is instantly accessible to clerks.

Clerks review orders for completeness and clarity. They may fill in missing information or contact the customer for the information. Clerks also contact customers if the customers need additional information, such as prices or shipping dates, or if delays in filling the order are anticipated. For orders received by regular mail, clerks remove checks or money orders, sort them, and send them for processing.

After an order has been verified and entered, the customer's final cost is calculated. The clerk then routes the order to the proper department—such as the warehouse—which actually sends out or delivers the item in question.

In organizations with sophisticated computer systems, inventory records are adjusted automatically, as sales are made. In less automated organizations, order clerks may adjust or verify inventory records. Clerks also may notify other departments when inventories are low or when filling certain orders would deplete supplies.

Some order clerks must establish priorities in filling orders. For example, an order clerk in a blood bank may receive a request from a hospital for a certain type of blood. The clerk must first find out whether the request is routine or an emergency and then take appropriate action.

**Work environment.** Most order clerks work in areas that are clean, well lit, and relatively quiet. These workers sit for long periods of time in front of computer terminals, which may cause eyestrain and headaches.

Order clerks usually work a standard 40-hour workweek. Clerks in retail establishments typically work overtime during peak holiday seasons, when sales volume is high. Some firms may have shifts round-the-clock to accommodate customers' time zones.

### Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Most order clerks are trained on the job. Employers prefer workers who are computer literate and proficient in word-processing and spreadsheet software.

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

**Other qualifications.** It is helpful for clerks to be comfortable using computers and to have a working knowledge of word-processing and spreadsheet software. Proficiency with computer software is increasingly important because most orders are being filled and filed electronically.

**Advancement.** By taking on more duties, ambitious order clerks can receive higher pay or become eligible for advancement opportunities. Some use their experience as an order clerk to move into sales positions.

## Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-16	
				Number	Percent
Order clerks.....	43-4151	271,000	205,000	-66,000	-24

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*.

### Employment

Order clerks held about 271,000 jobs in 2006. Over half of all order clerks were employed in wholesale and retail trade establishments, and another 15 percent were employed in manufacturing firms. Approximately 1 out every 10 order clerks worked in the electronic shopping and mail order houses sector of retail trade. Other order clerk jobs were in industries such as information, warehousing and storage, couriers, and business support services.

### Job Outlook

Overall employment of order clerks is expected to decline rapidly through the year 2016 due to improvements in technology and office automation. However, numerous job openings are expected because some of the clerks who leave the occupation will need to be replaced.

**Employment change.** Employment of order clerks is expected to decline rapidly by 24 percent from 2006 to 2016 as improvements in technology and office automation continue to increase worker productivity.

Growth in electronic commerce, and the use of automated systems that make placing orders easy and convenient, will decrease demand for order clerks. The spread of electronic data interchange, which enables computers to communicate directly with each other, allows orders within establishments to be placed with little human interaction. In addition, internal systems allowing a firm's employees to place orders directly are becoming increasingly common. Outside orders placed over the Internet often are entered directly into the computer by the customer; the order clerk is not involved in placing the order. Some companies also use automated phone menus to

receive orders. Others use answering machines. Developments in voice recognition technology may further reduce the demand for order clerks.

Furthermore, increased automation will allow current order clerks to be more productive, with each clerk able to handle an increasingly higher volume of orders. Sophisticated inventory control and automatic billing systems permit companies to track inventory and accounts with much less help from order clerks than in the past.

**Job prospects.** While overall employment of order clerks is expected to decline through the year 2016, numerous openings will occur each year to replace order clerks who transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force. Many of these openings will be for seasonal work, especially in catalog companies or online retailers catering to holiday gift buyers.

### Earnings

Median hourly earnings of order clerks in May 2006 were \$12.66. The middle 50 percent earned between \$9.91 and \$16.22. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$8.18, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$20.69. Median hourly earnings in electronic shopping and mail-order houses were \$10.50.

### Related Occupations

Order clerks receive and process orders. Other workers who perform similar duties include stock clerks and order fillers and hotel, motel, and resort desk clerks.

### Sources of Additional Information

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