
Shipping, Receiving, and Traffic Clerks

(O*NET 43-5071.00)

Significant Points

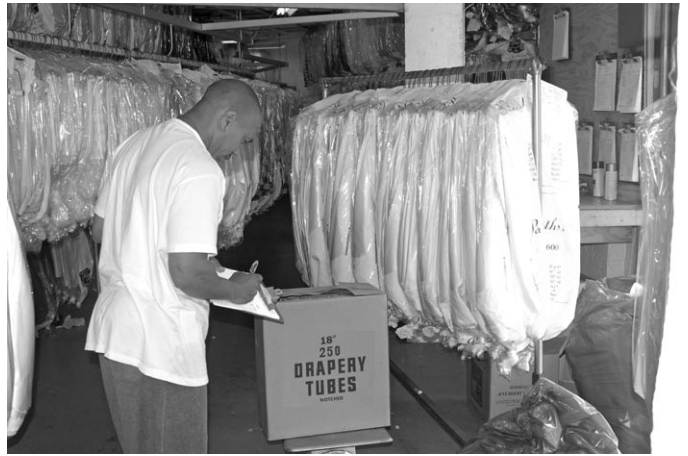
- Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks generally are entry-level workers who need no more than a high school diploma.
- Slower-than-average employment growth is expected as a result of increasing automation; many additional job openings will result from the need to replace workers who leave the occupation.
- Because of increasing automation, employers prefer to hire those familiar with computers and other electronic office and business equipment.

Nature of the Work

Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks keep records of all goods shipped and received. Their duties depend on the size of the establishment they work for and the level of automation used. Larger companies typically are better able to finance the purchase of computers, scanners, and other equipment to handle some or all of a clerk's responsibilities. In smaller companies, a clerk maintains records, prepares shipments, sorts packages, and accepts deliveries. In both environments, shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks may lift cartons of various sizes.

Shipping clerks keep records of all outgoing shipments. They prepare shipping documents and mailing labels and make sure that orders have been filled correctly. Also, they record items taken from inventory and note when orders were filled. Sometimes they fill the order themselves, taking merchandise from the stockroom, noting when inventories run low, and wrapping or packing the goods in shipping containers. They also address and label packages, look up and compute freight or postal rates, and record the weight and cost of each shipment. In addition, shipping clerks may prepare invoices and furnish information about shipments to other parts of the company, such as the accounting department. Once a shipment is checked and ready to go, shipping clerks may sort and move the goods from the warehouse—sometimes by forklift—to the shipping dock or truck terminal and direct their loading.

Receiving clerks perform tasks similar to those of shipping clerks. They determine whether orders have been filled correctly by verifying incoming shipments against the original order and the accompanying bill of lading or invoice. They make a record of the shipment and the condition of its contents. In many firms, receiving clerks either use hand-held scanners to record barcodes on incoming products or manually enter the information into a computer. These data then can be transferred to the appropriate departments. An increasing number of clerks at larger, more automated companies use radio-frequency identification (RFID) scanners, which store and remotely retrieve data using tags or transponders. Clerks then check the shipment for any discrepancies in quantity, price, and discounts. Receiving clerks may route or move shipments to the proper department, warehouse section, or stock-



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room. They also may arrange for adjustments with shippers if merchandise is lost or damaged. Receiving clerks in small businesses may perform some duties similar to those of stock clerks. In larger establishments, receiving clerks may control all receiving platform operations, such as scheduling of trucks, recording of shipments, and handling of damaged goods.

Traffic clerks maintain records on the destination, weight, and charges on all incoming and outgoing freight. They verify rate charges by comparing the classification of materials with rate charts. In many companies, this work may be automated. Information either is scanned or is entered by hand into a computer for use by the accounting department or other departments within the company. Traffic clerks also keep a file of claims for overcharges and for damage to goods in transit.

Work environment. Most jobs for shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks involve frequent standing, bending, walking, and stretching. Lifting and carrying smaller items also may be involved, especially at small companies with less automation. Although automated devices have lessened the physical demands of this occupation, their use remains somewhat limited. The work still can be strenuous, even though mechanical material handling equipment, such as computerized conveyor systems, is used to move heavy items at a rapid pace.

The typical workweek is Monday through Friday; however, evening and weekend hours are common in some jobs and may be required when large shipments are involved or during major holiday periods.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks generally are entry-level workers who need no more than a high school diploma. Because of increasing automation, however, employers prefer to hire those familiar with computers and other electronic office and business equipment.

Education and training. Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks usually learn the job by doing routine tasks under close supervision. They first learn how to count and mark stock, and then they start keeping records and taking inventory.

Training in the use of automated equipment usually is done informally, on the job. As these occupations become more automated, however, workers may need longer periods of training to master the use of the equipment and technology. Because of increasing automation, employers prefer to hire

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-16	
				Number	Percent
Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks	43-5071	769,000	797,000	28,000	4

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*.

those familiar with computers and other electronic office and business equipment.

Other qualifications. Strength, stamina, good eyesight, and an ability to work at repetitive tasks, sometimes under pressure, are important characteristics. Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks who handle jewelry, liquor, or drugs may need to be bonded.

Advancement. Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks are commonly promoted to head clerk, and those with a broad understanding of shipping and receiving may sometimes become purchasing agents or enter a related field, such as industrial traffic management. The Warehousing Education and Research Council offers online courses in distribution and logistics, which may enhance a clerk's potential for advancement.

Employment

Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks held about 769,000 jobs in 2006. About 71 percent were employed in manufacturing or by wholesale and retail establishments. Although jobs for shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks are found throughout the country, most clerks work in urban areas, where shipping depots in factories and wholesale establishments usually are located.

Job Outlook

Slower-than-average employment growth is expected as a result of increasing automation. However, many additional job openings will result from the need to replace shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks who leave the occupation.

Employment change. Employment of shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks is expected to grow 4 percent between 2006 and 2016, more slowly than the average for all occupations. Job growth will continue to be limited by automation as all but the smallest firms move to reduce labor costs by using computers and high-technology scanners to store and retrieve shipping and receiving records.

Methods of handling materials have changed significantly in recent years. Large warehouses are increasingly becoming automated, with equipment such as automatic sorting systems, robots, computer-directed trucks, and programmed data storage and retrieval systems. This automation, coupled with the

growing use of hand-held barcode and RFID scanners in shipping and receiving departments, has increased the productivity of shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks.

Job prospects. In addition to some openings from employment growth, many job openings will occur because of the need to replace shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks who leave the occupation. This is a large entry-level occupation, and many vacancies are created each year as workers leave as part of their normal career progression. Because smaller warehouses, distribution centers, and trucking terminals will continue to rely on sorting and moving goods by hand, job opportunities at those facilities may be better than at larger, more automated centers.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of wage-and-salary shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks in May 2006 were \$26,070. The middle 50 percent earned between \$20,670 and \$32,840. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$16,970, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$40,590.

These workers usually receive the same benefits as most other workers. If uniforms are required, employers generally provide them or offer an allowance to purchase them.

Related Occupations

Shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks record, check, and often store materials that a company receives. They also process and pack goods for shipment. Other workers who perform similar duties are stock clerks and order fillers; production, planning, and expediting clerks; cargo and freight agents; and Postal Service workers.

Sources of Additional Information

For information about career opportunities and online courses in distribution, warehousing, and storage systems, contact:

► Warehousing Education and Research Council, 1100 Jorie Blvd., Suite 170, Oak Brook, IL 60523. Internet: <http://www.werc.org>

Additional information about job opportunities may be obtained from local employers and local offices of the State employment service.