
Counter and Rental Clerks

(O*NET 41-2021.00)

Significant Points

- Jobs usually require little or no experience or formal education.
- Employment is projected to grow much faster than average as businesses strive to improve customer service.
- Many full-time and part-time job opportunities should be available, primarily because of the need to replace workers who leave this occupation.

Nature of the Work

Counter and rental clerks take orders for rentals and services. Many rent cars or home improvement equipment, for example. Regardless of where they work, counter and rental clerks must be knowledgeable about the company's goods and services, policies, and procedures. Depending on the type of establishment, counter and rental clerks use their knowledge to give advice on a wide variety of products and services, ranging from hydraulic tools to shoe repair. For example, in the car rental industry, these workers tell customers about the features of different types of automobiles and about daily and weekly rental costs. They also ensure that customers meet age and other requirements for renting cars, and they indicate when and in what condition the cars must be returned. Those in the equipment rental industry have similar duties but also must know how to operate and care for the machinery rented. In drycleaning establishments, counter clerks inform customers when items will be ready and about the effects, if any, of the chemicals used on certain garments. In video rental stores, counter clerks advise customers about the use of video and game players and the length of the rental period. They scan returned movies and games, restock shelves, handle money, and log daily reports.

When taking orders, counter and rental clerks use various types of equipment. In some establishments, they write out tickets and order forms, although most use computers or bar-code scanners. Most of these computer systems are user friendly, require very little data entry, and are customized for each firm. Scanners read the product code and display a description of the item on a computer screen. However, clerks must ensure that the information on the screen matches the product.

Work environment. Firms employing counter and rental clerks usually operate nights and weekends for the convenience of their customers. As a result, many employers offer flexible schedules. Some counter and rental clerks work 40-hour weeks, but many are on part-time schedules—usually during rush periods, such as weekends, evenings, and holidays.

Working conditions usually are pleasant; most stores and service establishments are clean, well lighted, and temperature controlled. However, clerks are on their feet much of the time and may be confined behind a small counter area. Some may need to move, lift, or carry heavy machinery or other equipment. The job requires constant interaction with the public and can be stressful, especially during busy periods.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Most counter and rental clerk jobs are entry-level positions that require little or no experience and minimal formal education.

Education and training. Many employers prefer workers with at least a high school diploma. In most companies, counter and rental clerks are trained on the job, sometimes through the use of videos, brochures, and pamphlets.

Clerks usually learn the firm's policies and procedures and how to operate a firm's equipment from more experienced workers. However, some employers have formal classroom training programs lasting between a few hours and a few weeks. Topics covered in this training include the nature of the industry, the company and its policies and procedures, operation of equipment, sales techniques, and customer service. Counter and rental clerks also must become familiar with the different products and services rented or provided by their company to give customers the best possible service.

Other qualifications. Counter and rental clerks should enjoy working with people and should be tactful and polite, even with difficult customers. They also should be able to handle several tasks at once, while continuing to provide friendly service. In addition, good oral and written communication skills are essential.

Advancement. Advancement opportunities depend on the size and type of company. Many establishments that employ counter or rental clerks tend to be small businesses, making advancement difficult. In larger establishments, however, jobs such as counter and rental clerks offer good opportunities for



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Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

| Occupational Title | SOC Code | Employment, 2006 | Projected employment, 2016 | Change, 2006-16 | |
|---------------------------------|----------|------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|---------|
| | | | | Number | Percent |
| Counter and rental clerks | 41-2021 | 477,000 | 586,000 | 109,000 | 23 |

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*.

workers to learn about their company's products and business practices. That can lead to more responsible positions. Some counter and rental clerks are promoted to event planner, assistant manager, or salesperson. Some pursue related positions. A clerk that fixes rented equipment might become a mechanic, for example.

In certain industries, such as equipment repair, counter and rental jobs may be an additional or alternative source of income for workers with multiple jobs or for those who are semiretired. For example, retired mechanics could prove invaluable at tool rental centers because of their knowledge of, and familiarity with, tools.

Employment

Counter and rental clerks held about 477,000 jobs in 2006. About 22 percent of clerks worked in consumer goods rental, which includes video rental stores. Other large employers included drycleaning and laundry services; automotive equipment rental and leasing services; automobile dealers; amusement, gambling, and recreation industries; and grocery stores.

Counter and rental clerks are employed throughout the country but are concentrated in metropolitan areas, where personal services and renting and leasing services are in greater demand.

Job Outlook

Much faster than average employment growth coupled with the need to replace workers who leave this occupation should result in many full-time and part-time job opportunities.

Employment change. Employment of counter and rental clerks is expected to increase by 23 percent during the 2006-16 decade, much faster than the average for all occupations. Because all types of businesses strive to improve customer service by hiring more clerks, fast employment growth is expected in most industries; growth in amusement and recreation industries is expected to be especially fast.

Job prospects. Many full-time and part-time job opportunities should be available, primarily because of the need to replace experienced workers who transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force.

Earnings

Counter and rental clerks typically start at the minimum wage, which, in establishments covered by Federal law, was \$5.85 an hour in 2007. In some States, the law sets the minimum wage higher, and establishments must pay at least that amount.

Wages also tend to be higher in areas where there is intense competition for workers. In addition to wages, some counter and rental clerks receive commissions based on the number of contracts they complete or services they sell.

Median hourly earnings of counter and rental clerks in May 2006 were \$9.41. The middle 50 percent earned between \$7.58 and \$13.05 an hour. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$6.56 an hour, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$18.17 an hour. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest number of counter and rental clerks in May 2006 were:

| | |
|---|---------|
| Automobile dealers | \$19.15 |
| Automotive equipment rental and leasing | 10.79 |
| Lessors of real estate | 10.31 |
| Consumer goods rental | 8.07 |
| Drycleaning and laundry services | 7.95 |

Full-time workers typically receive health and life insurance, paid vacation, and sick leave. Benefits for counter and rental clerks who work part time or work for independent stores tend to be significantly less than for those who work full time. Many companies offer discounts to full-time and part-time employees on the goods or services they provide.

Related Occupations

Counter and rental clerks take orders and receive payment for services rendered. Other workers with similar duties include tellers, cashiers, food and beverage serving and related workers, gaming cage workers, Postal Service workers, and retail salespersons.

Sources of Additional Information

For general information on employment in the equipment rental industry, contact:

► American Rental Association, 1900 19th St., Moline, IL 61265. Internet: <http://www.ararental.org>

For more information about the work of counter clerks in drycleaning and laundry establishments, contact:

► International Fabricare Institute, 14700 Sweitzer Ln., Laurel, MD 20707. Internet: <http://www.ifi.org>