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## Information and Record Clerks

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### Significant Points

- Numerous job openings should arise for most types of information and record clerks, due to employment growth and the need to replace workers who leave this large occupational group.
- A high school diploma or its equivalent is the most common educational requirement.
- Because many information and record clerks deal directly with the public, a professional appearance and a pleasant personality are imperative.
- These occupations are well suited to flexible work schedules.

### Nature of the Work

Information and record clerks are found in nearly every industry in the Nation, gathering data and providing information to the public. The specific duties of these clerks vary as widely as the job titles they hold.

Although their day-to-day duties differ considerably, many information and record clerks greet customers, guests, or other visitors. Many also answer telephones and either obtain information from, or provide information to, the public. Most clerks use multiline telephones, fax machines, and personal computers. *Hotel, motel, and resort desk clerks*, for example, are a guest's first contact for check-in, check-out, and other services within hotels, motels, and resorts. *Interviewers, except eligibility and loan*, found most often in medical facilities, research firms, and financial institutions, assist the public in completing forms, applications, or questionnaires. *Eligibility interviewers, government programs* determine the eligibility of individuals applying for assistance. *Receptionists and information clerks* often are a visitor's or caller's first contact within an organization, providing information and routing calls. *Reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks* assist the public in making travel plans, reserving seats, and purchasing tickets for a variety of transportation services. (*Customer service representatives* provide information in response to inquiries about products or services and handle and resolve complaints. While these workers are classified as information and record clerks and are included in the estimate of employment for this occupational group, they are discussed in detail elsewhere in the *Handbook*).

*Court, municipal, and license clerks* perform administrative duties in courts of law, municipalities, and governmental licensing agencies and bureaus. Court clerks prepare the docket of cases to be called, secure information for judges, and contact witnesses, attorneys, and litigants to obtain information for the court. Municipal clerks prepare draft agendas or bylaws for town or city councils, answer official correspondence, and keep fiscal records and accounts. License clerks issue licenses or permits, record data, administer tests, and collect fees.

*New-account clerks* interview individuals desiring to open bank accounts. Their principal tasks include handling customer inquiries, explaining the institution's products and services to people, and

referring customers to the appropriate sales personnel. If a customer wants to open a checking or savings account or an individual retirement account, the new-account clerk will interview the customer and enter the required information into a computer for processing.

Other information and record clerks focus on maintaining, updating, and processing a variety of records, ranging from payrolls to information on the shipment of goods or bank statements. They ensure that other workers get paid on time, that customers' questions are answered, and that records of all transactions are kept.

Depending on their specific titles, these workers perform a wide variety of recordkeeping duties. *Brokerage clerks* prepare and maintain the records generated when stocks, bonds, and other types of investments are traded. *File clerks* store and retrieve various kinds of office information for use by staff members. *Human resources assistants, except payroll and timekeeping* maintain employee records. *Library assistants, clerical* assist library patrons. *Order clerks* process incoming orders for goods and services. *Correspondence clerks* reply to customers regarding claims of damage, delinquent accounts, incorrect billings, complaints of unsatisfactory service, and requests for exchanges or returns of merchandise. *Loan interviewers and clerks* and *credit authorizers, checkers, and clerks* review applicants' credit history and obtain the information needed to determine the creditworthiness of those who apply for credit cards.

The duties of record clerks vary with the size of the firm. In a small business, a bookkeeping clerk may handle all financial records and transactions, as well as have payroll and personnel duties. A large firm, by contrast, may employ specialized accounting, payroll, and human resources clerks. In general, however, clerical staffs in firms of all sizes increasingly are performing a broader variety of tasks than in the past. This is especially true for clerical occupations involving accounting work. As the growing use of computers enables bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks to become more productive, these workers may assume billing, payroll, and timekeeping duties.

Another way in which computers affect these occupations is the growing use of financial software to enter and manipulate data. Computer programs automatically perform calculations on data that were previously calculated manually. Computers also enable clerks to access data within files more quickly than they would using the former method of reviewing stacks of paper. Nevertheless, most workers still keep backup paper records for research, auditing, and reference purposes. Despite the growing use of automation, interaction with the public and coworkers remains a basic part of the job of many record clerks.

### Working Conditions

Working conditions vary for different types of information and record clerks, but most clerks work in areas that are clean, well lit, and relatively quiet. This is especially true for information clerks who greet customers and visitors and usually work in highly visible areas that are furnished to make a good impression. Reservation agents and interviewing clerks who spend much of their day talking on the telephone, however, commonly work away from the public, often in large centralized reservation or phone centers. Because a number of agents or clerks may share the same workspace, it may be crowded and noisy. Interviewing clerks may conduct surveys on the street or in shopping malls, or they may go door to door.

Although most information and record clerks work a standard 40-hour week, about 1 out of 5 works part time. Some high school and college students work part time in these occupations, after school or during vacations. Some jobs—such as those in the transportation industry, hospitals, and hotels, in particular—may require

working evenings, late-night shifts, weekends, and holidays. Interviewing clerks conducting surveys or other research may work mainly evenings or weekends. In general, employees with the least seniority tend to be assigned the least desirable shifts.

The work performed by information clerks may be repetitious and stressful. For example, many receptionists spend all day answering telephones while performing additional clerical or secretarial tasks. Reservation agents and travel clerks work under stringent time constraints or have quotas on the number of calls answered or reservations made. Additional stress is caused by technology that enables management to electronically monitor employees' use of computer systems, tape-record telephone calls, or limit the time spent on each call.

The work of hotel, motel, and resort desk clerks and transportation ticket agents also can be stressful when these workers are trying to serve the needs of difficult or angry customers. When flights are canceled, reservations mishandled, or guests dissatisfied, these clerks must bear the brunt of the customers' anger. Hotel desk clerks and ticket agents may be on their feet most of the time, and ticket agents may have to lift heavy baggage. In addition, prolonged exposure to a video display terminal may lead to eyestrain for the many information clerks who work with computers.

### Employment

Information and record clerks held 5.1 million jobs in 2002. The following tabulation shows employment for the individual occupations:

Customer service representatives .....	1,894,000
Receptionists and information clerks .....	1,100,000
Order clerks .....	330,000
File clerks .....	265,000
Interviewers, except eligibility and loan .....	193,000
Hotel, motel, and resort desk clerks .....	178,000
Reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks .....	177,000
Human resource assistants, except payroll and timekeeping .....	174,000
Loan interviewers and clerks .....	170,000
Library assistants, clerical .....	120,000
Court, municipal, and license clerks .....	106,000
New account clerks .....	99,000
Eligibility interviewers, government programs .....	94,000
Credit authorizers, checkers, and clerks .....	80,000
Brokerage clerks .....	78,000
Correspondence clerks .....	33,000

Although information and record clerks are found in a variety of industries, employment is concentrated in health services; finance, insurance, and real estate; transportation, communications, and utilities; and business services.

### Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Despite the fact that hiring requirements for information and record clerk jobs vary from industry to industry, a high school diploma or its equivalent is the most common educational requirement. Increasingly, familiarity or experience with computers and good interpersonal skills are becoming equally important as the diploma to employers. Although many employers prefer to hire information and record clerks with a higher level of education, only a few of these clerical occupations require such a level of education. For example, brokerage firms usually seek college graduates for brokerage clerk jobs, and order clerks in high-technology firms often need to understand scientific and mechanical processes, which may require some college education. For new-account clerks and air-

line reservation and ticket agent jobs, some college education may be preferred.

Many information and record clerks deal directly with the public, so a professional appearance and a pleasant personality are important. A clear speaking voice and fluency in the English language also are essential, because these employees frequently use the telephone or public-address systems. Good spelling and computer literacy often are needed, particularly because most work involves considerable use of the computer. In addition, speaking a foreign language fluently is becoming increasingly helpful for those wishing to enter the lodging or travel industry.

With the exception of airline reservation and transportation ticket agents, information and record clerks generally receive orientation and training on the job. For example, orientation for hotel and motel desk clerks usually includes an explanation of the job duties and information about the establishment, such as the locations of rooms and the available services. New employees learn job tasks through on-the-job training under the guidance of a supervisor or an experienced clerk. They often need additional training in how to use the computerized reservation, room assignment, and billing systems and equipment. Most clerks continue to receive instruction on new procedures and on company policies after their initial training ends.

Receptionists usually receive on-the-job training that may include procedures for greeting visitors, for operating telephone and computer systems, and for distributing mail, fax, and parcel deliveries. Some employers look for applicants who already possess certain skills, such as computer and word-processing experience, or who have previous formal education. These workers must possess strong communication skills, because they are constantly interacting with customers.

Most airline reservation and ticket agents learn their skills through formal company training programs. In a classroom setting, they learn company and industry policies, computer systems, and ticketing procedures. They also learn to use the airline's computer system to obtain information on schedules, the availability of seats, and fares; to reserve space for passengers; and to plan passenger itineraries. In addition, they must become familiar with airport and airline code designations, regulations, and safety procedures, on all of which they may be tested. After completing classroom instruction, new agents work on the job with supervisors or experienced agents for a period during which the supervisors may monitor telephone conversations to improve the quality of customer service. Agents are expected to provide good service while limiting the time spent on each call, without being discourteous to customers. In contrast to the airlines, automobile clubs, bus lines, and railroads tend to train their ticket agents or travel clerks on the job through short in-house classes that last several days.

Most banks prefer to hire college graduates for new-account clerk positions. Nevertheless, many new-account clerks without college degrees start out as bank tellers and are promoted by demonstrating excellent communication skills and the motivation to learn new skills. If a new-account clerk has not been a teller before, he or she often will receive such training and work for several months as a teller. In either case, new-account clerks undergo formal training regarding the bank's procedures, products, and services.

Some information and record clerks learn the skills they need in high schools, business schools, and community colleges. Business education programs offered by these institutions typically include courses in typing, word processing, shorthand, business communications, records management, and office systems and procedures. Order clerks in specialized technical positions obtain their training from technical institutes and 2- and 4-year colleges.

Some entry-level clerks are college graduates with degrees in business, finance, or liberal arts. Although a degree rarely is required, many graduates accept entry-level clerical positions to get into a particular company or to enter a particular field. Some companies, such as brokerage and accounting firms, have a set plan of advancement that tracks college graduates from entry-level clerical jobs into managerial positions. Workers with college degrees are likely to start at higher salaries and advance more easily than those without degrees.

Regardless of their level of educational attainment, clerks usually receive on-the-job training. Under the guidance of a supervisor or other senior workers, new employees learn company procedures. Some formal classroom training also may be necessary, such as training in specific computer software.

Advancement for information and record clerks usually comes by transfer to a position with more responsibilities or by promotion to a supervisory position. Most companies fill office and administrative support supervisory and managerial positions by promoting individuals within their organization, so information and record clerks who acquire additional skills, experience, and training improve their opportunities for advancement. Receptionists, interviewers, and new-account clerks with word-processing or other clerical skills may advance to a better paying job as a secretary or administrative assistant. Within the airline industry, a ticket agent may advance to lead worker on the shift.

Additional training is helpful in preparing information clerks for promotion. In the lodging industry, clerks can improve their chances for advancement by taking home-study or group-study courses in lodging management, such as those sponsored by the Educational Institute of the American Hotel and Motel Association. In some industries—such as lodging, banking, insurance, or air transportation—workers commonly are promoted through the ranks. Information and record clerk positions offer good opportunities for qualified workers to get started in a business of their choice. In a number of industries, a college degree may be required for advancement to management ranks.

### Job Outlook

Overall employment of information and record clerks is expected grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through 2012. In addition to many openings occurring as businesses and organizations expand, numerous job openings for information and record clerks will result from the need to replace experienced workers who transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force. Replacement needs are expected to be significant in this large occupational group, because many young people work as clerks for a few years before switching to other, higher paying jobs. These occupations are well suited to flexible work schedules, and many opportunities for part-time work will continue to be available, particularly as organizations attempt to cut labor costs by hiring more part-time or temporary workers.

The outlook for different types of information and record clerks is expected to vary in the coming decade. Economic growth and general business expansion are expected to stimulate faster-than-average growth among receptionists and information clerks. Positions as hotel, motel, and resort desk clerks are expected to grow faster than the average, as the occupational composition of the lodging industry changes and services provided by these workers expand. Employment of interviewers, except eligibility and loan, is expected to grow faster than average, with these workers benefiting from rapid growth in the health and social assistance sector. Library assistants are also expected to grow faster than the average as these workers take on more responsibilities.

Human resource assistants and new-account clerks are expected to grow about as fast as average; despite computer technology that increases their productivity, these workers will be needed to perform duties that are important to their organization. Average employment growth is expected for court, municipal, and license clerks as the number of court cases and demand for citizen services continues to increase. Employment of reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks also is expected to grow about as fast as average, due to rising demand for travel services.

Employment of other information and record clerks is expected to experience little or no growth or decline. File clerks are expected to have little or no growth; despite rising demand for file clerks to record and retrieve information, job growth will be slowed by productivity gains stemming from office automation and the consolidation of clerical jobs. As government programs, such as welfare, continue to be reformed, employment of eligibility interviewers will decline. Employment of correspondence clerks, as well as credit authorizers, checkers, and clerks is expected to decline due to automation and the consolidation of recordkeeping functions across all industries. Employment of both brokerage clerks and loan interviewers is expected to decline as online trading and other technological innovations continue to automate more of this type of work. With advances in electronic commerce continuing to increase the efficiency of transactions among businesses, consumers, and government, employment of order clerks also is expected to decline.

### Earnings

Earnings vary widely by occupation and experience. Annual earnings in 2002 ranged from less than \$13,020 for the lowest-paid 10 percent of hotel clerks to more than \$53,410 for the top 10 percent of brokerage clerks. Salaries of human resource assistants tend to be higher than for other information and record clerks, while hotel, motel, and resort desk clerks tend to earn quite a bit less, as the following tabulation of median annual earnings shows:

Brokerage clerks .....	\$33,210
Eligibility interviewers, government programs .....	31,010
Human resource assistants, except payroll and timekeeping ....	30,410
Loan interviewers and clerks .....	27,830
Court, municipal, and license clerks .....	27,300
Credit authorizers, checkers, and clerks .....	26,690
Customer service representatives .....	26,240
Correspondence clerks .....	25,960
Reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks .....	25,350
New-account clerks .....	25,200
Order clerks .....	24,810
Interviewers, except eligibility and loan .....	21,690
Receptionists and information clerks .....	21,150
File clerks .....	20,020
Library assistants, clerical .....	19,450
Hotel, motel, and resort desk clerks .....	17,370

Earnings of hotel and motel desk clerks also vary considerably, depending on the location, size, and type of establishment in which they work. For example, clerks at large luxury hotels and at those located in metropolitan and resort areas generally are paid more than clerks at less exclusive or “budget” establishments and than those working at hotels and motels in less populated areas.

In 2003, the Federal Government typically paid salaries ranging from \$19,898 to \$23,555 a year to beginning receptionists with a high school diploma or 6 months of experience. The average annual salary for all receptionists employed by the Federal Government was about \$25,704 in 2003.

In addition to their hourly wage, full-time information and record clerks who work evenings, nights, weekends, or holidays may receive shift differential pay. Some employers offer educational assistance to their employees. Reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks receive free or reduced fares for travel on their company's carriers for themselves, their immediate families, and, in some companies, friends.

**Related Occupations**

A number of other workers deal with the public, receive and provide information, or direct people to others who can assist them. Among these workers are customer service representatives, dispatchers, security guards and gaming surveillance workers, tellers, and counter and rental clerks.

For more information on information and record clerks, see the statements on brokerage clerks; credit authorizers, checkers, and clerks; file clerks; hotel, motel, and resort desk clerks; human resources assistants; interviewers; library assistants; order clerks; receptionists and information clerks; and reservation and transportation ticket agents and travel clerks following this statement.