

Occupational Outlook: Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks

Significant Points

- Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks held more than 2 million jobs in 2004 and are employed in every industry.
- Employment is projected to grow more slowly than average as the spread of office automation lifts worker productivity.
- The large size of this occupation ensures plentiful job openings, including many opportunities for temporary and part-time work; those who can carry out a wider range of bookkeeping and accounting activities will be in greater demand than specialized clerks.

Nature of the Work

Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks are an organization's financial recordkeepers. They update and maintain one or more accounting records, including those which tabulate expenditures, receipts, accounts payable and receivable, and profit and loss. They represent a wide range of skills and knowledge from full-charge bookkeepers who can maintain an entire company's books to accounting clerks who handle specific accounts. All of these clerks make numerous computations each day and increasingly must be comfortable using computers to calculate and record data.

In small establishments, *bookkeeping clerks* handle all financial transactions and recordkeeping. They record all transactions, post debits and credits, produce financial statements, and prepare reports and summaries for supervisors and managers. Bookkeepers also prepare bank deposits by compiling data from cashiers, verifying and balancing receipts, and sending cash, checks, or other forms of payment to the bank. They also may handle payroll, make purchases, prepare invoices, and keep track of overdue accounts.

In large offices and accounting departments, *accounting clerks* have more specialized tasks. Their titles, such as accounts payable clerk or accounts receivable clerk, often reflect the type of accounting they do. In addition, their responsibilities vary by level of experience. Entry-level accounting clerks post details of transactions, total accounts, and compute interest charges. They also may monitor loans and accounts to ensure that payments are up to date.

More advanced accounting clerks may total, balance, and reconcile billing vouchers; ensure the completeness and accuracy of data on accounts; and code documents according to company procedures. These workers post transactions in journals and on computer files and update the files when needed. Senior clerks also review computer printouts against manually maintained journals and make necessary corrections. They may review invoices and statements to ensure that all the information appearing on them is accurate and complete, and they may reconcile computer reports with operating reports.

Auditing clerks verify records of transactions posted by other workers. They check figures, postings, and documents to ensure that they are correct, mathematically accurate, and properly coded. They also correct or note errors for accountants or other workers to adjust.

As organizations continue to computerize their financial records, many bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks are using specialized accounting software on personal computers. With manual posting to general ledgers becoming obsolete, these clerks increasingly are posting charges to accounts on computer spreadsheets and databases. They now enter information from receipts or bills into computers, and the information is then stored either electronically or as computer printouts (or both). The widespread use of computers also has enabled bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks to take on additional responsibilities, such as payroll, procurement, and billing. Many of these functions require these clerks to write letters, make phone calls to customers or clients, and interact with colleagues. Therefore, good communication skills are becoming increasingly important in the occupation.

Working Conditions

Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks work in an office environment. They may experience eye and muscle strain, backaches, headaches, and repetitive motion injuries as a result of using computers on a daily basis. Clerks may have to sit for extended periods while reviewing detailed data.

Many bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks work regular business hours and a standard 40-hour week. A substantial number work just part time. Full-time and part-time clerks may work some evenings and weekends. Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks may work longer hours to meet deadlines at the end of the fiscal year, during tax time, or when monthly or yearly accounting audits are performed. Those who work in hotels, restaurants, and stores may put in overtime during peak holiday and vacation seasons.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Most bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks are required to have a high school degree at a minimum. However, having some college is increasingly important and an associate degree in business or accounting is required for some positions. Although a college degree is rarely required, graduates may accept bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerk positions to get into a particular company or to enter the accounting or finance field with the hope of eventually being promoted to professional or managerial positions.

Experience in a related job and working in an office environment also is recommended. Employers prefer workers who are computer-literate; knowledge of word processing and spreadsheet software is especially valuable.

Once hired, bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks usually receive on-the-job training. Under the guidance of a supervisor or other senior worker, new employees learn company procedures. Some formal classroom training also may be necessary, such as training in specific computer software. Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks must be careful, orderly, and detail-oriented in order to avoid making errors and to recognize errors made by others. These workers also should be discreet and trustworthy, because they frequently come in contact with confidential material. In addition, all bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks should have a strong aptitude for numbers.

Bookkeepers, particularly those who handle all the recordkeeping for companies, may find it beneficial to become certified. The Certified Bookkeeper designation, awarded by the American Institute of Professional Bookkeepers, assures employers that individuals have the skills and knowledge required to carry out all the bookkeeping and accounting functions up through the adjusted trial balance, including payroll functions. For certification, candidates must have at least 2 years of bookkeeping experience, pass three tests, and adhere to a code of ethics. More than 100 colleges and universities offer a preparatory course for certification and another 150 offer a course online. The Universal Accounting Center offers the Professional Bookkeeper designation. Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks usually advance by taking on more duties in the same occupation for higher pay or by transferring to a closely related occupation. Most companies fill office and administrative support supervisory and managerial positions by promoting individuals from within their organizations, so clerks who acquire additional skills, experience, and training improve their advancement opportunities. With appropriate experience and education, some bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks may become accountants or auditors.

Employment

Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks held more than 2 million jobs in 2004. They are found in all industries and at all levels of government. Local government and the accounting, tax preparation, bookkeeping, and payroll services industry are among the individual industries employing the largest numbers of these clerks. A growing number work for employment services firms, the result of an increase in outsourcing of this occupation. About 1 out of 4 bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks worked part time in 2004.

Job Outlook

Employment of bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks is projected to grow [more slowly than average](#) for all occupations through 2014. More job openings will stem from replacement needs than from job growth. Each year, numerous jobs will become available as these clerks transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force. The large size of this occupation ensures plentiful job openings, including many opportunities for temporary and part-time work.

Although a growing economy will result in more financial transactions and other activities that require these clerical workers, the continuing spread of office automation will lift worker productivity and contribute to the slower-than-average increase in employment. In addition, organizations of all sizes will continue to downsize and consolidate various recordkeeping functions, thus reducing the demand for bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks. Furthermore, some work performed by these workers will be outsourced to lower-wage foreign countries. Those who can carry out a wider range of bookkeeping and accounting activities will be in greater demand than specialized clerks. Demand for full-charge bookkeepers is expected to increase, because they are called upon to do much of the work of accountants, as well as perform a wider variety of financial transactions, from payroll to billing. Certified bookkeepers and those with several years of accounting or bookkeeper experience will have the best job prospects.

Earnings

In May 2004, the median wage and salary annual earnings of bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks were \$28,570. The middle half of the occupation earned between \$22,960 and \$35,450. The top 10 percent of bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks more than \$43,570, and the bottom 10 percent earned less than \$18,580.

Related Occupations

Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks work with financial records. Other clerks who perform similar duties include bill and account collectors; billing and posting clerks and machine operators; brokerage clerks; credit authorizers, checkers, and clerks; payroll and timekeeping clerks; procurement clerks; and tellers.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics