

Occupational Outlook: Credit Authorizers, Checkers, and Clerks

Significant Points

- Most jobs require only a high school diploma.
- Employment is expected to decline.

Nature of the Work

Credit authorizers, checkers, and clerks review credit history and obtain the information needed to determine the creditworthiness of individuals or businesses applying for credit. They spend much of their day on the telephone or on the Internet obtaining information from credit bureaus, employers, banks, credit institutions, and other sources to determine applicants' credit history and ability to repay what they borrow or charge.

Credit authorizers, checkers, and clerks process and authorize applications for credit, including applications for credit cards. Although the distinctions among the three job titles are disappearing, some general differences remain. *Credit clerks* typically handle the processing of credit applications by verifying the information on the application, calling applicants if additional data are needed, contacting credit bureaus for a credit rating, and obtaining any other information necessary to determine applicants' creditworthiness. If clerks work in a department store or other establishment that offers instant credit, they enter the applicant's information into a computer at the point of sale. A credit rating is then transmitted from a central office within seconds to indicate whether the application should be rejected or approved.

Credit checkers investigate the credit history and current credit standing of a person or business prior to the issuance of a loan or line of credit. Credit checkers also may contact credit departments of businesses and service companies to obtain information about an applicant's credit standing. Credit reporting agencies and bureaus hire checkers to secure, update, and verify information for credit reports. These workers often are called *credit investigators* or *credit reporters*.

Credit authorizers approve charges against customers' existing accounts. Most charges are approved automatically by computer. However, when accounts are past due, overextended, or invalid, or when they show a change of address, salespersons refer the associated transactions to credit authorizers located in a central office. These authorizers evaluate the customers' computerized credit records and payment histories and quickly decide whether to approve new charges.

Working Conditions

Credit authorizers, checkers, and clerks usually work a standard 40-hour week. However, they may work overtime during particularly busy periods, such as holiday shopping seasons and store sales. Most credit authorizers, checkers, and clerks work in areas that are clean, well lit, and relatively quiet. These workers sit for long periods of time in front of computer screens, which may cause eyestrain and headaches. Part-time work is available, and temporary workers are often hired during peak workloads.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

A high school diploma or its equivalent is usually the minimum requirement for these workers. Other requirements of the job include good telephone and organizational skills and the ability to pay close attention to details and meet tight deadlines. Computer skills also are important in order to enter and retrieve data quickly.

Most new employees are trained on the job, working under close supervision of more experienced employees. Some firms offer formal training that may include courses in telephone etiquette, computer use, and customer service skills. Some credit authorizers, checkers, and clerks also take courses in credit offered by banking and credit associations, public and private vocational schools, and colleges and universities. These workers typically can advance to loan or credit department supervisor or team leader of a small group of clerks.

Employment

Credit authorizers, checkers, and clerks held about 67,000 jobs in 2004. Nearly half of these workers were employed by finance and insurance industries, mainly firms in credit intermediation and related activities, such as commercial and savings banks; credit unions; and mortgage, finance, and loan companies. Credit bureaus, collection agencies, and wholesale and retail trade establishments also employ these clerks.

Job Outlook

Employment of credit authorizers, checkers, and clerks is expected to decline through 2014. Despite a projected increase in the number of credit applications, technology will allow these applications to be processed, checked, and authorized by fewer workers than were required in the past.

Credit scoring is a major development that has improved the productivity of credit authorizers, checkers, and clerks, thus limiting employment growth in the occupation. Companies and credit bureaus now can purchase software that quickly analyzes an applicant's creditworthiness and summarizes it with a "score." Credit issuers then can easily decide whether to accept or reject an application on the basis of its score, speeding up the authorization of loans or credit. Obtaining credit ratings also has become much easier for credit checkers and authorizers because businesses now have computer systems directly linked to credit bureaus that provide immediate access to a person's credit history.

The job outlook for credit authorizers, checkers, and clerks is sensitive to overall economic activity. A downturn in the economy or a rise in interest rates usually leads to a decline in demand

for credit. Even in slow economic times, however, job openings will arise from the need to replace workers who leave the occupation for various reasons.

Earnings

Median hourly earnings of credit authorizers, checkers, and clerks in May 2004 were \$13.97. The middle 50 percent earned between \$11.27 and \$17.56. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$9.19, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$21.90. Median hourly earnings in nondepository credit intermediation were \$13.74 in 2004, while median earnings in depository credit intermediation were \$13.62.

Related Occupations

Credit authorizers, checkers, and clerks obtain and analyze credit histories. Other workers who review account information include bill and account collectors, loan officers, and insurance underwriters.

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