

ACCOUNTANT

Snapshot

Career Cluster: Banking & Finance; Business Administration;
Government & Public Administration

Interests: Keeping records, working with numbers, offering
guidance, analyzing data

Earnings (Yearly Average): \$65,080

Employment & Outlook: Average Growth Expected

OVERVIEW

Sphere of Work

Accountants are responsible for the financial record keeping, financial efficiency, and fiduciary reporting of individuals, corporations, non-profit organizations, and government entities. Accountants offer diverse financial services, including financial document preparation and review, payroll, budget analysis, investment guidance, auditing, bankruptcy filing, and tax preparation. The main fields of accounting include internal accounting, public accounting, managerial accounting, and government accounting. Certified public accountants (CPAs) are the most common accounting position. CPAs may be independent



contractors or employed by public accounting firms providing financial services to businesses and individuals.

Work Environment

An accountant's work environment is generally office-based. Depending on the employer and particular job description, an accountant may telecommute from a home office, visit client offices as a contractor, or work on a full-time basis in an employer's office. Accountants may work as a full-time member of a team responsible for targeted financial responsibilities or may be hired as a project contractor. An accountant's work environment is dependent on technology (computers and accounting software programs), as well as having access to the most recent government regulations.

Profile

Working Conditions: Work Indoors
Physical Strength: Light Work
Education Needs: Bachelor's Degree
Licensure/Certification: Required
Physical Abilities Not Required: No Heavy Labor
Opportunities For Experience: Internship, Military Service, Part-Time Work
Holland Interest Score*: CRS

* See Appendix A

at educating themselves about and responding to technological and regulatory change. Analytical people choosing to pursue the occupation of accountant may find satisfaction in implementing and auditing financial record keeping, as well as staying up to date on accounting best practices, ethical issues, and legal matters in accounting.

Occupation Interest

Individuals attracted to the accounting profession tend to be well-organized and detail-oriented people who find satisfaction in manipulating numbers and tracking financial trends. Accountants may also have an interest and affinity for technology and regulatory issues. For instance, those who excel in accounting tend to be adept

A Day in the Life—Duties and Responsibilities

Typical daily work tasks of a general accountant will include activities such as tax preparation, payroll, bookkeeping, and auditing. Organizations may also require accountants to select, implement, and troubleshoot accounting software systems, as well as stay up to date with regulatory and ethical issues and news in accounting by reading accounting industry journals and participating in industry associations. An accountant's daily occupational duties and

responsibilities may also include meeting with clients, colleagues, supervisors, and employees as needed.

Clients, on a daily basis, may require accountants to provide financial counseling, tax preparation, payroll management, purchase order tracking, auditing, bankruptcy help, and contract preparation.

Colleagues, on a daily basis, may require accountants to participate in discussions of work teams, workflows, dynamics, and best practices.

Supervisors, on a daily basis, may require accountants to present their work and account for their work hours, take on extra work as needed, and strategize about organizational operations and best practices.

The duties of those accountants who have or supervise employees in their organizations will include managerial roles and responsibilities. Employees, on a daily basis, may need their supervising accountants to provide a review of the employee's financial document preparation or specific training related to accounting practices or technology. It is not unusual for accountants to advise or provide analysis to senior management on the financial implications of corporate performance, growth or acquisitions. Periodically, supervising accountants will also need to perform employee performance reviews.

External accountants who work for organizations with remote or multiple locations often travel to those locations to perform in-house auditing and bookkeeping work. Busy accountants will need to accommodate educational training, certification renewal, extended work travel, and commuting into their daily work schedules.

Duties and Responsibilities

- **Designing or modifying accounting systems and procedures**
- **Maintaining accounts or records**
- **Auditing contracts, purchase orders and vouchers and preparing related reports**
- **Preparing periodic financial statements and other management reports**
- **Directing and coordinating activities of workers engaged in keeping accounts and records**

OCCUPATION SPECIALTIES

Public Accountants

Public Accountants prepare federal, state and local tax returns of individuals, businesses or other organizations.

Budget Analysts

Budget Analysts apply principles of accounting to analyze past and present financial operations in order to prepare a budget.

Management Accountants

Management Accountants plan, set up and direct the operation of an accounting system to determine the cost of producing or selling an item or service.

Property Accountants

Property Accountants identify and keep records of company owned or leased equipment, buildings and other property.

Systems Accountants

Systems Accountants devise and install customized accounting systems and related procedures in establishments that do not use a standardized system.

Internal Auditors

Internal Auditors examine and analyze the accounting records of a business and prepare reports concerning its financial status and operating procedures.

WORK ENVIRONMENT

Physical Environment

Accountants generally work in office environments. The work of an accountant largely requires sitting at a desk and using computers for long periods of time each day. Accountants often meet with their immediate staff, and may be required to meet with corporate officers and outside auditing firms. Access to meeting spaces is often necessary.

Relevant Skills and Abilities

Analytical Skills

- Analyzing data

Communication Skills

- Speaking effectively
- Writing concisely

Interpersonal/Social Skills

- Being able to work independently
- Working as a member of a team

Organization & Management Skills

- Paying attention to and handling details

Research & Planning Skills

- Laying out a plan
- Organizing information

Technical Skills

- Working with data or numbers
- Working with machines, tools or other objects

Human Environment

An accountant's human environment may be social or isolated depending on the assignment and organization. Accountants, depending on their work assignments and organization, may interact with clients, employees, supervisors, or colleagues.

Technological Environment

An accountant's technological environment will generally include computers, financial software packages for bookkeeping and auditing, telecommunication tools, and reference materials outlining legal and regulatory matters.

EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND ADVANCEMENT

High School/Secondary

High school students interested in someday pursuing a career in accounting should prepare themselves by building good study habits and exercising personal discipline. For those who feel at ease with numbers and mathematical functions, it is helpful to maximize the school's offering of mathematical and business courses, as well participate in any extracurricular activities relative to business and mathematics. Students should consider applying for internships or even volunteer work with local accountants or financial organizations to learn what it is accountants do on a daily basis.

Suggested High School Subjects

- Accounting
- Algebra
- Business
- Business & Computer Technology
- Business Data Processing
- Business Law
- College Preparatory
- Computer Science
- Economics
- English
- Mathematics
- Social Studies

Famous First

The first Certified Public Accountant (CPA) was Frank Broaker of New York City, who was certified on December 1, 1896. Several other candidates were certified on the same day, but Broaker's name appeared first in the alphabetical list. Later, he was criticized for publishing a crib sheet to aid other aspiring CPAs in their effort to pass the state exam.



Postsecondary

Postsecondary (college and university) level students interested in pursuing a career in accounting should prepare themselves by building a foundation in mathematics, basic accounting, and business. Due to the importance of technology, law, and ethics in the practice of accounting, postsecondary students interested in pursuing a career in accounting will also benefit from studying computer science, political science, and possibly even philosophy (in order to explore the field of ethics). Postsecondary students committed to pursuing accounting may gain experience and build connections through accounting internships and entry-level employment with accounting businesses and firms. It's important to note that a college degree is a condition of CPA licensure in most states.

Related College Majors

- Accounting
- Business Administration
- Financial Management

Adult Job Seekers

Adults seeking accounting jobs have generally earned a bachelor's degree and, in some cases, an MBA. Adult job seekers will benefit from joining professional accounting associations as a means of professional networking. Professional accounting associations generally maintain job lists advertising open accounting positions. Adult job seekers who

wish to join the accounting profession, but who lack a college degree, may gain access to the field by seeking out entry-level bookkeeping and clerk positions. Supervisors and mentors can help junior accountants to plan their career and educational choices.

Professional Certification and Licensure

Professional recognition through certification and licensure is extremely valuable in the job market. Most states require CPA candidates to complete 150 semester hours of college coursework - an additional 30 hours beyond the usual 4-year bachelor's degree. Prospective accounting majors should research the requirements of any states in which they hope to become licensed.

To become a CPA, it is also necessary to take a four-part two-day examination that is the same for all states. Candidates are not required to pass all four parts at once, but most states require they pass all four parts within 18 months of passing the first part. Most states also require applicants for a CPA certificate to have some public accounting experience. Accountants may join professional associations, although membership is not required.



Additional Requirements

Individuals dedicated to training and advancing in the accounting field generally work to develop their analytical, mathematical, and business abilities.

Written and verbal communication skills are also important for accountants, as is proficiency with accounting software. High levels of integrity and ethics are required of accountants, as accountants often work with confidential documents. Membership in professional accounting societies is encouraged among junior and senior accountants as a means of building status within a professional community and networking.

Fun Fact

Roll over, Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. Ohio houses another hall of fame: The Accounting Hall of Fame, established at Ohio State University in 1950. As of 2014, 92 accountants had been elected to it.

Source: <http://fisher.osu.edu/departments/accounting-and-mis/the-accounting-hall-of-fame/>

EARNINGS AND ADVANCEMENT

Earnings depend upon the accountant's experience, level of education and certification as a public accountant. While larger firms usually pay higher starting salaries than small or medium-sized firms, the small and medium-sized firms usually offer the well-qualified employee an opportunity for more rapid advancement. Generally, certified public accountants (CPAs) and those with graduate degrees earn a higher beginning salary.

According to a salary survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, graduates with a Bachelor's degree in accounting received average annual starting salaries of \$53,536 in 2012; graduates with a Master's degree in accounting earned \$54,403 annually.

Median annual earnings of accountants were \$65,080 in 2013. The lowest ten percent earned less than \$41,000, and the highest ten percent earned more than \$113,000.

Accountants may receive paid vacations, holidays, and sick days; life and health insurance; and retirement benefits. These are usually paid by the employer.

**Metropolitan Areas with the Highest
Employment Level in this Occupation**

| Metropolitan area | Employment⁽¹⁾ | Employment per thousand jobs | Hourly mean wage |
|--|---------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| New York-White Plains- Wayne, NY-NJ | 71,070 | 13.56 | \$44.94 |
| Los Angeles-Long Beach-Glendale, CA | 43,490 | 10.94 | \$37.55 |
| Washington-Arlington- Alexandria, DC-VA-MD- WV | 35,350 | 14.93 | \$40.82 |
| Chicago-Joliet- Naperville, IL | 31,340 | 8.47 | \$35.80 |
| Houston-Sugar Land- Baytown, TX | 29,650 | 10.75 | \$38.74 |
| Atlanta-Sandy Springs- Marietta, GA | 28,460 | 12.33 | \$36.56 |
| Dallas-Plano-Irving, TX | 25,300 | 11.77 | \$37.07 |
| Boston-Cambridge- Quincy, MA | 24,150 | 13.81 | \$38.28 |
| Philadelphia, PA | 22,040 | 11.98 | \$37.58 |
| Denver-Aurora- Broomfield, CO | 21,360 | 16.68 | \$35.95 |

⁽¹⁾ Does not include self-employed. Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

EMPLOYMENT AND OUTLOOK

Accountants and auditors held about 1.3 million jobs in 2012. Employment is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through the year 2022, which means employment is projected to increase 10 percent to 15 percent. Stricter financial laws and regulations, recent financial crises, and increased scrutiny of company finances will drive job growth. In addition, the need to replace accountants and auditors who retire or transfer to other occupations will produce thousands of additional job openings annually, reflecting the large size of this occupation. The changing role of accountants and auditors will also spur job growth. In response to market demand, accountants and auditors will offer more financial management and consulting services. By focusing on analyzing operations, rather than simply providing financial data, accountants will help to boost demand for their services.

Opportunities are expected to be favorable for college graduates seeking accounting and auditing jobs who have worked part-time in a business or accounting firm while in school. In fact, experience has become so important that some employers in business and industry seek persons with one or two years experience for beginning positions.

Employment Trend, Projected 2010–22

Accountants and Auditors: 13%

Business and Financial Occupations: 13%

Total, All Occupations: 11%

Note: "All Occupations" includes all occupations in the U.S. Economy. Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections Program

Related Occupations

- Auditor
- Bookkeeper & Accounting Clerk
- Budget Analyst
- Credit Manager
- Energy Auditor

- Financial Analyst
- Financial Manager
- Personal Financial Advisor
- Public Administrator

Related Military Occupations

- Finance & Accounting Manager

Conversation With . . .

LYNN AMORE

Accountant

The Hanover Insurance Group
Accounting professional, 10 years

1. What was your individual career path in terms of education, entry-level job, or other significant opportunity?

When I got out of high school, I worked for Digital Equipment Corporation as a secretary. I took a lot of night classes. Then I got married and had a child. In 1996, I was laid off, so I went back to school full-time to finally get my degree. I was always good with numbers and got my degree in business administration. During that time, I took an internship at Hanover Insurance with no pay, but I got three credits. I was 36 years old! When my internship ended, they asked me to work through the summer as a temp. It was accounting work, reconciliations and so forth. At the end of the summer, they offered me a 30-hour permanent position as a reconciliation specialist, which is making sure that money that comes in the door is applied to a policy. I did that for a few years. During that time, I got a Series 6 license, which allows you to sell mutual funds and variable annuities. I always took advantage of the classes offered by Hanover. It's important to always keep improving. In my late 40s, I interviewed for a job that I didn't get. That motivated me to get my INS Certificate in General Insurance. You have to pass exams to get it. That made me more marketable, because I was 50 years old and I knew I was going to be up against younger people, competing for the same jobs. After that, I applied for an accountant's position that I wanted, and I got it.

2. What are the most important skills and/or qualities for someone in your profession?

It seems obvious, but you really need to understand basic accounting rules. You definitely need to know the Microsoft Office products: Excel, Access, Microsoft Word. You have to be a team player and be open to other people's ideas and new ideas. You must be organized and be thorough. You have to always double-check work. You have to deal with deadlines. In accounting, the end of the month can be a very busy time.

3. What do you wish you had known going into this profession?

I wish I had known how to deal with different personalities and how to not take things personally. My first boss was a very critical person and I took it very personally. You have to know how to stand up for yourself.

4. Are there many job opportunities in your profession? In what specific areas?

There are a lot of opportunities. Most businesses or organizations really want you to be a Certified Public Accountant (CPA). If you are a CPA or have your master's degree, or both, you're really golden. There are opportunities in finance, management, products.

5. How do you see your profession changing in the next five years? What role will technology play in those changes, and what skills will be required?

You have to be proficient with Microsoft Access and Microsoft Excel and know the products inside and out, how to work with pivot tables that slice data and work with macros. You have to stay on top of the software because it's always changing. It's awesome. You have to like that stuff. One thing that they tell you at Hanover is you're in charge of your own career. We have to write development goals and progress reports. You can just sit back and do your job and do it every day, or you can learn and be ready as the profession changes. Always take advantage of training opportunities. You'll be lucky if you can work for a company that offers a lot of training.

6. What do you enjoy most about your job? What do you enjoy least about your job?

It's close to home! But, seriously, I like working with the spreadsheets. I like getting creative with the databases and figuring out process improvements. I find that fun. And I like the people I work with. That said, though, what I like least is working alongside one of my coworkers who just talks so much about herself. She's a narcissist.

7. Can you suggest a valuable "try this" for students considering a career in your profession?

Try to get an internship. That's such a great way to just sort of try it. But, short of that, create a spreadsheet or put a budget together. Create tabs and link all the data together. Kids—actually, everyone—should always do a budget.

SELECTED SCHOOLS

Many large universities, especially those with business schools, offer programs in accounting. The student can also gain initial training through enrollment at a liberal arts college or community college. Below are listed some of the more prominent institutions in this field.

Brigham Young University
Marriott School of Management
Campus Drive
Provo, UT 84602
801.422.4121
marriottschool.byu.edu

**Indiana University—
Bloomington**
Kelley School of Business
1309 E. 10th Street
Bloomington, IN 47405
812.855.8100
kelley.iu.edu

New York University
Stern School of Business
665 Broadway, 11th Floor
New York, NY 10012
212.998.4500
www.stern.nyu.edu

Ohio State University
Fisher College of Business
120 Schoenbaum Hall
210 W. Woodruff Avenue
Columbus, OH 43210
614.292.2715
fisher.osu.edu

**University of Illinois—
Urbana-Champaign**
College of Business
1515 East Gregory Drive
Champaign, IL 61820
217.333.2740
business.illinois.edu

**University of Michigan—
Ann Arbor**
Ross School of Business
701 Tappan Avenue
Ann Arbor, MI 48109
734.763.5796
michiganross.umich.edu

University of Notre Dame
Mendoza College of Business
Notre Dame, IN 46566
574.631.7505
business.nd.edu

University of Pennsylvania
The Wharton School
1 College Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19104
215.898.6376
www.wharton.upenn.edu

University of Southern California

Marshall School of Business
3670 Trousdale Parkway
Los Angeles, CA 90089
213.740.8674
www.marshall.usc.edu

University of Texas—Austin

McCombs School of Business
1 University Station, B6000
Austin, TX 78712
512.471.5921
www.mcombs.utexas.edu

MORE INFORMATION

Accreditation Council for Accountancy and Taxation

1010 North Fairfax Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-1574
888.289.7763
www.acatcredentials.org

American Accounting Association

5717 Bessie Drive
Sarasota, FL 34233-2399
941.921.7747
info@aaahq.org
aaahq.org/index.cfm

American Institute of Certified Public Accountants

1211 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10036
212.596.6200
www.aicpa.org

The American Institute of CPA Student Scholarships

www.aicpa.org/BecomeACPA/Scholarships/Pages/default.aspx

Institute of Internal Auditors

247 Maitland Avenue
Altamonte Springs, FL 32701
407.937.1100
www.theiia.org

Institute of Management Accountants

10 Paragon Drive
Montvale, NJ 07645-1718
800.638.4427
www.imanet.org

National Association of State Boards of Accountancy

150 4th Avenue North, Suite 700
Nashville, TN 37219
615.880.4200
www.nasba.org