

Administrative Assistant

Snapshot

Career Cluster: Business Administration

Interests: Office management; managing people, projects, and schedules; information management technology; communication; meeting/event planning

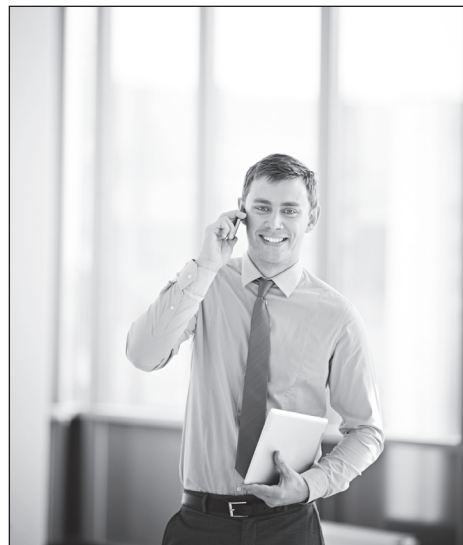
Earnings (Yearly Average): \$32,840

Employment & Outlook: Average Growth Expected

OVERVIEW

Sphere of Work

An administrative assistant is an office professional who performs various clerical tasks to assist the executives, presidents, or owners of a corporate business or government agency with the smooth operation of the office. An administrative assistant is responsible for managing and completing a wide range of short- and long-term duties and projects, and frequently takes on executive responsibilities in the absence, or under the direction, of the executive.



Work Environment

An administrative assistant generally works from an indoor office and takes all directions from his or her employer. An assistant usually works in a space that is near, or in some cases connected to, the workspace of the executive to whom he or she reports. Administrative assistants interact with other office personnel, other executives or company vice presidents, and external vendors. They must often assume office management responsibilities, frequently delegating tasks and projects to secretaries, interns, and other subordinates. They usually work a standard forty-hour week but may be expected to work longer hours, depending on the nature of the business.

Profile

Working Conditions: Work Indoors

Physical Strength: Light Work

Education Needs: High School Diploma or GED, Technical/Community College

Licensure/Certification:

Recommended

Physical Abilities Not Required: No Heavy Labor

Opportunities For Experience:

Apprenticeship, Military Service, Part-Time Work

Holland Interest Score*: ESC

* See Appendix A

Occupation Interest

Those interested in pursuing a career as an administrative assistant must be highly detail-oriented with the desire to complete any task, big or small, quickly and efficiently. An administrative assistant must have a passion for working with and managing people and must maintain a positive attitude. Because employers expect extremely efficient results from their office personnel, an administrative assistant should

possess the desire to please and sometimes to exceed what would normally be expected of an office worker.

A Day in the Life—Duties and Responsibilities

An administrative assistant's typical workday consists of performing standard, high-level clerical tasks as needed, as well as completing additional errands and assignments as directed by the employer. Administrative assistants provide information management support to top company executives. These tasks may include organizing conference calls, arranging itineraries and travel plans, reviewing correspondence, and preparing the office for large meetings. They may also supervise other employees and provide training and

orientation to new office personnel. Throughout the day, they manage all communications for their employers, including scheduling appointments, maintaining paper and electronic files, overseeing large projects, conducting research, and handling messages and mail services.

In addition to regular administrative tasks, administrative assistants often perform duties outside of the administrative sphere, such as running personal errands, meeting with external vendors, and conducting an employer's business in his or her absence. Some administrative assistants, like those who operate within a specialized field, may be required to learn and understand technical terminology and procedures used in that field.

Administrative assistants are sometimes expected to be on call for last minute or emergency projects outlined by their employers.

Duties and Responsibilities

- **Coordinating office services**
- **Overseeing record-keeping and scheduling of executives**
- **Reviewing budgets, personnel performance, and work schedules**
- **Acting as a liaison between executives and other staff personnel**

WORK ENVIRONMENT

Physical Environment

Administrative assistants usually work in clean, comfortable, and well-maintained offices located in close proximity to that of their employer. Some administrative assistants have their own offices where they work alone, and some work in large, open spaces with many other office employees. Most administrative assistants work in corporate business offices, hospitals, schools, government agencies, law firms, or nonprofit organizations. A virtual administrative assistant works remotely, from a home or private office.

Relevant Skills and Abilities

Communication Skills

- Speaking effectively
- Writing concisely

Interpersonal/Social Skills

- Cooperating with others
- Motivating others
- Providing support to others
- Working as a member of a team

Organization & Management Skills

- Following instructions
- Managing people/groups
- Managing time
- Organizing information or materials

Research & Planning Skills

- Solving problems

Human Environment

Administrative assistants interact with numerous people on a daily basis and must maintain a pleasant attitude. They may greet guests or customers, direct and supervise office employees and vendors, and interact with high-level executives.

Technological Environment

An administrative assistant commonly uses a computer equipped with standard office software, e-mail, and Internet applications, as well as any custom software the company may use. Administrative assistants also use transcription and dictation

software, copy and fax machines, scanners, telephone systems, and audio recorders.

EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND ADVANCEMENT

High School/Secondary

High school students interested in becoming administrative assistants should focus on subjects like business, communications, computers, technology, economics, and English. High school graduates who have some basic knowledge of office management can apply to become administrative assistants. Students can also take independent classes to learn the fundamentals of office management. They can also participate in a job shadowing project or mentorship program.

Suggested High School Subjects

- Business
- Business & Computer Technology

- Business Data Processing
- Business Law
- College Preparatory
- Composition
- English
- Mathematics

Famous First

The first business high school was the Washington Business High School in Washington, DC, which opened in 1890. The school's first principal, Allan Davis, held a law degree. The school functioned for some thirty years before it was finally closed.



College/Postsecondary

Interested postsecondary students should complete a vocational education program that offers training in office skills or a one- or two-year program in office administration at a community college or vocational school. Administrative assistants in a specialized field, like law or medicine, must complete specialized training programs designed to familiarize new employees with the culture and language of the specialty.

A postsecondary degree is not formally required for administrative assistant positions; however, it has become increasingly helpful to have a college degree, as employers are looking for polished, knowledgeable individuals who are able to interact intelligently and effectively with top executives.

Postsecondary students are also encouraged to seek internships or part-time volunteer positions in local corporate offices to gain real-world experience and to further their knowledge of the trade.

Related College Majors

- Administrative Assistant/Secretarial Science
- Business Administration & Management
- Executive Assistant/Secretary Training
- General Office/Clerical & Typing Services
- Office Supervision & Management

Adult Job Seekers

People applying for administrative assistant jobs through a temporary placement agency often receive training in computer and office skills through the agency. Other job seekers apply directly with a business or company, and some are hired after completing an internship or volunteer assignment. Most businesses offer administrative on-the-job training in new technologies and software. Continuing education classes also give administrative assistants the tools they need to stay abreast of changes in the industry.

Professional Certification and Licensure

Though administrative assistants are not required to receive formal certification or licensure, certification has become increasingly beneficial. An administrative assistant can become a Certified Administrative Professional (CAP) by meeting specific requirements and successfully completing an examination. Professional administrative organizations like the International Association of Administrative Professionals and the International Virtual Assistants Association offer testing and certification in office administration and management. Administrative assistants working in a specialized field like law or medicine may need to pass specific courses and tests in order to receive certification. Consult credible professional associations within the field and follow professional debate as to the relevancy and value of any certification program.

**Additional Requirements**

A successful administrative assistant must pay impeccable attention to detail. Executives expect their administrative assistants to complete all daily tasks pleasantly, accurately, and in a timely fashion.

Employers want to hire administrative assistants they can implicitly trust to assist them, so loyalty, good judgment, a friendly attitude,

and the ability to multitask are extremely valuable traits in the office environment.

Fun Fact

In 1942, the National Secretaries Association was formed “to elevate the standards of the secretarial profession.” The group defined a secretary as “an executive assistant who possesses a mastery of office skills, who demonstrates the ability to assume responsibility without direct supervision, who exercises initiative and judgment, and who makes decisions within the scope of assigned authority.”

Source: <http://library.temple.edu/scrc/national-secretaries>

EARNINGS AND ADVANCEMENT

Swift advancement is possible for able and hard-working individuals. Though entry level positions in business are paid an hourly rate, administrative assistants are almost always salaried positions. Earnings depend on the size of the organization and the level of responsibility and experience.

Median annual earnings of administrative assistants were \$32,840 in 2013. The lowest ten percent earned less than \$21,000, and the highest ten percent earned more than \$49,000.

Salaries in different parts of the country vary. Earnings are generally lowest in southern cities and highest in northern and western cities. In addition, salaries vary by industry; salaries tend to be highest in transportation, legal services, and public utilities, and lowest in retail trade, finance, insurance and real estate. Certification in this field is usually rewarded with a higher salary.

Administrative assistants 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	107,230	20.46	\$19.00
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Glendale, CA	60,250	15.16	\$18.27
Chicago-Joliet-Naperville, IL	45,600	12.32	\$16.95
Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown, TX	42,140	15.28	\$16.39
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	34,730	14.67	\$20.61
Philadelphia, PA	34,180	18.58	\$17.47
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta, GA	32,320	14.00	\$16.85
Denver-Aurora-Broomfield, CO	31,500	24.59	\$17.96
Nassau-Suffolk, NY	31,150	25.21	\$18.18
Dallas-Plano-Irving, TX	31,030	14.44	\$16.42

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

EMPLOYMENT AND OUTLOOK

Administrative assistants and secretaries held about 2.3 million jobs in 2012. Employment of administrative assistants 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. There will always be a need for individuals that can effectively carry out the wishes and plans of executives. Conscientious and hard working people will find no shortage of opportunities in this occupation.

Employment Trend, Projected 2012–22

Administrative Assistants and Secretaries: 12%

Total, All Occupations: 11%

Office and Administrative Support Occupations: 7%

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

Related Occupations

- Administrative Support Supervisor
- Customer Service Representative
- Executive Secretary
- General Office Clerk
- Legal Secretary
- Medical Assistant
- Secretary

Related Military Occupations

- Administrative Support Specialist
- Finance & Accounting Specialist
- Legal Specialist & Court Reporter
- Management Analyst
- Personnel Specialist
- Postal Specialist
- Religious Program Specialist

Conversation With . . .

RILEY CLARK

Executive Assistant

Anne Arundel Community College, Arnold, MD

Administrative Assistant, 7 years

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

I received my bachelor's degree in Communication from Boston University, and worked part-time throughout college as an administrative assistant at a law firm. When I graduated, I spent some time traveling, but returned to a less than ideal job market. I found an entry-level position at a not-for-profit, and worked very hard to steadily increase my responsibilities. Through connections I made in that role, I was informed of an open position at a local university. Currently, I am Executive Assistant to the Vice President for Learning at a community college. Some of my previous titles have included Program Assistant, Program Coordinator, and Assistant to the Dean.

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

For administrative support positions, the most important skills to hone are problem solving and the ability to adapt to changing environments. With those two skills, you can handle any task asked of you.

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

I think people in my profession develop intimate relationships with the people they support. Some people are just not compatible in a work environment, so I wish I had known how to interview a potential supervisor while being interviewed for a position.

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

I believe there are entry-level opportunities for administrative support staff, but the higher ranking administrative support positions are much less common, in my experience.

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?

I think the key role for people in administrative support and related positions will be to act as a liaison between the emerging advancements in technology and the people we are assisting. I can generate reports much faster using my computer skills than someone from the generation above me, and the generation below will be even faster. To prepare for that, I take classes in commonly used software to make sure I can provide the best support to my manager.

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

What I enjoy most about my job is the diverse range of operations I'm asked to conduct on a daily basis. My least favorite aspect of this profession is a general misunderstanding of the breadth and scale of the operations that administrative support staff conduct.

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

Evaluate your personal relationships—friendships, family, romantic relationships. If you find that you do more for the people in your life than you receive from them, you might be very satisfied in an administrative support role. If taking care of others makes you happy, you should definitely explore the possibility of an administrative support position.

SELECTED SCHOOLS

Many technical and community colleges offer programs in business administration and/or secretarial science. Interested students are advised to consult with their school guidance counselor or to research area postsecondary schools and training programs.

MORE INFORMATION

American Society of Administrative Professionals

121 Free Street
Portland, ME 04101
888.960.2727
www.asaporg.com

Association of Executive and Administrative Professionals

900 S. Washington Street, Suite G-13
Falls Church, VA 22046
703.237.8616
www.theaeap.com

International Association of Administrative Professionals

P.O. Box 20404
Kansas City, MO 64195-0404
816.891.6600
www.iaap-hq.org

International Virtual Assistants Association

375 N. Stephanie Street, Suite 1411
Henderson, NV 89014
877.440.2750
www.ivaa.org

Office and Professional Employees International Union

80 8th Avenue, Suite 610
New York, NY 10011
800.346.7348
www.opeiu.org