Snapshot

Career Cluster: Banking & Finance; Business Administration

Interests: Accounting, finance, business management,

mathematics, analyzing information **Earnings (Yearly Average):** \$35,730

Employment & Outlook: Average Growth Expected

OVERVIEW

Sphere of Work

Bookkeepers are responsible for administering the financial records of a business. This may include the business's payroll, invoices, expenses,

receipts, and other accounting matters. While bookkeepers fulfill an accounting function, they are generally not qualified accountants. A certified accountant must possess graduate qualifications and professional certification, whereas bookkeeping requires no formal qualifications.

Generally speaking, bookkeepers work for smaller businesses and handle all accounting functions, whereas workers known as accounting clerks or accounting assistants usually work for larger



companies performing particular tasks as members of an accounting team. A bookkeeper may work alone, in which case they usually interact with external financial service providers such as an auditor and tax accountant.

Bookkeeping is a general business administration function, but many bookkeepers and accounting assistants will develop specialized industry experience as a result of the employers they work for.

Work Environment

Bookkeepers can expect to work in office settings. Depending on the size and nature of the organization they serve, they may manage financial record keeping alone or as part of an accounting team. Internally, they will interact with other administrators, business support staff, and management. Externally, they may interact with customers, suppliers, vendors, wholesalers, contractors, and other service providers.

Bookkeepers engaged in full-time work for an employer usually work a standard forty-hour week, although they may be required to work longer hours during a company's busy periods or to meet financial reporting deadlines. Self-employed bookkeepers may serve a number of small- to medium-sized firms, each on a part-time basis. They may work from home or on-site.

Profile

Working Conditions: Work Indoors
Physical Strength: Light Work
Education Needs: High School
Diploma, Technical/Community College
Licensure/Certification: Usually Not

Required

Physical Abilities Not Required: No

Heavy Labor

Opportunities For Experience: Internship, Military Service

Holland Interest Score*: CRE, CSE

Occupation Interest

Bookkeeping attracts people who have an interest in accounting, numbers, and business transactions. This work may also attract candidates who would like to gain entry-level experience in accounting and financial administration before committing to studies in accounting, finance, or economics.

The often meticulous and repetitive nature of bookkeeping

^{*} See Appendix A

demands sustained attention to detail. Bookkeepers may spend long periods of time sitting at a desk or workstation crunching numbers and doing data entry. Therefore, attention to accuracy and the ability to meet deadlines are important.

These roles also offer potential opportunities to learn a variety of allied skills and specialist business functions, such as purchasing, quoting, budgeting, and payroll.

A Day in the Life-Duties and Responsibilities

Accounting clerks are usually members of an accounting team. As such, they may spend periods of their day working alone and with others. Bookkeepers may work as part of a team or independently. Much of the day will be spent at a desk doing financial data entry into specialized accounting and bookkeeping systems.

Bookkeepers and accounting assistants may also assist with payroll processing, invoicing and receipting, accounts payable and receivable administration, reconciling bank statements, writing checks, making bank deposits, doing petty cash reimbursements, completing forms, and preparing financial reports such as profit and loss statements or balance sheets. They may also assist in processes such as budgeting and purchasing.

They may be expected to attend meetings and to contribute to projects, groups, and committees. General administrative tasks are likely to include opening and sending mail and generating correspondence, memos, and other written communications.

Duties and Responsibilities

- Calculating employees' wages and preparing payroll checks
- Recording data from sales slips, statements, check stubs and inventory records in general ledgers, journals or on data processing sheets or computers
- Preparing financial reports
- Balancing books

WORK ENVIRONMENT

Immediate Physical Environment

Office settings predominate. Bookkeepers and accounting assistants are found in nearly every type of industry and business. Self-employed bookkeepers may work from home.

Relevant Skills and Abilities

Communication Skills

- Expressing thoughts and ideas
- Writing concisely

Interpersonal/Social Skills

- Cooperating with others
- · Having good judgment
- · Working as a member of a team

Organization & Management Skills

- Following instructions
- Organizing information or materials
- Paying attention to and handling details
- Performing routine work

Research & Planning Skills

Using logical reasoning

Technical Skills

- Performing scientific, mathematical and technical work
- Working with data or numbers
- Working with machines, tools or other objects

Human Environment

Bookkeepers must be able to sustain relatively detailed and repetitive work for long periods of time. They must also be able to work collaboratively with colleagues, supervisors, managers, members of other departments, and external stakeholders such as customers and vendors.

Technological Environment

Bookkeepers are expected to use specialized accounting software and systems, as well as general office computing programs. Daily operations will also demand the use of standard office technologies, including telephone, e-mail, photocopiers, and the Internet.

EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND ADVANCEMENT

High School/Secondary

High school students can best prepare for a career in bookkeeping by taking courses in business mathematics and administration, accounting, bookkeeping, communications, and business law. Foreign languages are also increasingly valued as businesses find themselves operating in global and cross-cultural contexts.

Becoming involved in extracurricular school activities that develop business competencies will also provide students with an opportunity to develop relevant skills and learn from others prior to graduation. This could include, for example, participating in business incubation projects.

Suggested High School Subjects

- Accounting
- Applied Communication
- Bookkeeping
- Business
- Business & Computer Technology
- Business Data Processing
- Business English
- Business Law
- Business Math
- Keyboarding

Famous First

The first account ledgers were clay tablets written in cuneiform script (perhaps

the oldest form of written language) dating from 10,000 years ago or earlier in parts of the Middle East. Daily transactions were collected in a basket and the contents summarized in a larger, multi-columned tablet that showed the totals.



Postsecondary

There are no formal educational qualifications required for bookkeeping, although an associate

or bachelor's degree in accounting would be highly regarded by employers. Practical experience and knowledge of accounting and bookkeeping software is usually expected, as is an understanding of accounting methods. A large selection of nondegree programs and short courses are offered in bookkeeping.

Opportunities for career advancement will depend largely on the size and type of organization in which the candidate works and their breadth of experience. Bookkeepers and accounting assistants who wish to become accountants or financial controllers will need to complete a bachelor's degree in accounting, finance, or economics, as well as postgraduate professional certification.

Related College Majors

- Accounting Technician Training
- Bookkeeping

Adult Job Seekers

AAdults seeking a career transition into or return to bookkeeping are advised to refresh their skills and update their resume. A number of agencies and institutions provide self-guided continuing education and professional development modules. Candidates may make themselves more attractive to employers by gaining specialist knowledge in

certain fields, such as payroll, taxation preparation, wholesale accounting, credit applications and collections, financial statement analysis, double-entry bookkeeping, and fraud prevention. Experience in relevant specialty areas or industries should be highlighted in the candidate's resume and application letter.

Networking, job searching, and interviewing are critical. Aspiring bookkeepers may be well-counseled also to consider allied roles, such as payroll specialist and purchasing clerk.

Professional Certification and Licensure

There are no formal professional certifications or licensing requirements for bookkeeping. Certification with and/or membership in national or state-based professional associations is optional.



Additional Requirements

Bookkeeping balances the demands of data entry and transactional work with potentially more complex and strategic accounting activities. These are roles,

therefore, in which there are often opportunities to learn a variety of allied skills and business functions.

EARNINGS AND ADVANCEMENT

Earnings depend on the type, size, and geographic location of the employer as well as the employee's ability and length of experience. Median annual earnings of bookkeepers and accounting clerks were \$35,730 in 2013. The lowest ten percent earned less than \$23,000, and the highest ten percent earned more than \$55,000.

Bookkeepers and accounting assistants may receive paid vacations, holidays, and sick days; life and health insurance; and retirement benefits. These benefits 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	63,210	12.06	\$20.95
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Glendale, CA	48,720	12.26	\$19.63
Chicago-Joliet- Naperville, IL	34,270	9.26	\$19.31
Houston-Sugar Land- Baytown, TX	30,010	10.88	\$18.62
Dallas-Plano-Irving, TX	26,380	12.27	\$18.75
Atlanta-Sandy Springs- Marietta, GA	25,810	11.18	\$18.07
Philadelphia, PA	22,380	12.16	\$19.61
Washington-Arlington- Alexandria, DC-VA-MD- WV	22,010	9.30	\$21.52
Minneapolis-St. Paul- Bloomington, MN-WI	21,650	12.08	\$19.10
Boston-Cambridge- Quincy, MA	20,880	11.94	\$21.66

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

EMPLOYMENT AND OUTLOOK

AThere were about 1.8 million bookkeepers and accounting assistants employed nationally 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. These workers will be needed as there is more attention being paid to the level of accuracy, accountability and transparency that public companies must use when reporting financial information, including the use of International Federal Reporting Standards. Still, most job openings will stem from replacement needs, due to workers who transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force.

Employment Trend, Projected 2012–22

Bookkeepers and Accounting Assistants: 11%

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

- Accountant
- Bank Teller
- Billing Clerk
- Cashier
- General Office Clerk
- Medical Records Administrator

- Office Machine Operator
- Payroll Clerk
- Statistical Assistant

Related Military Occupations

• Finance & Accounting Specialist

Conversation With . . KAREN MILLER

Bookkeeper/Accountant/Office Manager New Orleans, LA 5 1/2 years

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

I received a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration from the University of New Orleans and went straight into a large corporation. I started as an executive assistant and I thought once I got my foot in the door I could work my way up, which I did. I spent the 10 years in human resources as a benefits clerk and then as a compensation analyst. However, I learned over the years that I really wanted to work for a small business because I felt a corporation has so much bureaucracy and I'd lost the personal touch. When I was in HR, I had to do exit interviews whenever there were layoffs and it was just a very cold process. So I joined my family's business in payphones, back before cellphones prospered. I became operations manager and ran every aspect of the business until we sold the business after the proliferation of cellphones. During this time, I found that I really enjoyed accounting, specifically working with numbers and analyzing profits. By this time I was in my 50's and wanted to "slow" down, so I started working part-time as a bookkeeper/accountant. That's what I am currently doing.

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

The most important skills for a bookkeeper/accountant are definitely organization and attention to detail.

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

I always assumed the position of bookkeeper/accountant was a boring job, but I've learned that I like the process. I like entering numbers, having clean numbers, and having them balance. If I'd know that earlier, I would have gotten into it much sooner, and possibly gone for CPA accreditation.

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

There are plenty of job opportunities in this profession. A working mother could do something as basic as part-time bookkeeping, or someone could establish a career in accounting and go as high as CFO of a major corporation. The options are very diverse in this field.

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 this profession will stay in great demand for two reasons: 1) Technology helps streamline the job greatly, but a human brain will always need to analyze the data. 2) Technology enables this job to be done remotely - such as at home - or on a part-time basis, which is a wonderful alternative for many employees.

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

I enjoy organizing things, and when I analyze reports and make recommendations, and when they result in favorable numbers, it is a source of pride in the job! There's nothing really that I enjoy the least. I don't mind being at a desk for hours, but I'm sure lots of people would not like that aspect of the job.

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

When I was in college, I got a part-time job at the university in their financial services department, and that is when I became exposed to the "numbers" world. Even though my degree is not in accounting, my bachelor's degree program in business administration required that I take three different accounting courses. The rest I learned from on-the-job exposure. A real "try this" would be to use the Quickbooks accounting program in your own life for your personal finances, and get a real feel for income/expense analysis. This profession has greatly helped me plan my personal finance spending and retirement planning.

SELECTED SCHOOLS

Many technical and community colleges offer programs in business administration and accounting. Interested students are advised to consult with their school guidance counselor or to research area postsecondary schools and training programs. For those interested in pursuing a bachelor's degree, see the list of schools in the "Accountant" chapter in the present volume.

MORE INFORMATION

American Accounting Association

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

American Institute of Professional Bookkeepers 6001 Montrose Road, Suite 500 Rockville, MD 20852 800.622.0121 www.aipb.org

National Association of Certified Public Bookkeepers

140 N. Union Street, Suite 240 Farmington, UT 84025 866.444.9989 www.nacpb.org

Kylie Grimshaw Hughes/Editor