

Bookkeeper & Accounting Clerk

Snapshot

Career Cluster(s): Business, Management & Administration, Finance, Hospitality and Tourism

Interests: Accounting, finance, business management, mathematics, analyzing data

Earnings (Yearly Average): \$38,390

Employment & Outlook: Decline expected

OVERVIEW

Sphere of Work

Bookkeepers and accounting clerks 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 and accounting clerks fulfill an accounting function, they are generally not qualified accountants. A certified accountant must possess graduate qualifications and professional certification, whereas bookkeeping and clerking requires no formal qualifications.

Generally speaking, bookkeepers work for smaller businesses and handle all



accounting functions, whereas accounting clerks 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 and account clerking is a general business administration function, but many bookkeepers and accounting clerks will develop specialized industry experience as a result of the employers they work for.

Work Environment

Bookkeepers and accounting clerks 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 and accounting clerks 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 or Equivalent
Licensure/Certification: Not required
Opportunities For Experience: Part-time work, Military service, Internship
Holland Interest Score*: CRE, CSE, CSI, CSR

* See Appendix A

Occupation Interest

Bookkeeping and account clerking 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 demands sustained attention to detail. Bookkeepers and accounting clerks 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 clerks 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**

OCCUPATION SPECIALTIES

Audit Clerk

Audit Clerks verify the accuracy of figures, calculations, and postings relating to business transactions recorded by other workers. They examine such information as expense accounts, bank records, and inventory records to verify the accuracy of the recorded data.

WORK ENVIRONMENT

Relevant Skills and Abilities

Communication Skills

- Editing written information
- Expressing thoughts and ideas
- Writing concisely

Interpersonal/Social Skills

- Cooperating with others
- Working with a team
- Working independently

Organization & Management Skills

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

Research & Planning Skills

- Using logical reasoning

Physical Environment

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

Human Environment

Bookkeepers and accounting clerks 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.

Technical Skills

- Performing mathematical calculations
- Working with data and/or numbers
- Working with computers, digital devices, and other tools

Technological Environment

Bookkeepers and accounting clerks 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 or account clerking 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
- Communication
- Bookkeeping
- Business
- Intro to Computers
- English
- Pre-Law

- Mathematics
- Typing

Famous First

Italian mathematician Luca Pacioli, a contemporary of inventor Leonardo da Vinci, has been called the “father of bookkeeping” for his seminal work on the subject of “double-entry bookkeeping” published in 1494. Though the practice of double-entry bookkeeping is believed to have begun in the 1300s, Pacioli’s mathematical study of the subject was the beginning of academic bookkeeping and accounting in the western world and established bookkeeping as a field of statistics and mathematics.



College/Postsecondary

There are no formal educational qualifications required for bookkeeping or account clerking, 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 clerks 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
- Business Accounting
- Finance, General
- Business, General
- Mathematics

Adult Job Seekers

Adults seeking a career transition into or return to bookkeeping or account clerking 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 and accounting clerks may be well-counseled also to consider allied roles, such as payroll clerk and purchasing clerk.

Professional Certification and Licensure

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



Additional Requirements

Bookkeeping and account clerking 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 in the bookkeeping and clerk fields depend on experience and expertise, and the average median salary for a bookkeeper or accounting clerk in 2016 was \$38,390, with a range of less than \$23,000 to over \$59,000. Higher salaries are found in professional service companies or in the finance and insurance fields, while those working in retail or wholesale companies earn lower salaries on average. Advancement in the field generally involves applying for positions in larger or more profitable companies or gaining seniority within a company. Most bookkeepers and clerks work full time.

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

Metropolitan area	Employment	Employment per thousand jobs	Hourly mean wage
New York-Jersey City- White Plains, NY-NJ Metropolitan Division	76,210	11.57	\$22.13
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Glendale, CA Metropolitan Division	56,300	13.34	\$21.77
Chicago-Naperville- Arlington Heights, IL Metropolitan Division	33,130	9.10	\$20.04
Houston-The Woodlands- Sugar Land, TX	29,940	10.20	\$20.91
Dallas-Plano-Irving, TX Metropolitan Division	29,830	12.28	\$20.43
Atlanta-Sandy Springs- Roswell, GA	26,670	10.44	\$19.76
Boston-Cambridge- Newton, MA NECTA Division	22,560	12.51	\$22.55
Minneapolis-St. Paul- Bloomington, MN-WI	21,590	11.30	\$20.53
Nassau County-Suffolk County, NY Metropolitan Division	20,380	15.85	\$21.99
Washington-Arlington- Alexandria, DC-VA-MD- WV Metropolitan Division	20,220	8.12	\$23.32

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

EMPLOYMENT AND OUTLOOK

The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that opportunities for bookkeepers and accounting clerks will decline over the decade from 2014 to 2024. In 2014, there were 1.7 million professional bookkeepers and/or accounting clerks in the United States, but that number is expected to drop at least 8 percent to 1.6 million by 2024. The decline of the bookkeeping and clerk industry is primarily due to the advancement of technology. With better and more efficient accounting and computing systems available, there has been a reduced demand for full time bookkeeping services. Positions that remain are often on a contract-basis, with companies hiring out bookkeeping activities rather than keeping a professional bookkeeper on staff.

Related Occupations

- Accountants and Auditors
- Budget Analysts
- Cost Estimators
- Medical Records Administrator
- Payroll Clerk
- Cashier
- Bank Teller
- Financial Clerks
- Loan Officers
- Tax Examiners and Collectors, and Revenue Agents

Related Military Occupations

- Service Branch Bookkeeper

Conversation With . . .

KAREN MILLER

Bookkeeper/Accountant/Office Manager
New Orleans, Louisiana
Bookkeeper, 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 cell phones prospered. I became operations manager and ran every aspect of the business until we sold the business after the proliferation of cell phones. 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 colleges and universities, especially those with business schools, offer programs in finance and business administration. The student can also gain initial training through enrollment at a technical or community college. For advanced positions, a master's of business administration (MBA) with a concentration in finance is usually expected. Below are listed some of the more prominent institutions in this field.

Carnegie Mellon University

Tepper School of Business
500 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15213
412.268.2268
tepper.cmu.edu

Indiana University, Bloomington

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

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Sloan School of Management
50 Memorial Drive
Cambridge, MA 02142
617.253.2659
mitsloan.mit.edu

New York University

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

University of California, Berkeley

Haas School of Business
S450 Student Services Building #1900
Berkeley, CA 94720
510.642.1421
haas.berkeley.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 North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Kenan-Flagler Business School
Campus Box 3490, McColl Building
Chapel Hill, NC 27599
919.962.3235
www.kenan-flagler.unc.edu

University of Pennsylvania

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

MORE INFORMATION

American Accounting Association

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Sarasota, FL 34233-2399
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aaahq.org/index.cfm

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6001 Montrose Road, Suite 500
Rockville, MD 20852
800.622.0121
www.aipb.org

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Public Accountants**

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