

Office Administration

Secretaries and administrative assistants perform routine clerical and organizational tasks. They organize files, draft messages, schedule appointments, and support other staff.

Work Environment

Although secretaries and administrative assistants work in nearly every industry, many are concentrated in schools, hospitals, government agencies, and legal and medical offices. Most work in comfortable office settings. Virtual assistants typically work from a home office.

How to get Qualified

High school graduates with basic office and computer skills usually qualify for entry-level secretarial and administrative assistant positions.

Employers of more specialized positions, including medical and legal secretaries, often require applicants to have some knowledge of industry-specific terminology and practices. Community colleges and vocational-technical schools usually offer instruction in these areas.

Secretaries and administrative assistants generally advance through promotion to other administrative positions with more responsibilities. Qualified administrative assistants who broaden their knowledge of a company's operations and enhance their skills may be promoted to senior or executive secretary or administrative assistant, clerical supervisor, or office manager.

Certification in secretarial studies is becoming more and more important in gaining employment in the field.

Other qualifications/skills required:

Analytical skills. Administrative services managers must be able to review an organization's procedures and find ways to improve efficiency.

Communication skills. Much of an administrative services manager's time is spent working with other people. Therefore, excellent communication ability is a key quality.

Detail oriented. Administrative services managers must pay attention to details. This quality is necessary across a range of tasks, from ensuring that the organization complies with building codes to managing the process of buying equipment.

Leadership skills. In managing workers and coordinating administrative duties, administrative services managers must be able to motivate employees and deal with issues that may arise.

Job Outlook

Overall employment of secretaries and administrative assistants is expected to grow 12 percent from 2010 to 2020, about as fast as the average for all occupations. Among specialties, medical secretaries are the only occupation that is expected to have much-faster-than-average employment growth. This is driven by the rapid growth of the healthcare industry. Overall, the majority of job openings will result from the need to replace workers who leave these occupations.

Employment of executive secretaries and administrative assistants is projected to grow 13 percent from 2010 to 2020, about as fast as the average for all occupations, as these workers continue to provide high-level support for executives.

Employment of medical secretaries is projected to grow 41 percent from 2010 to 2020, much faster than the average for all occupations. Employment growth will be driven by rapid growth of the healthcare and social assistance industries. An anticipated increase in the use of medical services by an aging population will require many additional medical secretaries.

Employment of legal secretaries is expected to grow 4 percent from 2010 to 2020, slower than the average for all occupations. This slow employment growth is due primarily to the slower-than-average growth of the legal industry overall.

Employment of secretaries, except legal, medical, and executive, is expected to grow 6 percent from 2010 to 2020, slower than the average for all occupations. Although developments in office technology are certain to continue, many secretarial and administrative duties are of a personal, interactive nature and are not easily automated. Responsibilities such as planning meetings, working with clients, and instructing staff require tact and communication skills. Because technology cannot currently substitute for these interpersonal skills, secretaries and administrative will continue to be required.

In addition to jobs coming from employment growth, numerous job openings will arise from the need to replace secretaries and administrative assistants who transfer to other occupations or retire. Job opportunities should be best for applicants with extensive knowledge of computer software applications. Applicants with a bachelor's degree are expected to be in great demand and will act as managerial assistants who perform more complex tasks.

