



Chapter One The U.S. Postal Service

Hundreds of thousands apply each year for postal jobs, and those who understand the hiring process and study for entrance exams – when required – will dramatically improve their chances. The Postal Service never charges fees to take an exam or to apply for jobs. Don't be misled by ads that offer postal employment and charge a fee for their services. You will find all you need in this book, its companion Web site at www.postalwork.net and on the official USPS Web site at www.usps.com/employment.

The Postal Service is huge by any standard, employing over 765,000 workers with an annual budget of \$75 billion. It pays over \$2 billion in salaries and benefits every two weeks to workers in 300 occupations for positions at 37,000 post offices, branches, and stations throughout the United States. Approximately 40,000 postal workers are hired yearly to backfill for retirements, transfers, deaths and to replace employees who choose to leave for other reasons.

Starting pay in 2009 was \$20.94 per hour, \$43,555 per year, for part-time flexible mail carriers. Mail handlers start at \$15.65 per hour, \$32,553 per year, and clerks start at \$19.19 per hour, \$39,915 per year.¹ Workers are initially hired under the part-time flexible pay scale and typically work 40 or more hours per week.

Adding benefits, overtime, and premiums, the average bargaining unit annual compensation rate was \$66,929 in 2008.

www.postalwork.net
www.usps.com/employment

¹ Beginning salary figures obtained from the Pittsburgh USPS human resource office.

The average pay and benefits for career bargaining unit employees was \$66,929 per year, excluding corporate-wide expenses, in 2008.² The largest pay system in the Postal Service is predominantly for bargaining unit employees. There are also executive and administrative annual Pay-For-Performance schedules for non-bargaining unit members that pay from \$21,293 up to an authorized maximum of \$110,329.

Significant changes were implemented in 2008 that simplified, centralized, and streamlined the recruiting process. Now applicants apply for specific job vacancies online instead of testing to get on a local hiring register. Under the new process, exams are often two parts, an online assessment tool and a proctored section that you take at a designated location in your area. The 473 Major Entry Level Jobs Exam is now equally divided into a 90-minute unproctored online assessment and a 90-minute standard proctored test. The proctored exams are contracted out to local testing facilities, providing greater access for applicants.

BENEFITS

Postal employees receive the same general benefits provided to federal employees for the most part. However, USPS employees pay considerably less health care bi-weekly premiums than the competitive Civil Service does.

Vacation and Sick Leave

All employees receive: 10 paid holidays, 13 days of vacation for the first three years, twenty days of vacation with three to fifteen years service, and after fifteen years, twenty-six days. Additionally, 13 sick days are accrued each year regardless of length of service. Military time counts toward benefits. If you have three years of military service, you begin with four weeks paid vacation and three years toward retirement.

Health Benefits and Life Insurance

Medical health plans and the Federal Employees' Group Life Insurance (FEGLI) programs are available to all employees. The medical plan is an employee-employer contribution system and includes HMO and Blue Cross and Blue Shield programs. There are hundreds of plans to choose from. The FEGLI program offers low-cost term life insurance for the employee and basic coverage for the family. FEGLI offers up to five times the employee's salary in death benefits.

² Comprehensive Statement on Postal Operations, 2008 — USPS

One of the primary benefits of Postal Service employment is the satisfaction you experience from working in a challenging and rewarding position. Positions are available with the level of responsibility and authority that you desire.

Retirement

The Postal Service retirement system was significantly changed for individuals hired after January 1, 1984. There are three components to the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS). Retirees receive a fixed annuity based on the number of years served, typically 1% of an employee's high three years average earnings for each year of service, Social Security, and there is an employee contribution system that is fashioned after a 401k defined contribution plan. You can elect to contribute into a *THRIFT savings 401k plan*. The government will match your contribution up to 5 percent. Your contributions are tax deferred and reduce your taxable income by the amount contributed. The retirement benefit is determined by the amount that has accumulated during the employee's career. This includes the interest earned and capital gains realized from the retirement fund. Go to www.federalretirement.net to learn more about the FERS retirement system

There are many withdrawal options, including lump sum and various fixed-term annuities. The contribution plan payout is in addition to the Social Security and fixed annuity benefits that you will be eligible for at retirement. Postal workers pay considerably less for their health benefits than competitive federal Civil Service employees due to their negotiated union contracts.

EMPLOYEE CLASSIFICATIONS

Initial appointments are either casual or transitional (temporary) or Part-Time Flexible (Career). Hourly rates for Part-Time Flexible employees vary depending upon the position's rate schedule. Some positions are filled full-time, such as the Maintenance (Custodial) classification.

- Full-Time and Part-Time Flexible (career) employees compose the *Regular Work Force*. This category includes security guards. Part-Time Flexible employees are scheduled to work fewer than 40 hours per week and they must be available for flexible work hours as assigned. Part-Time Flexible employees are paid by the hour. Hourly rates vary from \$16.72 for PS Grade 3 Step BB to \$31.62 for PS Grade 11 step P. See page 15 for a complete pay scale listing.
- A *Supplemental Work Force* is needed by the Postal Service for peak mail periods and offers casual (temporary) employees two 89-day employment terms in a calendar year. During Christmas an additional 21 days of employment can be offered to Supplemental Work Force employees. Transitional (temporary) employees can work up to 360 days in carrier positions.

Entrance exams are not required for supplemental work force jobs, and these positions can not be converted to full-time positions. However, you will be able to apply for future job vacancies and take the 473 Postal Exam in your area when they

are advertised. Many, if not the majority of, postal workers today start out in casual or transitional positions and eventually apply, pass the exam, and get hired.

College students may be considered for casual (temporary) employment with the Postal Service during the summer months. The rate of pay is from \$6.55 to \$22.50 per hour. Tests are not required and appointments cannot lead to a career position. Apply early for summer work. Contact post offices in your area no later than February for summer employment applications. Casual temporary positions are also advertised on the Postal Service's employment and job listing Web site at www.usps.com/employment.



QUALIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

Various standards from age restrictions to physical requirements must be met before you can take one of the Postal Service exams.

Age Limit

You must be at least eighteen to apply. Certain conditions allow applicants as young as sixteen to apply. Carrier positions, requiring driving, are limited to age 18 or older. High school graduates or individuals who terminated high school education for sufficient reason are permitted to apply at age 16.

Entrance Exams

Clerks, carriers, rural carriers and other mail-handling job applicants must pass an entrance exam. Specialties such as mechanic, electronic technician, machinist, and trades must also pass a written test. The overall rating is based on the test results and your qualifying work experience and education. Professionals and certain administrative positions don't require an entrance exam or written test. They are rated and hired strictly on their prior work experience and education. The clerk and carrier exam was updated in December of 2004 to the new 473 and 473 C and 473 E Battery Exams. The only difference among the three is the occupational title and the methods of taking the exams.

The **473 Major Entry Level Jobs Exam** covers the following positions:

- ✓ **City Carrier**
- ✓ **Rural Carrier**
- ✓ **Mail Processing Clerk**
- ✓ **Sales, Service, and Distribution Associate**
- ✓ **Mail Handler**

This exam, also referred to as the *473 Battery Examination*, covers the vast majority of entry-level hiring. Custodial positions are reserved for veteran preference eligibles by federal law. The USPS also requires *motor vehicle* and *tractor trailer operators*, and highly skilled maintenance positions such as *Building Equipment Mechanic, Engineman, Electronics Technician, and General Mechanic*

to successfully pass an entrance exam. All of the skilled maintenance positions require examination 931. A separate announcement, examination 932, is required for Electronics Technician positions. A list of exams is included on page 23, and Chapter Four provides sample tests for major occupations.

Eight sample exams are presented in Chapter Four and a sample *473 Battery Examination* is included in Chapter Five to help you prepare for this test. The 473 examination and completion of forms will require approximately three hours and fifteen minutes, with half of the exam taken online when you first apply and a second proctored exam at a local testing facility in your area. Jobs with the U.S. Postal Service are highly competitive due to the excellent salary and benefits offered. It's essential that you pass the test with the highest score possible to improve your chances. Applicants scoring between 90% and 100% will get called sooner than lower graded applicants and they have a better chance of being hired.

Citizenship

Applicants do not have to be U.S. citizens. If you have permanent alien resident status in the United States of America or owe allegiance to the United States of America you can apply for Postal Service jobs.

Physical Requirements

Physical requirements are determined by the job. Carriers must be able to lift a 70-pound mail sack and all applicants must be able to efficiently perform assigned duties. Eyesight and hearing tests are required. Applicants must have at least 20/40 vision in the good eye and no worse than 20/100 in the other eye. Eyeglasses are permitted.

State Driver's License

Applicants must have a valid state driver's license for positions that require motor vehicle operation. A safe driving record is required and a Postal Service road test is administered for the type of vehicle that you will operate.

DRUG TESTING (SUBSTANCE ABUSE)

The Postal Service maintains a comprehensive program to ensure a drug-free workplace. A qualification for postal employment is to be drug free, and this qualification is determined through the use of a urinalysis drug screen. When you are determined to be in the area of consideration for employment, you will be scheduled for a drug screening test.

APPLICATION PROCEDURES

Positions Requiring Written Examinations

The Postal Service significantly changed the application process in 2008, and you now apply for specific job vacancies. Previously, you had to sign up for a test that was administered every two to three years in your area. Applicants who passed the exam were placed on a hiring register in rank order by exam score. When vacancies occurred in an area, the Postal Service would contact the highest ranked candidates and call them in for an interview. You could be on the list for two years or more and never get called, and when the list was closed you had to reapply by retaking the same test.

Exam registers became outdated quickly as applicants found other employment, and they were difficult to maintain. The hiring process was decentralized, and many were excluded from the list because they missed the exam testing notification in their area. Now, when a vacancy exists the Postal Service advertises the job on its centralized Web site and you apply for a specific job that will be filled between four and six weeks of the job announcement's closing date.

To apply for postal positions, first visit www.postalwork.net/jobs.htm, this book's companion Web site, and review the step-by-step instructions with helpful hints on how to apply for post office jobs on the official Web site. This site shows screen shots of the official application pages with instructions to help you successfully navigate the new *eCareer* application system. Don't be sidetracked by major private-sector jobs board ads. The Postal Service seldom advertises on any of the large online jobs boards, and if it does you are linked directly to the official site at <http://usps.com/employment> to apply at no cost.

There are many postal job scams online and in newspaper classifieds that list toll-free numbers and charge fees ranging from \$70 to over \$200 for exam study guides. The application process is free to all who apply and this book provides a comprehensive 473 exam study guide in Chapter Five.

You can also call **1/478-757-3199** or TTY 1-800-800-8776 to apply, take an assessment, or to apply for temporary and casual employment. You must have the job announcement number to use the phone system, and it can be confusing. If you don't have an announcement number, which is readily available for current openings on the Internet, contact your local post office, Management Sectional Center (MSC), General Mail Facilities, or call your local Customer Service District Office that is listed in Chapter Four.

Apply online at www.usps.com/employment. Most libraries offer online access. Job opportunities are also advertised at local post offices, in national and

local newspapers, journals and periodicals. Read the caution notice above prior to calling any toll-free number.

A passing score of 70 percent or better is required for your name to be added to the register. The highest-rated applicants will be called to complete additional paperwork, take a drug screening test, and an interview. Your score determines your placement on the list.

Apply for each job separately. However, after you initially register online, pass the test, and obtain an **Exam History Code**, you can enter this code at the beginning of the application process to avoid having to retest. To improve your chances, apply for all positions that you qualify for. Your exam results are valid through the exam date shown on your Notice of Rating.

Positions That Don't Require a Written Exam

Vacancies in these positions — generally professional and administrative — are announced (advertised) first within the Postal Service. Postal employees who have the knowledge, education, credentials, and skills may apply for these openings. If there aren't any qualified internal applicants (called bidders in the federal sector), then the postal service will advertise the vacancies to the general public and accept résumés and applications for rating. All applicants must pass an entrance examination and/or an evaluation process to be considered for a job. Corporate positions that don't require entrance exams are covered in Appendix B.

It is generally recommended that job applicants seeking entry-level professional and administrative positions take the 473 Battery Exam to get their foot in the door. Once hired, as vacancies open in their specialty such as accounting, budget, and engineering, they will have first crack at the jobs through internal Postal Service job announcements. You can view the diverse lists of job advertisements online at www.usps.com/employment. There are lists of jobs reserved for current postal employees only. Once you get your foot in the door you can bid on these restricted announcements, and the experience that you will gain from the entry-level position will help you better understand the postal system.

Realistically, many professional jobs won't be filled internally. Few postal clerks and non-professional employees will have law degrees, engineering credentials or doctorates, for example. Visit the employment Web site to explore all the available jobs, and review the job classifications list in Chapter Ten.

These job openings will be advertised on the USPS Web site. You should also contact local Customer Service and Sales District (CSSD) personnel offices listed in Appendix C to identify upcoming job vacancies for your specialty. You can also call your local CSSD office to check on the status of your application or to follow up on interviews.

You will be rated on a point system (maximum of 100 points) plus veterans preference points if applicable, even without a written test. Therefore, your résumé and *Application for Employment* (PS Form 2591) or online submission must be

thoroughly completed and include all key information such as degrees, training, credentials, and detailed work experience. Only the top three candidates will generally be referred to the selecting official for consideration.

I suggest compiling your résumé and application offline first and spend quality time drafting your work experiences, collecting the required employment and education history, and spell and grammar check your application. Then, and only after thorough review, copy and paste it to the online résumé builder. Use the PS Form 2591 that is available at www.postalwork.net to make sure you capture all required information. If you omit key information your application may be rejected, and at the very least you stand to lose points. Corporate applicants need to spend quality time compiling their federal style resume and application. You will find *The Book of U.S. Government Jobs*, Chapter Six, very helpful. This book takes applicants step-by-step through the process from evaluating the job announcement to compiling work histories and Knowledge, Skills & Abilities (KSAs) statements. This book's companion Web site at www.federaljobs.net will also prove helpful.

VETERANS PREFERENCE

Veterans receive five or ten point preference. Those with a 10% or greater compensable service-connected disability are placed at the top of the register in the order of their scores. All other eligibles are listed below the disabled veterans group in rank order. The Veterans Preference Act applies to all Postal Service positions. Refer to Chapter Eight for detailed information on veterans preference.



Custodial exams for the position of cleaner, custodian, and custodial laborer are exclusively for veterans and present employees. These jobs are open only to veterans preference candidates.

PAY SCALES

The Postal Service (PS) pay scale for bargaining unit employees and the Executive and Administrative Schedule (EAS) pay scale for non-bargaining unit employees are presented in this chapter.

Special pay scales are also used for rural letter carriers, city carriers, mail handlers and others. Full-time mail carriers earn between \$41,167 and \$53,853 annually and transitional temporary carriers earn between \$20.58 and \$21.49 per hour. Rural carriers are paid on an equivalent annual rate dependent on hours worked each week. If they work a 12-hour work week they earn \$11,808 to \$15,194 a year. Working a 48-hour work week increases earning to between \$51,170 and \$65,831 a year.

The Postal Service also pays extra compensation, overtime, and night shift differential to workers. A Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) is added to the base salary of employees at the rate of one cent per hour for each .4 point increase in the Consumer Price Index. Postal pay scales are posted on www.postalwork.net and are updated as changes occur. You will find General Schedule federal pay schedules posted on www.federaljobs.net.

POSTAL SERVICE (PS) Full Time Annual Rates (8/30/2008)									
Grades									
Steps	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
BB	33,443	34,621							
AA	34,448	35,616							
A	35,453	36,611	38,377	40,122	41,964	42,802			
B	36,458	37,606	39,314	41,008	42,800	43,644			
C	37,463	38,601	40,251	41,894	43,636	44,526			
D	38,468	39,596	41,188	42,780	44,472	45,388	49,120	52,298	53,473
E	39,473	40,591	42,125	43,666	45,308	46,250	49,765	53,065	54,287
F	40,478	41,586	43,062	44,552	46,144	47,112	50,410	53,832	55,101
G	41,483	42,581	43,999	45,438	46,980	47,974	51,055	54,599	55,915
H	42,488	43,576	44,936	46,324	47,816	48,836	51,700	55,366	56,729
I	43,493	44,571	45,873	47,210	48,652	49,698	52,345	56,133	57,543
J	44,498	45,566	46,810	48,096	49,488	50,560	52,990	56,900	58,357
K	45,503	46,561	47,747	48,982	50,324	51,422	53,635	57,667	59,171
L	46,508	47,556	48,684	49,868	51,160	52,284	54,280	58,434	59,985
M	47,513	48,551	49,621	50,754	51,996	53,146	54,925	59,201	60,799
N	48,518	49,546	50,558	51,640	52,832	54,008	55,570	59,968	61,613
O	49,518	50,541	51,495	52,526	53,668	54,870	56,215	60,735	62,247
P							56,860	61,502	63,241

Step Increases BB-P are awarded on time in service and range from 24 weeks to 96 weeks between increases.

EXECUTIVE & ADMINISTRATIVE STEP SCHEDULE (EAS) 2008			
EAS Grade	Min / Max	EAS GRADE	Min / Max
1	\$21,293 / \$28,137	15	\$37,862 / \$59,123
2	\$21,999 / \$29,060	16	\$39,206 / \$66,122
3	\$22,714 / \$30,016	17	\$40,945 / \$69,053
4	\$23,630 / \$31,226	18	\$42,743 / \$72,085
5	\$24,418 / \$32,267	19	\$44,769 / \$75,502
6	\$25,298 / \$33,413	20	\$47,197 / \$79,598
7	\$26,334 / \$34,800	21	\$49,490 / \$83,465
8	\$27,390 / \$36,195	22	\$52,433 / \$90,459
9	\$28,460 / \$37,608	23	\$55,291 / \$95,388
10	\$39,510 / \$38,997	24	\$58,027 / \$100,109
11	\$31,102 / \$48,566	25	\$60,913 / \$105,088
12	\$32,594 / \$50,898	26	\$63,952 / \$110,329
13	\$34,115 / \$53,272		
14	\$35,896 / \$56,054		

POSTAL OCCUPATIONS With Over 400 Employees

Occupation	Number Employed	Average Salary
Accounting Specialist / Tech	478	\$57,120
Address Management Specialist	528	\$57,787
Auto Technician	2,267	\$47,454
Auto Technician (Lead)	1,202	\$56,932
Bldg. Equipment Mechanic	2,370	\$55,962
Bulk Mail Technician	3,017	\$53,521
Carrier City	181,909	\$51,063
Carrier (Temporary Relief)	4,715	\$26,101
Carrier Technician	27,217	\$51,529
Casual Temporary	11,368	\$25,160
Clerk Special Delivery Services	466	\$52,528
Criminal Investigators	429	\$75,464
Customer Service Analyst	605	\$64,426
Data Collection Technician	1,352	\$53,401
Data Conversion Operator	4,953	\$30,956
Distributions Windows & Markup Clerk	2,033	\$52,448
Electronics Technician	7,783	\$60,479
Flat Sorting Mach. Operator	2,958	\$52,139
Human Resource Specialists	648	\$61,873
Laborer Custodial, Custodian	16,279	\$47,831
Mail Handler/Tech/Operator	52,918	\$47,330
Mail Processing Clerk	81,511	\$51,907
Mail Processing Machine Operators	1,422	\$50,250
Maintenance Support Clerk/Tech	1,435	\$51,623
Maintenance Mechanic & MPE	9,230	\$55,485
Motor Vehicle Operator	2,759	\$50,533
Parcel Post Dist-Machine	8,737	\$51,765
PM/Relief/Replacement	12,951	\$24,355
Postal Inspector	1,494	\$78,950
Postal Police	581	\$51,114
Postmaster	22,876	\$65,000
Review Clerk	621	\$53,655
Rural Carrier Associates	53,064	\$37,493
Rural Delivery Carriers	68,812	\$52,843
Sales Services Associates	50,993	\$50,269
Secretary	836	\$50,980
T&A Payroll Clerks	413	\$53,661
Tractor Trailer Operator	5,530	\$52,599
Training Technicians	450	\$53,598
Transitional Employee	13,232	\$41,166

Source: Employee Master File/RDL/OCCLIST/ Occupation Code Listing