
Bookbinders and Bindery Workers

(O*NET 51-5011.00, 51-5012.00)

Significant Points

- Employment is expected to decline rapidly, reflecting the use of more productive machinery and the growth of imports of bound printed material.
- Opportunities for hand bookbinders are limited because only a small number of establishments do this highly specialized work.
- Most bookbinders and bindery workers train on the job.

Nature of the Work

The process of combining printed sheets into finished products such as books, magazines, catalogs, folders, and directories is known as “binding.” When a publication or advertising supplement has been printed, it must then be folded, glued, stitched, stapled, or otherwise turned into the finished product that will be seen by the public. *Bindery workers* set up, operate, and maintain the machines that perform these various tasks, while *bookbinders* perform highly skilled hand finishing operations.

Job duties depend on the material being bound. Some types of binding and finishing jobs consist of only one step. Preparing leaflets or newspaper inserts, for example, requires only folding. Binding of books and magazines, on the other hand, requires a number of steps. Bindery workers first assemble the books and magazines from large, flat, printed sheets of paper. They then operate machines that first fold printed sheets into “signatures,” which are groups of pages arranged sequentially. They then assemble the signatures in sequence and join them by means of a saddle-stitch process or perfect binding (where no stitches are used). In firms that do “edition binding”, workers bind books produced in large numbers, or “runs.”

In libraries where repair work on rare books is needed, bookbinders sew, stitch, or glue the assembled printed sheets, shape the book bodies with presses and trimming machines, and reinforce them with glued fabric strips. Covers are created separately and glued, pasted, or stitched onto the book bodies. The books then undergo a variety of finishing operations, often including wrapping in paper jackets. In establishments that print new books, this work is done mechanically.

A small number of bookbinders work in hand binderies. These highly skilled workers design original or special bindings for limited editions, or restore and rebind rare books. Some binders repair books and provide other specialized binding services to libraries.

Bookbinders and bindery workers in small shops may perform many binding tasks, while those in large shops tend to specialize. Tasks may include performing perfect binding or operating laminating machinery. Others specialize as folder operators or cutter operators, and may perform adjustments and minor repairs to equipment as needed.

Work environment. Binderies often are noisy and jobs can be strenuous, requiring considerable lifting, standing, and carrying. Binding often resembles an assembly line on which workers perform repetitive tasks. The jobs also may require

stooping, kneeling, and crouching, but equipment that minimizes such activity is now widely available.

Bookbinders and bindery workers normally work 40 hours per week, although weekend and holiday hours may be necessary if production on a job is behind schedule. Many large printers operate around the clock, so some bindery workers may work on shifts. Part-time workers made up 11 percent of this occupation in 2006.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

On-the-job training remains the most common form of training for entry level bindery workers, but new technology will require workers to obtain more formal training. Attention to detail and mechanical aptitude are important for these jobs.

Education and training. High school students interested in bindery careers should take shop courses or attend a vocational-technical high school. Occupational skill centers also provide an introduction to bindery work and bookbinding. For entry-level positions, most employers look for high school graduates or those with associate degrees.

Training in graphic communications also can be an asset. Vocational-technical institutes offer postsecondary programs in the graphic arts, as do some skill-updating or retraining programs and community colleges. Other programs are made available by unions to their members. Four-year colleges also offer programs related to printing and publishing, but their emphasis is on preparing people for careers as graphic artists, educators, or managers in the graphic arts field.

While postsecondary education is available, most bookbinders and bindery workers learn the craft through on-the-job training. Inexperienced workers usually are assigned simple tasks such as moving paper from cutting machines to folding machines. They learn basic binding skills, including the characteristics of paper and how to cut large sheets of paper into different sizes with the least amount of waste. Usually, it takes one to three months to learn to operate the simpler machines but it can take up to one year to become completely familiar with more complex equipment, such as computerized binding machines. As workers gain experience, they learn to operate more types of equipment. To keep pace with changing technology, retraining is increasingly important for bindery workers.

Formal apprenticeships are not as common as they used to be, but still are offered by some employers. Apprenticeships allow



Bookbinders pay careful attention to detail to avoid binding pages incorrectly.

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-16	
				Number	Percent
Bookbinders and bindery workers	51-5010	72,000	57,000	-15,000	-21
Bindery workers.....	51-5011	65,000	51,000	-14,000	-22
Bookbinders.....	51-5012	7,200	6,000	-1,200	-17

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

beginners to acquire skills by working alongside skilled workers while also taking classes. The more structured program provided by an apprenticeship enables workers to acquire the high levels of specialization and skill needed for some bindery and bookbinding jobs.

Other qualifications. Bindery work requires careful attention to detail. Accuracy, patience, neatness, and good eyesight are all important. Mechanical aptitude is necessary to operate the newer, more automated equipment, and workers with computer skills will increasingly be in demand. Manual dexterity is needed in order to count, insert, and fold. In addition, creativity and artistic ability are necessary for hand bookbinding.

Certification and advancement. With experience, binders can expect increased salaries and more responsibility. Completion of a formal certification program can further advancement opportunities. Without additional training, advancement opportunities outside of bindery work are limited. In large binderies, experienced bookbinders or bindery workers may advance to supervisory positions.

Employment

In 2006, bookbinders and bindery workers held about 72,000 jobs, including 7,200 as skilled bookbinders and 65,000 as bindery workers. More than 3 out of 4 bookbinding and bindery jobs are in printing and related support activities. Traditionally, the largest employers of bindery workers were bindery trade shops, which are companies that specialize in providing binding services for printers without binderies or whose printing production exceeds their binding capabilities. However, this type of binding is now being done increasingly in-house, and is now called “in-line finishing.”

The publishing industry employed less than 1 in 10 bindery workers. Other bindery workers were found in the employment services industry, which supplies temporary workers to companies that require their services.

Job Outlook

Employment of bookbinders and bindery workers is projected to decline rapidly between 2006 and 2016, but opportunities should be good because many job openings are created by bindery workers who transfer to other occupations.

Employment change. Overall employment of bookbinders and bindery workers is expected to decline rapidly by 21 percent between 2006 and 2016. Over this period, demand for domestic bindery workers will slow as productivity in printing and bindery operations increases. Computers have caused binding to become increasingly automated, and coupled with other technological advances, have reduced labor requirements. Consequently, more printing companies are expected to per-

form bindery services in-house rather than send the work to specialized binding shops. Also, some bindery jobs will be lost because of outsourcing of work to firms in foreign countries where books and other materials that take a long time to make can be produced more cheaply.

More efficient binding machinery will slow growth in demand for specialized bindery workers who assist skilled bookbinders. The number of establishments that do hand bookbinding is small, also limiting growth.

Job prospects. Bindery workers generally face favorable job opportunities because many workers leave these jobs and there is a recurring need to replace them. However, improvements in binding machinery mean fewer will be replaced than leave. Additionally, many skilled bookbinders are older and will likely retire in the next decade. Experienced workers will continue to have the best opportunities for these skilled jobs. Prospects for all bindery jobs will be best for workers who have completed training or certification programs, internships, or who have experience in a related production occupation.

Earnings

Median hourly earnings of bookbinders were \$14.55 in May 2006, compared to \$13.16 per hour for all production occupations. The middle 50 percent earned between \$10.48 and \$19.34 an hour. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$8.30, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$22.69.

Median hourly earnings of bindery workers were \$12.29 in May 2006. The middle 50 percent earned between \$9.67 and \$16.02 an hour. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$7.93, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$20.14.

Related Occupations

Other workers who set up and operate production machinery include prepress technicians and workers; printing machine operators; machine setters, operators, and tenders—metal and plastic; and various other precision machine operators.

Sources of Additional Information

Information about apprenticeships and other training opportunities may be obtained from local printing industry associations, local bookbinding shops, local offices of the Graphic Communications Conference or local offices of the State employment service. Apprenticeship information is also available from the U.S. Department of Labor’s toll-free helpline: (877) 282-5627.

For general information on bindery occupations, write to:

► Graphic Communications Conference of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, 1900 L St.NW., Washington, DC 20036-5007.

For information on careers and training programs in printing and the graphic arts, contact:

➤ Graphic Arts Education and Research Foundation, 1899 Preston White Dr., Reston, VA 20191-5468.

Internet: <http://www.makeyourmark.org>

➤ Printing Industries of America/Graphic Arts Technical Foundation, 200 Deer Run Rd., Sewickley, PA 15143.

➤ NPES The Association for Suppliers of Printing Publishing, and Converting Technologies, 1899 Preston White Dr., Reston, VA 20191-4367.

Internet: <http://www.npes.org/education/index.html>