



Work that suits you: Using BLS data to match your preferences

Elka Torpey | February 2018

Everyone has likes and dislikes, even on the job. Maybe you'd be happiest having a regular, predictable schedule. Or perhaps you don't want to lift heavy objects.

Whatever your work preferences, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) has a survey for you. The Occupational Requirements Survey (ORS) can help identify types of jobs that may—or may not—be a good match for your interests and abilities. This new survey highlights some of the conditions and demands that are typical in different occupations. Read on to learn more about the survey and how its data may help you in choosing a career.

A new survey

In 2015, the BLS National Compensation Survey program began collecting occupational requirements data for the ORS. The first estimates were published in 2016 and 2017. BLS collects these data for the Social Security Administration, which plans to use them to help workers with disabilities.

The four categories of data from ORS are:

- Environmental conditions
- Mental and cognitive demands
- Physical demands
- Vocational preparation

The tables in this article illustrate one requirement from each category, showing data by selected occupational groups.

The tables also show median annual wages in the selected groups, using data from the BLS Occupational Employment Statistics survey. Compare these data with \$37,040, the median annual wage for all workers—half made more and half made less than this amount—in 2016. These wage data exclude the self-employed.

When looking at overall wages for a group of occupations, keep in mind that these wages are averages of the occupations in the group; wages for specific occupations may be higher or lower than the average. For example, the sales and related occupations group had a relatively low median wage overall, \$26,590, but occupations such as [wholesale and manufacturing sales representatives for technical and scientific products](#) (\$78,980) had much higher wages.

Environmental conditions

Identified in this category are some of the conditions workers might be exposed to in a job as it's typically performed. These conditions include extreme heat or cold, hazardous contaminants, and outdoor work.

Some people are sensitive to noise, for example. These people might opt for a quiet job in an art museum, rather than a job with the loud intensity of bulldozing work. Table 1 shows selected occupational groups in which workers were, or were not, exposed to loud noises. About 13 percent of all workers were subject to this environmental condition in 2017.

Table 1. Occupational groups with high and low percentages of noise exposure, 2017, and median annual wages, 2016¹



¹ Data are for wage and salary workers only; self-employed workers were not surveyed.
 Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Requirements Survey (requirements) and Occupational Employment Statistics Survey (median annual wage).

The construction and extraction group and the installation, maintenance, and repair group had the highest wages among occupational groups with above-average exposure to loud noises: \$43,610 and \$43,440, respectively.

About half of all workers in construction and extraction occupations were subject to loud noises—the most of any occupational group. If you prefer working in quieter surroundings, you may want to avoid occupations such as [construction equipment operators](#), [carpenters](#), and [welders](#).

Mental and cognitive demands

An occupation's cognitive requirements include the need to interact with others, make decisions, and adapt to changes.

If you prefer to work a consistent schedule, for example, ORS data help to identify occupations that may let you do that—as well as to find those in which your schedule might frequently change. Table 2 shows the percentage of occupational groups in which schedule changes were more common or less common. In 2017, about 48 percent of all workers had jobs with changing schedules.

Table 2. Occupational groups with high and low percentages of schedule changes, 2017, and median annual wages, 2016¹

 High percentages of schedule changes			 Low percentages of schedule changes		
Occupational group	Percentage of workers with schedule changes, 2017	Median annual wage, 2016	Occupational group	Percentage of workers with schedule changes, 2017	Median annual wage, 2016
Protective service	70%	\$38,660	Education, training, and library	26%	\$48,000
Food preparation and serving related	60	20,810	Office and administrative support	32	34,050
Healthcare practitioners and technical	58	63,420	Business and financial operations	38	66,530
Sales and related	57	26,590	Architecture and engineering	39	77,900
Personal care and service	56	22,710	Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance	45	24,700
Transportation and material moving	56	30,730	Management	45	100,790
Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media	56	47,190	Production	45	33,130
Construction and extraction	55	43,610	Legal	46	79,650
Installation, maintenance, and repair	55	43,440	Life, physical, and social science	47	63,340
Healthcare support	52	27,910			

¹ Data are for wage and salary workers only; self-employed workers were not surveyed.
 Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Requirements Survey (requirements) and Occupational Employment Statistics Survey (median annual wage).

A number of the occupational groups with lower-than-average percentages of workers with schedule changes had above-average wages in 2016. Occupations in these higher paying groups also typically require a bachelor's degree or more education.

About 3 out of 4 [security guards](#) had schedule changes—the most of any of the detailed occupations for which there were data in 2017. [Home health aides](#) and [police patrol officers](#) also topped the list.

Occupations in which relatively few workers had schedule changes were [teacher assistants](#), [general office clerks](#), and [elementary school teachers](#).

Physical demands

This category assesses the physical effort generally required to successfully do work-related tasks. It includes requirements such as kneeling, lifting, and carrying.

Maybe you know you don't want to sit all day at work, for example, or maybe you'd prefer not to stand or move around. Table 3 shows, for selected occupational groups, the percentage of the workday in 2017 during which sitting was required. Workers, on average, spent about 40 percent of their day at work sitting.

Table 3. Occupational groups with high and low percentages of sitting, 2017, and median annual wages, 2016¹

High percentages of sitting			Low percentages of sitting		
Occupational group	Percentage of workday that sitting is required, 2017	Median annual wage, 2016	Occupational group	Percentage of workday that sitting is required, 2017	Median annual wage, 2016
Computer and mathematical	84%	\$82,830	Food preparation and serving related	4%	\$20,810
Business and financial operations	81	66,530	Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance	11	24,700
Legal	78	79,650	Construction and extraction	16	43,610
Architecture and engineering	69	77,900	Production	18	33,130
Management	68	100,790	Installation, maintenance, and repair	21	43,440
Office and administrative support	66	34,050	Personal care and service	27	22,710
Community and social service	63	42,990	Healthcare support	27	27,910
Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media	59	47,190	Sales and related	27	26,590
Transportation and material moving	42	30,730	Education, training, and library	35	48,000
			Healthcare practitioners and technical	36	63,420

¹ Data are for wage and salary workers only; self-employed workers were not surveyed.
 Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Requirements Survey (requirements) and Occupational Employment Statistics Survey (median annual wage).

Many of the occupational groups in table 3 include jobs that required sitting for extended lengths of time and also had relatively high wages. The level of education typically required to enter the occupations in these groups is often higher, too, with many employers requiring a bachelor's or higher degree.

In specific occupations for which there are ORS data, [telemarketers](#) spent the largest portion of their day sitting—about 93 percent, on average. [Combined food preparation and serving workers, including fast food workers](#) spent the least, 2 percent.

For a mix of sitting and standing, consider [light truck or delivery services drivers](#), [driver/sales workers](#), and [first-line supervisors of correctional officers](#). Jobs in these occupations required about equal amounts of time sitting and standing or moving around.

Vocational preparation

Data in this category provide information about the education level, work experience, and pre- and post-employment training required to prepare for an occupation.

To qualify for jobs in some occupations, for example, you might need pre-employment training. This type of training may lead to a credential—such as an [educational certificate, license, or certification](#)—or may be available in an [apprenticeship](#). Table 4 shows the prevalence of pre-employment training in selected occupational groups. In 2017, about 28 percent of all workers needed some form of pre-employment training.

Table 4. Occupational groups with high and low percentages of pre-employment training, 2017, and median annual wages, 2016¹

High percentages of pre-employment training			Low percentages of pre-employment training		
Occupational group	Percentage of workers requiring pre-employment training, 2017	Median annual wage, 2016	Occupational group	Percentage of workers requiring pre-employment training, 2017	Median annual wage, 2016
Healthcare practitioners and technical	78%	\$63,420	Office and administrative support	6%	\$34,050
Healthcare support	68	27,910	Building and grounds cleaning and maintenance	8	24,700
Legal	63	79,650	Sales and related	9	26,590
Education, training, and library	62	48,000	Production	11	33,130
Protective service	59	38,660	Computer and mathematical	13	82,830
Personal care and service	44	22,710	Arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media	17	47,190
Transportation and material moving	42	30,730	Architecture and engineering	18	77,900
Community and social service	39	42,990	Food preparation and serving related	18	20,810
Construction and extraction	37	43,610	Business and financial operations	19	66,530
Installation, maintenance, and repair	34	43,440	Management	21	100,790
			Life, physical, and social science	22	63,340

¹ Data are for wage and salary workers only; self-employed workers were not surveyed.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Requirements Survey (requirements) and Occupational Employment Statistics Survey (median annual wage).

As table 4 shows, occupational groups with higher-than-average requirements of pre-employment training had varied wages. These ranged from a high of \$79,650 for legal occupations to a low of \$22,710 for personal care and service occupations.

Healthcare occupations had the highest percentages of workers who required training prior to employment. Many of the occupations in this group have specific licensing or certification requirements, which vary by state. [Licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses](#), [nursing assistants](#), and [registered nurses](#) were among those with the highest percentages of workers who need pre-employment training.

For more information

This article provides an overview of the many types of data available from the ORS. For more, visit the [ORS](#) website. Find summaries of requirements by occupational group at www.bls.gov/ncs/ors/orsprofiles.htm.

You can get detailed descriptions of occupations, including specific work duties, job outlook, and more in the [Occupational Outlook Handbook \(OOH\)](#). Additional wage data are available from the BLS [Occupational Employment Statistics](#) program.

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