



## Chapter One

# The U.S. Postal Service

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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 website at [www.postalwork.net](http://www.postalwork.net) and on [www.usps.com/employment](http://www.usps.com/employment), the official USPS website.

The postal service is huge by any standard, employing over 617,714 workers with an annual budget of \$80 billion. It pays over \$2 billion in salaries and benefits every two weeks to workers in 300 occupations for positions at 33,000 post offices, branches, and stations throughout the United States. Thousands of postal workers are hired yearly to backfill for retirements, transfers, deaths and to replace employees who choose to leave for other reasons. They also hire tens of thousands of casual temporary workers for the holiday mail rush every year.

Starting pay in 2014 for city carrier assistants was \$15.30 per hour, \$31,793 per year. Part Time Flexible (PTF) sales and services/distribution associates earn \$17.88 per hour, mail handler assistants \$14.03 per hour, and Postal Support Employee (PSE) clerks start at \$12.94 per hour. Tractor trailer operators start at \$19 an hour while automotive mechanics start at \$40,124 annually.<sup>1</sup> Mail processing, clerk, and delivery workers are initially hired as supplemental workers with temporary appointments and typically work 40 or more hours per week.

*Adding benefits, overtime, and premiums, the average annual compensation rate for all employees was \$75,614 in 2013.*

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**[www.postalwork.net](http://www.postalwork.net)**  
**[www.usps.com/employment](http://www.usps.com/employment)**

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<sup>1</sup> Beginning salary figures obtained from various national 2014 Post Office job announcements.

The average pay and benefits for all postal employees was \$75,614 per year in 2013.<sup>2</sup> The largest postal service pay system is predominantly for bargaining unit employees. Approximately 90% of career employees are covered by collective bargaining agreements. There is also an Executive Administrative Schedules (EAS) for non-bargaining unit members that pay ranges from \$23,279 up to an authorized maximum of \$120,617.

Applicants now apply for specific job vacancies online instead of testing to get on a local hiring register. Under the postal service's eCareer recruiting program exams are often administered in two parts, an online assessment tool when you first apply and a proctored exam in your local area.

The 473 Delivery, Distribution and Retail Exam, the exam that all mail carriers, clerks and mail handlers must pass, is divided into two parts. The first part is a 90-minute unproctored online assessment (473E). If you pass the initial online assessment with a score of 70 or higher you will be scheduled for a 90-minute 473 proctored test. The proctored exams are contracted out to local testing facilities that provide greater access for applicants.

## **BENEFITS**

Postal employees receive the same general benefits provided to federal employees for the most part. However, USPS employees health care bi-weekly premiums are considerably less than what the competitive civil service must pay.

### **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.

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<sup>2</sup> Comprehensive Financial Statement on Postal Operations, 2013 — 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.

Employees can contribute into a *THRIFT savings 401k plan*. The government matches contributions up to 5 percent. 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](http://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 \$13.73 for PS Grade 3 Step I to \$33.44 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 mail handler positions for 360 calendar days. During Christmas an additional 21 days of employment can be offered to supplemental work force employees. City carrier assistants, mail handler assistants and postal support employees (clerks) can be hired for a period of 360 calendar days and may be rehired after a break in service.

Entrance exams are not required for casual clerk or postmaster relief positions. These positions cannot 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. 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 website at [www.usps.com/employment](http://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 the 473E and 473 entrance exams. Specialties such as mechanic, electronic technician, machinist, and trades must also take and pass a proctored 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. They are rated and hired strictly on their prior work experience and education.

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

- ✓ City Carrier
- ✓ City Carrier Assistant
- ✓ General Clerk
- ✓ Mail Handler
- ✓ Postal Support
- ✓ Rural Carrier
- ✓ Sales and Service Associate

This exam, previously 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 operators, tractor trailer operators*, and highly skilled maintenance positions such as *building equipment mechanic, electronics technician, and general mechanic* to pass entrance exams.

Maintenance mechanics must take the 955 test for their speciality and electronics technicians must complete the same exam's electronics technician group section. The 955 test replaced the 931 and 932 exams that were previously used. An exams list is provided on page 23 and Chapter Four presents sample tests for a seven major occupations other than the 473 exam.

A sample *473 and 473E Examination* is included in Chapter Five. Study tips are included and the test-taking strategies that can help you achieve as high a score as possible.

The 473 examination and completion of forms requires approximately three hours and fifteen minutes to complete. The first half of the exam, the 473-E, is completed online when you apply and a second proctored exam is taken at a local testing facility. Applicants that score between 80% and 100% will be 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

### All Vacancies

All applications are processed online and after you register write down your user name, password and email address. Keep this information handy. You will need it to check on your application and to apply for other jobs. Once you register, apply for a job, and take an exam you will receive a “*Candidate ID Number.*” You are able to apply for other jobs requiring the same exam without retesting if you enter this number when you start a new application. Write this information in the margin of this workbook so you will have it available when needed.

A position announcement is provided for each job vacancy that applicants must read carefully.

When you search for jobs and click on a vacancy in your area you will see a link to the position announcement in the upper right hand corner. **Click on the link and print a copy of the announcement.** Many forgo doing this and regret it later. There is essential information that you may need to apply plus you will find a contact name and number to call if you have problems applying or need to reschedule an exam.



### Positions Requiring Entrance Examinations

When a vacancy exists the postal service advertises the job on its website and you apply for a specific job that will be filled within four to six weeks of the job announcement’s closing date.

To apply for postal positions, first visit [www.postalwork.net/jobs.htm](http://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 website. This site shows screen shots of the official application pages with instructions to help you successfully navigate the *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 up to \$100 or more 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.

Apply online at [www.usps.com/employment](http://www.usps.com/employment). Most libraries offer online access if you don't have a computer at home. 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 a 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 and to improve your chances, apply for all positions that you meet the basic qualifications. To determine your eligibility read the ***position announcement*** that is provided for each job vacancy. Your exam results are valid for up to 6 years provided you have your Candidate ID Number formerly called the Exam History Code when you apply for other jobs.

### **Positions That Don't Require Entrance Exams**

Generally professional and administrative don't require written exams. Typically they are announced (advertised) first within the postal service and postal employees who meet the job qualifications may apply for these openings. If there aren't any qualified internal applicants (called bidders), then the postal service advertises the vacancies to the general public and they 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 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](http://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 website to explore all the available jobs, and review the job classifications list in Chapter Ten.

These job openings will be advertised on the USPS website. 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 for assistance if you lose your paperwork and need them to direct you to the proper office.

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) and online submission must include all key information such as degrees, training, credentials, and detailed work experience. Only the top 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](http://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 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 website at [www.federaljobs.net](http://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 Seven 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. Pay scales for most of the major occupations are available online at [www.postalwork.net/pay\\_scales\\_.htm](http://www.postalwork.net/pay_scales_.htm).

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. You will find General Schedule federal pay schedules posted on [www.federaljobs.net](http://www.federaljobs.net).



POSTAL SERVICE (PS) Full Time Annual Rates (3/8/2014)									
Grades									
Steps	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
BB	35,788	37,003							
AA	36,830	38,035							
A	37,872	39,067	40,597	42,722	44,606	45,488			
B	48,914	40,099	41,869	43,640	45,474	46,382			
C	39,956	41,131	42,841	44,558	46,342	47,276			
D	40,998	42,163	43,813	45,476	47,210	48,170	52,039	55,329	56,567
E	42,040	43,195	44,785	46,394	48,078	49,064	52,708	56,125	57,410
F	43,082	44,277	45,757	47,312	48,946	49,958	53,377	56,921	58,253
G	44,124	45,259	46,729	48,230	49,814	50,852	54,046	57,717	59,096
H	45,166	46,291	47,701	49,148	50,692	51,746	54,715	58,513	59,939
I	44,208	47,323	48,673	50,066	51,550	52,640	55,384	59,309	60,782
J	47,250	48,355	49,645	50,964	52,418	53,534	56,053	50,105	61,625
K	48,292	49,387	50,617	51,902	53,286	54,428	56,722	60,901	62,468
L	49,334	50,419	51,589	52,820	54,154	55,322	57,391	61,697	63,311
M	50,376	51,451	52,561	53,738	55,022	56,216	58,060	62,493	64,154
N	51,419	52,483	53,533	54,656	55,890	57,110	58,729	63,289	64,997
O	452,590	53,515	54,505	55,574	56,758	58,004	59,398	64,085	65,840
P							60,067	64,881	66,683

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) 2014			
EAS Grade	Min / Max	EAS GRADE	Min / Max
1	\$23,279 / \$30,761	15	\$41,392 / \$64,634
2	\$24,041 / \$31,770	16	\$42,861 / \$72,286
3	\$24,831 / \$32,814	17	\$44,764 / \$75,491
4	\$25,834 / \$34,139	18	\$46,729 / \$78,807
5	\$26,693 / \$35,275	19	\$48,942 / \$82,542
6	\$27,658 / \$36,549	20	\$51,598 / \$87,020
7	\$28,789 / \$38,045	21	\$54,105 / \$91,247
8	\$29,945 / \$39,570	22	\$57,321 / \$98,893
9	\$31,114 / \$41,115	23	\$60,446 / \$104,281
10	\$32,261 / \$42,633	24	\$63,439 / \$109,442
11	\$34,003 / \$53,095	25	\$66,592 / \$114,887
12	\$35,634 / \$55,643	26	\$69,915 / \$120,617
13	\$37,296 / \$58,239		
14	\$39,243 / \$61,280		

THE LARGEST POSTAL OCCUPATIONS
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**Occupation**

Accounting Specialist / Tech  
Address Management Specialist  
Auto Technician  
Auto Technician (Lead)  
Bldg. Equipment Mechanic  
Bulk Mail Technician  
Carrier City  
Carrier (Temporary Relief)  
Carrier Technician  
Casual Temporary  
Clerk Special Delivery Services  
Criminal Investigators  
Customer Service Analyst  
Data Collection Technician  
Data Conversion Operator  
Distributions Windows & Markup Clerk  
Electronics Technician  
Flat Sorting Mach. Operator  
Human Resource Specialists  
Laborer Custodial, Custodian  
Mail Handler/Tech/Operator  
Mail Processing Clerk  
Mail Processing Machine Operators  
Maintenance Support Clerk/Tech  
Maintenance Mechanic & MPE  
Motor Vehicle Operator  
Parcel Post Dist-Machine  
PM/Relief/Replacement  
Postal Inspector  
Postal Police  
Postmaster  
Review Clerk  
Rural Carrier Associates  
Rural Delivery Carriers  
Sales Services Associates  
Secretary  
T&A Payroll Clerks  
Tractor Trailer Operator  
Training Technicians  
Transitional Employee