

Overview

These Guidelines are designed to be used by both the publishers and the consumers of career and Occupational information literature. Because career and occupational literature is often an individual's initial (and sometimes only) exposure to a specific occupation or occupational field, it is very important that this information be accurately and comprehensively conveyed to the user. The Guidelines represent the National Career Development Association's (NCDA) views of what constitutes good career and occupational literature. The Association encourages the use of these Guidelines by publishers to ensure quality control in their publications and by those who select and use career and occupational literature to ensure maximum value from their purchases.

Helping individuals obtain, evaluate, and use career and occupational information is within the scope of NCDA's mission to facilitate the career development of individuals. The revision of these Guidelines is one of the services provided by NCDA to encourage the development of accurate and reliable information by publishers, and the informed use of this information by consumers and clients.

The nature of career information has changed considerably in its content and its delivery since NCDA was founded in 1913, as the National Vocational Guidance Association. However, the need for career and vocational information as an important consideration in career planning has remained constant. As recently as 1989, 65% of the adults who participated in the NCDA Gallup Survey indicated that if they could plan their work lives again, they would try to get more information about career choices and options.

In addition to their evaluative use locally, these Guidelines also form the basis for the ratings of current career and occupational literature by the Career Information Review Service of NCDA. These ratings appear in The Career Development Quarterly to assist professionals in their selection of quality career and occupational information literature.

Definition of Terms

The first step in any evaluation process is to determine that all parties concerned are using terms that communicate the same meaning to all. To address this issue of clarity, the following Guidelines have been designed to be used for occupational literature and for career literature. The content and purpose of these two types of literature are closely related but differ in some important aspects. Therefore, the terms occupation, occupational field, career, and career progression have been used in these Guidelines to refer to the specific type of information being discussed. Occupation refers to a specific job, usually indicated by a job title and/or number. Occupational field refers to a group or cluster of related occupations, often but not necessarily requiring similar skills, knowledge, and abilities and sharing similar working conditions. Career is a more encompassing term that includes, but is not limited to, the series of occupations one might expect to hold in the course of his or her working history. Career progression refers to the series of occupations that might be held during one's work history, each involving increasing levels of decision making, responsibility, status, and compensation.

General Guidelines

This section discusses items related to the general preparation and presentation of career and occupational literature.

1. Dating and Revisions

The date of publication should be clearly indicated. Because of rapid changes in employment outlook and earnings, material should be revised at least every three to four years to stay current and accurate. This is particularly important in highly technical and skilled occupations and less a factor in unskilled or semiskilled occupations.

2. Credits

Credits should include (a) publisher, (b) consultants, (c) sponsor, and (d) sources of any statistical data. Photographs and original artwork should be accompanied by the name of the photographer/artist, photographic outfit, and copyright mark (if any).

3. Accuracy of Information

Information should be accurate and free from distortion caused by self-serving bias, sex stereotyping, or dated resources. Whenever possible, resources over five years old should be avoided. Information should be secured from and/or reviewed by knowledgeable sources within the occupation, the occupational field, or career research. Reviewers should be selected to reflect different viewpoints germane to an occupation (e.g., business and labor) and be trained in the evaluation process. Reviewers must not use the literature to promote their own concerns or viewpoints. Data such as earnings and employment projections should be based on current, reliable, and comprehensive research.

4. Format

The information should be conveyed in a clear, concise, and interesting manner. Although information from the Content Guidelines should appear in all publications, publishers are encouraged to vary the manner of presentation for the sake of stimulation and appeal. A standard style and format for grammar should be adopted and utilized throughout the document.

5. Vocabulary

The vocabulary of the information should be appropriate to the target group. Career and occupational information is used by people of varying ages and abilities. Information designed for a specific age range or for any other clearly identifiable group should be clearly identified as such. Information designed for broader use should be comprehensible to younger persons but suitable in style for adults. Technical terminology or jargon should be either fully explained or avoided. The use of nonsexist language is essential.

6. Use of Information

The intended purpose, the target audience, and the potential use of the information should be clearly identified in the introduction to the material. Reviews should specify the intended audience, such as elementary schools, middle/junior high schools, high schools, vocational schools, community college, colleges/universities, employment/training programs, rehabilitation agencies, correctional agencies, libraries, or specify other audiences. Persons often do not have the opportunity to thoroughly review materials until after the materials have been purchased. The authors and publishers should help potential purchasers determine whether the materials present useful information.

7. Bias and Stereotyping

Care should be taken in all publications to eliminate bias and stereotyping against persons with a disability, or based on gender, race, social status, ethnicity, age, or religion. Job title and information should be bias-free. Particular care should be taken to ensure the use of gender-free language. If graphics are used, people of different races, ages, sexes, and physical abilities should be portrayed at various occupational levels. Where applicable, data, information, or resources relevant to equal opportunity for women, minorities, or persons with a disability should be included.

8. Graphics

Graphic displays, when used, should enhance the value of the narrative information. Pictures should be current and portray individuals engaged in activities primary to the occupation or unique to it. Again, the importance of portraying individuals of different sexes, races, ages, and physical abilities in a variety of roles cannot be overemphasized.

This section discusses guideline items that deal with the content of information on occupations and/or occupational fields. Reviews of nonoccupational materials will rely primarily on the previously discussed criteria.

1. Duties and Nature of the Work

The career and occupational literature should describe in a clear and interesting fashion: (a) the purpose of the work, (b) the activities of the worker, (c) the skills, knowledge, interests, and abilities necessary to perform the work, and (d) any specializations commonly practiced in the occupation. Literature that describes occupational fields should also include: (a) the overall function and importance of the field, (b) the variety of occupations available, (c) the common skills, knowledge, interests, and abilities shared by members of the field or industry, and (d) contrasts among the various occupations represented in the field.

2. Work Setting and Conditions

The portrayal of the work setting and conditions should include a description of the physical and mental activities and the work environment. Where applicable, the information should include the full range of possible settings in which the work may be performed. The range of typical physical and mental activities should be described. Environmental characteristics should include the physical surroundings, the psychological environment, and the social environment. In addition to these characteristics, other conditions related to the performance of the work, such as time requirements or travel requirements, should be described.

Aspects of the work that might be regarded as undesirable are as crucial to realistic decision making as those that are generally considered desirable; therefore, care should be taken to make descriptions as comprehensive as possible. Because different individuals may view a given work condition as either positive or negative, the descriptions should be free of the author's bias and present a balanced picture. The variety and similarity of settings should be discussed. Specific geographic locations related to employment in the occupational field should be included.

3. Preparation Required

The preparation required for entrance into the occupation, or into various levels of an occupation, should be clearly stated. The length and type of training required and the skills, knowledge, abilities, and interests of successful students or trainees should be indicated. Typical methods of financial support during training should be included. Alternative means of obtaining the necessary preparation or experience should be stated where applicable. Readers should be informed of any preferred employer selection criteria over and above minimal preparation requirements. In literature that describes a range of occupations in a career progression, the various levels of preparation required for employment in each successive occupation should also be highlighted.

4. Special Requirements or Considerations

Bonafide physical requirements: Bonafide physical requirements that are necessary for entrance into a particular occupation should be included. Only bonafide occupational qualifications should be addressed. Consideration should be given to addressing job accommodations that can and are legally required to open opportunity to all the members of our society.

Licensing, certifications or membership requirements: Licenses, certifications, or memberships in unions or professional societies may also be required for some occupations. These requirements should be indicated and the process necessary for achieving any of these requirements should be described.

Personal Criteria: The listing of qualities desired of any worker (e.g., honesty, dependability) is not particularly valuable to individuals attempting to differentiate various career possibilities. On occasion it may be useful and appropriate to consider personal criteria, if available, regarding unique skills, knowledge, mental and physical abilities, and interests. The basis for the information should be clearly identified.

Social and Psychological Factors: Participation in an occupation has important effects on the lifestyle of the individual (and his or her family), and these effects should receive appropriate consideration in the presentation of information. When these factors are determined to be appropriate to the use of the material, the source of the information presented on social and psychological factors should be clearly identified.

5. Methods of Entry

The variety of means for typical entry into the occupation should be indicated, as well as any preferred avenues for entry. Alternative approaches should be described where applicable-particularly for those occupations where experience can be substituted for education and other formal preparation or where education can be substituted for work experience.

6. Earnings and Other Benefits

Current data on entry wages, average earnings and the typical range of earnings in the occupation should be presented. In addition, variations in average earnings by geographic region should be reported if available. Fringe benefits have become an increasingly important aspect of total compensation, and ample coverage of both typical benefits and those that are unique to the occupation or occupational field should be given.

7. Usual Advancement Possibilities

The typical and alternative career progressions related to the occupational field should be presented. The supplementary skills, knowledge, and abilities necessary for advancement and the alternative means for acquiring them should be indicated. Issues such as the role of job change, availability of training, and seniority should be discussed as they pertain to advancement in the particular occupational field.

8. Employment Outlook

Statements concerning the employment outlook should be realistic and include both the short-range and the long-range outlook for the occupation and occupational field. Mention of the past record of the occupation may be useful in completing its outlook picture. A broad range of factors that may have an impact on the employment outlook, including economic, demographic, technological, geographic, social, and political factors, should be considered. Current U.S. Department of Labor or other expert research should be consulted. Realism is essential, but readers should not be discouraged from entering highly competitive fields if they have the ability, interest, and motivation to succeed.

9. Opportunities for Experience and Exploration

Literature should list opportunities for part-time and summer employment; opportunities for internships, apprenticeships, and cooperative work programs; and opportunities for volunteer work. Pertinent clubs and organizations, as well as school-related activities and programs, should be described. Publishers are encouraged to give sufficient attention to this heading because these career-related possibilities can be acted on immediately and thus have high motivational value.

10. Related Occupations

Occupations that share similar requirements on aptitudes, interest patterns, or work environments with the occupation under consideration should be listed. In addition to its value in early exploration, this information is particularly useful to adults considering lateral occupational changes.

11. Sources of Additional Information

Reference should be made to additional sources of information such as professional or trade organizations and associations, specific books or pamphlets, journals or trade publications, audiovisual materials, and literature available from public agencies. For students, the assistance of school guidance counselors or college career counselors is recommended.