

# Assembler (Light Industry)

## What is the work like?

Assemblers work in factories, often on assembly lines, putting parts (known as components) together to form completed products or parts of other products.

Completed products may include small consumer items, such as toys, hair dryers, watches or lamps. Larger products may include furniture, refrigerators, dishwashers or cars, often requiring assemblers to work with a conveyor system. This involves adding components before the product moves on to another assembler to complete the next stage.

Some assemblers work with electronics, attaching microchips and wires or inserting components into electronic circuit boards. These are then used in a wide range of products, including:

- appliances, such as computers, televisions, DVD players, mobile phones, food blenders, washing machines and vehicle on-board electronic control units (ECUs)
- scientific, medical and aeronautical equipment used in aircraft, satellites and missiles.

Tasks vary according to the type of products being made, but may include:

- adding components in the right order
- following diagrams and instructions
- using tools, such as spanners, pliers, tweezers, drills and electric screwdrivers
- soldering to precise standards
- using components, such as bolts and screws
- using adhesives, solder wire, staples and cable ties
- using microscopes for detailed work
- testing items and checking quality
- packing products or putting them in the correct area for collection.

Assemblers often sit or stand next to a conveyer belt. They pick up an item on the belt, add the appropriate components and put the item back on the belt. This method requires assemblers to work at a similar speed to their colleagues. In other organisations, assemblers sit or stand at a bench and assemble items independently. The work can be repetitive and may involve handling tiny components.

In some factories, particularly those producing electrical and electronic goods, assemblers operate and monitor computer-controlled machinery that assembles products.

## Hours and environment

Assemblers usually work between 37 and 40 hours a week. Many employers operate a shift system to cover days, evenings, nights and weekends. Overtime and part-time work may be

available.

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Assemblers spend most of their working day sitting or standing. They usually wear protective clothing such as overalls, and in certain environments may wear head coverings, protective glasses, boots and gloves. The work may involve some lifting and carrying.

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## **Salary and other benefits**

These figures are only a guide, as actual rates of pay may vary, depending on the employer and where people live.

- Salaries may start at around £12,000 a year.
- With experience, this may rise to £15,000.
- Some assemblers may earn up to £20,000.

In some companies, assemblers receive a basic salary. In others, they are paid a piece rate, which is a set amount for each article assembled. Workers may receive bonuses for meeting or exceeding targets.

There may be extra payments for shift work.

## **Skills and personal qualities**

Light industry assemblers should:

- be good with their hands
- have practical skills
- be able to understand and follow instructions and diagrams
- work quickly, methodically and accurately
- be able to work with a minimum of supervision and as part of a team
- have good concentration for carrying out repetitive tasks

- be comfortable using tools
- have computer skills, if working with computerised equipment
- have good eyesight and normal colour vision for some jobs (in electronic assembly work components may be colour coded).

## Interests

It is important to:

- enjoy practical work
- be interested in the way products are made.

## Getting in

Around 400,000 assemblers are employed by manufacturing companies throughout the UK. In some places of work they may not be employed directly, but through an agency at an agreed daily rate.

In many modern factories, machines undertake assembly work that was previously performed by employees. As a result, there may be fewer opportunities for unskilled or semi-skilled assemblers.

Vacancies are advertised in local and national newspapers, at Jobcentre Plus offices, local Connexions centres and recruitment consultancies.

### Entry routes

It is possible to become an assembler without formal educational qualifications, but employers may prefer some key skills qualifications or GCSEs. Useful subjects include English, maths and practical subjects, such as engineering and technology.

As well as attending an interview, candidates may be asked to sit a practical test to check they are good with their hands and have the ability to assemble parts quickly and accurately.

The Diplomas in engineering and manufacturing and product design may be relevant for this type of work. Apprenticeships may be available.

Apprenticeships and Advanced Apprenticeships provide structured training with an employer and pay at least £95 per week from August 2009. A recent survey found that the average wage for apprentices was £170 a week. Entry to Employment (e2e) can help to prepare those who are not yet ready for an Apprenticeship. In addition, Young Apprenticeships may be available for 14-16-year-olds. To find out more, see the Apprenticeship page on this website, contact the local Connexions service or visit: [www.apprenticeships.org.uk](http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk).

## Training

New recruits usually receive induction training, where they learn about health and safety, staff welfare and conditions of employment.

Most training is on the job, under the supervision of a training officer, supervisor or experienced colleague. Workers are taught how to use tools and machinery and to read assembly diagrams. They may also learn how to check the quality of finished items.

Apprentices usually attend college on day or block release. They may work towards:

- NVQ Level 1 and 2 in performing engineering operations (electrical/electronic/control maintenance)
- NVQ Levels 1 and 2 in performing manufacturing operations
- NVQ Levels 2 and 3 in electrical assembly or installation.

Workers receive additional training if new tools, machinery or working methods are introduced.

## Getting on

Experienced assemblers may be promoted to chargehand, team leader or supervisor posts. There may also be opportunities to move into other areas of work, including distribution and quality control.

## Further information

Diploma in Engineering. Engineering Diploma Development Partnershipc/o Semta, 2nd Floor, Weston House, 246 High Holborn, London WC1V 7EX. 020 7269 9840. Website: [www.engineeringdiploma.com](http://www.engineeringdiploma.com)

Diploma in Manufacturing and Product Design. Email: [enquiries@manufacturingdiploma.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@manufacturingdiploma.co.uk)  
Website: [www.manufacturingdiploma.co.uk](http://www.manufacturingdiploma.co.uk)

Engineering Connections, Reddings Lane, Tyseley, Birmingham, West Midlands B11 3ET. 0800 917 1617. Website: [www.apprentices.co.uk](http://www.apprentices.co.uk)

The Engineering and Technology Board, 2nd Floor, Weston House, 246 High Holborn, London WC1V 7EX. 020 3206 0400. Website: [www.eteachb.co.uk](http://www.eteachb.co.uk)

Enginuity, Engineering and Technology Careers. Website: [www.enginuity.org.uk](http://www.enginuity.org.uk)

The Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET), Michael Faraday House, Six Hills Way, Stevenage, Herts SG1 2AY. 01438 313311. Website: [www.theiet.org](http://www.theiet.org)

Scenta Limited, 2nd Floor, Weston House, 246 High Holborn, London WC1V 7EX. Website: [www.scenta.co.uk](http://www.scenta.co.uk)

Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies Alliance (SEMTA), 14 Upton Road, Watford, Hertfordshire WD18 0JT. 01923 238441. Website: [www.semta.org.uk](http://www.semta.org.uk)

Women's Engineering Society, The IET, Michael Faraday House, Six Hills Way, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG1 2AY. 01438 765506. Website: [www.wes.org.uk](http://www.wes.org.uk)

## Further reading

NVQ Engineering: Level 2: Electrical Option Units - Longman

(Some may be priced)

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