

Communication Sciences

Includes:

- Audiologist
- Speech-language pathologist

Audiologist



Career Description

Audiologists are professionals who work with people that exhibit hearing, balance, and related ear problems. They examine individuals of all ages and identify those with the symptoms of hearing loss and other auditory, balance, and related neural problems. They then assess the nature and extent of the problems and help the individuals manage them. Using audiometers, computers, and other testing devices, they measure the loudness at which a person begins to hear sounds, the ability to distinguish between sounds, and the impact of hearing loss or balance problems on an individual's daily life. Audiologists interpret these results and may coordinate them with medical, educational, and psychological information to make a diagnosis and determine a course of treatment. Audiologists must effectively communicate diagnostic test results, interpretation, and proposed treatment in a manner easily understood to patients/clients and their families/caregivers.

Hearing disorders can result from a variety of causes, including trauma at birth, viral infections, genetic disorders, exposure to loud noise, certain medications, or aging. Treatment may include examining and cleaning the ear canal, fitting and dispensing hearing aids, fitting and tuning cochlear implants, and providing aural rehabilitation. Aural rehabilitation emphasizes counseling on adjusting to hearing loss, training on the use of hearing instruments, and teaching communication strategies for use in a variety of listening environments. Audiologists also may recommend, fit, and dispense personal or large area amplification systems and alerting devices.

Some audiologists specialize in work with the elderly, children, or hearing-impaired individuals who need special therapy programs. Others develop and implement ways to protect workers' ears from on-the-job injuries. They measure noise levels in workplaces and conduct hearing protection programs in factories, as well as in schools and communities.

A graduate degree is necessary to practice as an audiologist in most states. A doctoral degree (AuD, ScD, PhD) is required for work in some areas.

Audiologists specialize in the study of:

- Normal and impaired hearing
 - Prevention of hearing loss
 - Identification and assessment of hearing and balance problems
 - Rehabilitation of persons with hearing and balance disorders
- In addition, audiologists may:
- Prepare future professionals in colleges and universities
 - Manage agencies, clinics, or private practices
 - Engage in research to enhance knowledge about normal hearing, and the evaluation and treatment of hearing disorders
 - Design hearing instruments and testing equipment



Employment Characteristics

Audiologists may work in a wide range of settings, including schools, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, skilled nursing facilities, government health facilities, community clinics, geriatric facilities, health maintenance organizations (HMOs), public health departments, research laboratories, private practice, or industrial corporations.



Salary

Salaries of audiologists depend on educational background, specialty, and experience, along with the geographical location and type of setting in which they work. The median salary range in 2006 for audiologists certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) was \$65,000. Persons in supervisory positions—for example, in administration and management—may earn over \$85,000 per year. While the 2006 median starting salary for certified audiologists with 1 to 3 years' experience was \$52,000, the median salary for certified audiologists with clinical doctorate degrees was \$68,000, as compared to \$90,000 for those with research doctorate degrees. Good benefits packages, such as insurance programs and leave, are usually available to audiologists. For more information, see www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary, or refer to salary information on ASHA's Web site at <http://tinyurl.com/5m9qab>.



Employment Outlook

Employment of audiologists is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through the year 2016 (www.bls.gov/oco/ocos085.htm#outlook). Because hearing loss is strongly associated with aging, rapid growth in the population age 55 and older will cause the number of persons with hearing impairment to increase markedly. Members of the baby boom generation are now entering middle age, when the possibility of neurological disorders and associated hearing impairments increases. Medical advances are also improving the survival rate of premature infants and trauma and stroke victims, who then need assessment and possible treatment. Many states now require that all newborns be screened for hearing loss and receive appropriate early intervention services. Opportunities in research and higher education are expected to increase as baby boomers currently in these positions retire and a clinical doctoral degree is required as the minimum educational requirement for new clinicians. Greater awareness of the importance of early identification and diagnosis of speech, language, and hearing disorders also will increase employment.



Education Programs

Approximately 71 universities in the United States offer graduate education programs in audiology at the clinical doctoral level that prepare students for entry into independent professional practice. Although master's degree

programs had been the prominent degree programs for preparation for professional practice since 1965, clinical doctoral degree programs have replaced these master's programs in the US. Most programs can be identified as Doctor of Audiology programs or AuD programs; some clinical doctoral programs have chosen to use other degree designations such as Clinical PhD or Doctor of Science (ScD). Some advanced degree programs are available for further study with an emphasis on clinical issues or in research. *Note:* As of January 1, 2007, the Council on Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology (CAA) no longer accredits master's level programs in audiology. Few master's programs in audiology are available.

Length. Most clinical doctoral programs are designed to be completed in 4 years, including summers, for full-time study and include intensive clinical training designed to meet requirements for state licensure and national certification; the few remaining master's degree programs in audiology take at least 2 years, including summers.

Prerequisites. Course work in the biological sciences, physical sciences, mathematics, and behavioral or social sciences is required for graduate study. Undergraduate programs in communication sciences and disorders will provide a background in linguistics, phonetics, psychology, normal speech, and language development, and introductory course work in audiology. Excellent oral and written communication skills are expected.

Curriculum. Graduate programs should offer a curriculum to allow a student to meet the knowledge and skills necessary to enter independent practice in audiology. A typical graduate program of study includes courses in genetics; normal and abnormal communication development; auditory, balance, and neural systems assessment and treatment; diagnosis and treatment; pharmacology; and ethics. Opportunities to work in a variety of different clinical settings and with a broad range of clients are provided during the graduate program of study. In addition, clinical doctoral programs include the equivalent of 12 months full-time clinical experience as part of the degree program.



Licensure and Certification

In most states, audiologists must comply with state regulatory (licensure) standards and/or have state teacher certification to practice in specific settings. Earning a graduate degree, including completion of a 12-month clinical experience as part of the graduate program, and passage of a national examination are typically required to achieve the credentials. Individuals should contact the appropriate state licensure board or teacher certification agency for more information about requirements. ASHA offers the Certificate of Clinical Competence in Audiology (CCC-A), a nationally recognized credential that offers certificate holders ease in qualifying for state credentials because those requirements are similar or identical to ASHA's CCC requirements, recognition as a "highest qualified provider" of audiology services for reimbursement, and increased opportunities for employment or promotion, as certain positions in hospitals, educational programs, or private practices may require ASHA certification. In 2012, a doctoral degree will be required by ASHA to award certification in audiology; further, some states already require a clinical doctoral degree for licensure.



Inquiries

For information about a specific program, contact the director of the audiology program in care of the institution listed. Program information can be accessed on ASHA's Web site at: www.asha.org/students/academic/EdFind.

For additional information about the professions or program accreditation, contact:
 American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)
 2200 Research Blvd.
 Rockville, MD 20850
 800-498-2071
www.asha.org