

Speech-Language Pathologist



Career Description

Speech-language pathologists are professionals educated in the study of human communication, its development, and its disorders. Speech-language pathologists work with people who cannot make speech sounds or cannot make them clearly; those with speech rhythm and fluency problems, such as stuttering; people with voice quality problems, such as inappropriate pitch or harsh voice; those with problems understanding and producing language; those who wish to improve their communication skills by modifying an accent; those with cognitive communication impairments, such as attention, memory, and problem-solving disorders; and those with hearing loss who use hearing aids or cochlear implants, in order to develop auditory skills and improve communication. They also work with people who have swallowing difficulties.

Speech and language difficulties can result from a variety of causes, including stroke, brain injury or deterioration, developmental delays, cerebral palsy, cleft palate, voice pathology, mental retardation, hearing impairment, or emotional problems. Speech-language pathologists use written and oral tests, as well as special instruments, to diagnose the nature and extent of impairment and to record and analyze speech, language, and swallowing irregularities. For individuals with little or no speech capability, speech-language pathologists may select augmentative or alternative communication methods, including automated devices and sign language, and teach their use. They help patients develop, or recover, reliable communication skills so patients can fulfill their educational, vocational, and social roles.

Speech-language pathologists often work with education and other health care professionals, such as teachers, physicians, social workers, and psychologists, to evaluate and treat clients. They counsel individuals and their families concerning communication disorders and how to cope with the stress and misunderstanding that often accompany them. They also work with family members to recognize and change behavior patterns that impede communication and treatment and show them communication-enhancing techniques to use at home.

A graduate degree is required to work in most settings as a speech-language pathologist. A doctoral degree (PhD) is preferred in some career paths, such as college teaching, research, and private practice.

Working with an understanding of the full range of human communication and its disorders, speech-language pathologists:

- Evaluate and diagnose speech, language, and swallowing disorders in individuals of all ages, from infants to the elderly
- Treat speech, language, and swallowing disorders

In addition, speech-language pathologists may:

- Prepare future professionals in colleges and universities
- Engage in research to enhance knowledge about human communication processes and investigate behavioral patterns associated with communication disorders



Employment Characteristics

Speech-language pathologists may work in a wide range of settings, including schools, universities, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, skilled nursing facilities,

community clinics, geriatric facilities, home health care services, and public health departments, or in private practice.



Salary

Salaries of speech-language pathologists depend on educational background, specialty, and experience, along with the geographical location and type of setting in which they work. According to the ASHA 2006 Schools Survey Salary Report, the median salary for ASHA-certified speech-language pathologists was \$52,131 for those employed on an academic year (ie, 9-10 month) basis and \$57,000 for those on a calendar year (ie, 11-12 month). The 2006 median starting salary for certified speech-language pathologists in school settings with 1 to 3 years' experience was \$40,041 for an academic year appointment. The median calendar year salary for management positions was \$80,000. According to the ASHA 2005 Health Care Survey Salary Report, the median salary for ASHA-certified speech-language pathologists was \$60,000. The 2005 median starting salary for certified speech-language pathologists in health care settings with 1 to 3 years' experience was \$52,694. The median calendar year salary for management positions was \$72,985. Good benefits packages, such as insurance programs and leave, are usually available to speech-language pathologists.

Refer to Section IV, Table 5 of this Directory for more information, or see www.ama-assn.org/go/hpsalary.



Employment Outlook

Employment of speech-language pathologists is expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through the year 2014 (www.bls.gov/oco/ocos099.htm#outlook). More frequent recognition of problems in preschool and school-age children by teachers and parents, combined with the increased numbers of older citizens, and medical advances, has created a growing need for speech and language services. Additionally, opportunities for employment in research and higher education are expected to increase as baby boomers currently in these positions retire. Clinical opportunities will be especially strong for those with bilingual and multicultural expertise. There are shortages of qualified personnel in some areas of the country, especially in inner city, rural, and less populated areas. Job opportunities in medically related areas are expected to grow at an above average rate. Although competition for positions in some areas is keen, the potential for private practice and contract work is increasing rapidly. Many states now require that all newborns be screened for hearing loss and receive appropriate early intervention services. Greater awareness of the importance of early identification and diagnosis of speech, language, swallowing, and hearing disorders will also increase employment opportunities.



Educational Programs

Approximately 245 universities in the United States offer graduate education programs in speech-language pathology that prepare students for entry into practice.

Length. Full-time study usually takes at least 2 years, including summers, to complete a master's degree program in speech-lan-

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guage pathology. In addition, most agencies require a 9- to 12-month postgraduate clinical experience to fulfill credentialing requirements.

Prerequisites. Course work in the biological sciences, physical sciences, mathematics, and behavioral or social sciences are 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 speech-language pathology. 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 practice in speech-language pathology. A typical graduate program of study includes course content in normal and abnormal communication development; diagnostic and treatment procedures, articulation, expressive and receptive language, voice disorders, fluency, swallowing, and ethics. Opportunities to work in a variety of different clinical settings and with a diverse range of clients should be provided during the graduate program of study.



Licensure and Certification

In most states, speech-language pathologists must comply with state regulatory (licensure) standards and/or have state teacher certification to practice in specific settings. A graduate degree, completion of a 9- to

12-month clinical experience, 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 Speech-Language Pathology (CCC-SLP), 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 speech-language services for reimbursement, and increased opportunities for employment or promotion, as certain positions in hospitals, educational programs, or private practices may require ASHA certification.



Inquiries

For information about a specific program, write to the director of the speech-language pathology program in care of the institution listed.

For additional information about the professions or academic program accreditation, contact:

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)
2200 Research Boulevard
Rockville, MD 20850
800 498-2071
www.asha.org