

FACT SHEET: SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY

*Adapted from the U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Outlook Handbook
<http://www.bls.gov/oco/>*

NATURE OF THE WORK

Speech-language pathologists are professionals concerned with evaluation, treatment, and research in human communication and its disorders. They treat speech and language disorders and work with individuals of all ages, from infants to the elderly. They diagnose and evaluate speech problems such as stuttering, articulation, and voice disorders, or language problems such as aphasia & delayed language development, and related disorders such as dysphagia. They design and carry out comprehensive treatment plans to achieve the following:

- Help individuals learn correct production of speech sounds
- Assist with developing proper control of the vocal and respiratory systems for correct voice production
- Assist children and adolescents with language problems such as understanding and giving directions, answering and asking questions, understanding and using English grammar, using appropriate social language and conveying ideas to others
- Assist individuals who stutter to increase the amount of fluent speech
- Assist individuals who have had strokes or suffered other brain trauma relearn language and speech skills
- Help individuals to use augmentative and assistive systems of communication
- Counsel individuals with speech and language disorders and their families or caregivers to understand their disorder and to communicate more effectively in educational, social, and vocational settings
- Advise individuals and the community on how to prevent speech and language disorders

Although speech and language professionals work closely with teachers, physicians, psychologists, social workers, rehabilitation counselors, and other members of an interdisciplinary team, they are autonomous and do not work under direct medical supervision.

In addition to clinical applications focusing on the diagnosis and treatment of communication disorders, speech-language pathologists may also train other professionals in colleges and universities; administer or manage agencies, clinics, or private practices; engage in academic, laboratory, or medically related research to enhance knowledge about human communication processes; develop new methods and equipment to test and evaluate problems; establish more effective treatment programs; and investigate behavioral patterns associated with communication problems.

WORK SITES AND CONDITIONS

Speech-language pathologists typically work in various settings such as public and private schools, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, nursing care facilities, community clinics, colleges and universities, private practice, state and local health departments, state and federal government agencies, home health agencies (home care), long-term care facilities, adult daycare centers, centers for persons with developmental disabilities, and research laboratories.

Facilities in most school systems and established clinics are comfortable and adequately equipped, as are most facilities for research, colleges, and private practice. Since speech and hearing services are a vital part of total health care and the educational system, the number of work sites is expanding. Because of the increasing demand for these services, work schedules may be heavy. An additional challenge is the

constant need to update knowledge through educational experiences and reading professional journals. These challenges are balanced by the satisfaction of contributing to the quality of life of adults and children and facilitating the vital need of persons to communicate effectively.

EARNINGS

Salaries of speech-language pathologists depend on their educational background, specialty, and experience, along with the geographic location and type of setting in which they work. Median annual earnings of speech-language pathologists were about \$47,000 in 2000, with a range from about \$30,000 to \$70,000. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of speech-language pathologists in 2000 were as follows:

Hospitals	\$49,960
Offices of other health practitioners	\$47,170
Elementary and secondary schools	\$43,710

Good benefits packages, including insurance programs and paid leave, are usually available in most positions.

SIZE OF THE PROFESSION AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

There are more than 60,000 ASHA-certified speech-language pathologists. These individuals hold many major positions in clinical, academic, and research fields. There are an estimated 42,000 additional individuals who are providing services in the profession.

The future of the speech-language pathology profession appears excellent. More frequent recognition of problems in preschool and school-age children by teachers and parents, combined with the increasing numbers of older citizens, has created a growing need for speech and language services. There are shortages of qualified personnel in some areas of the country, especially in inner city and rural 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.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

To enter this career, one must have an interest in helping people, and the sensitivity, personal warmth, and perspective to be able to interact with the person who has a communication problem. Scientific aptitude, patience, emotional stability, tolerance, and persistence are necessary, as well as resourcefulness and imagination. Other essential traits include a commitment to work cooperatively with others and the ability to communicate effectively orally and in writing.

During high school, prospective speech-language pathologists should take courses in biology, physics, social sciences, English, and mathematics, as well as in public speaking, language, and psychology. On the undergraduate level, a strong liberal arts focus is recommended, with course work in areas such as linguistics, phonetics, anatomy, psychology, human development, biology, and physiology. The work of a speech-language pathologist is further enhanced by graduate education, which is mandatory in most work settings. Most speech-language pathologists are also required to obtain the ASHA Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC) which involves the completion of a master's degree, a 9-month, full-time clinical fellowship year, and a passing score on a national examination. For college teaching and research positions, a Ph.D. degree is desirable.