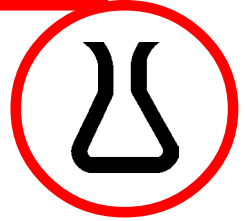


Speech-Language Pathologists



Occupational Brief Title Codes:

- D.O.T.: 076.107-010
- G.O.E.: 02.03.04
- S.O.C.: 29.1127.00
- O*NET™: 29-1127.00
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- H.O.C.: SAI

Work Classification Based Related

D.O.T. Occupations:

- Art Therapists
- Audiologists
- Kinesiotherapists
- Music Therapists
- Occupational Therapists
- Orientation and Mobility Therapists
- Physical Therapists
- Respiratory Care Workers

Interests Based Related

G.O.E. Occupations:

- Acupuncturists
- Chiropractors
- Naturopathic Physicians
- Optometrists

Skills Based Related

O*NET Occupations:

- Health Educators
- Occupational Therapists
- Physical Therapists
- Recreational Therapists
- Respiratory Therapists

Noteworthy Quote:

"I feel that it is especially rewarding to be able to make a substantial contribution with a very diverse caseload. In the case of those born with a craniofacial disorder like a cleft, speech pathology services can have a huge impact on the quality of life. Assisting those at the other end of the spectrum, who may require help in adjusting their voice production technique to avoid vocal problems in performance is also a valuable pursuit. In private practice, I can choose my caseload composition and size to suit my lifestyle."

—Ross Barnes, Speech-Language Pathologists, Gainesville, Florida

Speech-language pathologists (ˈspeech ˈlan-guage paˈthol-o-gists) perform assessments of patients to identify and interpret speech, language, communication, voice, and related disorders. They work with people to help improve speech and language skills and cognitive communication impairments.

Speech-language pathologists help the more than fourteen million Americans who have speech or language disabilities. Each year 85,000 Americans lose the ability to use speech and language because of a stroke. About 9,000 Americans each year have their larynx (voice box) removed because of cancer. Language disorders affect 2-3 percent of preschoolers and about one percent of school-aged children.

A speech or language disability can interfere with education, social life, and the means of livelihood. Children who cannot speak well cannot take part fully in class or in play with other children. Many with a speech or language disability cannot convey their ideas, thoughts, needs, and wants to others.

There are many causes of speech and language disabilities. Some are the result of physical causes. Others may come from mental or emotional disabilities. For many speech and language disabilities specific causes are not known. Some persons cannot make certain sounds. Some cannot distinguish between sounds. Persons with a cleft palate, cerebral palsy, or a hearing loss may not speak clearly.

Speech-language pathologists do not always know the causes of these disabilities and the specific measures needed to treat them successfully. These professionals may work closely with teachers, physicians, psychologists, social workers, rehabilitation counselors, audiologists, and other professionals. They do



Speech-language pathologists help individuals develop control of their voice and breathing mechanisms in order to produce correct speech sounds.

Photo by Amy Elliott

not, however, work under direct medical supervision. They are independent, self-directed professionals.

Work Performed

Speech-language pathologists work with individuals of all ages from infants to senior citizens. They work with individuals who cannot make speech sounds or cannot make them clearly. They work with people who have rhythm and fluency problems, such as stuttering. Some people have an inappropriate pitch or a harsh voice. Others are unable to understand and produce language.

Speech-language pathologists also engage in preventive activities to inhibit or slow the onset and development of communication disorders and in the treatment of people with swallowing difficulty.

Speech-language pathologists conduct screening programs to identify persons who have a speech or communication disorder. They then assess the extent of impairment. They give tests to measure vocabulary, ability to make certain sounds, and language development. They obtain and analyze samples of conversational speech in different speaking situations. They may use special instruments to measure and record irregularities in speech patterns. They use picture cards, tape recorders, computers and written tests.

For individuals with little or no speech, speech-language pathologists use other communication systems such as sign language or automated devices.

After speech-language pathologists evaluate a disorder, they plan and carry out a program of treatment. The plan describes the communication disorder, outlines proposed kinds of treatments and procedures, and gives both short-term and long-term communication goals.

Speech-language pathologists may use their familiarity with other cognitive or emotional difficulties to refer clients to specialists who treat patients with mental or emotional disabilities.

In the course of treatment speech-language pathologists monitor the progress of the client. They adjust the program according to the client's response to treatment.

Speech-language pathologists help individuals develop control of their voice and breathing mechanisms in order to produce correct speech sounds. They may show individuals how to use assistive devices such as a computer or picture board in order to communicate.

Speech-language pathologists may teach their clients how to make certain sounds, or how to change the pitch or quality of their voice. They may help patients learn new ways of using their vocal cords, lips, or other mechanisms of speech. They may, for instance, teach clients who have had their larynx removed how to produce speech sounds with the esophagus.

Speech-language pathologists counsel individuals, and their families, to help them understand and cope with stress and misunderstanding that often go with communication

disorders. They counsel family members to help them recognize and change behavior patterns that interfere with communication and treatment. They may show family members techniques to improve communication at home.

Speech-language pathologists may specialize. Some may work with persons who have aphasia, which is a language disorder caused by an injury to the cortex of the brain. Others may work with individuals whose speech is affected by a muscular paralysis, or those with a structural abnormality of a speech organ, such as a cleft palate.

Since a speech-language disability is often associated with hearing loss, speech-language pathologists often work with audiologists. These specialists treat individuals with hearing disorders. Many individuals have the physical ability to speak, but have never heard the human voice using sounds to communicate. Therefore, they have no pattern or example to copy in making sounds for speech.

Many speech-language pathologists work with children. They do screenings in public schools to find children with impaired speech or language. They test the children to learn the extent of the speech or language difficulty and carry out measures to help them. Some children may do better when they receive instruction in a group. Others may do better with individual instruction. Still, others may need a combination of both individual and group work.

Some speech-language pathologists work in colleges where they teach future professionals in speech-language pathology. Many engage in research on the causes or treatments of these disorders.

Other speech-language pathologists pursue technologies for speech-language pathology. They may create adaptive equipment and devices that promote speech. They may produce software for those who use computers to communicate. They may develop equipment to test, or evaluate speech-language.

Working Conditions

Speech-language pathologists work in a broad range of settings. Schools, hospitals, and clinics usually are comfortable and well-equipped. Practitioners with a private practice may have their own offices.

Speech-language pathologists rendering services through a home-health agency will encounter a wide range of home situations and must travel from client to client to provide their services.

Speech-language pathologists confer with their clients, and the families of their clients. They may confer with other medical specialists. They maintain strong relationships with the teachers of children that they work with.

The work is not physically hard, but it can be exhausting because it demands intense concentration. It can also be frustrating when a client does not improve with treatment.

Hours and Earnings

The standard work week for speech-language pathologists is forty hours. However, many speech-language pathologists work more than forty hours a week. Outside their working hours they may read and study, attend meetings, or do paperwork.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in May 2003, speech-language pathologists earned an average of \$50,050 a year. Wages ranged from a high of more than \$75,410 a year to a low of less than \$33,100 a year. Earnings vary depending on geographic location, employer, level of education, and years of experience.

Education and Training

Recent federal legislation requires speech-language pathologists in school systems in almost every state to have at least a master's degree or the equivalent. A master's degree is also required in other speech-language pathology settings. In some work, such as college teaching, research, and private practice, a doctoral degree is desirable.

A bachelor's degree with a major in speech and hearing or in a related field such as education or psychology is the usual preparation for graduate work. Undergraduate work should include work in linguistics, phonetics, physiology, speech acoustics, anatomy, and psychology. Students may also take courses in speech and hearing, child psychology, or sociology in preparation for this career.

About 235 colleges and universities offer master's degree programs in speech-language pathology and audiology. Not all are accredited, however. Courses cover anatomy and physiology of the areas that produce speech, language, and hearing; the development of normal speech, language, and hearing; acoustics; and psychological aspects of communication. Graduate students learn to evaluate and treat speech and language disorders. Some disorders stressed in these studies are language, stuttering, articulation (pronunciation of speech sounds), and voice. Students also learn how to modify accents and dialects. Graduate students also complete supervised clinical practice in communication disorders.

Licensing, Certification, and Professional Societies

Forty-six states require speech-language pathologists to have a license. Applicants must have a master's degree or the equivalent, 375 hours of supervised clinical experience, a passing score on a national examination, and nine months of postgraduate professional experience. These requirements reflect the certification criteria of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. To earn the Certificate of Clinical Competence, candidates must also complete a thirty-six-week postgraduate clinical fellowship. This professional credential is recognized in many states. Most employers also require this credential.

For licensure renewal, twenty-three states have continuing education requirements. Usually, Medicaid, Medicare, and private insurers will reimburse only certified and licensed speech-language pathologists for services.

In some states speech-language pathologists with only a bachelor's degree in speech pathology may work in schools with students who have communication disorders. These individuals may be classified as special education teachers rather than speech-language pathologists. Some states require speech-language pathologists to have a teaching certificate to work in the schools. In other states they must have taken education courses in college.

Personal Qualifications

Speech-language pathologists should have sensitivity, perception, and warmth in order to deal with persons with a communication disability. Patience, emotional balance, tolerance, and perseverance are necessary. At the same time, speech-language pathologists must be able to be objective about the problems of their clients.

Speech-language pathologists should have above-average intellectual aptitude, imagination, and resourcefulness. They must be able to effectively communicate test results, diagnoses, and proposed treatments so that their clients understand what they are saying.

Occupations can be adapted for workers with disabilities. Persons should contact their school or employment counselors, their state office of vocational rehabilitation, or their state department of labor to explore fully their individual needs and requirements as well as the requirements of the occupation.

Where Employed

There are more than 86,000 certified or licensed speech-language pathologists at work throughout the United States. About 60 percent of these offer services in preschools, elementary and secondary schools, or colleges and universities. Another 15 percent work in hospitals. Others serve in the offices of physicians; in speech, language, and hearing centers; home healthcare agencies; centers for individuals with physical or mental disabilities; and rehabilitation centers. Many work for federal and state agencies. The Department of Veterans Affairs has many specialists working in hospitals.

Some speech-language pathologists have a private practice. They may contract to offer services in schools, hospitals, nursing homes, visiting nurse associations, or managed healthcare groups. They may also work as consultants to industry.

Employment Outlook

The employment outlook for speech-language pathologists is good. This field is expected to grow faster than average through the year 2012. Federal law now states

that all children with impairments must receive free and appropriate public education. This creates a demand for qualified personnel to give them the aid they must have. The increasing number of older people in the United States, who are prone to strokes or other disabling conditions, are requiring the services of speech-language pathologists. Baby boomers are now at an age when the possibility of neurological disorders and associated speech impairments increases. Medical advances are improving the survival rate of trauma victims who need treatment.

There is a shortage of qualified personnel in inner-city, rural, and less-populated areas. Job opportunities in medically related speech and language disorders are expected to grow at an above-average rate. Although competition for some positions will be keen, the outlook for private practice and contract work is rapidly improving.

Entry Methods

When they are about to receive their master's degree, students should talk to speech-language pathologists in clinics or other settings. This networking between working professionals and faculty advisors may result in names or agencies to whom students can send resumes and requests for interviews.

Employers sometimes send personnel recruiters to college campuses to interview candidates. Student membership in the National Student Speech-Language Hearing Association and the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association may also help job seekers meet potential employers.

Advancement

Speech-language pathologists may advance by taking assignments with heavier duties. Clinicians may concentrate on one kind of speech disorder, such as aphasia.

Speech-language pathologists may branch out into related fields of interest. They may decide to concentrate on linguistics, health care, human development, or technology. Many speech-language pathologists set up a consulting practice.

For Further Research

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 10801 Rockville Pike, Rockville, MD 20852. Web site: www.asha.org.

National Student Speech-Language Hearing Association, 10801 Rockville Pike, Rockville, MD 20852. Web site: www.nsslha.org.

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