



Career Opportunities in Speech and Language Therapy (AA Transfer Degree Plan)

NATURE OF THE WORK: Speech-language pathologists, sometimes called '*Speech Therapists*', assess, diagnose, treat, and help to prevent speech, language, cognitive, communication, voice, swallowing, fluency, and other related 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. Problems can be congenital, developmental, or acquired. 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. Speech-language pathologists develop an individualized plan of care, tailored to each patient's needs. 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 teach these individuals how to make sounds, improve their voices, or increase their language skills to communicate more effectively. Speech-language pathologists help patients develop or recover reliable communication skills so patients can fulfill their educational, vocational, and social roles.

WORKING CONDITIONS: Speech-language pathologists usually work at a desk or table in clean comfortable surroundings. In medical settings, they may work at the patient's bedside and assist in positioning the patient. In school settings they may participate in classroom activities. While the job is not physically demanding, it requires attention to detail and intense concentration. The emotional needs of clients and their families may be demanding. Most full-time speech-language pathologists work between 35 and 40 hours per week; some work part-time. Those who work on a contract basis may spend a substantial amount of time traveling between facilities.

EMPLOYMENT: Speech-language pathologists held about 94,000 jobs in 2002. About half of the jobs were in educational services, including preschools, elementary, secondary schools, and colleges and universities. Other jobs were based in hospitals; offices of other health practitioners, including speech-language pathologists; nursing care facilities; home healthcare services; individual and family services; outpatient care centers; child day care services; and other various facilities. A few speech-language pathologists are self-employed in private practice. They contract to provide services in schools, offices of physicians, hospitals, nursing care facilities, and/or work as consultants to industries.

JOB OUTLOOK: Employment of speech-language pathologists is expected to [grow faster than the average](#) for all occupations through the year 2012. Members of the baby boom generation are now entering middle age, when the possibility of neurological disorders and associated speech, language, swallowing, and hearing impairments increases. Medical advances are also improving the survival rate of premature infants and trauma and stroke victims, who need assessment and possible treatment. Many states now require that all newborns be screened for hearing loss and receive appropriate early intervention services. The number of speech-language pathologists in private practice will rise due to the increasing use of contract services by hospitals, schools, and nursing care facilities. In addition to job openings stemming from employment growth, a number of openings for speech-language pathologists will arise from the need to replace those who leave the occupation.

EARNINGS: Median annual earnings of speech-language pathologists were \$49,450 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$39,930 and \$60,190. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$32,580, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$74,010.

Suggested citation: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2004-05 Edition*, Advertising, Marketing, Promotions, Public Relations, and Sales Managers, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos099.htm>