

Speech Language Pathologist

Professional Activities

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.

Speech-language pathologists keep records on the initial evaluation, progress, and discharge of clients. This helps pinpoint problems, tracks client progress, and justifies the cost of treatment when applying for reimbursement. 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.

Most speech-language pathologists provide direct clinical services to individuals with communication or swallowing disorders. In speech and language clinics, they may independently develop and carry out treatment programs. In medical facilities, they may work with physicians, social workers, psychologists, and other therapists. Speech-language pathologists in schools develop individual or group programs, counsel parents, and may assist teachers with classroom activities. Some speech-language pathologists conduct research on how people communicate. Others design and develop equipment or techniques for diagnosing and treating speech problems.

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 work with students in an office or classroom. Some deliver services in the client's home. 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 40 hours per week; about 1 in 5 work part time. Those who work on a contract basis may spend a substantial amount of time traveling between facilities.

Educational Requirements

Speech-language pathologists typically need at least a master's degree. Although master's programs do not require a particular undergraduate degree for admission, certain courses must be taken before entering a program. Required courses vary by institution. Graduate programs often include courses in speech and language development, age-specific speech disorders, alternative communication methods, and swallowing disorders. These programs also include supervised clinical experience.

The Council on Academic Accreditation (CAA), part of the [American Speech-Language-Hearing Association](#), accredits education programs in speech-language pathology. Graduation from an accredited program is required for certification and, often, for state licensure.

Almost all states require speech-language pathologists to be licensed. A license requires at least a master's degree and supervised clinical experience. Many states require graduation from an accredited master's program to get a license. For specific requirements, contact your state's medical or health licensure board. Speech-language pathologists can earn the Certificate of Clinical Competence in Speech-Language Pathology (CCC-SLP), offered by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. Certification satisfies some or all of the requirements for state licensure and may be required by some employers. Speech-language pathologists who work in schools may need a specific teaching certification. For specific requirements, contact your state's department of education or the private institution in which you are interested.

Academic Programs

[Augustana College](#)

[Eastern Illinois University](#)

[Elmhurst College](#)

[Governors State University](#)

[Illinois State University](#)

[Northern Illinois University](#)

[Northwestern University](#)

[Rush University](#)

[Saint Xavier University](#)

[Southern Illinois University Carbondale](#)

[University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign](#)

[Western Illinois University](#)

Employment/Salary Outlook

As the members of the baby boom generation continue to age, the possibility of neurological disorders and associated speech, language, and swallowing 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. An increased emphasis also has been placed on early identification of speech and language problems in young children. The combination of growth in the occupation and an expected increase in retirements over the coming years should create excellent job opportunities for speech-language pathologists. Opportunities should be particularly favorable for those with the ability to speak a second language, such as Spanish.

In health services facilities, the impact of proposed Federal legislation imposing limits on reimbursement for therapy services may adversely affect the short-term job outlook for therapy providers. However, over the long run, the demand for therapists should continue to rise as growth in the number of individuals with disabilities or limited function spurs demand for therapy services.

Employment in educational services will increase along with growth in elementary and secondary school enrollments, including enrollment of special education students. Federal law guarantees special education and related services to all eligible children with disabilities. Greater awareness of the importance of early identification and diagnosis of speech, language, swallowing, and hearing disorders will also increase employment.

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.

About half of jobs were in educational services, including preschools, elementary and secondary schools, and colleges and universities. Others were 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; or other facilities.

A few speech-language pathologists are self-employed in private practice. They contract to provide services in schools, offices of physicians, hospitals, or nursing care facilities, or work as consultants to industry.

State and National Wages

Location	Pay Period	2021		
		Low	Median	High
United States	Hourly	\$24.67	\$38.01	\$63.06
	Annual	\$51,310	\$79,060	\$125,560
Illinois	Hourly	\$23.16	\$37.82	\$57.12
	Annual	\$48,170	\$78,670	\$118,810

State and National Trends

United States	Employment		Percent Change	Job Openings ¹
	2021	2031		
Speech-Language Pathologists	159,800	193,900	21%	14,000
Illinois	Employment		Percent Change	Job Openings ¹
	2020	2030		
Speech-Language Pathologists	7,550	9,030	20%	640

¹Job Openings refers to the average annual job openings due to growth and net replacement.

Professional Organizations

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (asha.org)

National Student Speech Language Hearing Association (nsslha.org)

References

Occupational Outlook Handbook, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics
(<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/speech-language-pathologists.htm>)

O*NET OnLine (<http://online.onetcenter.org/link/summary/29-1127.00>)

Last Modified October 24, 2022