

NC State Student's Guide to a Career in Speech-Language Pathology

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Speech-Language Pathology Career Overview

Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) are healthcare professionals that do work in assessing, diagnosing, and treating speech, language, cognitive-communication, and swallowing disorders. They work with any range of age groups from newborns through the geriatric population. SLPs are employed in a variety of settings including health care centers (hospitals, clinics, skilled nursing facilities, private practice), K-12 schools, early intervention facilities, and college and university research settings.

Job Outlook:

Speech-language pathologists are in very much in demand, with the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) *Occupational Outlook Handbook* predicting a much faster than average growth in the projected percent change in employment. Across the United States, SLP jobs are found in urban, suburban, and rural areas.

Education:

A master's degree (MS or MA) is required to work as a speech-language pathologist. The degree typically takes around 2 years to complete and requires both academic coursework and clinical practice. Internships and externships are also usually built into the programs.

For graduate school, a prior completed bachelor's degree is required. Whether that degree must be in communication sciences and disorders (CSD) or not depends on the specific graduate program, however most do not make that a necessity as long as the applicant still has the prerequisites completed.

Applicable Majors and Minors at NC State

A bachelor's degree in communication sciences and disorders (CSD) or anything exactly similar is not offered at NC State. Many offered majors and minors however can be applicable to this career in that they can help you take prerequisites needed for acceptance into a speech-language pathology graduate program. The next section of this guide looks further into the specific prerequisite courses required.

Most Common Majors for Pre-SLP Students at NC State:

- Bachelor of Arts in Communication
Communication majors interested in SLP in the past have most often declared their concentration in Interpersonal, Organizational, and Rhetorical communication (IOR) instead of Public Relations or Media.
- Bachelor of Arts in English
- Bachelor of Arts in Education
 - Education majors interested in SLP in the past have most often been Applied Education Studies majors or Elementary Education majors, specifically.
- Bachelor of Arts in Psychology
- Bachelor of Sciences in Biology

Most Common Minors for Pre-SLP Students at NC State: (One can declare multiple minors)

- Linguistics
A minor in linguistics is the most popular way to take all the pre-SLP prerequisites NC State offers as a part of one's degree audit.
- Cognitive Science
- Spanish
Especially helpful for those who hope to work with Spanish-speaking clients in the future, this minor has been declared by those hoping to expand their future client reach in this way.

Preparing for Graduate Programs

Common Graduate Program Prerequisites

General Coursework Requirements

The following general coursework requirements are the same for any ASHA-certified graduate program. These classes cannot be related to speech-language pathology, audiology, hearing sciences, or communication sciences in most instances, according to ASHA guidelines.

Note: More courses at NC State other than those explicitly listed for each prerequisite may fulfill the requirement. The best way to find out if another course qualifies is to look up the ASHA's description of each requirement on their website ([Prerequisite Course Content Areas Related to SLP Certification Standards](#)) or contact individual graduate programs. Contacting individual graduate programs to confirm a prerequisite's fulfillment by their standards is the best way to be sure.

1) *Biological Sciences*

- Typical requirement is one 2/3-credit course, lab not usually required
- Examples of courses that meet requirement: biology, human anatomy and physiology, human genetics, veterinary science
 - Potential NC State Courses:
 - BIO 105: Biology in the Modern World
 - BIO 181: Introductory Biology: Ecology, Evolution and Biodiversity
 - GN 301: Genetics in Human Affairs
 - BIO 240/245: Principles of Human Anatomy & Physiology

2) *Physical Sciences*

- Typical requirement is one 2/3-credit course, lab not usually required
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- Examples of courses that meet requirement: physics or chemistry
 - Potential NC State Courses:
 - PY 131: Conceptual Physics
 - PY 201: University Physics I
 - PY 211: College Physics I
 - CH 101: Chemistry- A Molecular Science
 - CH 111: Preparatory Chemistry

3) *Statistics*

- Typical requirement is one 2/3-credit course
- Examples of courses that meet requirement: introduction to statistics, statistical principles of psychological research
 - Potential NC State Courses:
 - ST 311/312: Introduction to Statistics I/II

4) *Social Sciences and Behavioral Sciences*

- Typical requirement is one 2/3-credit course
- Examples of courses that meet requirement: Social Sciences (anthropology, sociology, economics, gender and sexuality studies), Behavioral Sciences (psychology, psychobiology, and cognitive science)
 - Potential NC State Courses:
 - Social Sciences: ANT 251: Physical Anthropology, ANT 252: Cultural Anthropology, SOC 202: Principles of Sociology, SOC 203: Current Social Problems, SOC 206: Social Deviance, SOC 306: Criminology, EC 201: Principles of Microeconomics, EC 205: Fundamentals of Economics, WGS 200: Introduction to Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies
 - Behavioral Sciences: PSY 200: Introduction to Psychology, PSY 208: Psychobiology of Success, PSY 307: Industrial and Organizational Psychology, PSY 311: Social Psychology, PSY 312: Applied Psychology, PHI/PSY 425: Introduction to Cognitive Science, PSY 420: Cognitive Processes

Field-Specific Coursework

In addition to the general coursework required (as listed above), speech-language pathology graduate programs differ in their field-specific prerequisites. Some may require all of the following coursework while others may require only some. Again, the best way to be sure of the classes you need to take is to research or contact individual graduate programs.

1) *Anatomy and Physiology of the Speech and Hearing Mechanism*

- Some programs require just anatomy and physiology of speech while some require coursework in the hearing mechanism as well. If the program requires coursework in both, they typically state they can be from one course as long as it covers both mechanisms in full.
- NC State Course:
 - ENG 320: Anatomy and Physiology of Speech (coursework covers

both speech and hearing mechanisms) [typically offered every Fall semester]

2) *Speech and Hearing Science*

- Some programs require just speech science while some require coursework in hearing science as well. If the program requires coursework in both, they typically state they can be from one course as long as it covers both mechanisms in full.
- NC State Course:
 - ENG 338: Speech Science (coursework covers both speech and hearing mechanisms) [typically offered in odd-numbered Spring semesters (e.g., Spring 2025)]

3) *Language Development*

- NC State Course:
 - ENG 325: Language Development [typically offered in even-numbered Spring semesters (e.g., Spring 2024)]

4) *Phonetics*

- NC State Course:
 - ENG 315: Phonetics [typically offered every Fall semester]

5) *Introduction to Audiology*

- Non-NC State Options:
 - At UNC-CH through Inter-Institutional Program
 - At NCCU through Inter-Institutional Program
 - At UNC-G through Inter-Institutional Program
 - Online through Longwood University or another online program
 - At/online through another university as a non-degree seeking student

6) *Aural Rehabilitation*

- Non-NC State Options:
 - At NCCU through Inter-Institutional Program
 - Online through Longwood University or another online program
 - At/online through another university as a non-degree seeking student

In addition, **programs have differing rules about when an incoming student must have their prerequisites completed.** Most often, they require that they must be completed prior to the start of the graduate program, not at time of application. However, there are some other options for some programs.

Most common option:

Programs where prerequisites must be completed prior to starting the graduate program but not prior to application submission.

Other option:

Programs that have Pre-Speech-Language Pathology programs, providing students with the opportunity to take the prerequisite courses they have not yet completed prior to starting graduate coursework.

- While some programs might have an accelerated program to take prerequisites and still graduate with those in the normal-paced graduate program, others may have a Pre-SLP program that requires you to defer your acceptance to the graduate program one year while you finish the prerequisite program.

GRE Requirement

The GRE General Test is a standardized test used to assess skills for success in graduate, business, and law schools. It contains two essays, quantitative and verbal sections, and an experimental or research section. The GRE measures problem solving that involves basic math, algebra, geometry, statistics, the comprehension of vocabulary, as well as the ability to analyze written material and think critically. A good GRE score is subjective and depends on the schools one is applying to.

Many speech-language pathology graduate programs do not require the GRE anymore; however one should research each program they are applying to well in advance to see if any program on their list does in fact require it. Planning for the test and studying will take substantial time so it will be best to confirm as soon as your graduate program list is confirmed.

Searching for Suitable Graduate Programs

Figuring out which speech-language pathology graduate programs you should apply to centers heavily around knowing your individual interests and priorities. For example, if you are highly interested in medical speech pathology (neuro rehabilitation, acute care, etc.) finding programs with university or associated hospitals would be a priority. If you are highly interested in working in a school setting, perhaps finding programs with public school system internships/externships would be a priority. If you do not know what area you are interested in, and that is okay because that is what graduate school is for, then finding a program that has a wide variety of placements as a part of their clinical rotations would be ideal.

In-State SLP Programs

Below are the six ASHA-accredited speech-language pathology programs in North Carolina.

(Each school listed is a link that will take you to their institution information page on ASHA's website.)

- **Western Carolina University: Master of Science (MS)**
- **University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill: Master of Science (MS)**
- **North Carolina Central University: Master of Science (MS)**
- **East Carolina University: Master of Science (MS)**
- **Appalachian State University: Master of Science (MS)**
- **University of North Carolina, Greensboro: Master of Arts (MA)**

Out-of-State SLP Programs

There are over 300 ASHA-accredited speech-language pathology graduate programs across the country. A good way to start your research is by considering your overall priorities in a graduate program. One person may weigh location more than program coursework and practicum, others may weigh cost of attendance and prerequisite requirements. Once you know what kind of program you are looking for, start your research.

Online SLP Programs

ASHA accredits 46 entirely-online speech-pathology degree programs. These programs may not provide the same clinical experience one might receive with more traditional programs however their availability may be helpful for those that could use them.

Resources

[ASHA EdFind - Find graduate programs in Speech-language pathology and audiology](#)

This link leads to ASHA's EdFind page where you can research speech-language pathology programs across the United States. The search page allows you to filter programs by more than just the state they are located in, but also by program offerings (prerequisites, part-time status, study abroad, online degrees), cultural emphasis, and grants and contracts.

Affording Graduate School

Financial Aid

Federal:

Once a person has completed their undergraduate degree the Department of Education (ED) sees them as financially independent. This means that when completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), you supply your own tax return. FAFSA dictates how much financial aid you can receive, but if your income is lower than that of your parents, being independent can lead to more need-based aid from the ED.

State:

Applying for state-based grants is another way to receive financial aid to support your advanced education. Some states offer grants specifically for graduate students. For these grants you may need to apply to the state's education department or perhaps directly with your school or by listing the school on your completed FAFSA. Student Loan Hero has a lengthy rundown on state grants for college, state-by-state. The link is here: [Your Complete Guide to State Financial Aid Grants](#)

Scholarships:

With a more defined career path than you had starting out as an undergraduate, you may also be in a better position to receive scholarships. Professional organizations in the field of speech-language pathology, speech, communication, or audiology even might be awarding money. Emphasizing the way you shaped your undergraduate degree to lead you to this career path and how you plan to use it can go a long way in earning you funds. Searching for graduate school scholarships online is probably the easiest way to find appropriate grants. Here are seven online search engines that can be a good starting point:

1. [Fastweb](#)
2. [GoGrad](#)
3. [Unigo.com](#)
4. [Scholarship America](#)
5. [Scholly](#)
6. [Graduate School Scholarships | Sallie Mae](#)
7. [Search for Scholarships – BigFuture | College Board](#)

Working During School

Working throughout graduate school can be a great way to earn much-needed income however it might be difficult to balance with the demands of full-time programs. In fact, it is often strongly recommended that students not work if possible when pursuing a program that is full-time. Due to the fact that speech-language pathology programs are usually always full-time this is commonly the case. Some programs just discourage student employment while others explicitly forbid it. If you do need to work in order to stay afloat financially, there are options others have successfully managed within the past.

Assistantships

This is an option, for those at schools that have them available, to work during a full-time graduate program. Assistantships are paid academic positions that typically involve part-time teaching, grading, and/or research. Not only do these positions work flexibly with a student's course load but the work done often relates to the field of the program in a way that can be helpful as a supplemental review of the content being learned and practiced in a student's own graduate work. The number of hours offered differs between programs and faculty needs. Additionally, certain assistantships may offer a tuition remission and/or stipend as well. Finally, these opportunities are a great way to form relationships within the department.

Other Jobs

Several NC State alumni that went on to speech-language pathology programs have noted that other jobs such as babysitting and nannying worked out well for them during graduate school. These jobs allowed them the flexibility of choosing their own hours and benefitted them in their future job if they worked in pediatrics.

Steps After Graduate School

Praxis Examination

The Praxis Exam in Speech Pathology is the national examination commissioned by ASHA as a major part of the speech-language pathology certification process. One must pass this test to earn their ASHA certification and is often also used as a requirement for state licensure. Graduate SLP programs prepare individuals for the content of the exam through their academic curriculum and clinical practices.

Each state determines their own passing score for professional licensure however most states require the same score that is required for ASHA certification which is currently 162.

The content of the examination is comprehensive and ASHA provides an outline of its content on their website at [Speech-Language Pathology Praxis Exam \(5331\) Content](#).

Just like other standardized tests you have taken before, there are SLP Praxis exam review books available to help test-takers study. There are several versions and they are available on Amazon amongst other sites. Additionally, there are free Praxis test prep materials including practice tests, online guides, and more that can be found on ETS/the test administrator's website:

<https://www.ets.org/praxis/acslpa/test-takers/resources/prep-materials.html>

The praxis exam is typically taken during the second year of the graduate program, possibly as early as the summer before the second year or right after graduation, but most typically in the last semester of the second year.

Clinical Fellowship Year

After full completion of the academic coursework and clinical practicum that makes up a speech-language pathology graduate program, aspiring licensed SLPs take part in a one year Clinical Fellowship. The Clinical Fellowship year (CFY) allows the fellow to transition from being a student to being an independent provider of speech-language pathology clinical services.

The CFY is a minimum of 1,260 hours and a minimum of 36 weeks of work full-time. Most Clinical Fellows complete this experience in one location with one mentor full-time, however part-time experiences exist as well; although, they will take additional weeks to reach the minimum required hours. The CFY begins after one receives their master's degree and also their appropriate state license.

In order to count hours that have been earned, a mentoring SLP must hold a CCC-SLP, have

at least 9 months of clinical experience since earning their CCC-SLP, and have completed at least 2 hours of professional development in supervision since earning their CCC-SLP.

ASHA provides both tips for selecting a CF Mentor and a specific list of qualifications a mentor needs to have: [A Guide to the ASHA Clinical Fellowship Experience](#)

Applying for a Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC-SLP)

After completion of a speech-language pathology graduate program accredited by the Council on Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology (CAA), one may submit an application for the CCC-SLP. Within the online application one submits their passing Praxis exam scores, official graduate transcript, and Speech-Language Pathology Clinical Fellowship Report and Rating Form. As a Clinical Fellow, one can apply for the CCC-SLP at any time.

Licensure in Other States

ASHA State-by-State Licensing Requirements: [ASHA State-by-State](#)

The link above provides information about each state's initial licensure requirements. There is no single nationally accepted license for speech-language pathology however most states have fairly uniform requirements. This means that if one receives their license in one state and decides to practice in another in the future, most states will accept a speech pathologist license from another state as an acceptable interim document until a new local license is acquired. Acquiring a new state's license often does not require more than the CCC-SLP certification; however, certain states can have variations from the national norms in license requirements. To understand individual licensing processes, one should research the state boards or agencies that administer the licensing process.

Observation

As a Possible Graduate Program Requirement

In addition to prerequisite coursework, some speech-language pathology graduate programs have observation requirements that are a part of their overall prerequisites. Just the same, this requirement most often must be completed before beginning the graduate program. Programs with this requirement encourage applicants to gain observation hours in multiple kinds of settings, i.e. medical (hospital, skilled nursing), school, and/or other (outpatient clinic, early intervention, etc.). Observing a variety of SLPs and client populations gives applicants broad perspectives of the field they are interested in.

Where to Start Your Search

There is no formal process for finding and establishing observations. Simply looking up local SLPs online is an easy way to start in addition to contacting SLPs at local hospitals, schools, and clinics. ASHA even has a 'Find a Provider' tool that allows you to search for ASHA-certified SLPs by location, ages treated, and areas of expertise.

ASHA ProFind: [ASHA ProFind - Communication help near you](#)

Note: Using this tool guarantees the providers you find are ASHA-certified however confirming they have up-to-date supervision CEUs (Continuing Education Units) is also important. Without this, the observation hours may not count later on.

To confirm a SLP has their certificates, searching the provider's ASHA number or name on [ASHA Certification and Ethics Verification](#) will show you their certification status. If they met the ASHA standards for providing clinical instruction and supervision, the "Clinical Instruction, Supervision, or Clinical Fellowship Mentor" section will indicate they have done so.

Local SLPs near NC State

Below are some local settings close to NC State, some have allowed student observation in the past. While they are not a guaranteed opportunity, they can also be a starting point of contact for NC State students.

Private Practices:

- Capitol City Speech: [Capitol City Speech Therapy](#)
- Developmental Therapy Associates: [Developmental Therapy Associates](#)
- Triangle Aphasia Project: [Triangle Aphasia Project](#)
- Raleigh Therapy Services: [Raleigh Therapy Services](#)
- Speech Therapy Solutions: [Speech Therapy Solutions](#)

Outpatient Facilities:

- Duke Health: [Duke Speech Pathology at Brier Creek | Raleigh, NC](#)
- UNC Rex: [Outpatient Rehabilitation](#)
- WakeMed: [Speech Therapy, WakeMed Health & Hospitals, Raleigh & Wake County, NC](#)

