

# Audiologist

## Job Description:

Audiologists assist people who have problems with hearing and balance. Between 15 and 28 million Americans experience some degree of hearing loss, a condition that can interfere with their quality of life at home, school, and work. Audiologists assess clients' ability to hear by performing special tests, observing behavior, and reviewing medical records. Based on their assessments, they develop ways to correct or manage hearing loss or problems with balance. Examples include prescribing and fitting amplification devices such as hearing aids and training clients in speech reading (lip-reading). There are an increasing number of sophisticated devices to assist clients which audiologists must understand and be able to recommend appropriately. Audiologists also help clients develop strategies for dealing with the social and emotional problems sometimes associated with hearing problems. Hearing disorders can be early indications of other medical problems. If a medical problem is suspected, the audiologist will refer the client to a physician or other health care professional.

Audiologists are autonomous professionals which means they do not work under the direct supervision of another health care professional. They work in a variety of settings. Many work in schools where they help children use a variety of devices to improve hearing and teach them strategies to better function in the classroom. Other audiologists work with elderly clients in clinics and extended-care facilities. Additional employment settings include hospitals, rehabilitation centers, private practice and physicians' offices, and government agencies.

Another type of work performed by audiologists is consulting with employers to assess noise levels in the workplace and develop ways to protect employee hearing. There are also opportunities in teaching and research for those who earn a Ph.D. A few specialize in designing new equipment and techniques for diagnosing and correcting hearing loss.

## Duties and Responsibilities:

- Identify hearing disorders by measuring hearing with special equipment.
- Develop and carry out treatment programs to help clients who have hearing and balance disorders.
- Explain hearing disorders to clients and their families.
- Encourage and motivate clients.
- Train clients to read speech (lip-read).
- Counsel clients on ways to deal with problems of daily life that are related to hearing loss.
- Recommend and fit hearing aids and other sound amplification systems.
- Fit and tune cochlear implants, a device consisting of a microphone, signal processor, external transmitter, and receiver. The receiver is surgically implanted under the skin near the ear.
- Test noise levels.
- Promote safe practices that prevent hearing loss.
- Work with other members of the health care team to develop treatment plans for clients.
- Refer clients to other health professionals when hearing problems are indications of medical conditions.
- Keep records of client evaluations and progress.
- Conduct research on hearing and balance disorders.

## Personal Qualities:

Audiologists work with clients who have difficulty communicating effectively with family and friends and as a result, may be experiencing frustration and emotional or psychological problems. Audiologists must be compassionate and interested in helping others. Because client progress can be slow, they must be

patient and encouraging. In addition, audiologists need excellent oral communication skills in order to explain diagnoses and treatment to clients of all ages and their families. Also important is the ability to concentrate and approach problems objectively.

### **Physical Requirements:**

Audiology is not physically demanding, but does require the ability to concentrate. Audiologists who work for school systems may need to walk to various classrooms or travel between schools.

### **Educational Requirements:**

The current educational requirement for audiologists is a master's degree. Beginning in 2012, the entry-level degree will be a doctorate (AuD) which will typically require four years of study beyond the bachelor's degree. As of 2007, audiologists seeking certification will need to have earned at least 75 hours of credit toward a doctorate. Master's level programs in audiology are currently being phased out and replaced with AuD programs.

There is no undergraduate degree in audiology. It is recommended that students planning to apply to AuD programs have a liberal arts and science background. Many students earn a bachelor's degree in communications or a related field. Undergraduate courses should include oral and written communication, the natural sciences, and linguistics. Students should check the specific prerequisites of the AuD programs in which they are interested.

### **Certification Requirements:**

Most states require audiologists to be licensed. State requirements are either identical or very similar to those required by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) for the Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC). These include earning a graduate degree, completing 300 to 375 hours of supervised clinical experience and a 36-week postgraduate clinical fellowship, and passing a national exam.

### **Projected Outlook for this Career:**

Although the actual number of audiologists is relatively small (about 13,000) employment is expected to grow much faster than average for all occupations. This is due to the growing number of older Americans, the group which suffers the greatest proportion of hearing loss. In fact, one-third of individuals over age 65 have a hearing loss that can interfere with their ability to communicate effectively. Another area of employment growth is in public schools because of federal legislation that requires schools to provide services for disabled children, including those with hearing impairments.

### **Salary Information:**

In 2004, the annual income for audiologists ranged from \$46,618 to \$57,334.

### **Career Ladders:**

Advancement can be achieved by promotion into a supervisory position, seeking employment in a larger facility, or by going into private practice.

### **To Learn More and Prepare:**

- Obtain information from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and the American Academy of Audiology.
- Explore the Web Links provided in this chapter.
- Review professional journals such as Audiology Today.
- Conduct an informational interview or job shadow an audiologist to learn more about the duties performed.

- Obtain employment or a volunteer position working with the hearing impaired.
- Keep a journal of your work and/or volunteer experiences.
- Develop your communication and problem-solving skills.
- Investigate scholarship and grant programs for students interested in audiology.
- In high school, take courses in biology, physics, math, and psychology.
- Contact AuD programs for information about their admission requirements and curriculum.
- Learn about the licensing requirements of state(s) in which you might want to work.

### **Professional Organizations:**

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association  
 10801 Rockville Pike  
 Rockville, MD 20852  
 (800)498-2071  
<http://www.asha.org>

American Academy of Audiology  
 11730 Plaza America Drive  
 Suite 300  
 Reston, VA 20190  
 (800) AAA-2336  
<http://www.audiology.org>

### **Web Links:**

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association  
 Click on "Career Center" under heading "About ASHA" to view useful information about audiology as a career, colleges and universities offering audiology programs, and fact sheets about hearing loss and the growing need for audiologists.  
<http://www.asha.org>

American Academy of Audiology  
 Site provides information about the AuD degree, a list of schools offering audiology programs, and links to the schools' Web sites.  
<http://audiology.org>

Better Hearing Institute  
 A nonprofit, educational organization providing information on medical, surgical, and rehabilitation options for improving hearing loss. In addition to interesting articles, this Web site contains facts, figures, self-quizzes, and links to other sites that provide information about hearing loss and related topics.  
<http://www.betterhearing.org>

Self-Help For Hard of Hearing People  
 Organization that provides information about hearing impairments and serves as an advocate for the hearing impaired. Contains a library of online articles.  
<http://www.hearingloss.org>

Audiology Online  
 Web site contains job openings in audiology and access to continuing education courses. Registration is free.  
<http://www.audiologyonline.com>