

Essential Skills and Attributes Required for the Study of Speech-Language Pathology

A. Purposes

This document, developed using information from alliances and organizations across Canada (e.g., [Speech-Language & Audiology Canada](#), [Canadian Alliance of Audiology and Speech Language Pathology Regulators](#)), provides information for applicants to Speech-Language Pathology (SLP) programs, students, faculty, staff, accessibility service providers, health professionals, and the public about the essential skills and attributes (ESAs) expected of candidates in SLP entry-to-practice programs. The purposes of the ESA document are to:

- provide information to prospective SLP students so they can make an informed choice regarding their potential application to pursue a graduate degree in SLP;
- help guide efforts of SLP students, faculty, and staff toward student achievement of ESAs for entry-level practice;
- help prospective and current SLP students make an informed choice about registration with Western's Accessible Education service;
- help students, accessibility counsellors, faculty, staff, and health professionals develop Accessible Education accommodations such that students may meet the ESA requirements;
- help ensure the health, wellness, and safety of learners during their academic program; and
- help ensure the best service provision for clients during student-led clinical appointments.

B. Essential Skills and Attributes for Graduate Study in SLPⁱ

In Canada, SLPs are generally regulated healthcare professionals who can help prevent, assess, and treat communication and swallowing disorders for individuals across the lifespan. SLPs can function as scholars, communicators, collaborators, clinicians, professionals, advocates, and leaders.ⁱⁱ Ontario university SLP programs are responsible for providing SLP students with opportunities to develop the essential competencies to fulfill these roles, and to become eligible for entry-level practice in Canada. To practice as a SLP, an individual must first successfully complete the [Canadian Entry-to-Practice exam](#) and register with their provincial regulatory organization, for example, in Ontario, the [College of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists of Ontario \(CASLPO\)](#).

Graduate education in SLP requires that the accumulation of scientific knowledge be accompanied by the simultaneous development of specific skills and attributes. ESAs refer to the skills and attributes that allow SLP graduate students to develop scientific knowledge, specific skills, and attitudes, and to meet essential competency standards for professional practice. The ESAs are the foundation for academic success and the practice of SLP upon graduation. An offer of admission to a SLP program should not be interpreted as evidence that the program has independently verified that an applicant possesses these ESAs.

Graduate students in SLP must demonstrate skills and attributes in four broad areas:

- Sensorimotor function
- Cognition
- Communication
- Professionalism

i. Sensorimotor function

Students must have sufficient sensorimotor function to:

- Attend (and participate in) all classes, group/teamwork, and activities that are part of the curriculum, including small group discussions and presentations, large-group lectures, one-on-one interactions, demonstrations, client appointments (virtually and in person)
- Read, write, and use digital media
- Perform and complete all aspects of SLP assessment and intervention procedures, which involve working directly with clients, their families, and their community
- Provide therapy and other aspects of care
- Function in a variety of settings (e.g., outpatient, inpatient, community, school venues)
- Perform in an acceptably independent and competent way in sometimes stressful and distracting clinical environments
- Demonstrate other appropriate SLP-specific competencies

Examples of activities requiring sensorimotor capabilities include, but are not limited to reading books, articles, and online resources; participating in classes, small groups, large groups, client presentations, review sessions, and laboratory work; using a computer; interacting with clients of different ages (from infants to elderly adults) in a variety of community, educational, and healthcare settings; performing a clinical examination of communication and swallowing; performing instrumental procedures such as an audiological screening, voice evaluation, and swallowing evaluation; accompanying team members on rounds and conferences in medical practicum settings; wearing appropriate equipment, such as a gloves, gown, and mask, as called for by the clinical situation.

ii. Cognition

In addition to basic cognitive functions such as language, memory, attention, and visuospatial functions, students must be able to demonstrate higher-level cognitive abilities, including:

- Executive functions (e.g., initiation, behavioral regulation, cognitive flexibility)
- Calculation
- Analysis
- Synthesis
- Organization
- Application

- Rational thought
- Clinical reasoning
- Ethical reasoning
- Sound judgment

Examples of applied higher-level cognitive abilities include, but are not limited to: understanding, synthesizing, and recalling material presented in classes, labs, small groups, client interactions, and meetings with preceptors; understanding 3-dimensional relationships, such as those demonstrated in the anatomy lab; successfully passing oral, written, and laboratory exams; understanding ethical issues related to the practice of speech-language pathology; engaging in problem solving and clinical reasoning, independently and in small groups; interpreting the results of client examinations and assessment tests; analyzing client and environmental characteristics, and determining the appropriate sequence of events to effect successful treatment; working through clinical problems and exhibiting sound judgment in a variety of clinical settings; making concise, convincing, and thorough presentations based on various kinds of data collection, including web-based research; knowing how to organize information, materials, and tasks in order to perform efficiently in clinical settings; initiating, planning, and organizing classroom-based and clinical tasks; understanding how to work and learn independently; understanding how to function effectively as part of a school or healthcare team.

iii. Communication

Students must be able to communicate skillfully with faculty members, other members of the school or healthcare team, clients, families, and other students, in the language of their graduate program (English or French), in order to:

- Elicit information
- Convey information
- Clarify information
- Create rapport
- Develop therapeutic relationships
- Demonstrate competencies

Examples of areas in which skillful communication is required include, but are not limited to: answering oral and written exam questions, eliciting a history from a client, presenting information in oral and written form to preceptors, participating in sometimes fast-paced small- or large-group discussions/interactions; writing assessment and/or intervention reports and documenting treatment; making presentations (formal and informal) in academic and practicum settings; communicating with members of the healthcare team; communicating assessment and intervention results with clients and their families about communication and swallowing issues; counselling; interacting in a therapeutic manner with clients; educating clients, families, and other stakeholders involved in the client's care; interacting with and responding to clinical preceptors; and writing notes and papers and completing assignments on a web-based educational platform. Students must have the ability to self-organize and self-manage their time and paperwork responsibilities. It is important to note that some programs may have

specific communication requirements to meet the needs of the population in a particular geographical area.

iv. Professionalism

Students must demonstrate mature and ethical conduct. They must be able to:

- Consistently display integrity, honesty, empathy, compassion, fairness, respect for self and others, diligence, and dedication
- Promptly complete all assignments and responsibilities attendant to the assessment and treatment of clients
- Communicate with, examine, and provide care for all clients—including those whose gender, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation, or spiritual beliefs are different from their own
- Develop mature, sensitive, and effective relationships, not only with clients but with all members of school, community, and healthcare teams
- Maintain appropriate relationship(s) with service users
- Abide by all provincial, national, and local laws and regulations, as well as all Western University's Student Codes of Conduct
- Tolerate physically, emotionally, and mentally demanding workloads
- Function effectively under stress, and proactively make use of available resources to help maintain both physical and mental health
- Adapt to changing environments and be able to learn in the face of uncertainty
- Be responsible and accountable for themselves and their behaviors

Examples of professional behavior include, but are not limited to: being prepared and arriving on time for required learning and clinical experiences; handing in assignments on time; refraining from plagiarizing or cheating; treating faculty, staff, and other students with respect; making an effort to understand prejudices and preconceptions that might affect client interactions or collegial relationships (especially in the areas of race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, disability, age, and religious difference); developing successful working relationships with preceptors, staff, and peers by accepting constructive feedback; maintaining a professional demeanor in clinical interactions; representing oneself accurately; appreciating and preserving client confidentiality; responding sensitively to clients' social and psychological issues; understanding social biases and stigmas; developing empathic listening skills; advocating for clients when appropriate; using hospital/clinic/school resources responsibly; asking for assistance when appropriate; getting advice when handling ethical dilemmas; taking constructive feedback from preceptors and other team members with open-mindedness and the intention to improve; contributing to the effectiveness, efficiency, and collegiality of these teams.

C. Students with Disabilities ([Accessible Education](#))

The School of Communication Sciences and Disorders' SLP program is committed to ensuring that students are afforded an academic environment that is dedicated to the advancement of learning and that is based on the principles of equitable access and individual dignity; as such, they are committed to facilitating the integration of students

with disabilities into the Western University community. The School also strives to preserve the academic integrity of the university and the program by affirming that all students satisfy the essential requirements of the program and program courses.

Each student with a disability or who require additional academic learning support is entitled to reasonable accommodation that will assist her/him to meet the program standards and academic requirements. Reasonable accommodation cannot compromise the essential requirements of a program or client/patient safety and well-being. The purpose of a reasonable accommodation is to ensure the student with a disability has the same opportunity as his/her student peers to attain the required operational level, but is not meant to guarantee success in the program.

Exploring reasonable accommodation options may involve the exercise of flexibility by both the University and the student with a disability, while maintaining the academic and technical standards and requirements of the program. The student with a disability must be able to demonstrate the requisite knowledge and behaviours, and perform the necessary skills independently and safely. In rare circumstances an intermediary may be appropriate. Instances when an intermediary may not be appropriate include, for example, where the intermediary has to provide cognitive support; or is a substitute for cognitive skills; or is solely conducting an assessment or treatment; or supplements clinical reasoning or judgment. The appropriateness of an intermediary will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Before accepting an offer of admission, students who may require disability related accommodations are strongly advised to review the [policies, procedures, and regulations](#) regarding accommodations and consult with the University's student accessibility services ([Accessible Education](#)) and the School making the offer. Please note that certain accommodations obtained in previous educational settings may not be appropriate, particularly with respect to clinical requirements. If admitted, students will be required to follow the policies and procedures of the University and the School within which the program is located.

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ⁱ Source: Adapted from Geisel School of Medicine, Dartmouth College:
<https://geiselmed.dartmouth.edu/admin/learnserv/esmpg.shtml>

ⁱⁱ Sources: CAASPR Draft Essential Competencies for SLP Practice; CanMEDS Framework:
<http://www.royalcollege.ca/rcsite/canmeds/canmeds-framework-e>