

An occupational therapist (OT) is a health professional concerned with restoration and maintenance of function following disease or injury. Specifically, occupational therapists are concerned mainly with finer motor control and its functioning in daily activities. An occupational therapist may work with a variety of patients such as stroke victims, amputees, spinal cord or head injury patients and developmentally disabled children. The goal of therapy is to reduce limitations, improve self-care skills, maintain function and prepare for employment. An occupational therapist collaborates with other health professionals such as physicians, nurses, physical therapists and social workers to help the patient attain the highest degree of physical, mental and economic independence possible. Occupational therapists work in many settings such as hospitals, schools, nursing homes, private practice, home health and psychiatric hospitals. The career opportunities for California and the nation are numerous and varied. A continual increase in occupational therapy positions is expected in the coming years. An occupational therapist must have many important personal qualifications including creativity, warmth, responsibility, determination and patience. A therapist must also be comfortable touching and treating the human body.

Occupational Therapy Practitioners

Occupational therapy practitioners are skilled professionals whose education includes the study of human growth and development with specific emphasis on the social, emotional, and physiological effects of illness and injury. The occupational therapist enters the field with a bachelors, masters(2-3yrs), or doctoral degree(3+yrs). The occupational therapy assistant generally earns an associate degree. Practitioners must complete supervised clinical internships in a variety of health care settings, and pass a national examination. Most states also regulate occupational therapy practice.

Preparation for Occupational Therapy School

The best prepared applicant is one who has seriously investigated the field, taken the proper prerequisite courses, and given much thought to the reasons for selecting occupational therapy as a career. Criteria used in the selection of applicants for occupational therapy school include GPA, work experience or exposure to the field, letters of recommendation, personal statement, applicable test scores [ie. Graduate Record Exam (GRE)], extracurricular activities and interview scores. Mean GPA ranges fluctuate with each applicant pool and each school. Work experience in the field is expected of occupational therapy applicants.

Prerequisite Courses

Note: These are general guidelines and each school will differ. Please check with your school to ensure you meet their specific prerequisite courses

One Semester of Anatomy	BIO 164 – Human Anatomy
One Semester of Physiology	BIO 161 – Human Physiology

Courses in Psychology	PSY 1 – Introduction to Psychology PSY 130 – Developmental Psychology PSY 142 – Abnormal Psychology
One Year of Physics	PHYS 8 – Principles of Physics I or ICP 1B – Integrated Calculus and Physics: Physics or PHYS 18 – Principles of Physics I for Biological Sciences and PHYS 9 – Introductory Physics II or PHYS 19 – Introductory Physics II for Biological Sciences
One Year of Biological Sciences	BIO 1/L – Contemporary Biology BIO 2/L – Introduction to Molecular Biology
One Year of English Composition	WRI 10 – College Reading and Composition and WRI 100 – Advanced Writing or WRI 116 – Science Writing in Natural Sciences
One Semester of Sociology / Cultural Anthropology	ANTH 1 – Introduction to Sociocultural Anthropology or SOC 1 – Introduction to Sociology
One Semester of Statistics	MATH 18 – Statistical Analysis of Scientific Data or MATH 32 – Statistics or PSY 10 – Analysis of Psychological Data
One Semester of Skills	ARTS 001A – Learning to See: Beginner Drawing or ARTS 3 – Learning to See: Painting or ARTS 4A – Learning to See in Three Dimensions

*It is the student's responsibility to check specific admission requirements for each individual school.

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Occupational Therapy Education

Q. What is the difference between an entry level master's and an entry level doctoral degree?

A. Both are routes of entry to the profession and both are accredited using the same Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) Standards. The professional content will be similar; however, the entry level doctorate program will place a greater emphasis on management, theory, research, and critical thinking and may require additional Level II Fieldwork.

Q. What is the difference between an MOT, MA, or MS degree that is awarded at the completion of my master's degree program?

A. These are all appropriate degrees to award at the completion of an entry level occupational therapy educational program. The degree awarded is an institutional prerogative based on consistency with the mission and structure of the college/university. All are considered entry level degrees.

Q. What should I major in at the undergraduate level if I apply to an entry level master's or an entry level doctoral program?

A. The choice is personal. Examples of what other students have majored in at the undergraduate level include biology, psychology, sociology, anthropology, liberal arts, and anatomy. It is important that you contact the educational programs to which you are interested in applying and make sure you have taken the necessary prerequisites for admission into their programs.

Q. How much will I make as an occupational therapist?

A. For the most recent salary information, go to the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics

Q. Who can I contact if I have further questions?

A. For further information about studying to become an occupational therapist or occupational therapy assistant, you may refer to the Web site of the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA).

Schools in California

[California State University, Dominguez Hills](#)

[California State University, San Jose](#)

[Dominican University of California](#)

[Loma Linda University](#)

[Samuel Merritt University](#)

[Stanbridge College](#)

[University of Southern California](#)

[University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences - California Campus](#)

[West Coast University - Los Angeles](#)