Occupational Therapy (OTR or OTD)

Career Description

- Occupational therapists help people of all ages learn or regain the skills they need to function and live independently.
- For example, OTs may work with:
  - Children who have autism or developmental or learning disabilities
  - People recovering the ability to do their own personal care after a stroke or accident
  - Clients with mental illness in coping with the demands of daily living
- OTs work in hospitals, mental health facilities, rehabilitation hospitals, public schools, community centers, nursing homes, and private practice.
- OTs develop customized treatment plans; analyze homes and job sites to make recommendations about adaptive needs; train people in using adaptive equipment; and provide support and guidance to family members and caregivers.

Becoming an Occupational Therapist

- To attend an accredited OT program, a bachelor’s degree in any major and the appropriate prerequisite coursework is required. A master’s degree leads to an O.T.R. (Occupational Therapist Registered). A doctoral program leads to an O.T.D. (Doctor of Occupational Therapy).
- Many programs are shifting to the doctoral degree, but it is possible to practice with either a master’s degree or a doctorate. The doctoral program places a greater emphasis on management, theory, research, and critical thinking and will require 3 years rather than the typical 2 years required for the master’s degree.
- Graduation from an accredited educational program and passing a national certification examination is required to become an occupational therapist.

Preparation

- Clinical experience is generally required and ideally will include a number of clinical practice settings.
- Some schools require a minimum of 40 hours of clinical observation time split between at least two clinical settings.
- Research experience is a plus and ideally includes learning about human subjects review boards.
- OT programs do not have a standard set of requirements, although many similarities do exist.
- The initial courses are similar to other professional health care fields such as Physical Therapy programs, yet some further courses are required.
- Individual programs vary in the courses they require; a broad academic background is encouraged including completion of the following courses with grades of C or better.

Common Prerequisite Courses (pre-reqs determined by each OT program but similar to this list)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirements</th>
<th>Purdue Equivalents (specific courses may vary by major)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anatomy &amp; Physiology</td>
<td>BIOL 20300-20400 (8 hours) or BIOL 30100-30200* (6 hours)</td>
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<tr>
<td>General Biology (required at some schools)</td>
<td>BIOL 11000-11100 or BIOL 13100 &amp; 23100 &amp; 23200 (lab) [may only need 3-4 hours of general biology to meet most schools requirements]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physics (required at some schools)</td>
<td>PHYS 22000 or equivalent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social/Behavioral Science</td>
<td>PSY 12000 (Intro) &amp; PSY 35000 (Abnormal) &amp; HDFS 21000 (Lifespan); Other possible requirements: SOC 10000 (Intro), ANTH 10000 (Intro)</td>
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<tr>
<td>English (may need comp &amp;/or literature courses)</td>
<td>ENGL 10600 or 10800 or SCLA 10100*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>COM 11400</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statistics (some schools require from math department)</td>
<td>STAT 30100 or STAT 50300 or SOC 38200 or PSY 20100*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Requirements at some programs</td>
<td>HSCI 13100 (medical terminology); PHIL 11100 (ethics); some programs require college-level algebra, general chemistry, kinesiology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Med Planning Seminar (optional)</td>
<td>BIOL 39600-0 credit 10 week class covering how to apply to medical school and other health professions programs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Ask individual OT programs if they will accept these courses toward their requirements.
Student Organization: Pre-OT/PT Club

Research Programs

- [AOTA Find a School](https://www.aota.org/Education-Careers/Find-School.aspx)

Applying

- An aptitude test, the GRE (Graduate Record Exam—general test) is required at many programs.
- If English is not your first language, a TOEFL exam may also be required.
- Application is through an online system called OTCAS and/or directly with the schools you would like to attend if they do not participate in OTCAS.
- Competitive applicants have:
  - Strong academic performance including a grade point average (GPA) of 3.6 or better
  - High scores on the MCAT
  - Leadership, teamwork, and communication skills
  - Undergraduate research experience
  - Volunteer and shadowing/observation experiences
  - Strong positive letters of recommendation (mostly from faculty and OTs)
- Early application is key as many programs take only a small number of students. OTCAS typically opens in mid-July. Apply by mid-August of your senior year if possible (assuming a 4-year graduation timeline).

Fee Assistance

- Visit specific school websites to learn if fee assistance is available.
- [AOTA Financial Aid and Scholarship Information](https://www.aota.org/Education-Careers/Find-School/Aid.aspx)
- [GRE Fee Reduction Program](https://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/about/fees/reductions/)

Employment Outlook

- The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects a faster than average increase in demand for Occupational Therapists (a 24% increase through 2026).
- To contain costs, OTs are increasingly supervising occupational therapy assistants and aides.
- The median annual earnings of occupational therapists in 2018 was $84,270.

Programs in Indiana

- [University of Indianapolis](http://ot.uindy.edu) Indianapolis, IN -- Doctoral & Master’s degrees
- [IUPUI](https://shrs.iupui.edu/academics/occupational-therapy/index.html) Indianapolis, IN -- Doctoral degree
- [Indiana State University](http://www.indstate.edu/health/program/ot) Terre Haute, IN -- Master’s degree
- [University of Southern Indiana](http://www.usi.edu/health/occupational-therapy) Evansville, IN -- Master’s degree
- [Indiana Wesleyan University](https://www.indwes.edu/adult-graduate/programs/doctorate-of-occupational-therapy/) Marion, IN -- Doctoral degree
- [Huntington University](https://www.huntington.edu/graduate/occupational-therapy) Huntington, IN -- Doctoral degree

More Information

- [American Occupational Therapy Association](http://www.aota.org/)
- [American Occupational Therapy Foundation](http://www.aotf.org)
- [OTCAS](https://otcas.liaisoncas.com/applicant-ux/#/login) (application service)

Other Careers You Might Want to Consider

- Physical Therapy
- Orthotics & Prosthetics
- Occupational Therapy Assistant

Information for this career guide came from the above websites, the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/occupational-therapists.htm) and [Explore Health Careers](https://explorehealthcareers.org/field/occupational-therapy).