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 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.

Education & Licensure

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 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.

Many schools require a minimum of 40 hours of clinical observation time split between at least two clinical settings.

Research experience is a plus, especially for doctoral programs, 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 (required courses 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>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anatomy &amp; Physiology</td>
<td>BIOL 20300-20400 (BIOL 30100-30200)</td>
</tr>
<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics (required at some schools)</td>
<td>PHYS 22000 or equivalent</td>
</tr>
<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>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English (may need comp &amp;/or literature courses)</td>
<td>ENGL 10600 or 10800 or SCLA 10100*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>COM 11400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistics (some schools require from math department)</td>
<td>STAT 30100 or STAT 50300 or SOC 38200 or PSY 20100*</td>
</tr>
<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. Courses no longer offered.

Student Organization: Pre-OT/PT Club
Preparing for your Giant Leap
purdue.edu/preprofessional

Program Information

Accreditation Council for OT Education (ACOTE) https://acoteonline.org/all-schools/

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 3.5 or better
  - High scores on the GRE (where required)
  - Leadership, teamwork, and communication skills
  - 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 18% increase through 2028). https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/occupational-therapists.htm
- To contain costs, OTs are increasingly supervising occupational therapy assistants and aides.
- The median annual earnings of occupational therapists in 2019 was $84,950.

Diversity Matters

The occupational therapy profession needs therapists who look just like you, and who share your life experiences. Race or ethnicity, LGBTQ identity, (dis)ability, age, geographic region, socioeconomic status, and nationality all add to a richer experience for all students in the OT program classroom, contribute to the OT profession, and ultimately lead to better outcomes for patients/clients.

Programs in Indiana

- University of Indianapolis Indianapolis, IN -- Doctoral & Master’s degrees -- https://www.uindy.edu/health-sciences/ot/
- IUPUI Indianapolis, IN – Master’s & Doctoral (candidacy) – https://shhs.iupui.edu/admissions/graduate-professional/doctor-occupational-therapy.html
- Indiana State University Terre Haute, IN – Master’s degree -- https://www.indstate.edu/health/program/ot
- University of Southern Indiana Evansville, IN – Master’s & Doctoral (applicant) -- https://www.usi.edu/health/occupational-therapy
- Indiana Wesleyan University Marion, IN – Doctoral degree -- https://www.indwes.edu/adult-graduate/programs/doctorate-of-occupational-therapy/
- Huntington University Huntington, IN – Doctoral degree -- https://www.huntington.edu/graduate/occupational-therapy
- Indiana University South Bend South Bend, IN – Master’s degree (developing program) – not yet admitting students
- Manchester University Fort Wayne, IN – Doctoral degree (developing program) – not yet admitting students
- Valparaiso University Valparaiso, IN – Doctoral degree (developing program) – not yet admitting students

More Information

- American Occupational Therapy Association https://www.aota.org/
- American Occupational Therapy Foundation https://www.aotf.org/

Other Careers to Consider – Physical Therapy · Orthotics & Prosthetics · Occupational Therapy Assistant

Preparing for your Giant Leap
purdue.edu/preprofessional