

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

## **A. Overview**

This document 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 applying to a program;
- help guide efforts of SLP students, faculty, and staff toward student achievement of essential skills and attributes for entry-level practice;
- help prospective and current SLP students decide if they should register with student accessibility services if accepted into the program;
- help students, accessibility advisors, faculty, staff, and health professionals develop reasonable accommodations such that students may meet the ESA requirements;
- help ensure the safety of learners during the education program; and
- help ensure the safety of clients during student-led clinical encounters.

## **B. Essential Skills and Attributes for Graduate Study in SLP<sup>i</sup>**

The SLP functions as a scholar, communicator, collaborator, clinician, professional, advocate, and leader.<sup>ii</sup> 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 Ontario. To practice as a SLP in Ontario, an individual must also become registered with the provincial regulatory organization, 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, groups, and activities that are part of the curriculum, including small group discussions and presentations, large-group lectures, one-on-one interactions, demonstrations, client encounters (at a distance and close at hand)
- Read, write, and use digital media
- Perform basic assessment procedures, including examining clients
- 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 competencies

Examples of activities requiring sensorimotor capabilities include, but are not limited to reading books, articles, and online resources; participating in classes, small groups, client presentations, review sessions, and laboratory work; using a computer; working with small children in a community or preschool setting; performing a clinical examination of speech and swallowing; performing instrumented procedures such as an audiological evaluation, 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, alone and in small groups; interpreting the results of client examinations and diagnostic 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, cogent, 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-group discussions/interactions; writing assessment reports and documenting treatment; making presentations (formal and informal) in academic and practicum settings; communicating with members of the school or healthcare team; talking with clients and their families about communication and swallowing issues; 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. 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, caring, 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 students' own
- Develop mature, sensitive, and effective relationships, not only with clients but with all members of school, community and healthcare teams
- Abide by all provincial, national, and local laws and regulations, as well as all University's 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
- Take responsibility for themselves and their behaviors

Examples of professional behavior include, but are not limited to showing up for required experiences on time and prepared; 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, and not reinforcing them; developing empathic listening skills; advocating for clients when appropriate; using hospital/clinic/school resources responsibly; showing up prepared and on time for all clinical meetings; 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**

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 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 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 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.

*NOTE: specific programs in Ontario may have additional program specific essential requirements.*

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<sup>i</sup> Source: Adapted from Geisel School of Medicine, Dartmouth College:

<https://geiselmed.dartmouth.edu/admin/learnserv/esmpg.shtml>

<sup>ii</sup> Sources: CAASPR Draft Essential Competencies for SLP Practice; CanMEDS Framework:

<http://www.royalcollege.ca/rcsite/canmeds/canmeds-framework-e>