

Careers in Psychology

Subfields in Psychology: Experimental/research, Developmental, Cognitive, Social, Evolutionary, Educational, Industrial/organizational, Forensic, and Health, Clinical Neuropsychology, Quantitative and Measurement, and Rehabilitation

In addition to practice-related careers in clinical, counseling and school psychology (see Practice Areas in Psychology sheet), other areas of specialization involve differing educational requirements (bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree, depending on position/role) and career opportunities.

People with a **master's degree in psychology** may work as psychological assistants conducting research under the direct supervision of doctoral-level psychologists. A master's degree in psychology requires at least 2 years of full-time graduate study.

Requirements usually include practical experience in an applied setting and a master's thesis based on an original research project.

A **bachelor's degree in psychology** qualifies a person to assist psychologists and other professionals in community mental health centers, vocational rehabilitation offices, and correctional programs. Bachelor's degree holders may also work as administrative assistants for psychologists. Many, however, find employment in other areas, such as sales, service, business management, public affairs, or in educational settings as a teaching assistant.

Experimental or research psychologists study the behavior of both human beings and animals. They work in university and private research centers and in business, nonprofit, and governmental organizations. Their work is primarily focused on statistics, research and experimentation.

Developmental psychologists study the physiological, cognitive, and social development that takes place throughout life. Some specialize in behavior during infancy, childhood, and adolescence, or changes that occur during maturity or old age. Developmental psychologists also may study developmental disabilities and their effects. Increasingly, research is developing ways to help elderly people remain independent as long as possible. Developmental psychologists usually do research and teach in academic settings, but many act as consultants to day care centers, schools, or social service agencies as well as to industry.

Cognitive psychologists study human perception, thinking, and memory. Cognitive psychologists are interested in questions such as, how does the mind represent reality? How do people learn? How do people

understand and produce language? They also study reasoning, judgment, and decision making. Cognitive psychologists frequently collaborate with behavioral neuroscientists to understand the biological bases of perception or cognition or with researchers in other areas of psychology to better understand the cognitive biases in the thinking of people with depression, for example. Cognitive psychologists work at colleges and universities, government agencies and the legal system, corporate businesses, and private consulting.

Health psychologists are concerned with psychology's contributions to the promotion and maintenance of good health and the prevention and treatment of illness. They may design and conduct programs to help individuals stop smoking, lose weight, manage stress, and stay physically fit. Their training often makes them an asset to medical teams in terms of their contribution towards the goal of both helpful and cost effective health care, and in the areas of research, grant-writing, statistical, communication, and team development skills. They are employed in universities, research centers, hospitals, medical schools, rehabilitation centers, public health agencies, academic settings, and private consultation/ practice offices.

Social psychologists examine people's interactions with others and with the social environment. They work in organizational consultation, marketing research, systems design, or other applied psychology fields. Many social psychologists specialize in a niche area, such as group behavior, leadership, attitudes, and perception. Many social psychologists work in academic settings, but some work in federal agencies and businesses doing applied research.

Industrial-organizational psychologists apply psychological principles and research methods to the workplace in the interest of improving the quality of work-life. They also are involved in research on management and marketing problems. They screen, train, and counsel applicants for jobs, as well as perform organizational development and analysis. An industrial psychologist might work with management to reorganize the work setting in order to enhance productivity. Industrial psychologists frequently act as consultants, brought in by management to solve a particular problem. They are employed in business, government agencies, and academic settings.

Clinical neuropsychologists are professional psychologists trained in the science of brain-behavior relationships. The clinical neuropsychologist specializes in the application of assessment and intervention principles based on the scientific study of human behavior across the lifespan as it relates to normal and abnormal functioning of the central nervous system. Neuropsychologists work in academia doing research, as well as in hospitals, rehabilitation facilities, and in private and consulting practices assessing or treating patients with neuropsychological problems. They also work in industry as consultants applying their neuropsychological knowledge to product design or in the management of pharmaceutical clinical-trials research for drugs that could have impact on central nervous system function. This specialized area of practice typically involves a PhD or PsyD degree, although bachelor and master degree holders may be employed as psychometrists under the supervision of licensed clinical neuropsychologists.

Rehabilitation psychologists focus on the study and application of psychological knowledge and skills on behalf of individuals with disabilities and chronic health conditions in order to maximize health and welfare, independence and choice, functional abilities, and social role participation across the lifespan. They are involved in program development, service provision and the development of public policy and advocacy related to persons with disability and chronic health conditions. Rehabilitation Psychologists work in a broad range of settings, including private clinical and consultation practice offices, in universities and research centers as teachers and researchers, as well as in training and administrative departments in both the private sector and governmental agencies.

Forensic psychologists use psychological principles in the legal and criminal justice system to help judges, attorneys, and other legal professionals understand the psychological findings of a particular case. They are usually designated as an expert witness and typically specialize in one of three areas: family court, civil court, and criminal court. Forensic psychologists who work in family court may offer psychotherapy services, perform child custody evaluations, or investigate reports of child abuse. Those working in civil courts may assess competency, provide second opinions, and provide psychotherapy to crime victims. Criminal court forensic psychologists often conduct evaluations of mental competency, work with child witnesses, and provide assessment of juvenile or adult offenders. Forensic psychologists work in private practice, for government agencies such as the FBI or in laboratories, courtrooms,

and prisons as well as in mental institutions with criminal wards.

Evolutionary psychologists study how evolutionary principles such as mutation, adaptation, and selective fitness influence human thought, feeling, and behavior. Because of their focus on genetically shaped behaviors that influence an organism's chances of survival, evolutionary psychologists study mating, aggression, helping behavior, and communication. Because evolutionary psychology is simply a way of viewing psychology, evolutionary psychologists can work in all the fields that psychologists do. Many work in universities as researchers and teachers, as well as in laboratories, hospitals, private organizations or government agencies such as the National Institutes of Health.

Educational psychologists are concerned with the study of human learning. They consider a variety of factors such as human abilities, student motivation, and the effect on the classroom of the diversity of race, ethnicity, and culture that makes up America. They attempt to understand the basic aspects of learning and then develop materials and strategies for enhancing the learning process. For example, an educational psychologist might study reading and then develop a new technique for teaching reading. Educational psychologists are typically trained in Schools of Education and employed in academic settings. They also may be employed in private consultative/practice offices.

Quantitative and measurement psychologists (Q/M) focus on methods and techniques for designing experiments and analyzing psychological data. Some develop new methods for performing analysis; others create research strategies to assess the effect of social and educational programs and psychological treatment. They develop and evaluate mathematical models for psychological tests. They also propose methods for evaluating the quality and fairness of the tests. Q/M psychologists most often work in universities, testing companies, private research firms, and government agencies.

References:

Extracted and adapted from Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2010). *Career Guide to Industries, 2010-11 Edition*. Retrieved from Occupational Outlook Handbook: <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos056.htm>.

Extracted and adapted from American Psychological Association (2010). *Careers in Psychology*. Retrieved from: <http://www.apa.org/careers/resources/guides/careers.aspx>.

Extracted and adapted from American Psychological Association (2010). Division 38, Health Psychology. Retrieved from: <http://www.health-psych.org/AboutHowtoBecome.cfm>.