

## OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY RESOURCES

When pursuing occupational therapy, it is important to understand the different types of programs that are available to you. Students have a number of options, with programs varying from **entry-level master's programs**, **entry-level doctoral programs**, **occupational therapy assistant programs** or even go on to pursue **post professional doctoral programs**. You can read about the differences on the [AOTA's FAQ section](#) on OT education and career planning and by viewing each school's programs offered. A few things to consider when seeking occupational therapy programs are:

- The amount of required hours varies from program to program, but most require around **40-80 hours** of observation in a variety of settings. It is vital to **check the program's admission requirements** when obtaining hours. Check out [AOTA's article](#) on gaining creative and diverse experiences throughout your undergraduate career.
- View a list of **accredited programs** via the [AOTA website](#).
- Many programs require applicants to take the **GRE**, but not all do. Check with each program's requirements on minimum scores and if the test is required for admission.
- Many schools require your application to be submitted through the **Occupational Therapy Common Application System, or OTCAS**. You can make your account [here](#). However, **not all schools utilize OTCAS!** It is important to thoroughly read each program's admission procedures to properly apply for your programs of choice.

## **PREREQUISITE COURSES**

Most common **prerequisite courses**:

**Human Anatomy and Physiology I – BIOL 2160**

**Human Anatomy and Physiology II – BIOL 2170**

**Principles of Biology I – BIOL 1107/L**

**Principles of Chemistry I – CHEM 1211/L**

**Introductory Physics I – PHYS 1111/L**

**Introduction to General Psychology – PSYC 1101**

**Introduction to Human Development – PSYC 2103**

**Abnormal Psychology – PSYC 3200**

**Sociological Perspectives – SOCI 1121 OR Fundamentals of Sociology – SOCI 2100 OR Introduction to Anthropology – ANTH 1102**

**Probability and Statistics – MATH 2600**

**Medical Terminology – KINS 2331**

Other **highly suggested** course areas:

**Communication or Rhetoric courses**

**Additional Biology Courses**

*Required prerequisites can vary from program to program. Be sure to check with each school of interest for their required courses.*

*\*\*Talk with your academic advisor before choosing courses!*

## **GRE PREPARATION**

Not all programs require perspective students to take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), but many do. It is important that you thoroughly read each school's website to ensure that you have followed their procedure and that you meet their specific qualifications. The GRE is made up of **3 sections including: Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, and Analytical Writing**. You can register for the GRE [here](#). It is highly suggested that you spend time prior to your test date familiarizing yourself with the types of questions in each section, which you can do through taking a course with a company like Kaplan or Princeton Review, or you can buy study books online that contain practice tests and examples. Applications should be submitted during the summer between junior and senior year, so be sure to take the test in enough time to make the deadlines.

## **PERSONAL STATEMENT**

Personal Statements used to apply to occupational therapy programs being submitted through OTCAS should be a general overview as to why you chose this profession. When applying through a common application service, they will forward your information to the schools you select including your general personal statement. Pay attention to the character count allotted for the essay, and remember that this could take spaces into account! Follow the instructions listed carefully to ensure that you follow all of the

parameters set. You should start writing your personal statement early so that you can get adequate feedback prior to submitting your application. **Some programs will require an additional essay** that will pertain to their program after receiving your OTCAS application. It is important to check the website of each school you apply to.

## OBTAINING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Developing meaningful relationships with faculty is vital when seeking letters of recommendation. Begin thinking about faculty who you have or will have taken several classes with, have similar research interests with, or that you feel a connection to, so that you can begin building those relationships from day 1. Remember that a person’s title is not near as important as how well they know you as a student and as a person. When requesting letters of recommendation, quality highly outweighs quantity. **OTCAS** requires students to submit **at least 3 references and no more than 5**. However, certain schools may only accept a certain number or have specifications on letter writers, so it is vital to check the website of each program you are applying to. In addition to faculty, **you should seek occupational therapists and other industry professionals with whom you have worked**. This could include a supervisor for an internship or volunteer experience.

When asking for letters, remember to be gracious and *ask* for the letter. “Would you be willing to,” is usually a good way to start the conversation rather than demanding that they write you a letter. Faculty and professionals expect you to ask, and they will most likely agree as long as they feel comfortable speaking on your behalf. Be sure to give the faculty member, licensed professional, or whomever you plan to ask plenty of notice, generally a month is suggested. Providing a resume, CV, personal statement, or some other document will show that you are serious about obtaining a letter and give the faculty member some reference as to what you want them to talk about. **ALWAYS REMEMBER TO THANK YOUR REFERENCES!**

## INTERVIEWING PREPARATION

When preparing for professional school interviews, a lot of the same rules apply as with most job interviews. Remember to dress accordingly to interview etiquette and conduct yourself in a professional manner. On Handshake, you can view the Career Center’s “Dress for Success” handouts by clicking on the *Resources* tab. In addition, you want to be sure that you practice ahead of time. “Why occupational therapy?” or “Why our program?” are common types of questions that you want to be sure to prepare for. **Not all programs require interviews and the process varies from school to school**, so read the program’s webpage thoroughly.

Also, you will want to prepare your own questions to ask. Much like job interviews, you are interviewing the school and program just like they are interviewing you. Finding a good fit is important for you to thrive in a program. Once the interview is over, it is always a good idea to write thank you notes. These can be via email or handwritten. Making it to the interview stage is a huge feat, so you want to make sure that you make the best impression!

## MAJORING IN SOMETHING OTHER THAN SCIENCE/EXERCISE SCIENCE?

You do not need to have a degree in a science discipline to be an occupational therapist! This is a misconception that many have about the majority of health professions. Professional programs are seeking out students that will bring a different perspective to their program and a major other than a STEM field or exercise science could make you stand out. However, you must consider the required prerequisites that will need to be worked into the curriculum of your chosen major. In addition, consider seeking out additional challenging science or industry related courses as electives to make yourself a well-rounded candidate. But be sure to consult with your academic advisor before choosing courses!

## TIMELINE

<b>Year 1</b>	Meet with a pre-professional advisor to start building your timeline and to explore options and opportunities available to you.	Use the Learning Center for Supplemental Instruction to maintain a strong GPA from day 1 <b><i>especially in science/exercise science courses!</i></b>	Get involved with a student group that will both strengthen your application and apply to your interests.	Explore professional healthcare careers using Focus2 and Occupational Outlook Handbook, as well as attending the Graduate & Professional School Fair.
<b>Summer 1</b>	<b><i>*Work with the Career Center to start building your resume or CV to prepare your applications for summer experiences*</i></b> Volunteer at local hospitals or settings with inpatient OR outpatient occupational therapy and keep a journal about your experiences. Other summer experiences could include: research with a faculty member, summer enrichment programs, participation on campus with community science education programs for youth, and apply at summer camps for people with special needs.			
<b>Year 2</b>	Assess academic standing and plans for completing	Identify and connect with faculty for mentorship,	Seek out campus leadership opportunities	Continue gaining experience in your field as

	prerequisite courses with Academic Advisor.	research opportunities, and professional advice. Also seek out professional mentors and potential internship opportunities.	and community involvement. Be strategic in choosing settings that could make you a competitive candidate.	mentioned above. Attend the Graduate & Professional School Fair to continue growing your network and knowledge of programs available.
<b>Summer 2</b>	<b><i>*Work with a pre-professional advisor to begin looking at schools/programs of interest and choose several*</i></b> Start familiarizing yourself with what each program of interest requires. Consider the amount of experiential hours required, GRE requirements, etc. Continue to gain meaningful shadowing and volunteer hours, preferably with direct patient care. Create a budget that will include GRE, test preparation, and application fees for each program of interest including secondary application fees.			
<b>Year 3</b>	Begin preparing for the GRE by buying study materials or registering for a course with companies such as Princeton Review or Kaplan. Choose test date and be registered by second semester.	Consider what faculty, advisors, and mentors could potentially write your letters of recommendation and consult with them so that you can include their names on your OTCAS application. Speak with letter writers in person.	Keep regular contact with your pre-professional advisor to fine tune your application strategy, schools of interest, personal statement, and create your <a href="#">OTCAS Account</a> .	Discuss alternatives with your pre-professional advisor in case of needed gap year or change in career plans. Attend the Graduate & Professional School Fair to explore your options.
<b>Summer 3</b>	By the end of summer 3, you should have your final GRE score and be ready to start applying. Complete and submit your OTCAS application and any secondary application requirements. Continue involvement, research, and/or meaningful volunteering, shadowing, or internships that can be added to your experiences when applying.			
<b>Year 4</b>	Prepare with the Career Center for interviews with occupational therapy programs.	Complete secondary applications/essays as requested.	Evaluate acceptance offers and talk with your pre-professional advisor for guidance.	Consider if a gap year would be in your best interest to acquire the needed shadowing or volunteer hours, practical experiences, or prerequisites.