Speech–Language Pathology Assistants

A RESOURCE MANUAL

THIRD EDITION

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Contents

Preface

Speech-language pathology assistants (SLPAs) are "support personnel who, following academic and/or on-the-job training, perform tasks prescribed, directed, and supervised by American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) certified speech-language pathologists (SLPs)" (ASHA, n.d., para. 2). The use of SLPAs and support personnel is not new. As early as the 1970s, support personnel in the field of speech-language pathology were being used and regulated by different states in the United States (ASHA, n.d.). ASHA has had guidelines for the use of support personnel since 1969. Expansion in the use of SLPAs continues to increase as professionals in the field look for ways to contain costs and expand clinical services (ASHA, n.d.). ASHA maintains and periodically updates formal policy and guidelines on the training, use, and supervision of SLPAs. In 2020, ASHA also created a formal certification for SLPAs (C-SLPA) (Council for Clinical Certification in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2020).

CONTENT

This book is written specifically for SLPAs, addressing their unique needs. It is intended to be a practical resource on a wide range of topics that SLPAs may find of value. It does not cover normal processes of communication or communicative disorders in depth. Rather, it is intended as a "what now" or real-world perspective offering technical and clinical procedure suggestions for SLPAs, including SLPA professional issues and ethics, and instruction in workplace behaviors, such as implementing treatment and collecting and summarizing data. Specialized topics applicable to SLPAs, such as augmentative and alternative communication, cultural and linguistic diversity, play and literacy in therapy, speech sound remediation, and autism spectrum disorder are also included to extend SLPAs' foundational knowledge to real-world applications. This book is written for individuals with a variety of SLPA experience and training. It is our hope that SLPAs with all levels of experience and background will find tools and resources of value to them in this book. If you are an SLPA who has been in the field for many years, this book may offer you a fresh perspective on your role and ideas for continuing to refine your skills. If you are an SLPA just starting your career, this book offers you important information to take with you on your journey. If you are an SLPA in training, the book provides you with information relevant for your training, particularly to your clinical practicum and future employment as an SLPA.

ORGANIZATION

The first six chapters cover broad topics, including an overview of the roles and responsibilities of SLPAs and their supervisors. The initial chapters also cover professional conduct, ethics, cultural and

linguistic diversity, and topics important to the health and safety of SLPAs and the individuals they serve. Within these sections, ASHA documents are a cornerstone when referencing policies, procedures, rules, and regulations applicable to SLPA practice. At present, there is considerable variability between states' regulations applicable to SLPAs. As such, ASHA, as the sole national organization for the profession in the United States, serves as an important and primary resource on the topic. That is not to say that SLPAs should ignore state regulations. Rather, as will be discussed, SLPAs must be cognizant of both ASHA and individual state regulations. References and suggestions for accessing state-specific information are provided. Furthermore, given the dynamic nature of policies and procedures, readers should view the information in this book as an overview of regulations and policies in place at the time of publication. The reader is referred to ASHA's website, at https://www.asha .org, for the most recent information.

The next six chapters of the book are organized as "skill development" chapters. These chapters cover a specific set of skills needed by SLPAs across a wide variety of settings. They include the important topics of data collection, note writing, therapy implementation techniques for individual and group sessions, and a newly added chapter on the use of behavioral principles. Throughout each skill development chapter, helpful tips and applicable references and resources are provided, with the major emphasis on providing information that will be of value in actual clinical work as an SLPA.

The remaining seven chapters include treatment foundations and suggestions for specific populations, including newly added chapters on early intervention, language interventions for children, and foundational knowledge for working with adults with acquired neurologic disorders. This is not an exhaustive list of all the populations and disorders SLPAs may encounter in their clinical work. Rather, these chapters serve as additional considerations for common populations and disorders SLPAs might encounter.

COMPANION WEBSITE

This book has a companion website with important forms SLPAs can use in their clinical work. These forms can be freely modified and copied. Explanations about the content on the companion website are embedded within the chapters of the book. The following symbol denotes where the content of the companion website is referenced.

REFERENCES

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). (n.d.). *Frequently asked questions: Speech-language pathology assistants (SLPAs)*. https://www.asha.org/associates/SLPA-FAQs/

Council for Clinical Certification in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2020). *2020 Standards for ASHA Speech-Language Pathology Assistants Certification*. https://www.asha.org/certification/2020-slpa-certification-standards/

Contributors

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Stephanie L. Peterson has experience as a speech-language pathologist within the school and clinical settings and part-time lecturer in the Department of Speech and Language Pathology at CSULB. Her specialties include AAC, data collection, teletherapy, and collaboration. She has taught a variety of courses at CSULB, including SLPA, Child Language Disorders, and Speech Sound Disorders. Currently, she is working as a program specialist supporting multidisciplinary special education teams and overseeing a grant to support secondary special education students.

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Lei Sun is a full professor in the Department of Speech-Language Pathology at California State University Long Beach. She completed her BA and MA in Taiwan before changing the career path to become a speech-language pathologist. Dr. Sun speaks Mandarin Chinese as her primary language and is an English-language learner. Dr. Sun is passionate about developmental language disorder, language-based learning disability, speech sound disorders, and multicultural/multilingual issues.

CHAPTER 1

Defining Roles: SLPAs

Confidence, like art, never comes from having all the answers;
it comes from being open to all the questions.

—Earl Gray Stevens

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) defines SLPAs as "speech-language pathology assistants are support personnel who, following academic coursework, fieldwork, and on-the-job training, perform tasks prescribed, directed, and supervised by ASHA-certified speech-language pathologists" (ASHA, n.d.-a, Defining Speech-Language Pathology Assistants, para 1.).

SLPAs are not independent practitioners but rather work specifically under the direction and guidance of a qualified speech-language pathologist (SLP) to increase the availability, frequency, and efficiency of services provided by the SLP. SLPAs provide services in a wide variety of settings. These settings include but are not limited to the following (ASHA, 2022, Practice Settings, para. 1):[1]

- Public, private, and charter elementary and secondary schools
- Early intervention settings (e.g., homes, preschools, daycare settings)
- Hospitals (inpatient and outpatient)
- Residential health care settings (e.g., long-term care and skilled nursing facilities)
- Nonresidential health care settings (e.g., adult daycare, home health services, and clinics)
- Private practice settings
- University/college clinics
- Research facilities
- Corporate and industrial settings
- Student's, patient's, or client's residences

SLPAs differ from other support personnel, such as speech and language aides, instructional aides, paraprofessionals, and communication aides, both in the level of training and in the amount of supervision and oversight they receive. According to ASHA (n.d.-a.), "Aides, for example, have a different, usually narrower, training base and more limited responsibilities than speech-language pathology assistants" (Defining Speech-Language Pathology Assistants, para. 2).

The use of SLPAs is not new in the field of speech-language pathology. ASHA has had documents addressing support personnel since as early as the 1960s. The role of the SLPA in the field of speech-language pathology continues to evolve, however, given changes in health and educational service delivery models, increases in the number of individuals diagnosed with communication disorders, expansion in the scope of services provided by SLPs, and the rising costs of providing these services.

ASHA (2022) outlines that "some tasks, procedures, or activities used to treat individuals with communication and related disorders can be successfully performed by individuals other than SLPs if the persons conducting the activity are properly trained and supervised by ASHA-certified and/or state-credentialed SLPs" (Executive Summary, para. 3). This chapter outlines recommendations for the training and use of SLPAs. Recommendations for the supervision of SLPAs are summarized in Chapter 2.

Internationally, there is variability in professional classification, services provided, and the use of assistants in the field of speech-language pathology. For individuals interested in obtaining information about SLPAs outside of the United States, ASHA maintains a summary of international SLP professional organizations (this information is also available at https://www.asha.org/members/international/intl_assoc/). These organizations are a good starting point for discovering if SLPAs exist at similar levels in other parts of the world. The International Association of Logopedics and Phoniatrics is also a source of information on this topic (http://www.ialp.info/).

In the United States, regulations for the training, use, and supervision of support personnel vary from state to state. The governing bodies that regulate or oversee the use of SLPAs also vary from state to state. In some locations, a state's department of education (or similar educational body) establishes and oversees specific requirements for SLPA training, use, and supervision in school settings. In some locations, state licensing boards regulate SLPA training, use, and supervi-

sion in nonschool settings. And in some cases, educational setting-specific requirements overlap with those of noneducation requirements, but in others they differ.

As an SLPA, if you are working in a setting that requires formal licensure, certification, or registration for support personnel, it is imperative that you adhere to any applicable laws, regulations, and procedures. Not doing so could compromise the care of the individuals you serve and place you and your supervisor in legal jeopardy for actions outside your state's standards. SLPAs should familiarize themselves with the most recent regulations in their locations. Realize as well that state standards may change annually or without notice. Hence, it is your responsibility as an SLPA to be familiar with, and stay abreast of, the most recent regulations in your location.

ASHA's State Advocacy Team maintains a page on ASHA's website that summarizes each state's requirements, including requirements for support personnel (ASHA, n.d.-b.). This is a valuable resource for SLPAs. SLPAs should also go directly to the website of their state's regulating body for information regarding SLPA regulations, laws, and procedures. An Internet search using terms, such as the name of your state plus speech-language pathology assistant, support personnel, registration, certification, or licensure, will likely yield the contact information you need.

ASHA is the national professional organization in the United States in the field of speech-language pathology. ASHA's primary policy document outlining recommend training, use, and supervision of SLPAs is the *Speech-Language Pathology Assistant Scope of Practice* (ASHA, 2022). This document is available

in Appendix 1–A. This and other important documents pertaining to SLPAs can be retrieved from ASHA's website (http://www.asha.org/). This includes ASHA's "Frequently Asked Questions" section on its website with current and helpful information about SLPAs and ASHA "practice portals" for professionals to access ASHA resources and policies on specific topics. The practice portal on the subject of SLPAs (http://www.asha.org/ Practice-Portal/Professional-Issues/Speech-Language-Pathology-Assistants/) is highly valuable for current information on topics related to support personnel.

Lastly, keep in mind that the information discussed in this book applies to documents published by ASHA at the time this book was written. As an SLPA, you should make ASHA's website a favorite on your homepage for ready access. Similar to state regulations, ASHA policies and documents change over time. As such, it is critical that you keep abreast of recent information from ASHA applicable to SLPAs. Following a description of ASHA's recommended use and training of SLPA, the final section of this chapter describes a recently created ASHA certification for SLPA (C-SLPA).

SLPA MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS

As noted earlier, required training and education will vary by state, but ASHA's SLPA scope of practice recommends that SLPAs complete an "approved course of academic study, complete a supervised clinical experience, successfully pass the ASHA Assistants Certification Exam, meet credentialing requirements for the state in which they practice, and receive

orientation as well as on-the-job training of SLPA responsibilities specific to the setting" (ASHA, 2022, Minimal Qualifications of an SLPA, para. 1). There are three educational pathways for doing so (ASHA, 2022, Minimal Qualifications of an SLPA, para. 2):[1]

1. Completion of an SLPA program from a regionally accredited institution (e.g., an associate's degree, a technical training program, a certificate program), or
2. Receipt of a bachelor's degree in communication sciences and disorders from a regionally accredited institution AND completion of ASHA education modules, or
3. Receipt of a bachelor's degree in a field other than communication sciences and disorders AND completion of ASHA education modules AND successful completion of coursework from a regionally or nationally accredited institution in all of the following areas:
   - Introductory or overview course in communication disorders
   - Phonetics
   - Speech sound disorders
   - Language development
   - Anatomy and physiology of speech and hearing mechanisms

Following completion of one of the above pathways, ASHA's scope of practice stipulates each of the following (ASHA, 2022, Minimal Qualifications of an SLPA, para. 3):[1]

1. Completion of a supervised clinical experience that consists of a minimum of one hundred (100) hours

under the direct supervision of an ASHA-certified SLP. The supervising SLP must meet all ASHA certification and supervising requirements and state credentialing requirements.
2. Achieve a passing score on the ASHA Assistants Certification Exam.
3. Meet all state credentialing requirements.

SLPA DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

ASHA expectations for SLPAs working in the field of speech-language pathology include performing only those tasks that are prescribed by an SLP and adhering to all applicable guidelines and regulations, including state licensure and related rules regarding SLPAs in specific settings. Specifically, ASHA states that SLPAs are expected to do the following (ASHA, 2022, Expectations of an SLPA, para. 1):[1]

- Adhere to all applicable state laws and rules regulating the practice of speech-language pathology.
- Adhere to the responsibilities for SLPAs specified in this scope of practice document and in state requirements.
- Avoid performing tasks or activities that are the exclusive responsibility of the SLP.
- Perform only those tasks approved by the supervising SLP.
- Work only in settings for which the SLPA has been trained and in which state regulations allow for SLPA employment.
- Deliver services only with an ASHA-certified and state-

licensed SLP providing direct and indirect supervision on a regular and systematic basis. Frequency and type of supervision should be based on the SLPA's competencies and the caseload need, both of which are determined by the supervising SLP.

- Conduct oneself ethically within the Assistants Code of Conduct (ASHA, 2020) and state ethical codes.
- Self-advocate for needed supervision and training and for adherence to this SLPA scope of practice and other requirements.
- Provide culturally responsive services while communicating and collaborating with students, patients, clients, the supervising SLP, colleagues, families, caregivers, and other stakeholders.
- Actively pursue continuing education and professional development activities.
- Obtain information regarding availability and need for liability insurance.

ASHA's (2022) document makes a specific point of highlighting those activities SLPAs should not engage in, as they are specifically outside an SLPA's scope of service (Box 1–1). If you find yourself in a situation during your training or at any point during the course of your employment as an SLPA where you engage in (or are asked to perform) any of these activities, this is a clear warning sign that you should seek immediate assistance in addressing the issue. Chapter 3 discusses ethical dilemmas such as this and recommendations for resolving ethical conflict.

Now that you know what an SLPA must not do, ASHA's 2022 scope of practice document also outlines activities that are within the scope of responsibilities of an SLPA, including duties in the areas of service delivery, administrative support, and prevention and advocacy.

Service Delivery

In the area of service delivery, ASHA recommends that SLPAs identify themselves to clients, clients' families, and fellow service providers, both verbally and in writing, and wear a name badge (ASHA, 2022). Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 3, SLPAs are expected to conduct themselves ethically, maintain client confidentiality, and adhere to all federal and state regulations in the provision of services in schools and medical settings. Provided SLPAs are under the direction of a qualified SLP and given adequate training and supervision, Box 1–2 outlines ASHA's recommendations for activities within the scope of an SLPA related to service delivery. SLPAs "may not perform tasks when a supervising SLP cannot be reached by personal contact, phone, pager, or other immediate or electronic means" (ASHA, 2022, Minimum Requirements in Frequency and Amount of Supervision, para. 9). Furthermore, the purpose of an SLPA is to support the SLP in the provision of services, not to increase the caseload numbers of the SLP. ASHA recommends that SLPAs have liability insurance as protection for malpractice during service provision. Your employer may provide this insurance for you, or you may be expected to independently acquire liability insurance. This should be done prior to providing services to clients.

Box 1–1. Activities Outside an SLPA's Scope of Practice
(ASHA, 2022, Responsibilities Outside the Scope of SLPAs, para. 1)[1]

The SLPA should *NOT* engage in any of the following activities:

■ Representing themselves as the SLP
■ Interpreting assessment tools for the purpose of diagnosing disability, determining eligibility or qualification for services
■ Administering or interpreting feeding and/or swallowing screenings, checklists, and assessments
■ Diagnosing communication and feeding/swallowing disorders
■ Developing or determining the feeding and/or swallowing strategies or precautions for students, patients, and clients
■ Disclosing clinical or confidential information (e.g., diagnosis, services provided, response to treatment) either orally or in writing to individuals who have not been approved by the SLP to receive information unless mandated by law
■ Writing, developing, or modifying a student's, patient's, or client's plan of care in any way
■ Making referrals for additional services
■ Assisting students, patients, and clients without following the individualized plan of care prepared by the ASHA-certified SLP
■ Assisting students, patients, and clients without access to supervision
■ Selecting augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems or devices
■ Treating medically fragile students, patients, and clients without 100% direct supervision
■ Performing procedures that require specialized knowledge and training (e.g., vocal tract prosthesis shaping or fitting, vocal tract imaging)
■ Providing input in care conferences, case conferences, or any interdisciplinary team meeting without the presence or prior approval of the supervising SLP or other designated SLP
■ Providing interpretative information to the student, patient, client, family, or others regarding the student's, patient's, or client's status or service
■ Signing or initialing any formal documents (e.g., plans of care, reimbursement forms, reports) without the supervising SLP's co-signature
■ Discharging a student, patient, or client from services

Box 1–2. SLPA Scope of Responsibility: Service Delivery
(ASHA, 2022, Service Delivery, para. 1)[1]

- Self-identifying (e.g., verbally, in writing, signage, titles on name badges) as an SLPA to students, patients, clients, families, staff, and others
- Exhibiting compliance with federal, state, and local regulations, including the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), reimbursement requirements, and state statutes and rules regarding SLPA education, training, and scope of practice
- Administering and scoring screenings for clinical interpretation by the SLP
- Assisting the SLP during assessment of students, patients, and clients (e.g., setting up the testing environment, gathering and prepping materials, taking notes as advised by the SLP)
- Administering and scoring assessment tools that (a) the SLPA meets the examiner requirements specified in the examiner's manual and (b) the supervising SLP uses to verify the SLPA's competence in administration, exclusive of clinical interpretation
- Administering and scoring progress monitoring tools exclusive of clinical interpretation if (a) the SLPA meets the examiner requirements specified in the examiner's manual and (b) the supervisor has verified the SLPA's competence in administration
- Implementing documented care plans or protocols (e.g., individualized education plan [IEP], individualized family service plan [IFSP], treatment plan) developed and directed by the supervising SLP
- Providing direct therapy services addressing treatment goals developed by the supervising SLP to meet the needs of the student, patient, client, and family
- Adjusting and documenting the amount and type of support or scaffolding provided to the student, patient, or client in treatment to facilitate progress
- Developing and implementing activities and materials for teaching and practice of skills to address the goals of the student, patient, client, and family per the plan of care developed by the supervising SLP
- Providing treatment through a variety of service delivery models (e.g., individual, group, classroom based, home

based, cotreatment with other disciplines) as directed by the supervising SLP

- Providing services via telepractice to students, patients, and clients who are selected by the supervising SLP
- Documenting student, patient, or client performance (e.g., collecting data and calculating percentages for the SLP to use; preparing charts, records, and graphs) and reporting this information to the supervising SLP in a timely manner
- Providing caregiver coaching (e.g., model and teach communication strategies, provide feedback regarding caregiver-child interactions) for facilitation and carryover of skills
- Sharing objective information (e.g., accuracy in speech and language skills addressed, participation in treatment, response to treatment) regarding student, patient, and client performance to students, patients, clients, caregivers, families, and other service providers without interpretation or recommendations as directed by the SLP
- Programming AAC devices
- Providing training and technical assistance to students, patients, clients, and families in the use of AAC devices
- Developing low-tech AAC materials for students, patients, and clients
- Demonstrating strategies included in the feeding and swallowing plan developed by the SLP and sharing information with students, patients, clients, families, staff, and caregivers
- Assisting students, patients, and clients with feeding and swallowing skills developed and directed by the SLP when consuming food textures and liquid consistencies

In addition, SLPAs who use multiple languages (based on their training and experiences in working with multilingual students, patients, or clients and their families) may also:

- Assist the SLP with interpretation and translation in the student's, patient's, or client's first language during screening and assessment activities exclusive of clinical interpretation of results.

- Interpret for students, patients, clients, and families who communicate using a language other than English, when the provider has received specialized training with interpreting skills in the student's, patient's, or client's first language.
- Provide services in another language for individuals who communicate using a language other than English or for those

who are developing English-language skills. Such services are based on the provider's skills and knowledge of the language spoken by the student, patient, or client.

SLPAs who speak multiple languages can find serval valuable resources in advancing their skills and competency in this area within ASHA's Practice Portal devoted to Bilingual Service Delivery (located at https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/professional-issues/bilingual-service-delivery/). Chapter 5 also offers additional information and resources in this area.

Administrative Support

In addition to providing clinical services, SLPAs may provide administrative support to their supervisors, including the activities listed in Box 1–3.

Prevention and Advocacy

SLPAs may also assist their supervisors in activities related to the prevention of communicative disorders and advocacy for

individuals with communicative disorders and their families. Box 1–4 highlights activities within the scope of responsibilities of an SLPA in this area.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICES

ASHA highlights the critical importance of SLPAs meeting the needs of the individuals they serve in "a space of mutual understanding and respect" and in a culturally responsive manner (ASHA, 2022). Specifically, offering culturally responsive services is the "explicit use of culturally based care and health knowledge in sensitive, creative, and meaningful ways" (Leininger, 2002, p. 84, as cited in ASHA, 2022, Culturally Responsive Practices, para 2). This requires that SLPAs (ASHA, 2022, Culturally Responsive Practices, para 2):[1]

■ Adjust communication style and expectations to meet the needs of clients, patients, and students from different cultural groups and to provide services in a culturally responsive manner.

> **Box 1–3. SLPA Scope of Responsibility: Administrative Support**
> (ASHA, 2022, Administrative Support, para. 1)[1]
>
> ■ Assist with clerical duties and site operations (e.g., scheduling, recordkeeping, maintaining inventory of supplies and equipment).
> ■ Perform safety checks and maintenance of equipment.
> ■ Prepare materials for screening, assessment, and treatment services.