

Reading Specialist

Snapshot

Career Cluster(s): Education, English

Interests: English reading, composition, teaching, social services

Earnings (2018 Median Average): \$53,630 yearly; \$25.79 hourly

Employment & Outlook: Slower than average growth expected

OVERVIEW

Sphere of Work

Reading specialists, sometimes called “Adult Literacy” teachers or “Reading Coaches,” are educators specializing in helping individuals with reading difficulties. Reading specialists can focus on helping students at any level, from elementary school to adult and 57 percent work for elementary or secondary schools, or junior colleges, with the remaining 43 percent divided between colleges, universities, private educational companies, and social assistance/outreach organizations. Some reading specialists are ESL (English as a Second Language) instructors who specialize in teaching reading to individuals from non-English speaking backgrounds.



Work Environment

Reading specialists typically work in a classroom or office setting meeting either with individual students or leading classes. Some reading specialists may work in different classrooms within a single school, while others may work out of several schools or offices and may therefore need to commute between work sites. Some reading specialists work as private tutors out of their home or visiting the homes of students.

Profile

Working Conditions: Work Inside

Physical Strength: Light Work

Education Needs: Bachelor's Degree,
Master's Degree

Licensure/Certification: Required for
some positions

Opportunities for Experience: Part-
Time Work, Student Teaching

Holland Interest Score*: SAE

* See Appendix A

Occupation Interest

Individuals looking to become reading specialists should have a strong interest in teaching, interpersonal communication, and English language and literature. In addition, as the position straddles the lines between education and social service, reading specialists should have a strong interest in helping others and providing community/social

outreach. Reading specialists should also be creative and artistic, as these qualities are helpful when creating lesson, and should be comfortable socializing with individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

A Day in the Life—Duties and Responsibilities

The typical duties of a reading specialist differ depending on whether the specialist focuses on a specific type of reading education and on their chosen teaching environment. Some reading specialists work for an entire school district and may help to supervise the district's reading and English staff. In other cases, reading specialists may work at a single school, college, or with a private company offering reading support and tutoring services. Adult education instructors may work irregular hours, in the mornings, evenings, and at night, to provide reading instruction for individuals who work during business hours.

During a typical day, a reading specialist may spend time meeting with students, grading and evaluating assignments, meeting with or supervising teachers or tutors, and preparing classroom materials and/or lesson plans. Reading specialists working for schools or districts may also meet with parents or family of students enrolled in reading programs.

Duties and Responsibilities

- **Instructing students individually or in groups**
- **Providing feedback on class performance or homework**
- **Preparing lectures or classroom presentations**
- **Meeting with teachers or educational administrators**
- **Grading or evaluating homework or classwork**
- **Meeting with parents or family of students**

OCCUPATION SPECIALTIES

ESL Teacher

ESL teachers are English teachers specializing in teaching writing, reading, and English speaking to non-English speakers. ESL teachers typically need proficiency in reading and writing and familiarity or interest in working with individuals from different cultures and educational backgrounds.

Literacy Coach

A literacy coach typically works with teachers to create and implement reading instruction programs used in school curricula. Literacy coaches may work directly with students or may take a supervisory role, helping teachers to develop the skills needed to work with students who have reading/writing difficulties.

Remedial Reading Teacher

Remedial reading teachers are English teachers specializing on helping students whose reading level is below average for the student's age or level of educational attainment. Remedial reading teachers typically work with individual students or with student groups.

Private Reading Tutor

A private reading tutor is an individual who works independently or for a private tutoring company and provides reading assistance for students with literacy or reading difficulties. Private tutors may be hired by a student or a student's family directly or may work for a reading/writing assistance center in an educational institution.

WORK ENVIRONMENT

Physical Environment

Reading specialists typically work in office or classroom environments. Literacy coaches and some other reading specialists may work for an entire school district and so may spend time traveling between schools within the district. Private reading tutors may work out of their home or may visit student homes for teaching sessions. Adult reading instructors tend to work in the morning, evenings, or at night, to work around the schedules of working students.

Human Environment

Reading specialists spend much of their time interacting directly with students, teachers, parents/family, and administrators and so must be comfortable with frequent daily interaction. Effective reading specialists develop relationships with students or teachers under their supervision, thereby helping the specialist to tailor his or her instruction to the needs of individual learners.

Relevant Skills and Abilities**Communication Skills**

- Speaking effectively
- Writing clearly and concisely

Interpersonal/Social Skills

- Being able to work independently
- Being able to work with groups
- Being able to lead group projects/discussions

Organization & Management Skills

- Managing people/groups
- Evaluating teacher and student performance
- Keeping detailed records of teacher/student progress

Research & Planning Skills

- Creating lesson plans
- Creating original educational material
- Researching teaching tools and technology

Technical Skills

- Working with digital technology
- Working with desktop publishing and word processing equipment

Technological Environment

In the 2010s, reading specialists often use personal computers, tablets, smartphones, and electronic communication in their jobs. Familiarity with basic computing, word processing, spreadsheet creation, and desktop publishing are also helpful skills for a reading specialist. In some cases, reading specialists may use specific software programs created to aid in teaching different types of students to read and may therefore need to familiarize themselves with available literacy software and digital aides. Modern reading technology, such as ebook readers, tablets, and e-book applications are also essential for the field and reading specialists need to become familiar and proficient at working with digital reading technology.

EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND ADVANCEMENT**High School/Secondary**

Those interested in becoming reading specialists should begin by pursuing a teaching degree at the Bachelor's level, with the expectation of continuing to the Master's degree level or higher. In high school, students should take classes focusing on English reading, analysis, and composition. Students will also benefit from classes

in intercultural studies, social work or sociology, basic computer literacy and technology, and any classes specific to a future career in education, including psychology. Though English education is primary for future English and reading teachers, familiarity with other languages is a benefit and students should take classes in one or more world languages.

Suggested High School Subjects

- English
- English literature
- English Composition
- Technical Writing
- Public Speaking
- Social Studies
- Civics
- Introduction to Computers
- Psychology
- Child Psychology
- World Languages

Famous First

One-room schoolhouses were common in the United States, and as of 2017, almost 400 one-room schools still operate in the United States. Teachers in one-room schools were often former students themselves. Their role is described by a student from Kentucky in the 1940s:

“The teachers that taught in the one room, rural schools were very special people. During the winter months they would get to the school early to get a fire started in the potbelly stove, so the building would be warm for the students. On many occasions they would prepare a hot, noon meal on top of the stove, usually consisting of soup or stew of some kind. They took care of their students like a new mother hen would care for her newly hatched chicks; always looking out for their health and welfare.”

Source: <https://www.courant.com/community/south-windsor/rnw-sw-south-windsor-one-room-schoolhouse-0625-20150616-story.html>



College/Postsecondary

Reading specialists should pursue college degrees in education, educational theory, or English. In addition to core studies, future professionals will benefit from a varied education that includes classes in sociology, social studies, history, intercultural studies, and one or more world languages. More than half of reading specialists and adult education experts have Master's degrees and undergraduate students should therefore expect to apply for graduate studies in English education, Adult education, or teaching English as a second language depending on the students specific interests. Reading specialist degrees at the Master's level are typically Master's of Education (MEd) degrees.

Related College Majors

- Education
- Education Administration
- English Education
- English Composition
- English Literature
- Communications
- Social Work
- Linguistics
- English as a Second Language

Adult Job Seekers

Individuals with degrees in English or teaching can apply for open positions, though they may need supplementary training to apply for some positions. Applying for a position as a student teacher or assistant reading specialist may also help prepare individuals for a career in the field. Those with experience in management or education administration may qualify for literary coach positions and other supervisory roles, while those with backgrounds in literature and English composition/analysis may qualify for starting positions as reading tutors or remedial reading teachers.

Professional Certification and Licensure

In some states, individuals working as reading coaches or specialists may be required to obtain and maintain a teaching license. The qualifications and process of obtaining a teaching license varies by

state but typically involve participating in a class and passing a test administered by a state educational institution. Typically, a Bachelor's degree is needed before applying for admission to a teachers training program.



Additional Requirements

Reading specialists should have excellent communications skills, including the ability to compose and give public presentations, the ability to communicate with individuals from vastly different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and comfort working with peers and subordinates in either training or collaborative working situations. Cultural sensitivity, and the ability to connect with and understand individuals with different linguistic backgrounds and from different socioeconomic groups is an essential skill for a reading specialist. In addition, reading specialists should be patient and exhibit creativity when crafting lessons or working with students.

Fast Fact

Literacy matters for all kinds of reasons, including that reading for just six minutes a day can reduce stress by 68 percent.

Source: interestingliterature.com

EARNINGS AND ADVANCEMENT

The average salary for a reading specialist can vary widely depending on the specifics of the position and the region. The website Payscale.com lists the average salary for a reading specialist at approximately \$49,000 annually, with a range of \$30-40,000 for those beginning in the field. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) estimates the median annual wage for adult literacy and high school equivalency diploma teachers at \$53,630 in May 2018. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$32,370, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$89,710.

In May 2018, the median annual wages for adult literacy and high school equivalency diploma teachers in the top industries in which they worked were as follows:

Elementary and secondary schools; state, local, and private	\$61,170
Junior colleges; state, local, and private	\$52,650
Colleges, universities, and professional schools; state, local, and private	\$49,650
Other schools and instruction; state, local, and private	\$47,430

In May 2018, the median annual wages for psychologists in the top industries in which they worked were as follows: substance abuse, behavior disorder, or mental health counselors to address patients' issues as a team.

Government	\$96,410
Hospitals; state, local, and private	\$86,530
Ambulatory healthcare services	\$79,180
Elementary and secondary schools; state, local, and private	\$75,890

Teachers often work in the mornings and evenings, because classes are held at times when students are not at work. They typically work part time.

EMPLOYMENT AND OUTLOOK

The Bureau of Labor predicts 6 percent growth for the adult literacy industry, which includes reading specialists, and indicates average growth overall. Reductions in U.S. immigration, as a result of changes in immigration policy and shifting preferences among immigrants, have reduced the need for ESL reading specialists and teachers. Federal and state governments provide funding for reading education and the rise in charter schools in the United States has provided new opportunities for reading specialists. Some of the more promising metropolitan areas for reading specialists, especially in the adult education field, have seen job growth rates of as much as 14 percent, which is above average for all professions. To maximize job outlook and salary, prospective reading specialists may want to research the most active environments in the field and consider relocating for better opportunities.

Percent change in employment, Projected 2018–28

Other teachers and instructors: 6%

Total, all occupations: 5%

Adult literacy and high school equivalency

diploma teachers: -10%

Note: All Occupations includes all occupations in the U.S. Economy.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program

Related Occupations

- High School Teachers
- ESL Teachers
- Kindergarten and Elementary School Teachers
- Instructional Coordinators
- Librarians
- Middle School Teachers
- School and Career Counselors
- Social Workers
- Special Education Teachers
- Teacher Assistants

Related Military Occupations

- Military Language Specialist

Conversation With . . . **LYDIA KOWALSKI**

Literacy Specialist
Frederick County Public Schools
Frederick, Maryland
Literacy Specialist, 12 years

1. What was your individual career path in terms of education/training, entry-level job, or other significant opportunity?

Early on, I wanted to be a teacher. My brother is three years older than me and had an auditory learning disability. My mom would get activities from his teacher to do at home, and I helped. I really liked that although I didn't understand why I was able to figure out reading and he could not.

I got my undergraduate degree in English and secondary education from Mount Saint Mary's University in Emmitsburg, Maryland, then started teaching 7th grade English/Language Arts in a nearby school district. My training prepared me to teach literature, but a lot of my students were at a basic level of reading. I felt I was at a loss and didn't know how to help them. I constantly asked for help from the reading specialist at my school—and she recommended that I specialize in reading. That first year, while teaching full time, I began classes from my master's degree in reading specialization from Hood College in Frederick, Maryland. During my last year of grad school, I was offered a job as a literacy specialist at a nearby middle school. Six years later, I transferred to a high school to work with older students.

2. What are the most important skills and/or qualities for someone in your profession?

You need to be goal-oriented, organized, and patient. You need to be able to collaborate so you can co-teach with other staff members whose backgrounds aren't reading so you can give them strategies, as well as all community shareholders. And you should enjoy reading and writing! It's a huge part of getting students to buy in to a special reading program.

3. What do you wish you had known going into this profession?

I wish I had more professional knowledge and experience with special education laws, requirements, and documentation. Many of the students in the reading programs that I oversee have Individualized Education Plans. Writing IEP goals and facilitating the appropriate programs requires a lot of knowledge of special education

laws, which special ed teachers typically do. Had I known that going in, I would have taken more special education classes earlier in my career to prepare.

This is also true for students who speak English as a second language because they make up a large portion of the students in the reading intervention programs. Strategies used by ELL (also known as English Language Learner) teachers, such as the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model, would have been extremely helpful for me to know.

4. Are there many job opportunities in your profession? In what specific areas?

I'm finding each county is different, and I'm finding that both in Maryland and when I meet teachers from other states at conferences. There tend to be more jobs at the elementary level than the secondary. Overall, I find that job opportunities can be limited. If literacy specialists get certified in specific dyslexia programs, then private work is available.

5. How do you see your profession changing in the next five years, how will technology impact that change, and what skills will be required?

The profession is evolving and needs to continue to change because digital literacy proficiency can be different from a student's print comprehension level. Technology can be a valuable tool to provide personalized learning pathways, but this depends entirely on a student's computer skills and ability to work independently. There are already Apps and Google Extensions such as "OpenDyslexic" that can alter the print on any document or website to a font that is more reader friendly for some students with dyslexia. "Mercury Reader" is another Google Extension that simplifies any website to streamline the reading and eliminates advertisements, sidebars, and other distractions that would interfere with digital reading comprehension. Literacy Specialists must maintain knowledge of the latest reading intervention programs, and since many have a technology component it is an absolute must to continue taking educational technology courses.

6. What do you enjoy most about your job? What do you enjoy least about your job?

My favorite part of the job is watching struggling readers gain two or more years of reading comprehension growth in a single year. So many students that have struggled with reading since elementary school are ready to give up on themselves by high school and I love proving to them that there is still hope.

My least favorite part of the job are the state test requirements. I have to proctor state tests that take up a great deal of instruction time and are not always in the best interests of students. Watching students struggle through these tests and not being able to help them is frustrating.

7. Can you suggest a valuable “try this” for students considering a career in your profession?

Shadowing a literacy specialist at different grade levels would be beneficial if someone is considering a career in this profession, but if that isn't an option then offering English/Language Arts tutoring privately in a 1:1 setting would give someone the opportunity to experience a small aspect of the job. Tutoring centers like Sylvan have structured tutoring programs with predesignated lessons, but it would give someone the chance to see if they like working with students who need small group support.

MORE INFORMATION

American Federation of Teachers

555 New Jersey Ave., N.W.
Washington, DC 20001
www.aft.org

International Literacy Association

PO Box 8139
Newark DE 19714
www.literacyworldwide.org

National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

1111 W. Kenyon Road
Urbana, Illinois, 61801
www.ncte.org

American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL)

1827 Powers Ferry Road, Building 14,
Suite 100
Atlanta, Georgia, 30339
www.aaal.org

National Education Association

1201 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036
www.nea.org