



Orthoptist

Work Activities/Work Locations:

- Orthoptists work in ophthalmology—the branch of medicine devoted to the study and treatment of eye conditions and diseases.
- They work with ophthalmologists to evaluate and treat disorders of vision, eye movements and eye alignment in children and adults. They are the liaison between the ophthalmologist and the patient. See www.orthoptics.org for a career video.
- Orthoptists serve patients of all ages, but because of the nature of many binocular disorders, the majority of patients are children.
- Orthoptists may work in private ophthalmology practices, in a hospital or medical university setting with involvement in patient care, academics and clinical research. Orthoptists may serve as directors or advisors of state and local vision screening programs.

Advantages & Disadvantages:

- Orthoptics is a specialized profession that is both intellectually challenging and rewarding.
- Orthoptics combines independent diagnostic ability, technical understanding and therapeutic decision-making and an active involvement in patient care.
- Likes interacting with and helping people.

Method of Entry:

- Admission criteria vary from training program to training program.
- To be eligible for national certification one must complete a 24-month Orthoptic fellowship at an accredited program AND have a baccalaureate degree (no specific major)
- National certification by the American Orthoptic Council (AOC) is obtained after completing the two-year fellowship, the successful completion of a written and oral/practical examination. The written exam is given at all centers on the same day, usually in June. A candidate earning a passing score is now eligible for the oral/practical section of the examination, which is usually given at one central location in the fall of the year.
- Upon successful completion of both sections of the exam, candidates are awarded a Certificate and granted the use of the designation “C.O.” after their names.

Helpful High School Courses & Experiences:

- Students should take a college preparatory curriculum. A science background is recommended.

Education & Training:

- A baccalaureate degree (no specific major or prerequisite courses) is required.
- The Graduate Record Examination is NOT required as the Orthoptic Program is a Certification Program not a for credit/graduate program.
- Apply to Orthoptic Fellowship Program. Currently (2007) there are sixteen programs affiliated with medical facilities or universities in the US and Canada that offer Orthoptic curriculum. The Department Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences affiliated with the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Medicine and Public Health offers a 24-month fellowship training.
- The curriculum is both classroom and clinical instruction by staff orthoptists and ophthalmologists in a clinical medical setting.
- The Orthoptic Program is two intensive years of instruction following a logical sequence of courses to secure an understanding of the visual system. Courses include: anatomy, neuro-anatomy, physiology, pharmacology, diagnostic testing & measurement, systemic diseases & ocular motor disorders, principles of surgery, basic ophthalmic exam techniques, ophthalmic optics and orthoptic treatment.

Advancement Opportunities:

- For those more interested in teaching there are opportunities to provide clinical expertise and instruction to medical students, orthoptic students, post doctoral fellows, residents in ophthalmology and clinical staff.
- Those more academically inclined can participate in clinical research and in the presentation and publication of scientific papers.

Salary:

- Salaries vary greatly according to clinical/academic setting and location.
- Typical Starting Salary (Wisconsin): \$40,000 per year.
- Typical Starting Salary (National): \$50,000 per year.

Hours:

- Can be varied.
- Can work part- time.

Educational Institutions:

- **Bachelor's degree can be earned at any accredited college or university.**
- Orthoptic Program – University of Wisconsin-Madison
Department Ophthalmology & Visual Sciences 608-263-7189
<http://www.opth.wisc.edu/training/eduorth.html>
- University of Minnesota Orthoptic Program 612-626-6692
<http://www.med.umn.edu/ophthalmology/training/orthoptic/home.html>

Professional Organizations & Additional Information:

- See Wisconsin Health Careers Website: www.wihealthcareers.org