



# “Potential Positives vs. Negatives by SLP Setting” – BLOG POST

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SLP: You might be seasoned and looking for a change of scenery in settings in the workplace. You might be questioning whether to just change employers within the same setting. You might be desiring to return to a previous setting. You might just be starting out as a CFY.

For any situation you may find yourself in, when reflecting on a career path, it is helpful to consider the positives and potential drawbacks of each of the SLP settings. The aim of this blog post is to list the comprehensive effects, factors, details and considerations for SLP settings, and that each individual SLP has the most balanced information at hand to find their most beneficial choice — for this moment in time in their career.

It is important to note two individuals may view such positives/negatives in the settings differently. One person may find a potential drawback to a setting as a manageable factor, whereas another individual may consider the same factor a “game-changer” in terms of setting choices. The same goes for desirable qualities. What may be a desirable, pleasurable and enjoyable positive factor may be “ho-hum” to another individual. The goal is not to advocate one setting over another, but to provide a balanced perspective in which to consider all potential positives and drawbacks to all settings. It should also be noted that it is possible that there may be a setting not listed below; however, the attempt was to be as comprehensive as possible. Apologizes for any redundancies.

Each setting’s factors will be detailed by the categories for school settings (employee vs. contract status), private school setting, hospitals, in-patient rehab, skilled nursing facilities/long-term care, long-term acute care hospitals, outpatient, home health, early intervention, traveling positions, private practice, mobile instrumental clinician, and telepractice (employee vs. contract):

- potentially desirable aspects
- potentially undesirable aspects

## **Potentially desirable aspects to choosing different settings:**

— School setting (employee status):

- A salaried job is “guaranteed income,” regardless of a low or high caseload.
- The culture of school settings can be rich, supportive and encouraging.
- When others ask an SLP their occupation, there isn’t a question about typically what is involved in the role in a school setting.
- Summer, winter breaks, national holidays and other school breaks tend to be available in the school setting — this can be a helpful benefit particularly to an SLP who is a parent to a school-age child.



- Work-days tend to be shorter than other settings, due to a school daily schedule.
- Student loan forgiveness programs may be available, in certain regions/areas.
- Public school SLP positions tend to have continuing education opportunities readily available.
- Grouping students in the same grades tends to be the service delivery model in the public schools, when possible. This positive will allow a large caseload to be covered.
- Potential for retirement is available in the public school setting.
- Respect from the community is typically present.
- Comradery with other teachers in the school can be a benefit.

#### — School setting (contract status)

- Generally higher pay exists as compared to employee status SLPs in the public schools.
- Pay generally is reimbursed at an hourly rate, so pay will be commensurate with the amount of time worked, hour by hour.
- SLPs tend to contract from year to year, with no long-term commitment beyond the year expected, but possible in the next year.
- Tests, therapy materials, continuing education credits can be utilized toward business expenses for tax purposes.
- Many of the same potential desirable factors as school setting SLPs (employee status) would be present (see above).
- Potential freedom to move from school system to school system, each year re-negotiating pay at a contract rate.
- The independence of contract work in a public school capacity might be the desired population/setting.

#### — Private school setting (either as an employee or contract status).

- Many of the same potential undesirable factors as school setting SLPs would be present (see above).
- At a private school setting, group sizes could potentially be smaller.
- Pay may be reimbursed at an hourly rate.
- Less requirements from the government would be in place in terms of service delivery models, national standards to achieve, etc.
- There would possibly be freedom to share personal belief practices that are consistent with the private school's approach and mission statement.
- Working with students in a private school setting that may be faith-based or employ specific approaches may be the preferred population.

#### —Hospitals:

- Therapy sessions tend to be 1:1 in acute settings.
- Hospital SLPs tend to benefit from opportunities for communicating with providers on a direct/regular basis.
- Opportunities exist for working with many specialists (such as respiratory therapists) and various acute medical settings, such as neurology floors, cardiac floors, intensive care units, etc.
- Hospital settings tend to involve higher pay, as compared to school settings.



- Working with patients who have undergone acute medical events may be the desired population for the SLP.
- There may be opportunities for different settings within a hospital option (in-patient rehabilitation floors, intensive nursing rehab units, etc.); therefore, if “burn-out” occurs, there may be options for change in settings with the same employer.
- There might be opportunities for continuing education credits in hospitals.
- Instrumental assessment opportunities and access would be available.
- There is a sense of community when serving in an acute hospital.

#### In-Patient Rehab:

- Patients who require three hours of therapy a day tend to be medically stable to the point that there may be optimal opportunities for improvements on SLP goals, and goals overall.
- In-patient rehab tends to involve higher pay as compared to other settings.
- Quick-turnaround on patients is possible, meaning that a patient’s stay may be anywhere between a week to a few weeks, so SLPs will evaluate new patients frequently.
- Collaboration with other disciplines is a benefit: physical therapy, occupational therapy, etc.
- Opportunities for co-treatment with other disciplines may be possible, which will allow for functional use of strategies and techniques while performing other tasks.
- There may be therapy technicians to assist with transporting patients.
- A set schedule may be in place for when patients are to have speech therapy conducted.
- If more than one SLP works at the same company, if a patient-SLP relationship is not possible for performing therapy, there would be the option to switch therapists, an option that may not be available in other settings.
- Working with individuals who presumably medically stable but wanting to return home may be a preferred population.

#### — Skilled Nursing Facilities/Long-Term Care:

- Pay tends to be higher than other settings, depending upon the area.
- Therapy tends to be conducted 1:1. There may be opportunities for some payor sources to improve productivity with concurrent and group treatments, once a week.
- Patients are medically stable by the time they have reached the SNF level of care, and are often motivated for improvements.
- There would be opportunities to connect with families of patients and perform caregiver training prior to the patient’s discharge from the facility.
- If more than one SLP works at the same location, and if a patient-SLP relationship is not possible for performing therapy, there would be the option to switch therapists, an option that may not be available in other settings.
- Opportunities for co-treatment with other disciplines may be possible, which will allow for functional use of strategies and techniques while performing other tasks. Collaboration with other disciplines is a plus.
- Nurses, nurse aides and other employees at the facility would be available for trainings, in-services, etc. Forming these relationships and investing time in these individuals will make a direct impact on patient care.



- There will be potential for developing restorative dining programs and coordinating with the activities department to create programs to assist all patients, not just those on the current caseload.
- Elderly populations of individuals who may not have much support in the community, or who are currently functioning at a low level may be the ideal situation for an SLP.
- There will be opportunities to impact lives in this setting that is unique, and not possible in other settings — for those in long-term care.

#### — Long-Term Acute Care Hospitals (L-TACH):

- Managing speech pathology needs in an L-TACH may be the preferred setting of choice, due to the acute needs and specialized skill sets required.
- Opportunities exist for working with specialists (such as respiratory therapists), and therefore collaborate.
- Having the ability to work long-term with patients with acute medical needs, and speech pathology areas of involvement might just be the calling of an SLP.
- Working with the same patients long-term might benefit the patient in the reaching of goals, which can improve the quality of life of the patient. Impacting lives in this setting may allow the catalyst to begin — allow for patients to move to a higher level of care in the future.

#### — Outpatient Clinics:

- Treatments also tend to be conducted on a 1:1 basis.
- When there are cancellations in appointments, there is time for catching-up on paperwork or to develop programs.
- Some outpatient clinics may have the benefit of aquatics access to utilize in SLP treatments.
- There might be opportunities for ongoing continuing education credits in outpatient settings.
- The benefit of performing an SLP visit after an occupational therapy session with sensory-complex patients may assist in progress on SLP goals, and goals overall.
- Materials that occupational therapy and physical therapists utilize in sessions would be available as well to the SLP, if OTs and PTs both provide services in the same clinic. There would also be the opportunity for collaboration.
- If the desire is for patients to benefit from hour-long sessions, this is the setting to consider.

#### — Home Health:

- Flexibility exists in home health in scheduling appointments — in terms of time and locations. The home health setting might be a beneficial setting if there are high personal medical needs for the SLP, so to schedule around standing personal appointments.
- Reimbursement of mileage may be possible, depending upon the employer, which can assist with driving costs. If not reimbursable by an employer, personally pursuing tracking mileage to utilize for tax purposes is a possibility, based on the national IRS tax rate.
- Another benefit includes “breaks” from seeing patients during driving time from patient to patient. SLPs can utilize this time to listen to podcasts, music, etc.
- Pay tends to be higher than other settings.



- Assisting patients who are homebound and unable to leave the home without a considerable and taxing effort may be a desirable population.
- For multiple patients who live in the same Assistive Living Facility, productivity in seeing more patients without drive times can be a benefit.
- Working with patients in their home allows for a unique perspective to treating speech pathology patients. There are also ample opportunities for caregiver and family education, which is a benefit.

#### — Early Intervention:

- Depending upon the specific location type, travel might be a benefit, much like home health desirable factors.
- The benefit of working with patients at the earliest stage of life can be rewarding, and SLPs can make a difference in the lives of families who tend to be receptive to assistance.
- Therapy tends to also be provided on a 1:1 basis.
- Pediatric feeding is a common area in EI that may not be pursued in other pediatric settings to the same frequency.
- Working with patients who would be described as premature, and in the birth to three age range may be the preferred population.

#### — Traveling Positions:

- Viewing different locations as part of traveling will leave the SLP with a variety of geographic areas — potentially every 13 weeks.
- This setting lends itself for the SLP to gain the benefit of experience with a variety of different employers, electronic medical record systems, initiatives, etc.
- Traveling to different locations can have a positive impact on mood and quality of life, and will expand horizons.
- Pay can be a considerable increase as compared to other settings.
- Meeting different people from different cultures due to different geographical areas can be beneficial.
- It can be helpful and career-enriching to observe how different employers implement policies and how each employer operates therapy programs.
- There are financial incentives in terms of housing and taxes as a traveling SLP.

#### — Private Practice

- The benefit of owning one's own business, no matter the population of patients or students, can be a fulfilling and exciting adventure to embark upon.
- Freedom in choosing what populations to serve can be an autonomous advantage.
- A private practice has the opportunity to be mobile, if factors in an SLP's life require them to move.
- There would be the possible opportunity someday to sell the private practice if it grows and the SLP desires to sell the business.
- New skills involving bookkeeping, billing, etc. would be great experiences to add to a repertoire.
- Contract work with Adults with Developmental Disabilities on the Developmental Disability Waiver or similar program:



- Working with this population of patients can be fulfilling, and can be a long-term arrangement. Due to the long-term nature of this setting, there can be a financially stabilizing factor in available visits.
- Flexibility exists in this setting in scheduling appointments — in terms of time and locations.
- The same desirable factors would be present as the home health position (see above), as well as many of the desirable factors for the school setting, contract status (see above).
- The population of adults with developmental disabilities may be the preferred population.

— Mobile instrumental assessment position (contract):

- The independence of owning an SLP business that is based on performing instrumental assessments can feel rewarding.
- The same desirable factors would be present as the home health position (see above).
- The independence of contract work in a mobile instrumental capacity might be a desired population/setting.
- Performing instrumental evaluations solely, as opposed to a mix of evaluations/treatments might be a preferred activity.

— Telepractice (employee status):

- Clinicians can save on commute time, transportation costs
- The same desirable factors would be present as the home health position (see above).
- The potential of having access to direct technology for visits with patients may be desirable for the technology-savy.
- Sickness and in-person risks are eliminated as factors in therapy.
- Benefits are typically offered as part of the employment package.
- The workload tends to be more consistent, especially if the clinician is placed on salary.

— Telepractice (contract status):

- Clinicians can save on commute time, transportation costs
- The same desirable factors would be present as the home health position (see above).
- There may be opportunities to have more than one contract, providing more than one opportunity for work.
- Pay tends to be higher than employee rates for telepractice.
- Expenses should be able to be tax deductible.

**Potentially undesirable aspects to choosing different settings:**

— School setting (employee status):

- Pay tends to be considerably less — as compared to other settings.
- The same students that would be on the caseload would be present throughout the year, and potentially year after year, if not exited from speech pathology. Therefore, new variations of therapeutic tasks and activities would constantly need to be presented.



- A salaried employee is paid the same, no matter the hours put in each working day, weekends, or “setting up a classroom” at the start of each school year.
- Grouping tends to be a trend in the school setting, with the purpose of covering a full caseload. Some SLPs may feel like they do not operate at their optimum in conducting therapy in groups.
- The intensity of activity at the start and ending of the school year, and then having breaks of no work – may not be optimal for every SLP, as some SLPs benefit from a steady schedule.
- To receive retirement benefits, over 20 years needs to be invested in the school setting.
- Duties that other teachers have, such as playground duty/lunchroom duty, may be asked of an SLP.
- Social challenges that come with working with students in different financially-challenging regions may be difficult for some SLPs. There may be complex social situations not related to SES that also need to be navigated.
- The public school-age population may not be a desired group to work with, and other settings may be better fit for an SLP.

— School setting (contract status):

- There may be a need to work in different schools or different school settings, wherever the need is — year by year.
- Many of the same potential undesirable factors as school setting SLPs (employee status) would be present (see above).
- Contract work requires the SLP to be flexible in meeting the needs of the school district as changes occur.
- Keeping up with the financial details of contract work could be overwhelming to an SLP. An SLP may feel like the desire is to not be a businesswoman or businessman, but to just be a therapist.
- Typically, there are not employee benefits with contract settings. Therefore, health insurance, life insurance, short-term disability insurance, etc., would need to be obtained privately.

— Private school setting (either as an employee or contract status)

- Beliefs, practices and approaches of the private school would need to be respected, or at least adhered to.
- Private school schedules may vary from traditional public school schedules. This may be a scheduling conflict if the SLP has children who receive schooling in the public school system.
- Many of same potential undesirable factors as school setting SLPs would be present (see above).
- The private school-age setting may not be a desired population — due to it not being an area of interest for the SLP.

— Hospitals:

- In the event of a community emergency, SLPs would need to be available to report to the hospital to assist.
- Depending on if the hospital is a non-profit, the pay can be less than at other settings, such as a skilled nursing facility or long-term care.



- Potential exposure to infectious disease is possible. However, procedural infection control precautions would be taken.
- If an SLP is pregnant, certain activities may need to be limited, such as performing modified barium swallow studies.
- At times, people in the community do not understand the full scope of practice of SLPs, and this may need to be explained. SLPs can utilize the “Why Speech Pathology?” [nicespeechlady.com](http://nicespeechlady.com) resource.
- Hospital dress codes may need to be followed; there may not be the possibility of individual clothing options to wear at work.
- The medical-side of speech pathology may not be a preferred area of interest.

#### — In-Patient Rehab:

- Three hours a day of therapy may not be possible for some patients, due to fatigue or refusals, so this may require SLPs to find alternative ways to provide skilled SLP sessions.
- Documentation demands might be an undesirable factor.
- Schedules may tend to be tight in terms of timing, 30 minutes to 45 minutes on the clock, minute by minute.
- If census is low, and there are not available speech pathology patients, the potential may be present that SLPs could be sent home early, with pay not being as high as usual.
- Potential exposure to infectious disease is possible. However, procedural infection control precautions would be taken.
- At times, people in the community do not understand the full scope of practice of SLPs, and this may need to be explained. SLPs can utilize the “Why Speech Pathology?” [nicespeechlady.com](http://nicespeechlady.com) resource.
- Rehab dress codes may need to be followed; there may not be the possibility of individual clothing options to wear at work.
- There may be some patients who will eventually be placed in long-term care facilities, and it may be a difficult experience to see this type of social and physical situation.

#### — Skilled Nursing Facilities/Long-Term Care:

- Productivity demands may be a challenge to consistently fulfill, depending upon the requirement of the employer.
- For facilities that house both a SNF and long-term care services in the same building, it can be a challenge at times to treat a patient who is receiving speech with a skilled bed next to a long-term care patient in terms of discouragement to the SNF patient.
- It can be emotionally challenging to work in long-term care, due to the demanding nature of the specifics of the job. There may be social situations that the SLP cannot make an impact on, and this can tend to be disheartening.
- Time, dedication and persistence may be required in order to ensure access to instrumental swallowing assessments, and their results.
- If the caseload is low, and there are not available speech pathology patients, the potential may be present that SLPs could be sent home early, with pay not being as high as usual.
- Documentation demands might be an undesirable factor.





- At times, “building a caseload” would need to occur via chart reviews and potential communications with other disciplines, as the patient caseload numbers may vacillate.
- Holidays tend to still be work-days.
- At times, people in the community do not understand the full scope of practice of SLPs, and this may need to be explained. SLPs can utilize the “Why Speech Pathology?” [nicespeechlady.com](http://nicespeechlady.com) resource.
- Dress codes may need to be followed; there may not be the possibility of individual clothing options to wear at work.
- Potential exposure to infectious disease is possible. However, procedural infection control precautions would be taken.

— Long-Term Acute Care Hospitals (L-TACH):

- Managing speech pathology needs in an L-TACH may not be the preferred setting of choice, due to the severity of the acute needs and specialized skill sets required.
- Working with the same patients over time might feel redundant, and repetitive.
- Potential exposure to infectious disease is possible. However, procedural infection control precautions would be taken.

— Outpatient Clinics:

- No-shows or cancellations that occur on a regular basis might lead to needing to discharge patients due to non-arrivals, and this could be a non-preferred action by an SLP.
- Visits tend to be “on the hour,” so finding time to use the restroom might be a challenge, based upon how the clinic schedules patients.
- Scheduling multiple therapies for the same patient on the same day can sometimes be a challenge; scheduling might be managed by the SLP, or by front office staff.
- Flexibility might not be available for personal medical appointments, if standing appointments are scheduled each week in the clinic.

— Home Health:

- Time is needed in establishing a schedule that is standing, or that changes based on location of patients, week by week.
- Care would have to be taken to ensure that animals on the property would need to be put up to prevent any attacks. Asking families if they have dogs or other animals in the home, and asking them to be placed in a separate room, would be indicated.
- Houses where people smoke would be an environment that would need to be tolerated.
- If the caseload is low, and there are not available speech pathology patients, the potential may be present that SLPs could be sent home early, with pay not being as high as usual.
- SLPs need to schedule-in lunch breaks, etc., and sometimes, seeing a full schedule of patients in a work day can make for an extended day.
- Home health as a setting can sometimes be isolating, only collaborating with supervisors and other disciplines via email, telephone and weekly case conference meetings.



- At times, people in the community do not know all of the scope of practice of SLPs, and this may need to be explained. SLPs can use the “Why Speech Pathology?” [nicespeechlady.com](http://nicespeechlady.com) resource.
- Depending upon how paid, cancelled or “no-show” visits could mean lost wages, such as reimbursed via “paid per visit.”
- Going into people’s personal residences may not be the desired setting for an SLP.

#### — Early Intervention:

- There may be complex social situations with family members of the patients that the SLP might find challenging. There are social workers typically with the company to help navigate next-steps.
- There may be limited resources for some families in order to implement recommendations that are being made. Therefore, finding ways to put recommendations into place might be challenging.
- The pediatric population may not be a setting that would be preferred.

#### — Traveling Positions:

- The constant moving from one place to another may wear on an individual over time, and a desire to have one home location may occur.
- It might be challenging to focus on a new job when also adjusting to environmental changes in a new community at the same time.
- Financially, without a home base due to needing to travel, equity in a home with a mortgage would not be typically possible.
- Traveling to different locations may not be a preferred setting, especially for SLPs that have a family (or other commitments) that would keep them in a stationary geographical location.

#### — Private Practice:

- If there is a sickness or injury that occurs – and short-term disability doesn’t cover an injury (or no short-term disability policy is in place), the business could take a hit, financially.
- If there is lost time due to any other reason other than a sickness or injury, the business could be in jeopardy — if savings are not available.
- Health insurance, life insurance, short-term disability insurance, etc., would need to be obtained privately.
- If hiring employees when the business grows, a system for payroll would need to be put into place.
- The business workload that accompanies the private practice setting may not be desired.
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#### — Contract work with Adults with Developmental Disabilities on the Developmental Disability Waiver or similar program:

- A “good fit” may not be established with an individual who receives services and the SLP, and there may not be readily-available flexibility in finding another SLP.
- Management of mileage and expenses will need to occur.
- Many of the same potential undesirable factors as home health setting SLPs would be present (see above)



- If there is a sickness or injury that occurs – and short-term disability doesn't cover an injury (or no short-term disability policy is in place), the business could take a hit, financially.
- If there is lost time due to any other reason other than a sickness or injury, the business could be in jeopardy — if savings are not available.
- Keeping up with the financial details of contract work could be overwhelming to an SLP. An SLP may feel like the desire is to not be a businesswoman or businessman, but to just be a therapist.
- Typically, there are not employee benefits with contract settings. Therefore, health insurance, life insurance, short-term disability insurance, etc., would need to be obtained privately.
- Working with adults with developmental disabilities may not be a preferred population.

— Mobile instrumental assessment position (contract):

- Some patients may not be able to tolerate a procedure, and then this would be a lost visit/payment.
- There would be ongoing costs for upgrading of technology in order to remain current with the profession; however, this would be labeled as a business expense for tax purposes.
- Mobile instrumental assessments are still a growing field within the area of speech pathology, and support may be a challenge to acquire.
- Payment/service contracts with facilities or MD offices would potentially need to be negotiated on a regular basis.
- Many of the same potential undesirable factors as home health and Adults with Developmental Disabilities SLPs would be present (see above).
- Performing instrumental assessments may not be a desired as an SLP work setting.

— Telepractice (employee of a company):

- Clinicians may miss out in-person student contact.
- Clinicians will may require additional work in collaborating with teachers, other support personnel in order to perform work duties, communicate.
- There are setup costs in working from home, such as a internet connection, computer, etc. headset, etc.

— Telepractice (contract):

- Other factors above (see telepractice – employee of a company)
- Securing a contract each year may prove to be a challenge.
- Securing health insurance and other benefits might be difficult, for those that need it.
- The number of students or hours may not be guaranteed.

Many variables are at play when determining an ideal setting. There are other factors besides those listed here. As we make our career-path decisions, hopefully this data is helpful.