



more savvy about using PTAs," says Debbie VanDover, program director of the physical therapist assistant program at Mount Hood Community College in Gresham, Ore. Most PTA programs take two years to complete, compared with physical therapist programs, which last about seven years. While PTAs always work under a physical therapist—and earn about two thirds of their median pay—they can perform many of the same treatments as physical therapists. Competition for a spot in a PTA program can be intense, since schools must keep teacher-faculty ratios low. While the promising career draws interest from students of all ages, remember that interpersonal skills are critical and that the job can be physically demanding.

Occupational Therapist

Whether it's helping a developmentally challenged toddler learn to follow directions or teaching a man with permanent spinal cord damage to dress himself, the goal of an occupational therapist is always the same: to assist disabled clients in recovering or developing the skills they need to lead more independent, satisfying lives at work and home. In 2008, occupational therapists held about 105,000 positions. Many work at hospitals; others are employed by schools, evaluating and recommending therapies for specific students. They may work at nursing facilities, helping elderly patients lead more productive lives, or in mental-health settings, teaching life skills like time management and budgeting. Occupational therapists also help people struggling with drug and alcohol addictions or suffering from depression or eating disorders.

Technical Writer

The how-to manual that comes with your brand-new Blackberry Bold and the quick reference guide for the newest version of Internet Explorer have something in common: technical writing. It's the job of a technical writer to make complicated engineering jargon or concepts understandable to the audience, whether that's a niche group or just average Joes. As technical writer Tom Johnson puts it: "As long as the tech industry is hot, the demand for technical writers will be there. Almost every software project needs a techni-

cal writer." Tech writers may specialize in IT, engineering, or healthcare. Web or multimedia skills can improve employability. "One unique aspect of being a technical writer is that you're in charge of both authoring and publishing," Johnson says. "If you're creating quick reference guides, you both write the copy and design the layout. If you're creating screencasts, you're both the voice-over and the sound engineer." Johnson, who blogs about technical writing at www.idratherebwriting.com, says an engineering background or ability to read programming code can help.

Financial Adviser

Projected to be one of the faster-growing occupations over the next decade, thanks (again) to the impending retirement of 78 million baby boomers, financial advisers dole out advice on budgeting, taxes, investments, and estate planning. Some work for large financial firms, while others work at boutique advisory practices or set up shop as solo practitioners. Earnings will generally reflect the sophistication of the services provided, the clients, and the level of experience. Many advisers specialize in the insurance, tax, or estate fields.

Plumber

Few jobs are as vital to everyday life as a plumber's. For every sip of water from a school fountain and every time a clean plate comes out of the dishwasher, a plumber is, in large part, responsible. Modern plumbers often take care to steer clear of stereotypes about low-riding pants or lackluster customer service. Black Diamond Plumbing & Mechanical in northern Illinois is "very, very meticulous" about whom it hires and likes to train plumbers from scratch at an in-house training facility, says co-owner Rick Sperando. "I look for attitude and personality," he says. "I can teach plumbing skills, but I can't teach attitude." People with customer service backgrounds seem to do very well as plumbers, Sperando says. Black Diamond employees wear uniforms, are prohibited

