

A New Graduate's Guide to the SLP Clinical Fellowship

Finding Your Fit, Your Mentor, and Your Future Career Path

Graduating with your master's in speech-language pathology is a huge milestone—congratulations! As you step into your **Clinical Fellowship (CF)** year, you're entering one of the most important and transformative phases of your professional journey. The CF bridges the gap between graduate school and independent practice, giving you real-world experience, mentorship, and the confidence to grow into your clinical identity.

Whether you're feeling excited, overwhelmed, or a little bit of both, this guide will walk you through how to pick the right CF setting, how to choose a supportive mentor, and what types of SLP job opportunities you can explore both now and after your fellowship.

What Is the Clinical Fellowship?

The Clinical Fellowship is a supervised, mentored work experience required before obtaining your **Certificate of Clinical Competence in Speech-Language Pathology (CCC-SLP)** through ASHA. During your CF, you'll work as an SLP under the guidance of an experienced clinician who supports, evaluates, and mentors you.

Most fellowships last **36 weeks (or 1,260 hours)**, but the duration can vary depending on your schedule and setting.

How to Choose the Right Clinical Fellowship Location

Your CF setting shapes your early career, so choosing wisely matters. Here are the key factors to consider:

1. Identify Your Clinical Interests

Think about what energized you most during graduate school:

- Working with young children?
- Supporting medically complex patients?
- Helping students with language, literacy, or social communication?
- Working with adults recovering from stroke or brain injury?

Your CF doesn't lock you into one path forever, but it can be a launchpad for future specialization. For example, many SLPs want to work in a hospital but CFs in hospitals are rare. SLPs can get valuable experience in a SNF that translates well to the hospital. Additionally, many SLPs are curious about how to get to the NICU. They can get

valuable experience with NICU graduates in Early Intervention or even pediatric inpatient acute rehab to build those foundational skills.

2. Consider the Level of Support You'll Receive

Some settings offer well-structured onboarding and regular supervision; others are more independent. Ask:

- Will you have access to your supervisor on-site?
- Are there other SLPs or interdisciplinary team members you can learn from?
- What does training look like for new hires?

Look for a workplace that truly wants to support a *new graduate*, not just fill a vacancy.

3. Evaluate Caseload Variety, Complexity, and Demands

A strong CF experience includes:

- A manageable caseload
- Opportunities to grow clinical skills
- Exposure to a mix of diagnoses and treatment approaches

Too heavy a caseload—or one that is overly narrow—can limit your learning or lead to burnout.

4. Consider Your Lifestyle Needs

Location matters. Ask yourself:

- Do you want to be close to home or explore a new city?
- Do you prefer a fast-paced hospital or a quieter outpatient clinic?
- Do you need schedule flexibility?

Being flexible about location to get the right CF experience could pay off in the future. Rural hospitals might be more likely to hire a CF than a suburban hospital giving you the experience you seek. The right fit balances professional goals with personal needs.

How to Choose the Right Clinical Fellowship Mentor

Your CF mentor (also called your CF supervisor or CFSLP) can make or break your experience. Look for someone who is not only clinically skilled but also supportive, approachable, and invested in your growth.

1. Ask About Their Supervision Style

Some mentors are hands-on with frequent feedback. Others prefer a more independent model. Neither is wrong—what matters is what’s right *for you*.

Questions to ask:

- How often do you observe CFs?
- How frequently do you meet for supervision?
- What is your feedback style?
- How do you support CFs during challenging cases?

2. Look for a Mentor Who Values Teaching

Strong CF supervisors:

- Give constructive feedback
- Encourage your questions
- Offer clinical insights and practical resources
- Create a safe space for learning
- Are patient and non-judgmental

Trust your instincts—if you feel comfortable during the interview, that’s a great sign.

3. Confirm They Meet ASHA Supervision Requirements

Make sure your mentor:

- Has their **CCC-SLP**
- Has completed ASHA’s **supervision training requirements**
- Understands the CF paperwork process

This ensures your hours count and your fellowship stays on track.

Overview of SLP Job Types: Where Can You Work as a Clinical Fellow?

SLPs work in an incredibly diverse range of settings. Here are the most common options for CFs:

1. Schools

Ideal for SLPs who love:

- Language & literacy
- Articulation
- Social communication
- Working with teachers and families

Caseloads are often large, but schedules are consistent, and summers may be flexible.

2. Early Intervention (Birth–3)

A fit for clinicians who enjoy:

- Coaching families
- Naturalistic, play-based therapy
- Working in homes or community settings

EI is collaborative, functional, and relationship-centered.

3. Outpatient Pediatric Clinics

Great for those interested in:

- Feeding and swallowing
- Apraxia
- Autism spectrum support
- Articulation & phonology
- Language disorders

Outpatient pediatric clinics tend to be more structured and time rigid than some other settings. The caseloads may be heavy but can be varied and hands-on.

4. Hospitals & Medical Settings

Best for CFs who want:

- Medically complex cases

- Acute care experience
- Adult neurogenic disorders
- Dysphagia and instrumental evaluations

Opportunities may include NICU, inpatient rehab, or outpatient programs.

5. Skilled Nursing Facilities (SNFs) & Long-Term Care

Common for adult-focused SLPs:

- Work with dementia, stroke, TBI, dysphagia
- Fast-paced medical environment
- High demand for SLP services

Generally known for high productivity expectations, some SNFs provide strong mentorship, but verify supervision quality carefully.

6. Private Practice

Often offers:

- Flexibility
- Strong relationships with families
- Varied caseloads

Because CF supervision needs are specific, ensure a private practice is set up to support a CF appropriately.

Final Advice for New SLP Clinical Fellows

As you step into your Clinical Fellowship and begin shaping the clinician you want to become, remember that professional growth doesn't stop once your hours are complete. At Education Resources, Inc., we're committed to helping SLPs rediscover *why* they love this work—through courses that challenge, inspire, and equip you with the tools to become an expert in your specialty. Whether you're exploring new clinical areas or deepening your skills in the populations you're most passionate about, ERI's high-quality continuing education supports your journey every step of the way, empowering you to grow with confidence, compassion, and purpose.

Feeding Continuing Education for Pediatric Therapists

At Education Resources, Inc., we aim to provide exceptional continuing education

designed for OTs, PTs, and SLPs at all experience levels, supporting everyone from emerging professionals to advanced clinicians looking to grow their skills.

Here are a few of our upcoming courses:

ON-DEMAND COURSES:

Pediatric Feeding and Swallowing Disorders: Bridging the Clinical Decision-Making Gaps with Interactive Case Studies

[Anais Villaluna, Dana Kizer](#)

LIVE WEBINARS:

Beyond the Oropharynx: Integrating Esophageal Knowledge into Pediatric Feeding Practice

[Amanda Adsett](#)

Treatment Strategies for the Improvement of Oral, Pharyngeal, Feeding/Swallowing, and Respiratory Coordination Function: The Child with Neuromuscular Involvement

[Rona Alexander](#)

Infants and Children with Complex Feeding and Swallowing Disorders: Challenging Decision Making

[Joan Arvedson](#)

Feeding Challenges: Sensory vs. Structural vs. Experience

[Danielle Carey](#)

Feeding Tiny Humans: Strategies for “Typical” to Troubled Premature and Medically Complex Babies

[Shanna Semmler](#)

Feeding and Swallowing Disorders in Infancy: Assessment and Management

[Lynn Wolf, Robin Glass](#)