

Pursuing a Career in Brain Science and Cognitive Psychology

ALL ABOUT BRAIN SCIENCE AND COGNITION

When you meet new people, why do you remember some names but not others?

This is an example of a question that psychologists working in brain science and cognition seek to answer through their research.

These psychologists spend most of their time studying human thought processes and the capacity for understanding, interpreting and retaining information.

They may choose to work in one particular specialty, such as memory or learning disabilities, or they may focus their career on a specific health issue or population.

Brain science and cognitive psychology focuses on how individuals learn, process and store information.

Psychologists working in this field apply psychological science to address a wide variety of issues that affect a spectrum of populations. They work with infants and toddlers to address behavioral problems and developmental disorders. They work with adults to address memory disorders, substance use and health-related problems. Others study the brain's capacity to do tasks, handle multiple demands or recover from injury.

In their work, many of these psychologists will drill down into intricacies such as how music therapy can help heal degenerative brain disorders or how quickly humans can learn a new language. Some study how the brain interprets smells. Others are working to decode the human brain.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Most psychologists working in brain science and cognition spend their careers in a university setting where they teach or conduct research or both. However, there has been significant growth in other areas, such as human-computer interaction, software development and organizational psychology. This growth has opened new job opportunities in the private sector.

Cognitive psychologists can also work in clinical settings to help treat issues related to human mental processes, including Alzheimer's disease, speech issues, memory loss, and sensory or perception difficulties. These psychologists will often work in government and private research centers and treatment facilities, such as hospitals and mental health clinics, and as consultants or expert witnesses for court cases. Private practice is also an option for psychologists working in this field.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

While there are some entry-level opportunities available to those with a bachelor's degree, most careers in brain science and cognitive psychology begin with a master's or doctoral degree.

For psychologists with a master's degree, career options exist in human performance research, such as testing how well a person who has not slept for many hours can remember a short story. They may also work in industrial and organizational psychology, and some with master's degrees may be hired for certain teaching positions. Most of the work of master's level professionals will be supervised by a doctoral level psychologist.

Most psychologists with doctoral degrees in brain science and cognition teach and conduct research in academia.

WHAT YOU CAN EARN

The earnings for psychologists working in brain science and cognition vary based on degree, position and experience. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, brain science and cognitive psychologists working as industrial and organizational psychologists earned more than \$114,040 a year on average with a median annual salary of \$87,330 in 2010. The American Psychological Association found that median annual salaries for brain science and cognitive psychologists employed at universities averaged \$76,090 in 2009.

While demand for brain science and cognitive psychologists has fluctuated, the subfield is on the rise. As technology becomes more advanced and cures to health issues like Alzheimer's disease continue to be elusive, the demand for psychologists specializing in brain science and cognition is expected to increase.

Find out where psychology can take you at **WWW.PSYCHSCIENCEACTION.ORG**.