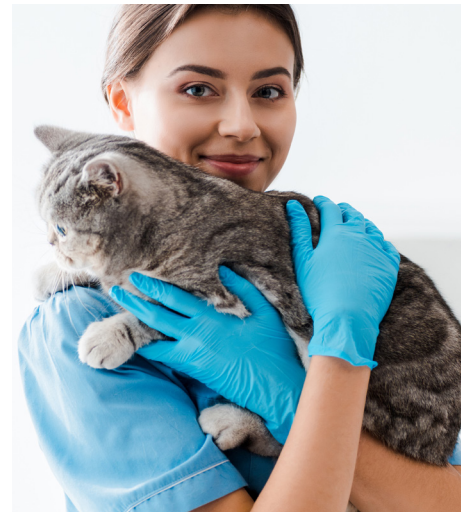


Building your Dream Career

Whether being a graduate of the ABC Veterinary Assistant Program is your first professional achievement, or you already have an educational and/or professional background, there are several essential steps that you should take in your search for a new career. In this section, we will provide guidance on finding the right career for you, which include attending to your own personal compensation requirements and finding happiness in your veterinary- or animal-related career endeavors.



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In Louise Miller's informative book, *Careers for Animal Lovers and Other Zoological Types*, she poses the following questions regarding careers in animal care. According to Miller, if you can answer "yes" to all or most of these questions, then you are prepared for a career with animals.

- Do I genuinely care about the welfare of animals?
- Am I willing to work long hours doing stressful work?
- Will I be happy living on a modest income?
- Am I willing to spend several years on education and training?
- Can I show empathy with people in times of grief?
- Do I have physical and mental strength and energy?
- Can I exercise good judgement and solve problems under difficult circumstances?
- Am I reliable and compassionate?
- Do I have up-to-date computer, organizational, and communication skills?
- Am I willing to relocate to areas where jobs are available?¹

The Veterinary Career for You

Upon successful completion of Stage 9: Career Building, you will be set up in a veterinary externship in or near your area to serve as an apprentice. Not only will you have the potential opportunity to gain employment at the veterinary facility you apprentice for, but you will also earn 100 hours of work experience in the veterinary field. As a graduate of the ABC Veterinary Assistant Program, your first instinct may be to seek a job as an actual veterinary assistant. This is the natural course of most graduates. The following sidebar provides an overview of the responsibilities of the veterinary assistant.

The Veterinary Assistant

The primary job of the veterinary assistant is to help the veterinarian and veterinary technician(s) complete necessary tasks to make their jobs easier, but the responsibilities of the position reach further. Veterinary assistants attend to a variety of administrative duties and generally assist with animals at the facility. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), some specific tasks of the position include:

- Restraining animals
- Sterilizing equipment
- Testing blood, urine and feces
- Providing first aid
- Answering phones

Additionally, the following description of the variety of roles an assistant may play over the course of a day can help give you a better understanding of what the position entails:

“Who are Veterinary Assistants?”

While every position within the veterinary practice team is important, veterinary assistants play a pivotal role, literally. In the course of a single day, an assistant provides help to veterinarians and veterinary technicians, which in turn allows those team members to perform the tasks and responsibilities of their positions. The next minute, the assistant may be helping a client understand why having their pet’s teeth cleaned is so important or providing a receptionist with a second set of hands at the front desk. Helping to fill scripts, keeping exams rooms cleaned and prepped, setting up lab work, helping with inventory, updating medical records, assisting with nursing care—there are more things that veterinary assistants do in a day than most people realize.”²

It should be noted that there are legal limitations to what a veterinary assistant can and cannot do, and these laws vary by state. Understandably, because veterinary assistants do not possess the same certifications and licensures as veterinary technicians, legally, they are not qualified to complete some of the more advanced tasks.

A general overview of the duties of a veterinary assistant includes:

- Basic diagnostic studies, including X-rays, nonsurgical specimen collection and laboratory testing procedures³
- Monitoring the condition of a hospitalized animal and reporting to the veterinarian⁴
- Dispensing prescription drugs according to the written instructions of the veterinarian⁵
- Restraining animals for examinations, radiographs, injections, and other technical procedures.

"A veterinary assistant must be able to modify the restraint technique for each technical procedure."⁶

Under direct supervision (the veterinarian is physically present on the premises), a veterinary assistant may perform these duties:

- Nonsurgical veterinary treatment including administering vaccines, sedatives and presurgical medications.⁷
- Observations related to animal diseases and conditions, which can be used by the veterinarian in developing a diagnosis or prognosis procedures.⁸
- Nutritional evaluation and counseling procedures.⁹

Additionally, in situations requiring emergency care, a state's law may permit a veterinary technician or veterinary assistant to provide care beyond their legally defined roles under the supervision of a veterinarian and to save the life of an animal.¹⁰



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Completing a NAVTA-approved veterinary assistant program, such as this one, provides immensely valuable training and preparation for launching a dynamic career. Graduation from the program can be listed on your résumé, providing potential employers with the knowledge that, if hired, you are educated about basic procedures. And, upon graduation, you qualify to take the Approved Veterinary Assistant (AVA) exam. Passing the exam and earning the nationally-recognized AVA designation is perhaps the best way to set yourself apart from other job candidates.



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As a veterinary assistant, there is a good chance that you will work in a veterinary care facility, and there are several options within this category, including:

- A routine care veterinary facility
- An emergency, or 24-hour veterinary hospital
- A mobile vet clinic
- Telehealth veterinary sessions
- A traveling vet for large animals

The Approved Veterinary Assistant (AVA) Exam and Designation

Animal Behavior College's (ABC's) Veterinary Assistant Program is approved by the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (NAVTA). Therefore, any student who graduates from the ABC program is eligible to take the Approved Veterinary Assistant (AVA) exam. Veterinary assistants who pass the exam receive a documenting certificate and are then qualified to use the Approved Veterinary Assistant (AVA) designation, a nationally recognized designation created by NAVTA. The AVA designation is recognized by the American Veterinary Medical Association and must be renewed every two years (based on the examination date).

Sources:

NAVTA. *The Approved Veterinary Assistant designation is a nationally recognized designation created by the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America.* Retrieved from <https://navta.net/veterinary-assistants-program/#>

Keep in mind as well, that once you have graduated a NAVTA-approved training program, you may decide to pursue a position that requires further education in the veterinary field, such as a veterinary technician, veterinary technologist, veterinary technician specialist or a veterinarian.

Veterinary Technician

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, “the veterinary technician is educated and trained to support the veterinarian by assisting with surgery, laboratory procedures, radiography, anesthesiology, prescribed treatment and nursing, and client education.”¹¹ Veterinary technicians also typically supervise the work of veterinary assistants.

Becoming a veterinary technician requires at least a two-year Associate of Science (AS) or Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree in veterinary technology from an American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA)-accredited community college. Earning this degree qualifies the graduate to take the Veterinary Technician National Examination (VTNE), which most states require to become a licensed veterinary technician (LVT), registered veterinary technician (RVT) or certified veterinary technician (CVT), the title being dependent on the state in which a person receives their credentials.¹²

A technician may also opt to achieve a four-year Bachelor’s degree, which, though not required, offers the opportunity for a higher salary, job advancement and better benefits. Some technicians become specialized in NAVTA-recognized areas: emergency and critical care, anesthesiology, internal medicine, zoological medicine or dentistry.¹³ All veterinary technicians must work under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian; they cannot diagnose, prescribe, perform surgery or any task legally prohibited by their state’s veterinary practice act.¹⁴

Veterinary Technologist

Like a veterinary technician, veterinary technologists assist the veterinarian and oversee the work of veterinary assistants. However, the position of veterinary technologist requires a four-year Bachelor of Science (BS) or Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) degree in veterinary technology from an AVMA-accredited school.



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The additional two years of training strengthens a student's understanding of the concepts they learned during their first two years and expands their management, research and critical thinking skills, giving them an advantage on the path to specialization and advancement to positions such as head technician or educator in a veterinary technician or assistant program.¹⁵

Veterinary Technician Specialist (VTS)

A veterinary technician specialist is a veterinary technician with advanced training in a specialized area. The areas of specializations are determined by NAVTA's Committee on Veterinary Technician Specialties (CVTS) and include anesthesia, animal behavior, dental technology, emergency and critical care, equine veterinary nursing, internal medicine and zoological medicine. The standards for certification in each area are determined by academies recognized by NAVTA's CVTS; an academy is defined by NAVTA as a group of veterinary technicians who have received formal, specialized training, testing and certification in an area. CVTS guides these groups of technicians with special training in specific disciplines in developing advanced programs for training and certifying veterinary technician specialists.¹⁶

Veterinarian

Becoming a licensed veterinarian involves completing a four-year degree program at a university along with attending and successfully completing four years of veterinary school. Being accepted to a veterinary school can be competitive, so the candidate should achieve high grades throughout their college education. The aspiring veterinarian must then pass a rigorous national veterinary medical board exam. Veterinarians may then choose to further their education in order to become specialists in certain fields, such as veterinary dentistry or parasitology. They may also choose a specialty such as small animals, large animals, exotic animals, etc. It is not necessary to become a veterinary assistant or technician before attending school to become a veterinarian, however, having experience in the veterinary hospital can give prospective students a good idea of what to expect in the veterinary field. The licensed veterinarian can choose to work for an existing veterinary facility, or he/she may choose to build his/her own practice.

Employment Opportunities Outside a Veterinary Clinic or Hospital

Beyond the veterinary clinic or hospital, other situations that might suit someone trained to be a veterinary assistant include employment at specialty and major pet supply stores, grooming salons, dog-walking businesses, doggie daycare centers, pet hotels and other pet-centered businesses. Responsibilities for such positions may entail managing pets who are boarding, assisting customers in identifying the best products for their pets' needs and general customer service.

Trained veterinary assistants with an interest in nutrition or particular aspects of health care may want to explore opportunities to be a brand ambassador for a pet food manufacturer or veterinary pharmaceutical company. Employment of this nature requires in-depth knowledge about pet nutrition and special diets or pet vaccinations, disease and parasite control, pharmacology and pet health conditions.¹⁷ Working for a pet insurance company is another opportunity trained veterinary assistants may wish to explore.

Additional employment options outside the veterinary clinic or hospital include the following:

Kennel Attendant

A kennel attendant may be employed with the veterinary facility where they assist. The duties of the kennel attendant usually involve assisting the veterinarian, technician, assistant, and all other staff, as well as helping to maintain the hospital's cleanliness. An attendant could also be tasked with grooming, bathing, feeding, walking and playing with the animals as well as administering medication and cleaning the kennels.¹⁸ Watching for changes in animal behavior as possible symptoms of illness is also a common responsibility. A kennel attendant may also become an employee of a boarding facility or pet hotel where their job is to optimize patient comfort and care. The kennel attendant may or may not be responsible for client relations (i.e. assisting clients in admitting and discharging of their pets).

Laboratory Assistant/Laboratory Animal Caretaker

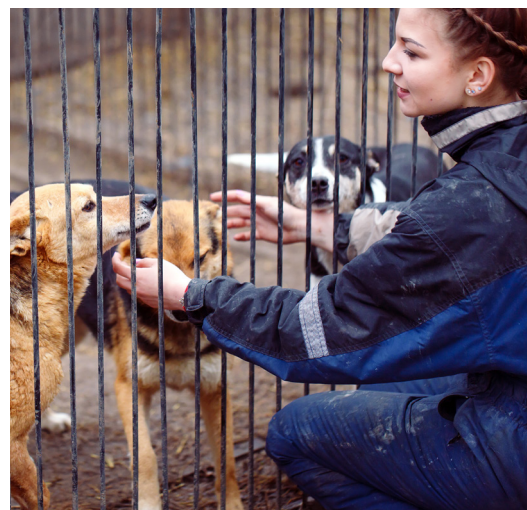
Working in a laboratory can be a great fit for a trained veterinary assistant. Required responsibilities may include setting up experiments or preparing samples for examination under the supervision of veterinary or laboratory animal technologists or technicians, veterinarians or scientists; observing animals for signs of illness, disease or injury; cleaning and disinfecting; sterilizing laboratory or surgical equipment; feeding and watering animals; administering medication and providing postoperative care.¹⁹

Doggie Daycare or Pet Hotel Operator/Attendant

Doggie daycares and pet hotels can be privately owned or corporate organizations. They are meant to serve pet owners with busy lives who do not want to leave their dogs/pets alone at home. Doggie daycares normally are specific to dogs, though some allow other animals as well. Owners can take their dogs to the daycare to be attended to and exercised/walked, especially during their workday or while on vacation. Some doggie daycares provide boarding while others have limited hours. Graduates of the ABC Veterinary Assistant Program may choose to become an entrepreneur and open a doggie daycare or pet hotel, or they may choose to work for an established daycare facility. Regardless of the circumstances, the strong training received through the ABC program can give the doggie daycare operator added knowledge about caring for animals

Animal Shelter or Animal Rescue Worker

There are thousands of animal shelters and rescues in existence that serve the purpose of temporarily housing homeless animals until they can be placed with new owners. Some animal shelters are labeled “no-kill,” meaning they do not ever euthanize or they only euthanize animals under specific circumstances, such as extreme aggression.²⁰ Other animal shelters labeled “kill shelters” will euthanize animals after holding them for a pre-determined amount of time.²¹ This is typically due to the large number of homeless/stray animals. Thus, if interested in a career in this field,



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the graduate of the ABC Veterinary Assistant Program must be prepared for this possibility or specifically look for work at a shelter that does not euthanize. Rescues are primarily no-kill but are often non-profit organizations seeking assistance from volunteers. They may be general animal rescues or breed-specific rescues. This career can be both emotionally difficult and immensely rewarding. Graduates of the ABC Veterinary Assistant Program are encouraged to volunteer for a shelter or rescue if they are able to.

Dog/Animal Trainer

The graduate of the ABC Veterinary Assistant Program has an enhanced understanding of animal care and, with their ever-increasing exposure to animals, animal behavior. Some students who complete their veterinary assistant training may decide to become dog trainers. Dog trainers can be employed with major pet stores or county programs, collaborate with shelters and/or rescues to provide training programs at their facilities, or they can be entrepreneurs and service private clients. They do not necessarily need to attend a vocational program or pursue certification to become a dog trainer, however it is highly recommended. There are programs offered that allow the aspiring trainer to gain certification. This can increase clientele and credibility. ABC offers dog and cat trainer certification programs across the United States and Canada.



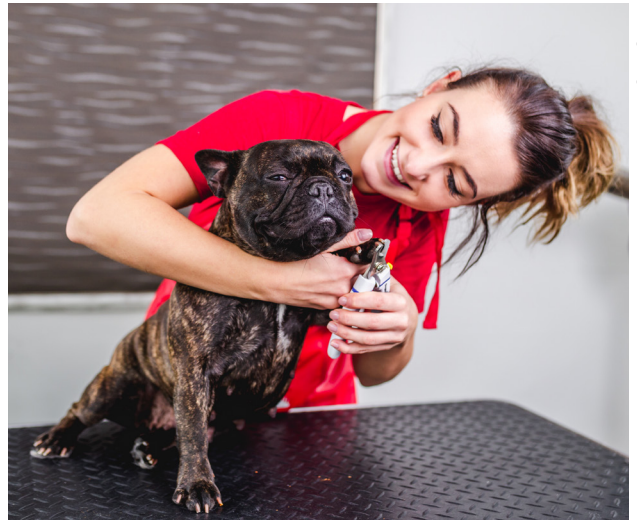
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Zookeeper or Zoo Attendant

Some veterinary assistants may desire a career working with exotic animals in a zoo or wildlife conservation setting. Zookeepers may participate in the day-to-day care of animals, tours and public education, organizing demonstrations, facility maintenance, and even animal training when fully educated. Some facilities will require a BS degree while others may provide on-the-job training. The website for the American Association of Zookeepers (AAZK) is www.aazk.org.

There are numerous other animal-related careers that a graduate of the ABC Veterinary Assistant Program can pursue; here is a list of other researchable positions. Again, some jobs will require further training. Some may provide on-the-job training, while others will call for further education.

- National Park Ranger/Manager
- Animal Groomer
- Animal Photographer
- Animal-Assisted Therapy
- Animal Control Officer
- Animal Research
- Wildlife Rehabilitation or Conservation
and Wildlife Management
- Animal Massage Therapist
- Aquarium Worker
- Author of Animal-Related Publications



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No matter which career you pursue, remember to consider your strengths, weaknesses, needs, wants, and skills. To be truly happy in your career choice, these aspects must be taken into account. If you are hoping for a career as a zookeeper but do not live close by a zoo, you must be willing to either commute or change your housing location in order to follow that path. If you wish to rely on steady income, being an entrepreneur and starting your own business may not be the right choice for you. If you prefer to be your own employer, however, founding a doggie daycare or pet photography business can be a suitable niche. Remember to explore all of your options. Louise Miller's book also offers the following, more specific career-based statements that will help you to decide what path is right for you.