

Career Center

A Student Guide to Disclosure in the Job Search

How to navigate the job search in regards to disclosing disability to employers and asking for appropriate accommodations.

This guide will cover the Why, Who, What, When, and How of disclosure, what to consider when identifying the accommodations you need in your prospective job, and your rights and responsibilities in regards to legal and ethical implications under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Why Should I Disclose or Not Disclose my Disability?

When applying for jobs, it will be important to consider the pros and cons of disclosure. Determine your need to disclose based off of the essential functions of a job. Remember that the employer only needs to know the information that will affect performance in the work place and not a detailed medical history. Here are reasons to disclose or not disclose that will be good to weigh during this process.

Pros

- Self-advocate and take control of how people perceive you
- Develop mentoring and peer support structures
- Access support and services needed to be successful in the job search
- Identify resources specifically for disability-targeted services and support networks
- Obtain information in developing a career plan that addresses barriers
- Discuss employment requirements, accommodations process, and disability issues with recruiters to determine if can meet needs of the position with or without accommodations
- More open communication with employers and co-workers of your choosing about your needs to help prevent misunderstandings
- Get appropriate and helpful accommodations
- Receive legal protection against discrimination

Cons

- Being defined by disability and not abilities
- * Experience exclusion from other coworkers
- * Being treated differently than others or experience possible discrimination
- * Overlooked for other jobs, teams, groups or organizations

* If the above experiences occur, you would have the right to seek legal recourse about discrimination depending on the circumstance.

Who Should I Disclose to?

If you decide to disclose, it is important to identify who you would disclose to on a need-to-know basis. Communicating with individuals who are necessary to share information with such as recruiters and individuals in charge of the accommodations process might seem more comfortable to you. However, when deciding to disclose to others in your work, there might be more factors to consider. Remember, you have control over who you tell and how confidential you want your information to be. Determining your own comfort level with individuals is key. Here are examples of who you can inform about your disability.

At Duke

Career counselors, Student Disability Access Office, academic advisers, faculty, staff, campus mentors, student organizations, program departments or offices

During Hiring Process

Human resources, recruiters, interviewers, hiring managers/committee

On the Job

- Co-workers, peers, colleagues, partners, related industry professionals
- Supervisor, manager, work mento



Consider the following questions to help you decide whether or not to disclose to certain individuals.

- What experience does this person have with similar disclosure situations?
- Do I respect this person and trust they will keep disclosure confidential?
- Can this person help me discuss/reflect on my disability in my future career?
- Does this person have the power to determine the reasonableness of the request for accommodations?
- Can this person provide accommodations?
- Is this person responsible for hiring, firing or promoting?
- Is this person in a supervisory role, and will they support me?

What Do I Disclose?

Here are tips on what to exactly disclose about your disability when the situation arises.

- Focus on abilities and strengths rather than disabilities
- General information about disability
- Why chose to disclose disability, including impact on job performance
- Job accommodations that have worked in the past from previous positions
- Types of accommodations you anticipate needing in the work place
- How disability and other life experiences positively affect work performance

When and How Should I Disclose in the Job Search Process?

There are many stages within the job process that you can disclose your disability. Outlined below are the advantages, disadvantages, and considerations of disclosing during a particular part of the application process.

Advantages	Disadvantages	Considerations	Examples
In a Resume or Application			
<p>Can be viewed as a positive trait in the hiring process</p> <p>Peace of mind about being upfront with the employer about your disability</p> <p>Better success in pre-interview timed testing required by some employers especially if you have received accommodations for time in the past</p>	<p>You do not have much space to explain how you live with your disability</p> <p>Employers might be more cautious in choosing you to interview</p>	<p>How well do you feel like you can write about your disability, focusing on strengths and maturity in how you have dealt with your disability?</p> <p>Are you involved in some way with the community of people who also have your same disability? How can you discuss this in a positive way that shows self-awareness?</p>	<p>Member of the American Association of People with Disabilities</p> <p>The position I am applying for in your department requires me to take a timed screening test. I have a disability and usually receive extra time for timed tests. Is there a way you can accommodate me?</p>
In a Cover Letter			
<p>You have more space to expand and explain how your disability has impacted your life</p> <p>A non-pressure avenue to say exactly what you want employers to know about you and your disability</p> <p>Peace of mind about being upfront with the employer about your disability</p>	<p>Employers will start forming an impression of you before they meet you based off of what you write</p> <p>Employers might attribute your disclosure as a risk</p>	<p>What will you say or not say about your disability?</p> <p>How will you discuss it in a way that shows ownership, responsibility and awareness?</p> <p>How will you talk about the impact it has had on your life and how it affects your job performance?</p>	<p>As an individual with a life long physical and speech disability, I learned early on to focus on my intellectual abilities and to develop strengths within my limits. For example, I received my first computer when I was 5 years old and learned to operate it independently. Today, I am proficient in many software applications, operating systems, and system troubleshooting.</p>

When and How Should I Disclose in the Job Search Process? (continued)

Advantages	Disadvantages	Considerations	Examples
Pre-Interview			
<p>Access to accommodations if needed before an interview</p> <p>Set expectations with employers so they will not be surprised or feel unequipped to accommodate you</p>	<p>You might not be able to fully explain aspects of your disability in pre-interview situations that will encompass the extent of your message</p>	<p>What accommodations will you need for the interview?</p> <p>Can you get the interview agenda ahead of time to know what to request?</p> <p>Can you speak to the employer who is organizing the on-site interview to get a better understanding of needs?</p>	<p>I am calling to confirm my interview scheduled at your company in 2 days. Could you please tell me where to find your office's accessible entrance?</p>
During an Interview			
<p>Honesty, peace of mind</p> <p>Opportunity to respond to disability issues in person</p> <p>Discrimination is less likely face to face</p>	<p>Puts responsibility on you to handle disability related issues in a clear non-threatening way</p> <p>If you emphasize the issue too much you run the risk of focusing on your disability more than your abilities</p>	<p>How comfortable are you discussing your disability?</p> <p>Have you planned out how you will bring up the topic and what you will say?</p> <p>Give examples of how you would perform the job</p> <p>Show you can do the job with the right accommodations</p> <p>Be positive, upbeat, and confident</p>	<p>I have a learning disability and have difficulty reading in the traditional way. My screen reader, which reads electronic information aloud using a computerized voice, has enabled me to succeed at college and I know it will be useful on this job.</p> <p>Through my disability, I have learned the value of connecting with professionals. I can be resourceful and creative to get the job done.</p> <p>You may be wondering how I can type letters with my physical disability. I have a great software program that allows the computer to type as I speak words. It can be loaded on most computers. I would be happy to show it to you sometime.</p>

When and How Should I Disclose in the Job Search Process? (continued)

Advantages	Disadvantages	Considerations	Examples
After the Interview, When the Job is Offered			
<p>If the disability information changes the hiring decision, even when you know you can perform the job well, there would be the chance of legal recourse</p> <p>Wanted to be selected based on skills and not have disability at the forefront of a hiring decision</p>	<p>Employer might feel like you should have told them before the hiring decision was made</p> <p>Could lead to distrust with the employers</p>	<p>If the job requires medication testing and you take medications that will show up on the screening, you might choose to disclose to the employer</p> <p>Evaluate your disability in relation to the job requirements</p> <p>Explain how your disability will not interfere with the ability to perform job duties</p>	<p>During the interview, you explained that work was verbally assigned at a staff meeting. I find that I work best when instructions are both written and verbal. I have a disability that makes processing verbal information a challenge. Could you accommodate me in this way?</p>
After You Start Work			
<p>Opportunity to prove yourself on the job before disclosure</p> <p>If disclosure affects employment status, even when you are still able to perform the job duties, you may be protected by the law</p>	<p>Nervousness or fear of having a disability-related problem on the job and not having the accommodations you need</p> <p>Fear it's is too late to disclose and your coworkers will wonder why you did not disclose during the hiring process</p> <p>Possibility that your co-workers will not know how to react to your disability</p> <p>Could change interaction with peers</p>	<p>It is better to ask for accommodations before your job performance is questioned</p> <p>The longer you put off disclosing the harder it becomes</p> <p>You might not recognize the need for accommodations when you first enter a job.</p> <p>If throughout the process the need becomes easier to identify, advocate for yourself to receive proper accommodations.</p>	<p>I have a disability that takes me longer to process information. When assigned projects can you allow me more time to develop questions and review the tasks independently? Thank you in advance for keeping this information confidential.</p>

When and How Should I Disclose in the Job Search Process? (continued)

Advantages	Disadvantages	Considerations	Examples
After a Disability-Related Problem on The Job			
Opportunity to prove yourself on the job before disclosure	Employer accusations of falsifying your application Not knowing how your coworkers will react to your disability Perpetuate disability myths and misunderstandings	Relationships you establish with peers may be hurt if they feel like you have not been truthful with them. It could be difficult to regain trust. Not disclosing here could cost you on your performance review if your supervisor believes you cannot do the job successfully	I have noticed that I am having a difficult time completing my work assignments. I have a medical condition that requires frequent breaks in order to do my work. Would you allow me to work later to enable me to take more breaks? I always get the job done when I manage my schedule in this way.
Never			
Employers will not be aware of your disability so they will not question your performance in regards to your disability	Nervousness or fear of having a disability related problem on the job	If you are able to perform the essential functions of the job without reasonable accommodations, you will not need to disclose your disability If you have a disability-related medical situation you might be hurt by inappropriate first aid	No example needed

How do I Identify the Accommodations that I need?

Ask yourself these questions to determine what accommodations you need to be successful on the job.

- What accommodations do you receive in college or graduate school? Why are these accommodations helpful to you?
- What strategies have you developed over the years that you can use in the workplace without requesting accommodations?
- What physical, sensory, and cognitive skills are needed for your prospective position?
- What does the task or assignment require? Break down all of the components of the job.
- Which aspects of the job do you feel requires accommodations?
- What accommodation options exist? If you do not know possible options, go to <https://askjan.org/> or access campus and community resources.

What Are my Rights and Responsibilities During the Job Search Process?

Know how you are protected under the law and what is considered your responsibility as you advocate for yourself.

Rights

- Have information about disability treated confidentially and respectfully
- Seek information about hiring practices from any organization
- Choose to disclose disability at any point during the employment process
- Receive appropriate accommodations in an interview to demonstrate skills and abilities
- Be considered for position based on skills and merit
- Be self-determined and proactive
- Have a respectful dialog about disabilities for purpose of reasonable accommodations

Responsibilities

- Demonstrate skills and merit
- Be truthful, self-determined, and proactive
- Search for jobs that address skills and abilities
- Inform the manager or interviewers about appropriate and reasonable accommodations for an interview
- Disclose need for accommodations if work-related adjustments are needed
- Negotiate reasonable accommodations with an employer at point of job offer and while on the job

Pre-Employment Disability-Related Questions:

An employer cannot ask certain questions related to your disability. For more information on what employers can or cannot ask in the pre and post offer stages and medical examination policies according to the Americans with Disabilities Act, visit

<http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/medfin5.pdf>

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