



CAREER DISABILITY DISCLOSURE FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

As an individual with a disability, it is up to you to decide if you want to share information regarding your disability with an employer. Although you are not required to disclose your disability to an employer if you can navigate the hiring process and perform the essential functions of the job without accommodations, you do need to disclose your disability to your employer if you need job accommodations and to be protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This info guide is designed to assist you in determining how, when, and to whom you should disclose your disability during the hiring process and in the workplace.

Preparing to Disclose Your Disability

Before you disclose your disability, it is a good idea to prepare yourself for the discussion with your employer by taking the following steps:

- Think about the pros and cons of disclosing your disability as well as when would be a good time to discuss your disability with your employer.
- Review the phases of the hiring process and the aspects of the job that may be difficult for you to perform due to your disability.
- Develop ideas for possible accommodations that could work for you; these may be accommodations that you have used successfully in the past, or they could be accommodations or solutions that you have researched and selected based on your own needs.
- Decide who you are going to disclose your disability to, such as a human resources representative or a hiring manager; you should only disclose your disability to those who need to be involved in the accommodation process.
- Make a plan of how much you want to disclose about your disability and decide what you want to say about your disability.

Requesting Accommodations

It is your responsibility to inform the employer if you need accommodations at any point during the employment process. When requesting accommodations, you should be familiar with:

- > The specific accommodations needed (however, know that the employer doesn't have to provide the exact accommodation that you request and they can select which accommodation to provide if more than one accommodation is effective)
- > The cost associated with each accommodation and where the requested accommodations can be obtained or purchased (although the employer is responsible for obtaining and purchasing accommodations, it can help to show how inexpensive an accommodation can be)

Creating a Disclosure Script

Before you disclose your disability to an employer, you can prepare and rehearse a disclosure script in advance so you feel more comfortable with the disclosure process and so you have a plan of exactly what you want to say to your employer. Your disclosure script should include:

- A brief description of your disability – be brief and avoid using technical terms that can be intimidating
- An emphasis on your job-related skills and abilities – you want to tell your employer that you are a qualified candidate with great skills who also happens to have a disability
- A description of the functional limitations related to your disability that may interfere with your job performance
- Examples of ways that you accommodate the functional limitations of your disability, such as using an FM system, using text-to-speech software or a screen reader, or driving an adapted car
- Suggestions for possible accommodations

Be sure to include the following when preparing your own disability disclosure script:

- Description of my disability
- The key skills and abilities I possess related to this job are...
- My functional limitations are...
- To accommodate my functional limitations, I typically...
- The accommodations I need include...

The following is an example of a disability disclosure script; you can use this template or create your own:

"I have (provide the preferred term for your disability). **I have** (list your key skills/abilities) **and can perform the essential functions of this job, but sometimes** (indicate your functional limitations) **might interfere with my ability to** (describe the duties you may have difficulty performing). **I accommodate my functional limitations by** (explain some ways that you accommodate your disability). **It's helpful if I have** (describe the specific accommodations you need)."

When to Disclose Your Disability

Before you disclose your disability to an employer, you should consider the positives and negatives of disclosure, the timing of your disclosure, what information you want to disclose and how you will explain it, the steps of the hiring process and the job duties that may be difficult for you due to your disability (if applicable), and some possible accommodations that you may have used in the past or that you have researched and feel would benefit you in the workplace. The following are some of the most common times to disclose a disability to an employer:

- **On resume, cover letter, and/or employment application:** Disclosing at this stage can give you peace of mind, since you have been up-front about your disability, but the employer may focus on your disability rather than your skills and abilities and you may be disqualified from the job before you are able to demonstrate your ability to do the job. It is not typically recommended to disclose your disability on your resume, cover letter, or employment application; however, you may need to disclose your disability at this stage if the employer has a program specifically for applicants with disabilities.
- **When employer contacts you for an interview:** If you have a physical disability, disclosing your disability at this stage may reduce the potential shock to the employer when you arrive for the interview. Disclosing your disability at this stage may distract the interviewer from your skills and ability to do the job, which can result in you not being seriously considered for the position. You may need to disclose your disability at this stage if you will need accommodations during the interview process, such as needing a sign language interpreter for the interview or a wheelchair accessible interview site.
- **During the interview:** Disclosing your disability during the interview allows you to present your disability in a positive and personal manner; however, it may distract the interviewer from your skills and ability to do the job, and you may not be seriously considered for the position. Disclosing at this stage may cause you to become more nervous during the interview.
- **After the interview, before the offer:** Disclosing your disability before the offer allows the employer to focus on your skills and ability to do the job during the interview rather than your disability. The employer may feel that you should have disclosed your disability earlier in the hiring process; to alleviate this concern, you can explain to the employer that you needed to learn more about the essential functions of the position before you disclosed your disability. Disclosing at this stage can cause you to not be seriously considered for the position.

- **After the offer, before you accept:** You may have legal recourse if the offer of employment is rescinded once you disclose your disability to the employer. The employer may feel that you should have disclosed your disability earlier in the hiring process; to alleviate this concern, you can explain to the employer that you needed to learn more about the essential functions of the position before you disclosed your disability. This stage of the hiring process is often the best time to disclose your disability to your employer.
- **After you start the job:** Waiting to disclose your disability until after you start the job gives you the opportunity to prove that you are capable of doing the job. If your employment status is impacted by your disclosure of your disability, you may have legal recourse. It may become even more difficult for you to disclose your disability if you choose to wait to disclose your disability, and your job performance may suffer as a result. Your employer may accuse you of falsifying your qualifications for the position if you choose to wait to disclose your disability until after you start the job. In addition, you may not have legal recourse against unfavorable changes in your employment status. If there are changes in your job responsibilities after you start a position, you may need to disclose your disability and request accommodations.
- **After a problem on the job:** It is highly recommended that you disclose your disability to your employer prior to problems occurring on the job. Choosing to disclose your disability after a problem occurs on the job gives you the opportunity to prove your capabilities and skills related to the job, but your relationship with your employer and your co-workers could be damaged as a result. Your employer may accuse you of falsifying your qualifications for the position if you choose to wait to disclose your disability until after a problem occurs on the job. In addition, you may not have legal recourse against unfavorable changes in your employment status.
- **Never:** Your employer does not need to know about your disability unless it impacts your ability to do your job and you are in need of accommodations in the workplace. If you do not disclose your disability to your employer at all, your disability does not become a factor in hiring decisions. If your employer discovers your disability, they may accuse you of falsifying your qualifications for the position, and you may not have legal recourse against unfavorable changes in your employment status.

(Adapted with permission from the Office of Career Services and Cooperative Education at Rochester Institute of Technology's "Job Seekers with Disabilities")