

Disclosure Decisions TO GET THE JOB

Every individual with a disability must choose whether to disclose (share) his or her disability with an employer. Primary factors to consider include whether accommodations will be needed on the job or whether a disability is visible or hidden. Other aspects related to the employer and the company may also influence your decision. Follow this disclosure decision guide to determine what will work best for you. Remember, if you choose to disclose your disability, you are protected from discrimination by federal laws.



First, identify a **NEED** for disclosure, such as determining accessibility, necessary accommodations, or potential job match. Consider your answers to questions in Chart 1 and decide if you have a reason to disclose.

If you decide that disclosure will help you be successful, look at the pros and cons of **WHEN** you disclose in Chart 2. Then, follow the general guidelines in Chart 3 to decide **HOW** to disclose.

Effective disclosure can establish a positive working relationship with your employer. Practicing with a close friend, family member, or career counselor can help to increase your comfort level and skills.



Three Steps to Disclosing a Disability

3. Choose HOW to Disclose

2. Decide WHEN to Disclose

1. Determine NEED for Disclosure

2. Decide WHEN to Disclose: Consider Pros and Cons

When	Potential Gains	Potential Setbacks
In a cover letter	Advance time to prepare positive written disclosure and to tailor your abilities to duties of job description.	Employer's preconceptions may hinder opportunity for an interview. Unable to read employer's body language and mood.
In a resume or on a job application	Establishes "up front" relationship and communication.	Employer may have stereotypes about disabilities and may not offer you an interview.
When employer calls for an interview	Establishes open communication and gives an employer time to review Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 compliance information.	May not get serious consideration during interview.
Before the interview	Shows respect to employer, gives employer advance notice to secure any accommodations that may be needed during the interview, and time to research proper etiquette or refresh knowledge on ADA.	Employer has advance time to yield to his or her stereotypes about disabilities.
During the interview	Opportunity to read employer body language, to time the disclosure, and to disclose in a brief, positive manner.	Employer may feel uneasy and ill prepared to respond with appropriate and legal questions.
After the job offer	May have legal recourse if disclosing disability negatively affects the hiring decision. There is time to get accommodations in place before the job starts. Positive relationship has already been established with employer.	Employer may feel that you have been dishonest in the application process, which may erode trust.
After the job begins	Gives opportunity to establish credibility before disclosure. Gives freedom to talk with co-workers about disability related issues.	May take time to secure requested accommodations. Employer may believe you have not been honest which may negatively affect your relationship.
When performance difficulties arise	Difficulties may not arise (i.e. you may never need to disclose).	Employer may have difficulty changing his or her perceptions of your work performance, feel betrayed or wonder why you waited so long.
Never	Disability information is kept private.	Not protected from discrimination under the ADA.

1. Determine NEED for Disclosure: Gather all the Facts

Consider the questions below. "Yes" answers may indicate a need for or benefit of disclosure. "No" answers may indicate a need for more preparation or limited benefit of disclosure.

Area	Questions	Circle Answer
Company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do I have background information about the company? Does the company, senior management, or owner welcome and value diversity? Has the company participated in any disability related recruitment programs? Is there a company policy on hiring individuals with disabilities? Does the company offer any internship programs? Is pre-employment testing required? What is the medium for testing? 	Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No
Job Position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have I requested a detailed job description for the position? Do I know what are the essential functions and expectations of the job? Can I talk with an employee who is currently in this position or in a similar one? Will my compensatory strategies (e.g., use of adaptive software or assistive technology) change the traditional way of getting the job done? Will I need accommodations for the application process, interview process, or at the worksite? 	Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No
Employer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the supervisor use a flexible and personal management style? Does the employer have experience in managing differences or diversity? Does the employer focus on essential, rather than marginal functions? Has the employer had positive experiences hiring individuals with disabilities? Can I provide the employer with resource information about the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and my specific accommodation needs? 	Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No
Myself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Am I familiar with the protections provided by the ADA? Am I comfortable with my disability? Am I aware of my strengths and functional limitations? Will I need potential medical assistance? Have I explored technology or strategies to compensate for my limitations? Have I previously used accommodations at a work-site? Have I practiced disclosure with a family member, close friend, or career professional? 	Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No Yes / No

Need More Information?

About company and position:

- University career centers
- Human resource departments
- Professional associations
- Local chambers of commerce
- Company specific websites
- Informational interviews

About potential accommodations:

- Job Accommodations Network
www.jan.wvu.edu
- Virginia Assistive Technology System -- www.vats.org
- ABLEDATA -- www.abledata.com
- Department of Rehabilitative Services -- www.vadrs.org

3. Choose HOW to Disclose: General Guidelines

How

Stress current involvement in a positive activity that shows your ability to manage your disability.

Be optimistic; focus on your abilities and job qualifications.

Give the employer information on what he or she needs to do or provide regarding communication, directions, or supervision.

Educate the employer by articulating or demonstrating how you can perform the essential functions of the job. Have resource information available for the employer.

Explain the benefits of your disability regarding your personal growth or perseverance.

Face employer concerns by talking about your compensatory strategies or accommodation solutions.

Use general, functional terms to briefly explain the impact of your disability on the job; avoid technical, medical diagnoses.

In a private setting, remind your employer about your right to confidentiality.

Frame the disclosure around how you work best.

Examples

Resume -- Member of the American Blind Skiing Foundation

Cover Letter -- 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.

Telephone Call Prior to the Interview -- "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?"

During the Interview -- Have you ever heard of a screen reader? 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. "

During the Interview -- "Through my disability, I have learned the value of connecting with professionals. I can be resourceful and creative to get the job done."

During the Interview -- "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."


After the Job Offer -- "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?"

After the Job is Accepted -- After disclosing your disability in your employer's office: "Thank you in advance for keeping this information confidential."

A Few Weeks on the Job -- "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."



OPENING DOORS



Disclosure Decision Worksheet

YES
I will disclose

1

List the reasons why you **NEED** to disclose.

2

WHEN will you disclose your disability?

2

2

List the reasons for choosing this time.

3

HOW will you disclose your disability?

3

Write a few phrases telling your employer about your disability.

3

Practice your disclosure with another person.

NO
I will not disclose

List the reasons why you choose **not** to disclose.

For each new job, review the information in this brochure to determine whether or not to disclose.