

Career Development Resources for Students with Disabilities

Students with physical or non-apparent disabilities often struggle to **decide if they should disclose a disability** in an academic or employment setting. This is a very personal decision only you can make. It's important to learn what strengths you have to offer an employer, how to manage your job search and how to seek accommodations when necessary.

Career Development Center

The Career Development Center (CDC) **supports students with physical, learning, sensory, mental health, developmental and other disabilities**. We encourage you to make one-on-one appointments with CDC staff members so we can advise you on your career plan, job search strategies and ways to highlight your strengths. Log in to your Handshake account to make an appointment. We can help you:

- Learn more about major, career and industry-specific resources.
- Create a unique job search strategy and highlight specific resources that match your interests.
- Create an action plan for your personal job search integrating all available resources to help you find your dream internship, co-op or full-time job.v

Disability Access Services

Disability Access Services (DAS) at Oregon State University facilitates access to university programs and services for students, faculty, staff and visitors with disabilities through accommodations, education, consultation and advocacy. If you have questions about rights, responsibilities or procedures to obtain accommodations, please contact them at 541-737-4098 or by email at disability.services@oregonstate.edu.

Disability Disclosure

Disclosure entails sharing information about your disability to receive accommodations or adjustments to maximize your performance. Disclosure can be done to receive either academic or work-based accommodations.

To Disclose or Not Disclose

Disclosure is voluntary and based on your personal decision. You are not required to disclose a disability. In general, one would disclose a disability in order to receive a work-based accommodation. There is no right or wrong approach to disclosing a disability.

Decision-Making Process

If you are trying to decide whether or not you should disclose a disability, it may be helpful to consider the following questions:

- Do I have an obligation to disclose to perform my job effectively?
- When is the right time?
- How much information does the employer need?
- How will disclosing the information affect my employment?

Advantages to Disclosure

There are several advantages to disclosing a disability including:

- You will start to receive reasonable accommodations.
- You will be protected legally under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- You can receive assistance with learning new skills.

Times to Disclose

You can disclose a disability **at any stage** of the employment process. Stages at which you might choose to disclose include:

- During or prior to the interview
- When the job offer has been made
- When you have been working in the job
- Not at all

To Whom Should You Disclose?

Disclosing a disability is on a **need-to-know basis**. Check your employee handbook to find out more about your employer's policy on accommodation requests. A general rule of thumb is to disclose to a person who has the ability to grant you work accommodations. Consider starting with a human resources professional. Under the ADA, employers are required to keep all disability information confidential.

How to Disclose

Let your employer know that you have a **need for a work adjustment**. You have no obligation to disclose a disability. However, it is your responsibility to seek out the assistance you need. When you do disclose, it is only necessary to share information about your work limitations, condition and needed accommodations.

Practice your disclosure conversation in advance with a friend or person you trust. Keep the conversation positive and focused on your strengths. Your confidence will convey that you have thought about what you need in order to accomplish the tasks required of the job.

Ways to Disclose a Disability

You may choose to disclose your disability in one of several ways, including:

- In person to a manager, supervisor or human resources professional.
- During an interview to make sure the work environment is a good fit, or over the phone to ensure the facility is accessible.
- In a cover letter to communicate how you've overcome obstacles due to your disability.
- On the voluntary self-identification portion of a government or job application.

Reasonable Work-Based Accommodations

Let your employer know what work accommodations you need. It is best to be knowledgeable about your needs to convey them to an employer. Below is a list of common work accommodations to help employees perform their jobs:

- Technology (communication aids, computer access aids, hearing and listening aids, etc.)
- Part-time or modified work schedules
- Equipment (ergonomic chair, desk, keyboard, etc.)
- Accessible facilities
- Mobility or transportation aids
- Qualified readers or interpreters
- Auditory tapes of meetings

Interview Strategies

1. Do your homework.

If you need accommodations like building access, you may need to disclose your disability. Map out the location of the interview and make sure it is accessible to you. If it is not, contact the interviewer to request a different location and have a location in mind if the interviewer needs suggestions.

It is okay to call and ask questions about accessible parking spaces or features such as elevators. It is always best to have these issues taken care of ahead of time, at least one week prior to your interview. This will also prove to your employer that you are able to plan and solve problems.

2. Be prepared for difficult questions.

The best way to tackle difficult questions is to be ready for them. List questions you have difficulty with and prepare answers. Practice your responses. If a script will make you feel more comfortable, make one and practice it until you no longer need it. You can also make an appointment to review interview skills or to do a mock interview

If you encounter a question about a difficult time during school or elsewhere, answer professionally and in a positive manner. If you do disclose your disability, do so with confidence.

3. Focus on your abilities.

Keep the focus on your skills and abilities, not your disabilities. You are being interviewed because you are qualified and capable of filling the position. Sell the employer on your strengths and what you can do. Always be positive and reframe your weaknesses into positives. Be honest and you will be in a good position.

Examples of reframing weaknesses include:

"I am very detail-oriented, and I am going to make sure that I get it right every time."

“During my interview I may not make a lot of eye contact, however I want to let each of you know ahead of time that I appreciate this opportunity.”

4. Bring a portfolio or other supporting materials.

If you have trouble talking about your strengths or making small talk, bring a portfolio to showcase your work. Let your work do most of the talking for you.

5. Distracting behaviors.

If you have trouble with fidgeting or remaining focused during an interview, bring a small outlet for your energy such as a paperclip.

6. Practice, practice, practice.

Practice is the best preparation for an interview. You should spend about 2-3 hours preparing for your interview. Make an interview skills or mock interview appointment to prepare.

7. Send a thank-you note.

A thank-you note can distinguish you from other candidates and clarify questions from the interview you felt you didn't articulate well. It will also reaffirm your interest in the job.

Illegal Interview Questions

The ADA places restrictions on disability-related questions that can be asked of applicants and employees. Questions asked by employers should relate to the performance of essential functions of a job. If an interviewer asks you about disability topics, you can respond in different ways:

- If you are comfortable answering the question, you may. However, you do not have to.
- If you do not wish to answer the question,
- inquire how this information relates to the job, as you prefer to keep the content focused on your professional qualifications.
- politely tell the interviewer that you prefer to keep the focus on items that are directly relevant to the position.

Examples of illegal interview questions include:

- Do you have a disability?
- Does your disability inhibit you from performing the essential functions of the job with or without an accommodation?

- Can you sit?
- Are you able to carry objects?
- Why do you use a wheelchair? Will we have to make an accommodation for your wheelchair?
- Describe all of your disabilities.

Examples of appropriate questions

- Are you able to perform the essential functions of the job?
- (If an applicant voluntarily discloses that they have a disability, an employer may ask a follow up question.) Do you need a reasonable accommodation, and if so, what type?
- Can you demonstrate how you would perform the following job-related functions?

Additional Resources, Associations & Job Boards

[Job Accommodation Network – Info on job accommodations and additional resources.](#)

[Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 Titles I and V: Employment discrimination laws.](#)

[Lime Connect: Scholarships, internships, jobs, webinars for students with disabilities.](#)

[Office of Personnel Management \(OPM\): Consult the “Job Seekers with Disabilities” link.](#)

Check out associations such as:

[Association for Higher Education and Disability: American Association of People with Disabilities](#)

[National Association of the Deaf](#)

[National Organization on Disability: Job Opportunities for DisABLED Veterans and many others.](#)

Check out job boards such as:

[Disability Job Exchange](#)

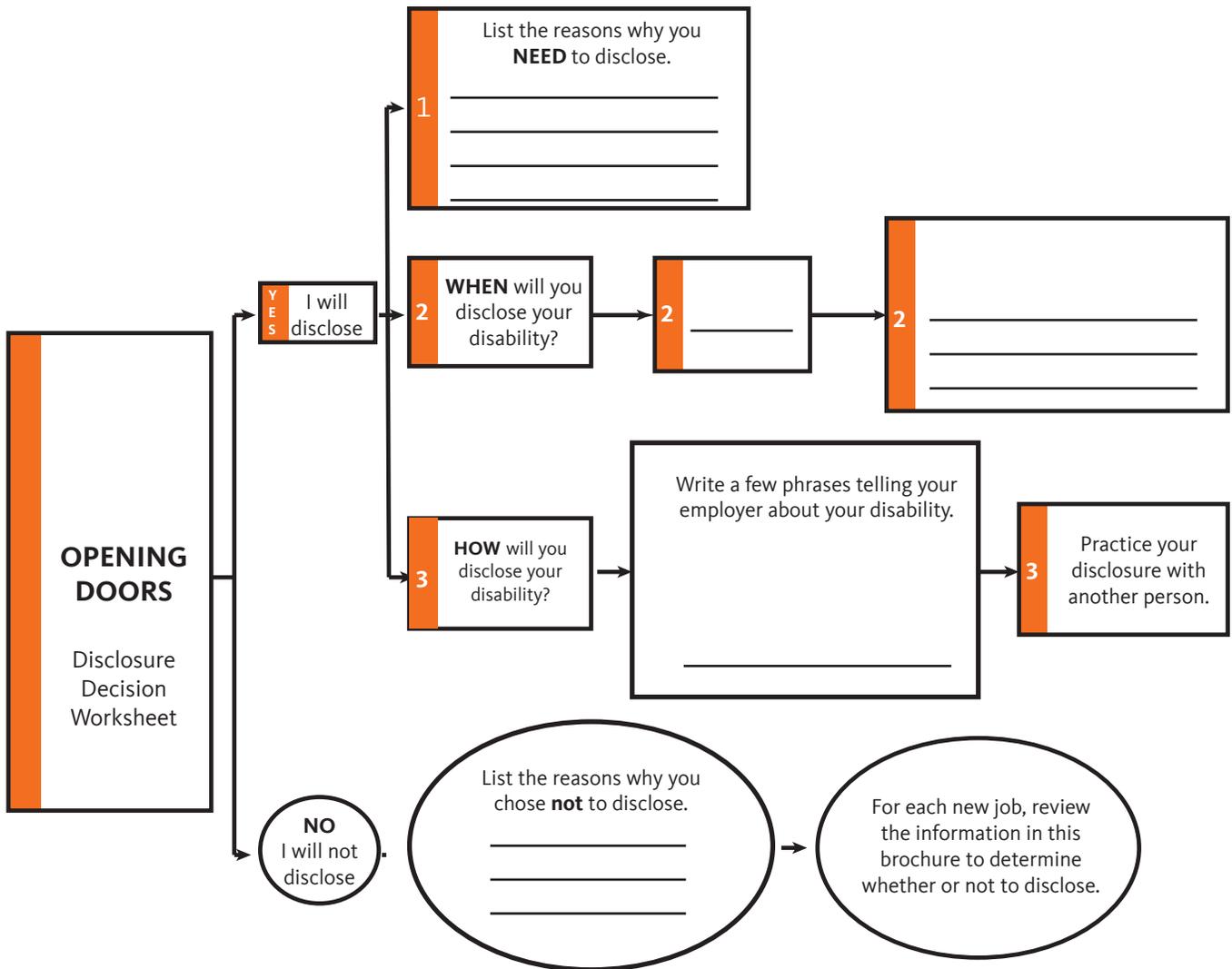
[RecruitDisability](#)

[USA Jobs](#)

[DisabledPerson](#)

[AbilityLinks](#)

Disclosure Decision Worksheet



Talking to Employers about Disability

Disclosure Conversation Checklist

Employees with disabilities have rights and choices about disclosing or discussing a disability either during a hiring situation or after employed.

Use this checklist to prepare for a disability-related conversation with an employer or potential employer by thinking through the legal, practical, and human aspects of this conversation.

You can work through this checklist alone, or with others who know about your situation and employment goals such as a disability service professional.

For each of the items on the following list give yourself a score:

1= I can do this

2= I think I can do this, but may need support

3= I need more preparation before I can do this.

Before the conversation, I do...

- Understand my choices, rights, and responsibilities around disclosing my disability in this situation.
- Understand that I am not alone in this situation. (The number of people with disabilities in the workplace might surprise you! There are probably other people with disability working where you are working or would like to work.)
- Know how much information I would/ would not like to share during this conversation. (You are only obligated to tell an employer that you have a disability when you request an accommodation to participate in the hiring process or to perform the essential functions of your job. Even in these instances, you do not need to share every detail of your condition.)
- Understand how my disability might impact the main functions of my job or the job I'm applying for
- Know how to explain a gap in my work history, if one exists.
- Know how to talk about my disability in a way that is clear, concise, unapologetic, and connected to my work tasks.
- Have an idea about what concerns/ questions the employer might have about my disability and thought through possible responses.
- Have suggestions about possible reasonable accommodations(s) I might need to perform the essential functions of my job,
- Know about how much each of these accommodation(s) might cost and what supports/ resources might be available.
- Know how I can keep the conversation focused on my desire to do the best job I can.
- Have someone I trust who I can practice this conversation with

Talking to Employers about Disability

Disclosure Conversation Checklist

During the conversation, I will...

- Focus on a clear and specific discussion of the accommodations/ modifications I need instead of on a vague, general discussion of my disability.
- Talk about how my disability may give me a valuable and unique perspective. (Having a disability might give you a unique perspective, make you a flexible, adaptable problem-solver, or make you more empathetic to others.)
- Cooperate with legitimate requests to provide medical information that will help the employer make decisions about hiring or accommodations.
- Gently but firmly challenge myths or misperceptions about my disability if they are brought up during the conversation.
- Be open to addressing the employer's legitimate questions/ concerns about how I would do the essential job functions with my disability. (If you have an obvious disability or disclose a non-obvious disability that an employer legitimately thinks would affect your ability to do the job, you may be asked to describe or demonstrate how you would do essential job tasks.
- Emphasize what I *can* do.
- If needed, discuss who else (if anyone) will be told about my disability. Stress to the employer that even if a co-worker needs to be told you will do things differently, you do not want the employer to tell others about your disability.
- If needed, touch upon how to manage any “fallout” from any accommodation/ modification I will be using among co-workers, customers or others in the workplace.
- Leave the conversation with a concrete plan of next steps to make sure the accommodation/ modification is effective in helping me do the essential functions of my job.