

DECIDING TO DISCLOSE A DISABILITY



Every student with a disability must decide when, how, and if to disclose during an opportunity search. This decision will vary with each individual and their unique situation. There are several factors to consider, including: whether accommodations will be needed during the interview, or in order to succeed at the opportunity, or whether it is a hidden or visible disability. This guide will help you determine what the best decision is for you. If you decide to disclose your disability you are protected by federal laws from discrimination.

Adapted from “Disclosure Decisions: To Get The Job” by Virginia Commonwealth University



DETERMINE IF THERE IS A NEED FOR DISCLOSURE

First you must determine if there is a need for disclosure by gathering all the facts. Consider the questions below by answering Yes/No and decide if you have a reason to disclose. Answering “YES” could mean that there is a need or benefit to disclosing your disability. Answering “NO” would mean more preparation is needed on your part in terms of researching the organization or position, or there is limited benefit of disclosure.

AREA	QUESTIONS
ORGANIZATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do I have background information about the organization? Does the organization, senior management, or owner welcome and value diversity? Has the organization participated in any disability related recruitment programs? Is there an organization policy on hiring individuals with disabilities? Does the organization offer any internship programs? Is pre-employment testing required? What is the medium for testing?
POSITION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have I requested a detailed position description? Do I know what the essential functions and expectations are of the position? 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 position done? Will I need accommodations for the application process, interview process, or at the worksite?
SUPERVISOR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the supervisor use a flexible and person management style? Does the supervisor have experience in managing differences or diversity? Does the supervisor focus on essential, rather than marginal functions? Has the supervisor had positive experiences hiring individuals with disabilities? Can I provide the supervisor with resource information about the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and my specific accommodation needs?
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 development specialist?



DECIDING WHEN TO DISCLOSE

After deciding that disclosing your disability will help you be successful, you next have to consider when to disclose. The chart below weighs some pros and cons to disclosing at different points during your opportunity search.

WHEN	POTENTIAL GAINS	POTENTIAL SETBACKS
IN A COVER LETTER	Advance time to prepare positive written disclosure and to tailor your abilities to duties of position description	Organizations preconceptions may hinder opportunity for an interview. Unable to read body language and mood.
IN A RÉSUMÉ OR APPLICATION	Establishes “up front” relationship and communication.	Organization may have stereotypes about disabilities and may not offer you an interview.
WHEN THE ORGANIZATION CALLS TO SET UP AN INTERVIEW	Establishes open communication and gives an organization time to review Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 compliance information.	Organization has advance time to yield to stereotypes about disabilities.
BEFORE THE INTERVIEW	Show respect to organization, gives advance notice to secure any accommodations that may be needed during the interview, and time to research proper etiquette or refresh knowledge on ADA.	Organization has advance time to yield to stereotypes about disabilities.
DURING THE INTERVIEW	Opportunity to read body language, to time the disclosure, and to disclose in a brief, positive manner. Highlight skills, qualifications, or past positions, and how you will be able to succeed at position with accommodations.	Interviewer may feel uneasy and ill prepared to respond with appropriate and legal questions.
AFTER THE POSITION OFFER	May have legal recourse if disclosing disability negatively affects the hiring decision. There is time to get accommodations in place before the position starts. Positive relationship had already been established with organization.	Organization 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. *Didn't know accommodations would be needed - issues in the position arise *Condition is intermittent - stable when position was started and now a flare up	May take time to secure requested accommodations. Organization 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).	Organization may have difficulty changing perceptions of your work performance, feel betrayed or wonder why you waited so long. Difficult time to disclose
NEVER	Disability information is kept private.	Not protected from discrimination under the ADA.



CHOOSING HOW TO DISCLOSE

Effective disclosure can establish a positive working relationship with your employer. Practicing with a close friend, family member, career development specialist or disability services coordinator can help to increase your comfort level and skills. Below are some general guidelines of how to disclose your disability during each timeframe.

HOW	EXAMPLES
Stress current involvement in a positive activity that shows your ability to manage your disability.	<u>Resume</u> Member of the American Blind Skiing Foundation
Be optimistic; focus on your abilities and job qualifications.	<u>Cover Letter</u> 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.
Give the organization information on what they need to do or provide regarding communication, directions, or supervision.	<u>Telephone Call Prior to the Interview</u> “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?”
Educate the organization by articulating or demonstrating how can perform the essential functions of the job. Have resource information available for the organization.	<u>During the Interview</u> “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.”
Explain the benefits of your disability regarding your personal growth or perseverance.	<u>During the Interview</u> “Through my disability, I have learned the value of connecting with professionals. I can be resourceful and creative to get the job done.”
Face concerns by talking about your compensatory strategies or accommodation solutions.	<u>During the Interview</u> “You may be wondering how I can type letter 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.”
Use general, functional terms to briefly explain the impact of your disability in the position; avoid technical, medical diagnoses.	<u>After the Job Offer</u> “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?”
In a private setting, remind your employer about your right to confidentiality.	<u>After the Job is Accepted</u> After disclosing your disability in your employer’s office: “Thank you in advance for keeping this information confidential.”
Frame the disclosure around how you work best.	<u>A Few Weeks in the Position</u> “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.”



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information when researching an organization or position:

- Company specific websites and social media
- Gustavus Career Development <http://gustavus.edu/career>
- Professional Associations
- Informational Interviews

About potential accommodations:

- Gustavus Disability Services
- American's with Disabilities Act as Amended (ADAA) <http://www.ada.gov/>
- Employer Assistance and Resource Network (EARN) is a free, nationwide service that provides resources to help employers hire and retain people with disabilities <http://askearn.org/>
- Disclosing a disability in a job interview, Pacer Center <http://www.pacer.org/tatra/resources/POD/disclosedisability.asp>
- Interactive process of identifying reasonable accommodations: <http://www.presagia.com/ada-101-six-steps-to-the-interview-process/>
- Job Accommodation Network (JAN) - Students, campuses, and employers can call, email, or chat live with specialists at JAN to receive personalized accommodations and disclosure advice. Just go to <http://askjan.org/> and click on "Live help" to ask any question.
- Job Applicants and the Americans with Disabilities Act <http://www.eeoc.gov/facts/jobapplicant.html#accommodation>
- Minnesota State Council on Disability provides resources for both employees and employers <http://www.disability.state.mn.us/employment/>
- Minnesota Vocational Rehabilitation Services <http://mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/disabilities/>
- National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability (NCWD) disclosure resources, The 411 on Disability Disclosure <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/411-on-disability-disclosure>.
- Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) <https://wrp.gov/AboutPre.do>

For more resources, please visit our website:

<https://gustavus.edu/career/disabilityresources.php>